MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

through *Treasure Hunting*

SHUBHAM TRIVEDI

PREFACE

Millions of people visit museums all over the world every week. Museums inspire the curious minds of our current generation with the deeds and ideas of past generations. Bearing such immense responsibilities, the design of museum experience becomes significant. Museums must not be mere books of history and culture. They must exhibit a dynamic experience capable of exciting the curiosity of the future generations about out fantastic achievements and thus inspire them to achieve even greater accomplishments. This study explores an alternate dynamic experience design for museum exploration utilizing the concept of gamification through treasure hunting. Popular museums in Tokyo are surveyed and possible venues for application of this experience design are identified. The process of experience design is carried out and a test run is organized at a museum venue. Hurdles encountered in the design process and the final participant responses are discussed to suggest possible improvements for a more effective experience design.
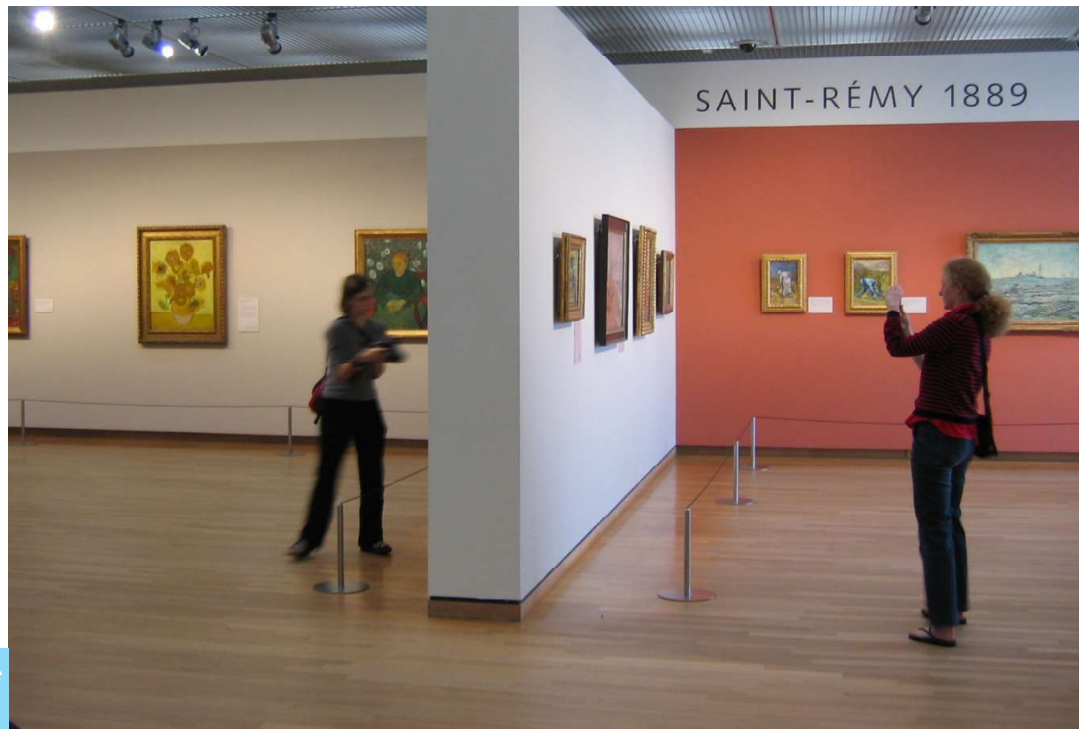
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INTRODUCTION

Before any discussion on the proposed experience design for museums may be taken up, it is imperative to explain the need for a new experience design and the objectives of this study. In this chapter, museum experience in the present times and its inherent shortcomings would be briefly discussed followed by an introduction to treasure hunting and its characteristics. Finally, using this introduction as background, objectives of this study would be described.

