

Stone Hut Survey Results Report

June 1, 2017

Background

The popularity and demand for reservations at the Stone Hut has increased dramatically over the last ten years. In 2015/16 and 2016/17, 100% of the reservation stays were awarded through the lottery with nothing available for first-come first-served (and since 2013 the Hut has had 100% occupancy).

Over the years, feedback from our guests on the Stone Hut has always been encouraged, but has not been actively solicited. With the increase in competition for reservations, there has been some strong opinions expressed on how reservations should be awarded.

The primary purpose of this survey was to obtain direct feedback from the Stone Hut guests to gain perspective on who are our guests, how the guests utilize the facility, their experiences at the Hut and with the reservation process, and opinion on potential future operational changes and facility management.

Survey Implementation

On February 2, 2017, 1958 subscribers to the Stone Hut email newsletter were contacted to inform them on how to link to the online Stone Hut survey through Survey Monkey. Of the 1958 email newsletter subscribers, 937 (46%) subscribers opened the email and 202 (24%) clicked through to the survey.

A second email reminder about the Stone Hut survey was sent to the original list on February 17, 2017 of which 617 (34%) opened the email and 97 clicked through to the survey. The survey was closed on the morning of March 1, 2017 with a total of 325 completed surveys. This represents a 16.6% response rate (325/1958).

In both email correspondences recipients were encouraged to forward the email to other interested parties, which may explain why the number of completed surveys is higher than the click through rate. Additionally, some individuals may have completed the survey more than once.

Survey Results

The survey was divided into four sections of questions:

- 1) General questions applicable to all respondents;
- 2) Questions for guests who had previously stayed at the Stone Hut;
- 3) Questions for guests who had previously participated in Stone Hut lottery; and
- 4) Socio-demographic questions applicable to all respondents.

The questions included were about the current reservation system, a preferred reservation system, rental policies, the facility, how the guest utilized the hut, etc.

1. Summary of General Questions for all Respondents:

- 46% (150 of 325) of respondents had previously stayed at the Stone Hut.
- 58% (168 of 291) of respondents had entered the lottery in the last five years.
- The majority of respondents (85% or 242 of 288) indicated they would be interested in staying in the Hut during the summer or fall with 47% (134 of 288) very interested and 38% (108 of 288) somewhat interested.
- When asked about their willingness to pay for a night's stay at the Stone Hut, the majority of the respondents were willing to pay less than \$250 per night in the winter, less than \$200 per night in the summer (see chart below) while 64% of the respondents agree that the Stone Hut is priced affordably. It appears that the Stone Hut is at a good price point with only a small increase in the price per night a possibility.

Price Per Night	Winter		Summer	
	<\$200	45 %	130	74%
\$225	18%	53	11%	32
\$250	23%	65	8%	27
\$275	1%	4	.4%	1
\$300	7%	31	3%	9
>\$300	5%	15	1%	4
Total		288		282

- Besides pricing, the respondents to the survey were asked a series of questions related to dates of reservation, length of reservation and how reservations should be handled. Respondents agree that the dates they receive are very important (71%, 185 of 260); longer

reservations should be limited (77%, 200 of 257); and the number of nights per reservation should be limited to 5 or less (81%, 209 of 257).

Reservations	Strongly Agree 5	Somewhat Agree 3	Neither Agree or Disagree 1	Somewhat Disagree -3	Strongly Disagree -5	Total Responses	Weighted Average
The Stone Hut is priced affordably	26% 67	38% 99	17% 44	15% 40	3% 9	259	1.97
The Stone Hut is too expensive	10% 26	25% 64	32% 82	19% 49	14% 35	256	0.32
Weekend/holiday and weekday pricing should be the same	37% 95	18% 46	16% 42	23% 60	6% 15	258	1.55
Weekend and holiday nights should be higher in cost	7% 19	29% 75	13% 34	19% 49	31% 81	258	0.27
High demand times should be auctioned off to the highest bidder	2% 6	4% 10	8% 20	11% 29	75% 193	258	-3.77
The dates I get are very important to me	33% 87	38% 98	18% 47	9% 23	2% 5	260	2.62
High demand times should be randomly selected as a special lottery	35% 89	25% 65	11% 29	12% 31	17% 44	258	1.38
The number of longer reservations should be limited	36% 93	41% 107	12% 32	4% 11	5% 14	257	2.78
Predetermined reservation date blocks would be acceptable	12% 30	33% 83	31% 79	12% 31	12% 29	252	0.95
I prefer that longer stays are given preferential treatment	6% 16	9% 24	12% 30	27% 71	46% 118	259	-2.40
Reservations should only be handled through an online process	28% 72	18% 45	35% 90	10% 27	9% 24	258	1.49
The number of nights per reservation should be limited to 5 or less	54% 139	27% 70	9% 24	5% 12	5% 12	257	3.24
The number of overnight guests should be reduced from 12 to 8 people	9% 24	15% 38	34% 87	17% 44	25% 66	259	-0.54

Preferred Reservation System

There was an open-ended question about “what would be your preferred reservation system for the Stone Hut?” and answers were grouped based on common themes. A single answer may have covered several common themes and was counted in each group.

- 25% (41 of 163) thought there should be an online reservation process – it should be noted that 17 of the 41 had a one word answer “online” to this question.

- 18% (29 of 163) thought the old lottery system should continue
- 16% (26 of 163) thought that no preference based on length of stay should be given
- 13% (21 of 163) thought there should be a decrease maximum stay
- 8.6% (14 of 163) thought it should be first-come, first-served
- 6.7% (11 of 163) thought there should be some type of preference for people who haven't stayed at the Hut in previous years
- 5% (8 of 163) thought predefined blocks of time should be implemented
- 3.7% (6 of 163) thought there should be a maximum of one stay per season per guest

2. Questions asked of those who had previously stayed at the Hut (46%):

- 22 of the 132 respondents (16.7%) had stayed more than once in a single season in the last five years.
- The average number of guests staying overnight each night was divided into ranges: 38% (50 out of 131) of respondents reported averaging 4-6 guests, while 51% (67 of 131 respondents) reported 7-10 overnight guests.
- 55% (72 of 131 respondents) of respondents reported they have visitors at the Hut who did not spend the night.
- The majority of groups have members of their party accessing the Hut without the aid of the lift. 61% (75 of 122) reported at least one member of their party skinning or hiking up the mountain on the first night of arrival, 50% (58 of 115) on subsequent nights and 22% (22 of 100) on the day they checked out. This may have not been a clear enough question – the large number that indicated that they skin up may either be reflective of a non-representative sample of Stone Hut guests, or failure to clarify that hiking up meant from the base of the mountain to the Hut as opposed to hiking from the Hut up to the nose of Mt. Mansfield at night for recreation, etc.
- Unsurprisingly, given the number of guests that have visitors that are not spending the night, many guests reported skiing, riding or hiking down the mountain after the lifts closed. This was most frequent during their stay (48%) or at the end (47%), but 31% reported it on their first night (which could have also been their last night if they had a one night reservation).
- Stone Hut guests indicated how much they valued various aspects/characteristics of the Hut by rating their importance. In all five categories more than half of the guests thought the characteristic was at least somewhat important. 75% (98 of 131) felt the remote location was very important and 71% (93 of 131) felt the same about the history of the Hut. These were followed closely by first tracks at 56% (73 of 130) and affordable stay at 47% (61 of 131). Access to hiking and snowshoeing was only very important to 28% (36 of 130) of the respondents.

- Respondents also rated their satisfaction on a number of items: 99% (130 of 131) were very satisfied about their overall experience while staying at the Stone Hut; 97% (127 of 131) were satisfied about the cleanliness of the facility; 91% (98 of 130; removing N/A for total) were satisfied about the quality of firewood; and 90% (98 of 109; removing N/A for total) were satisfied with the helpfulness of staff (there was no distinct made between Stone Hut staff and Stowe Mountain Resort staff in the question). See chart below.