1.1 Museusms of the world

Museums have been collecting, preserving and exhibiting various arts and artifacts around the world for over 2000 years. Even though most ancient museums began as private collections close to the general public, most of the museums today are open for public viewing and are visited by millions of people of various age groups every week all over the world.
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Museums in present times exist to serve various purposes. From collection and preservation of ancient artifacts to the exhibition of latest works of art, from the display of popular scientific principles to the exhibition of religious artifacts. While these museums have different primary objectives, one common aim binding all the public museums is nonethe-

less present. All public museums inevitably aim to enhance the public's awareness of cultures and understanding of our modern world today. Museums aim to engage the curiosity of the visitor and astound them with the glorious displays of various arts, artifacts or reproductions of scientific phenomenon. Younger generations can take inspiration from our wonderful scientific and cultural achievements to accomplish even more in the future.

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While this noble objective is commendable, measures employed by most modern museums to achieve the same are less so. Most of the museums treat the visitors with a rather static experience. While the artifacts at display may be exotic and the collection intelligently presented, the visitor experience still consists of merely browsing through the elements of the museum at one's leisure. Such an experience is akin to reading a booklet history, albeit a glorious one. Despite the fantastic representation and brilliant realism of most exhibitions, their reception is inherently dependent upon the sincerity and personal enthusiasm of the visitors.

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Another drawback of such experiences is the short length of time over

which the subject impresses on the mind of the visitor. Even the most amazing display of museum collections would fade with time and with it the any chances of inspiration or learning.

1.2 Treasure hunting

The earliest forms of treasure hunting appeared as searches for treasures of immense value thought to be hidden or misplaced by the nobility from ancient times. The key aspect of such hunts was the motivation for a big prize that drove searches far beyond the supposed capabilities of the human minds to solve even the most obscure clues in order to expose the hidden treasure[1]. Such campaigns could be organized only by professionals and would have been beyond the common people. However, the successful multiple broadcasts of the American Gameshow "Treasure Hunt" which televised sponsored treasure competitions finally brought widespread popularity to treasure hunting among the general public.

1. Easton, D. F. "Heinrich Schliemann: Hero or Fraud?" The Classical World 91, no. 5 (1998): 335-43. doi:10.2307/4352102.

Treasure hunts have emerged in numerous forms in recent times. From a fun event for a group of kids with nothing more than a few toys to be won to national events involving a number of participants competing for a grand prize, all forms of treasure hunting are based on the same concept of using the lure a prize to lead to the solution of complicated riddles. Recently, treasure hunting is also being organized as an entertaining way to explore a place or as team building games[2].

2. Sharma, Sunita, and Jo Geneen. "Team London Ambassadors hunt for a world record title." London & Partners - Telling London's story brilliantly. June 25, 2012.

While treasure hunts can be incredibly fun activities, their educational capabilities have not been explored before. In treasure hunts, similar to the phenomenon observed in design of video games, human behavior challenged by a difficult mission can persevere to great lengths while pursuing the target objective. Such an experience, with appropriate modifications in design, may also be applied in an educational sphere where the subjects are challenged with riddles closely related to the educational objectives. Within a treasure hunt experience design, the par-

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ticipants may be induced to search for and discover the educational objectives by themselves as if in self-study environment. In contrast to the self-study environment though, there is no requirement of any strong personal motivation on the part of the participant to continue the study. Instead, participants are allured by the object of treasure hunting. Such an experience design not only makes the educational activity fun, but also ensures continued learning after the event as the participants learn the charm of self-study.

1.3 Objecives of the study

With this background on the role of museums in spreading cultural awareness and the lack of dynamism in the current museum experience, an innovative new dynamic experience design based on the principle of treasure hunting is explored. In this design, the participants are required to search for and analyze information about the museum artifacts on display in order to answer the treasure-leading quest being posed. Such an experience is bound to not only enhance learning through single museum visits but also excite the participant's curiosity to continue the learning and exploration of the information about the artifacts on their own even after the visit.

Primary objectives of this study may be expressed as follows:

Test run: Primary objective of this research is to evaluate the feasibility of applying a treasure hunt based museum experience design to the museums in Tokyo. Basics of a treasure hunt design are explored from scratch and the design is suitably modified to comply with a museum background. Riddles targeting the educational objectives are designed as part of the experience design. Appropriate museum venues are also examined and a test run is staged to evaluate the feasibility of the treasure hunt experience design.

Analysis: Based on this preliminary design and test run, the observed response and experienced design obstacles are discussed and future ap-

proaches for a more effective treasure hunt design are suggested.