The remaining items received lower satisfaction ratings and managers should focus on improving these areas. But when combining excellent and good, the overall satisfaction was still high: 88% (110 of 124; removing N/A for total) of respondents were satisfied with the cleanliness of bathroom; 88% (96 of 109; removing N/A for total) were satisfied with the availability and quality of information on the website; 83% (98 of 118; removing N/A for total) were satisfied with the availability and quality of information at the Stone Hut; and 85% (103 of 120; removing N/A for total) were satisfied with the availability and quality of information about the ski resort policies and procedures (see chart below).

	Excellent 5	Good 1	Fair -1	Poor -5	N/A	Total Responses	Weighted Average
Cleanliness of facility	61% 80	36% 47	3% 4	0% 0	0% 0	131	3.38
Quality of firewood	54% 71	37% 48	8% 10	1% 1	1% 1	131	2.96
Helpfulness of staff	59% 76	17% 22	9% 11	0% 0	16% 20	129	3.03
Cleanliness of bathroom	44% 57	40% 53	9% 12	2% 2	5% 6	130	2.43
Overall experience	88% 115	11% 15	0% 1	0% 0	0% 0	131	4.50
Availability and quality of information on the website	30% 40	43% 56	8% 11	2% 2	16% 21	130	1.81
Availability and quality of information at the Stone Hut	27% 35	49% 63	15% 19	1% 1	10% 12	130	1.65
Availability and quality of information about the ski resort policies and procedures	27% 36	51% 67	10% 14	2% 3	8% 11	131	1.66

- An open-ended question was asked “if there was anything they would like to tell us about their previous stay,” and answers were grouped based on common themes. This was the first opportunity for the previous guests to respond in the narrative, and respondents took the opportunity to comment on the lottery (25 out of 64 responses) even though that was not the nature of the question. Since this was asked in a subsequent question and similar responses were provided in this question, no further analysis was conducted on comments on the lottery.

The only reoccurring theme for this question centered on access to the Hut (8 out of 64 responses). These responses focused on the interconnected issues of single ride lift ticket cost, skinning and hiking up, and skiing down.

- When asked about the ideal length of stay in the winter at the Stone Hut, respondents indicated 2 nights (42%) and 3 nights (30%) as their ideal lengths of stay.

Ideal length of Stay (Winter)	Responses
1 night	9% 12
2 nights	42% 54
3 nights	30% 39
4 nights	8% 10
5 nights	5% 6
6+ nights	7% 9
Total	130

- When asked what additional amenities guests would like at the Hut, 49% (39 of 79) responses wanted no changes. Even more telling is that 15 of those 39 could be characterized as adamant that additional amenities would detract from the experience.

3. Questions asked of those who had entered the lottery in the last 5 years (58%):

Success Rate

- Respondents were asked to report how many times they entered the lottery and were successful over the last five years. The self-reported lottery success rate is found in the chart below.

Number of times entered lottery in the last 5 years	Number of Responses	Number of times successful					
		0	1	2	3	4	5
1	23	20	3				
2	37	29	2	6			
3	27	20	3	4	0		
4	23	15	6	2	0	0	
5	55	24	15	6	2	5	3
15	1	1	0	0	0	0	0

- The self-reported overall success rate is 57 out of 560 entries or 10%. The question asked if they entered the lottery, not if they stayed in the Hut (i.e., under someone else's reservation). The self-reported success rate is a much lower success rate than our records indicate. In the 2016 lottery, the success rate was 31%; for 2015 there was a 20% success rate; and for 2014 lottery, the success rate was 26%. The assumption could be made that the respondents to this survey do not represent the greater population of Stone Hutters and that there are a higher number of unsuccessful lottery entrants that participated in the survey than those that have been successful.

It is difficult to draw many conclusions from this data. Many people have entered multiple times a year every year for five years, but it appears that this is not reported, except for one (which may be an outlier or typo). In the 2016 lottery, there was one person that entered six times for six different stays during the season. If you assume everyone is entering only once per year, people who have been entering the lottery longer appear to be much more successful. While this may be likely, it is not possible to conclude this from the data.

Lottery Fairness

- Lottery entrants felt the 2016 lottery (no preference based on length of stay) was fair with 35% (59 of 169) calling it very fair and 27% (45 of 169) calling it somewhat fair.