DESIGN

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This chapter forms the core of this report. Entire process of treasure hunt design from reconnaissance to test run organization is detailed here. The treasure hunt design is broadly divided into three stages: primary reconnaissance of the various museums in Tokyo to determine suitable venues at which the event could be organized, detailed background study on the selected museum for riddle formulation, and finally the on-site event organization to examine the practical feasibility of the event design.

2.1 Stage I: Reconnaissance

Tokyo, being the capital city of the nation and a center of modern art and culture, is home to more than a hundred organized museums. While art museums form the majority of the numbers, wide categories are still exhibited in ample numbers. From the museums of history preserving the artifacts from the past to a number of museums of science, sports and music exhibiting the achievements of modern world in their respective fields, wide of range of experiences are available within the city.

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While all museums have their specialties that make them impossible to compare, a shortlisting was carried out for the purpose of efficient reconnaissance. Major museums hosting significant collections were selected as the primary candidates. Some museums of smaller size but

hosting items of importance such as national treasures were also included. Locations of the shortlisted museums are illustrated on the map of Tokyo in page 10. While most of the museums are located within the 23 wards of Tokyo metropolitan area, a few of them are situated in the neighboring Kanazawa and Chiba prefectures.

Although all the shortlisted museums all had an amazing collection on display, their suitability for the treasure hunt experience design was evaluated on the basis of following consideration:

Type of collection: In order to design an appropriate riddle for any artifact, it is essential to build a thread of connected stories about the artifact. Artifacts with a unique origin and an identifiable history make it easier to frame an appropriate and interesting riddle. For an example, a statue of bodhisattva from *Tokyo National Museum* would be a much more convenient subject for framing a riddle as compared to some ceramic utensil from ancient china at *Nezu Museum* which, despite being exquisite work of craftsmanship, doesn't have a clearly identifiable artist or age of manufacture. This argument would become clearer in the section on riddle design.
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A number of folk craft museums surveyed in this study were found to be in appropriate for treasure hunt experience design in this regard. Exhibitions at *Japanese Folk Crafts Museum*, Shitamachi Museum, *Fukagawa-Edo Museum*, and *Showa Era Lifestyle Museum* were an impressive collection of items or recreations of items from old ages but they could not be used to frame a dynamic treasure hunt experience. On the other hand, *Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum* and *Japan Open-air Folk House Museum* exhibited similar collections but with a significant historical background suitable for a treasure hunt design. Exhibitions in art museums with a strong historical theme are also good opportunities for a treasure hunt design. "Heroes from Tales of the Water Margin" exhibition at *Ota Memorial Museum of Art* and "The Grand Sengai Exhibition" at *Idemitsu Museum of Arts* exemplify such exhibitions. Art
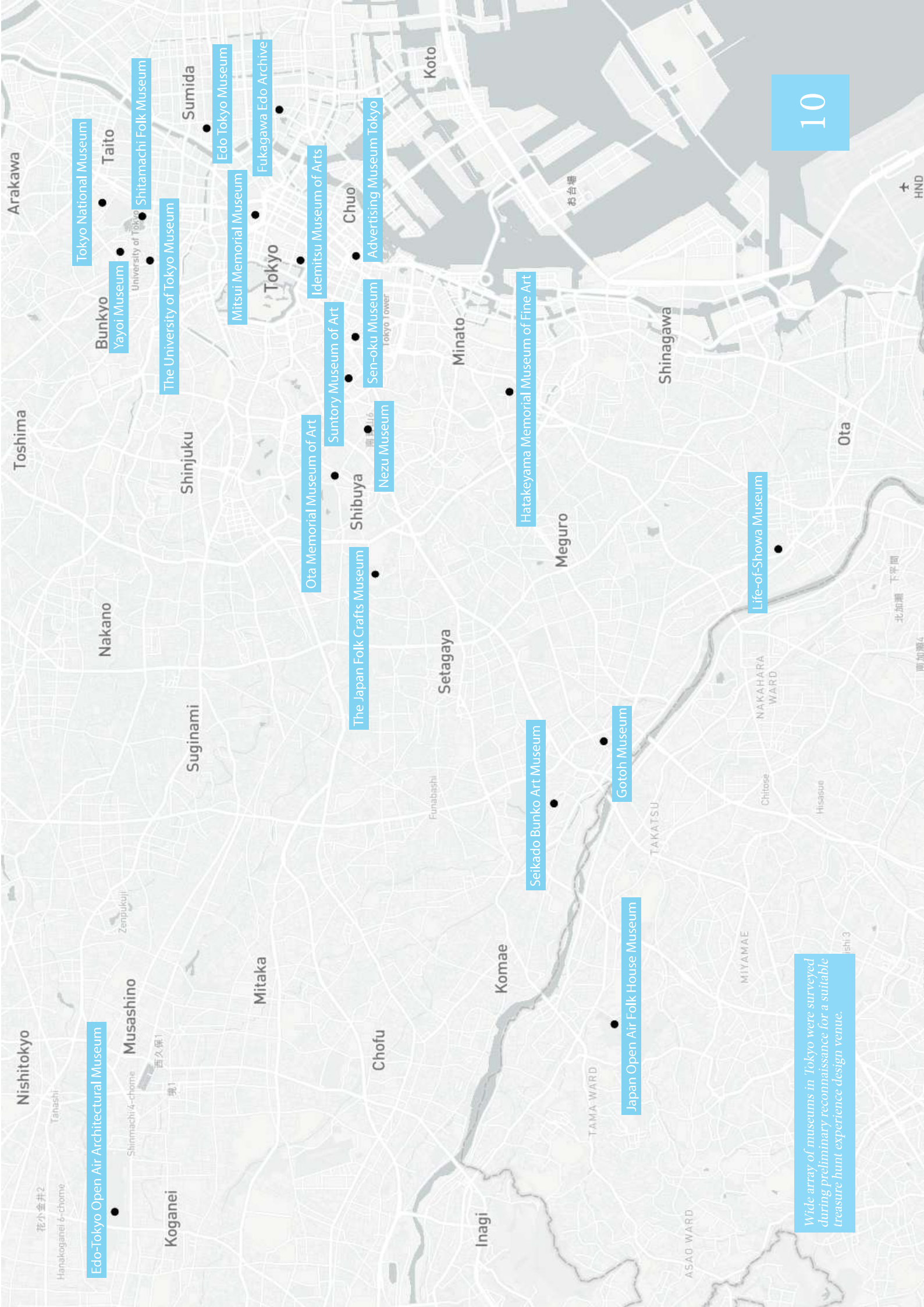
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Tokyo National Museum

Shitamachi Folk Museum

Sumida

Edo Tokyo Museum

Fukagawa Edo Archive

Advertising Museum Tokyo

Taito

Yayoi Museum

University of Tokyo

The University of Tokyo Museum

Mitsui Memorial Museum

Idemitsu Museum of Arts

Chuo

Tokyo

Bunkyo

Koto

Arakawa

Toshima

Sen-oku Museum

Suntory Museum of Art

Minato

Hatakeyama Memorial Museum of Fine Art

Shinagawa

Nezu Museum

Ota Memorial Museum of Art

Shibuya

Shinjuku

Meguro

Ota

Life-of-Showa Museum

The Japan Folk Crafts Museum

Nakano

Setagaya

Suginami

NAKAHARA WARD

Seikado Bunko Art Museum

Gotoh Museum

Funabashi

TAKATSU

MIYAMAE

Mitaka

Musashino

Komae

Chofu

Japan Open Air Folk House Museum

Nishitokyo

Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum

TAMA WARD

Inagi

Koganei

ASAO WARD

Wide array of museums in Tokyo were surveyed during preliminary reconnaissance for a suitable treasure hunt experience design venue.

museum exhibitions designed around themes with no associated historical background are ill suited for a treasure hunt experience design. "Introduction to Chinese Ceramics" exhibition at *Nezu Museum*, "The Traditional Performing Arts of Japan" exhibition at *Mitsui Memorial Museum*, and "Seven Daring Years: Odano Naotake and Akita Ranga" exhibition at *Suntory Museum of Art* were deemed inappropriate with this reasoning.