12% (20 of 169) still thought it was somewhat unfair and 8% (13 of 169) thought it was very unfair.

- Lottery entrants reported that the 2001-2015 lotteries (preferential treatment based on length of stay) were unfair. 29% (51 of 174) called it very unfair and 25% (44 of 174) called it somewhat unfair. Only 25% (46 of 174) thought it was very fair (11%; 20 of 174) or somewhat fair (15%; 26 of 174).
- Both processes had a 19% of respondents calling the lottery “neither fair nor unfair”.
- An open question: “Are there any other thoughts, or suggestions, you would like to share about the reservation systems that have been previously used.” 79 people responded to the question and themes were identified within those responses. Many (30%; 24 of 79, or 7% of overall respondents) expressed dissatisfaction with the previous systems.

Once again people expressed lots of suggestions for the future years. Those answers are repeated in the appropriate place but given the volume of several reoccurring themes they are categorized here as follows:

- 12.7% (10 of 79) thought a point system where people get preferential treatment if they were not successful the previous year should be implemented
- 7.6% (6 of 79) thought there should be no preference based on length of stay
- 6.5% (5 of 79) thought the lottery should be kept the same
- 6.5% (5 of 79) thought the maximum number of nights should be shortened
- 6.5% (5 of 79) thought the reservation system should be a first-come, first-served system
- 6.5% (5 of 79) thought stays should be limited to one stay per season per person

4. Socio-Demographic Information

- 70% (181 of 258) of respondents were male while 29% (76 of 258) were female.
- 60% (154 of 258) of respondents were in the 30-49 age group, while 29% (74 of 258) were between 50-64 years of age.
- 91% (235 of 258) of respondents were at least college graduates with 33% (86 of 258) having education after a bachelor’s degree.
- 92% (227 of 248) of respondents were non-Hispanic White.
- 58% (139 of 238) of respondents had an annual household income of over \$100,000 and 27% (64 of 238) had a household income between \$50,000 - \$99,000.
- The majority of respondents were from Vermont (64%), followed by Massachusetts (13.5%), New York (6.9%), New Jersey (4.1%) and Connecticut (3.7%). Those that indicated Vermont as their residency mostly came from Stowe (14%), the Burlington area (9.8%) and Waterbury (6%). See chart below.

Respondents Residence

All Respondents		Vermont Towns with Highest Representation	
VT	156	Stowe	34
MA	33	Burlington/S. Burlington	24
NY	17	Waterbury	15
NJ	10	Morrisville/Morristown	8
CT	9		
PA	5		
NH	3		
RI	3		
ME	2		
CO	1		
FL	1		
MI	1		
MO	1		
TN	1		
QC	1		
Total	244		

Additional Analysis:

Attempts were made to determine if any of the socio-demographic information influenced the responses for specific questions in the survey. The Stone Hut respondents as a group were fairly homogenous. There were no significant differences between the various characteristics (i.e., age, gender, income, and education) even in categories that one would assume most applicable. For example, income had relatively little influence on how much they were willing to pay for a night, the number of nights they wanted to stay, or how important an affordable reservation was to the respondent.

Conclusions:

It is evident from the survey that Stone Hut guests have some strong and varying opinions about the Stone Hut. The prominent conclusions from the survey are:

1. The Stone Hut guests like the Stone Hut facility the way it is and do not want or need additional amenities. The long tradition of the rustic nature of the Stone Hut is what draws the guests to the facility each year.
2. The guests also like the way the Stone Hut is operated and do not want to see any changes, except for reservations. There was no clear direction for the Stone Hut reservation system.
3. It is interesting that the guests are more price sensitive than expected especially since 58% had household incomes over \$100,000. The price point appears to be at the appropriate amount.
4. Stone Hut guests need to feel or perceive that the reservation lottery process is fair and everyone is treated the same regardless of time of year and dates requested.
5. There were opinions expressed on some of the ski resort policies. This information will be forwarded to Stowe Mountain Resort for consideration to changing some ski resort policies.