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Collection display length: Most museums that own a large collection of artifacts adopt a rotating exhibition policy of displaying only a set items at a time based on some predefined theme. While such an arrangement ensures exhibition of items under some brilliant scheme, it limits the time for which any particular set of artifacts are on display. As a result, it was not possible to carry out the process of reconnaissance, riddle development, and event realization within such short time frame in the case of some museums

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Art museums such as *Nezu Museum*, *Mitsui Memorial Museum*, *Idemitsu Museum of Arts*, *Suntory Museum of Art*, *Seikado Bunko Art Museum*, and *Yayoi Museum* had a typical exhibition duration of merely two months and were therefore deemed inappropriate for designing a treasure hunt despite some of them having very appropriate collections by other considerations. Large museums such as *Tokyo National Museum*, *National Museum of Japanese History*, and *Edo-Tokyo Museum* had a permanent exhibition in addition to short term special exhibitions allowing sufficient space of time for treasure hunt design. Museums such as *Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum*, Japan Open-air Folk House Museum, Edo-Tokyo Museum, Fukagawa-Edo Museum, Shitamachi Museum, and *Showa Era Lifestyle Museum* were the most suitable in this regard as they exhibit the same collection year round.

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Museum regulations: In order to solve the riddle, the participants are required not only to observe the artifact carefully but often also to search on the internet for supporting information or other clues. Therefore, un-

restricted use of mobile phones at the museum site is an indispensable requirement for organizing treasure hunts. Unfortunately, some museums restrict not only shooting photos at the exhibition but outright prohibit the use of mobile phones irrelevant of the purpose citing the fragility of artifacts on display as the reason.

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Museums exhibiting private collections such as *Nezu Museum, Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Ota Memorial Museum of Art, Suntory Museum of Art, Seikado Bunko Art Museum,* and *Yayoi Museum* were particularly restrictive in this regard making it difficult to hold a treasure hunt event. Open air museums such as *Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum* and *Japan Open-air Folk House Museum* on the other hand offered a restriction free environment suitable for organizing a treasure hunting event.

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Relevance of the exhibition: Apart from the above mentioned requirements related to the ease of treasure hunt design, one additional criteria was adopted in the context of this study. Exhibitions not related to Japan or Japanese culture were excluded. "Introduction to Chinese Ceramics" exhibition at *Nezu Museum* and "Heroes from Tales of the Water Margin" exhibition at *Ota Memorial Museum of Art* were deemed unsuitable for this reason.

2.2 Stage II: Riddle design

Riddles are the core of treasure hunt experience. Suitably designed riddles are the key to an enriching and interesting treasure hunt. Riddles are posed in the form a simple clue or fact that is supposed to be connected in some way to one of the artifacts. It is the job of the participant to explore in depth about the provided clue or the artifacts in the collection and identify the connection in order to solve the riddles. The task of riddle design may be considered in two stages: collecting relevant background information on the artifact, and stringing the relevant

background stories to form the riddle.

Information collection: Most of the modern museum artifacts are furnished with a short description placed right next to the item on display. This description forms the basis for collecting detailed background information. Museum shop's book collection facilitated convenient reference of this primary description for most of the museums. Further, various online databases hosted by the museums or other national organizations also made available the basic description of certain artifacts.
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Basic description thus acquired is surveyed for characteristic keywords specific to the artifact and having potential to form an interesting connection. Further information on these keywords is acquired through more generally available sources such as web encyclopedias.

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Ease of access of the information sources referenced in the riddle design also makes it easy for the participant to search for relevant clues. Description boards placed at the museum site and the web resources readily available from any smartphone are thus the only tools needed for participating in the treasure hunt experience.

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Stringing stories: Final task in the design of riddles is assembling the collected information regarding each artifact into an appropriate tread of connected ideas starting from an apparently obscure clue and ending in the answer, that is one of the artifacts. Difficulty of the riddle is directly related to the number of connected stories in the riddle. A number of connected stories that render the clue seem unrelated to any of the artifacts in the museum make a complicated and tough to solve riddle. On the other hand, rather easy to solve riddles can be designed by stringing together fewer stories.

EXAMPLES:

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List of Riddles:

2.3 Stage III: Event realization

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