

Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management >

Volume 18, 2009 - [Issue 2-3: The Marketing of Hospitality and Leisure Experiences](#)

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Marketing the Leisure Experience to Baby Boomers and Older Tourists

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Pages 254-272 | Published online: 04 Mar 2009

 Cite this article  <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368620802594136>

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Abstract

Tourism is big business, especially for the increasing numbers of baby boomers who are becoming increasingly targeted by marketers and travel companies as a growing market. This is because many baby boomers are healthier, financially well off, better educated and have a greater desire for novelty, escape and authentic experiences than previous cohorts of retirees. The baby boomer generation is a prime example of a niche market firmly embracing the notion that the next wave of successful tourism businesses will be those geared towards the experience economy. In recent years, 'boomers' have demonstrated that they are willing participants in new and adventurous forms of leisure and are opting for more physically challenging and 'adrenalin driven' experiences. Because of this emerging trend, marketing campaigns need to be tailored to emphasize the leisure experience and to include actual statements from older people based on their perceived feelings about the tourism experience. In seeking to bring greater attention to this issue, this article seeks to first detail the changing leisure

interests of today's older tourists before concluding with a discussion of key marketing considerations for this growing cohort group.

KEYWORDS:

Baby boomers

cohorts

leisure experiences

INTRODUCTION

It has become generally accepted that most people travel for the leisure experiences that they actively pursue. [Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, and Wanhill \(1998\)](#) stated that “most tourism throughout the world is a leisure activity” (p. 11). [Leiper \(1990\)](#) argued that tourism was a valued category of leisure, and that similar benefits such as relaxation can be derived from both the leisure/and or the tourist experience. The types and variety of leisure experiences that are engaged in by people while on holiday have also been of interest to several researchers ([Wei & Millman, 2002](#)). This is because tourists participate in different types of leisure experiences when they are away from home. [Leontido \(1994\)](#) and [Carr \(2002\)](#) found that tourists often behave in a more liberated, and less restrained manner in contrast to their leisure time behaviour at home. Tourists are also more likely to engage in conversations that help facilitate social interaction while on holiday, which is one of the strongest factors that contribute to satisfaction with the tourist or leisure experience ([Thomas & Butts, 1998](#)).

Older people and in particularly ‘baby boomers’ (who were born between 1946 and 1964) are an emerging markets that are openly embracing the ‘leisure experience’ in their tourist activities in increasing numbers. By 2050 it is estimated over two billion people will be aged 60 years and over. This will account for 22% (or one out of five) of the world's population, compared to only 10% in 2000, and this demographic shift will be seen across all continents ([United Nations, 2000](#)). One of the major flow-on effects is that older adults will be responsible for an increasingly larger share of all holiday spending in the future than all the younger cohort groups combined. For example, in 1999 alone, over 593 million international travellers were aged 60 years and over. This accounted for around a third of all holiday spending by this segment. By 2050 this figure is projected to be greater than 2 billion trips annually ([World Tourism](#)

There is little doubt that baby boomers are increasingly placing travel as a higher priority in their retirement years, mainly because they are feeling healthier, wealthier, better educated, more independent, have an abundance of leisure time and a lessening of social and family obligations than younger people ([Martin & Preston, 1994](#)). Because many have larger amounts of time for leisure and are relatively free of family obligations, they generally prefer to take trips for longer periods of time, often travel off season and have a greater concern for personal safety when travelling compared to younger age groups ([Zimmer, Brayley, & Searle, 1995](#)). Because of the greater heterogeneity and diversity of the older population, they often require a greater variety of choices in their travel experiences than previous generations of cohort groups. These can range from soft adventure travel that they want to organize themselves, to booking travel on the Internet, or to group package tours where everything is done for them by the travel agent and they stay in 5-star hotels.

In view of the importance of the aging baby boomers to tourism, this article aims:

1. To gain an understanding of the demographic characteristics of baby boomers and to investigate their changing needs for more challenging tourism and leisure experiences.
2. To recognize that the baby boomer market is a heterogeneous one and marketing needs to concentrate on segmentation according to a range of socio-demographic variables and not age alone.
3. To suggest key marketing considerations and recommendations for tourism organizations so as to attract greater numbers of baby boomers through the promotion of the actual leisure experience.

THE LEISURE EXPERIENCE

Although it has been generally acknowledged that there are common linkages between tourism and leisure, both fields of study have remained relatively disparate. In fact it was not until the 1980s that several leisure researchers first began to research tourism topics from a social psychological perspective ([Iso-Ahola, 1989](#)). This was because there was a growing realization that tourism and travel research was encapsulated

similar qualities. These included both being undertaken in people's free time, being regarded as pleasurable, intrinsically motivating and a rewarding experience that has formed the basis of the subjective definition of leisure ([Neulinger, 1974](#)).

The field of leisure studies research has also undergone major changes in recent years. In particular, the term leisure 'experience' is now being more commonly used by leisure researchers and this has replaced the use of terms such as 'activities' or 'patterns' ([Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987](#); [Tinsley & Tinsley, 1986](#); [Lee, Datillo, & Howard, 1994](#)).

More recently, researchers have begun to refer to the leisure experience as multi-dimensional in nature and characterized by the variety of experiences that occur. For example, [Lee et al. \(1994\)](#) referred to the transitory, dynamic and complex nature of leisure experiences. To most people, leisure is seen as a mixture of pleasurable (and sometimes unpleasurable) experiences that are generally characterised by feelings of fun, enjoyment and relaxation.

Contemporary leisure researchers such as Witt, Ellis, Mannell and Kleiber are now applying social psychological theory to the study of leisure. Such terms as perceived freedom, internal locus of control, optimal arousal, intrinsic motivation, and flow have been found to be useful concepts that when operationalized, have helped researchers to better define the 'leisure experience'. [Csikszentmihalyi \(1975, 1990, 1997\)](#) first coined the term 'flow' to describe those exceptional moments in life, and the effortless action that people feel when experiencing leisure, similar to when professional athletes are referred to as 'being in the zone'. [Csikszentmihalyi \(1975\)](#) defined flow as:

A unified flowing from one movement to the next, in which the person is in control of his/her actions and in which there is no distinction between self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present and future. (p. 36).

As a result of the application of social psychological research, leisure researchers have become more intent on studying the feelings, attitudes and motivations of people's leisure and tourist behaviour, rather than concentrating purely on participation rates or future leisure or tourism trends. In other words, the variety, frequency and quality of the 'experience' has become more important to study as a measure of overall life satisfaction, rather than the actual type of leisure or tourist activity that a person participates in ([Smith & Godbey, 1991](#); [Grant, 2007](#)).

We now live in a world where tourism and leisure experiences are now being increasingly catered for by the commercial sector. The modern tourism and leisure industry is now all about providing experiences at a profit for the pleasure of others. [Grant \(2007\)](#) stated that, “We want to escape, socialize, fantasize, be creative, learn new skills, engage in some form of physical activity or interact with the environment” (p. 30). It is now the experience and not the event or activity that has become important for consumers. As [Pine and Gilmore \(1999\)](#) stated, people want to, ‘buy an experience’ and to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that engage them in a memorable way. This change in mindset also has meant that tourist agencies have had to rethink about how they view their customers, and how they are going to service their changing needs and desires. That is, there has been a shift from a product centric mindset to a customer centred one in which:

- Customers are no longer targets; they are humans to be served.
- Marketing is no longer a game of persuasion; it is a service.
- Customers are no longer data sets; they are human beings.
- The focus is no longer on products; it is on the customer experience ([Gilmartin, 2007b](#), p. 2).

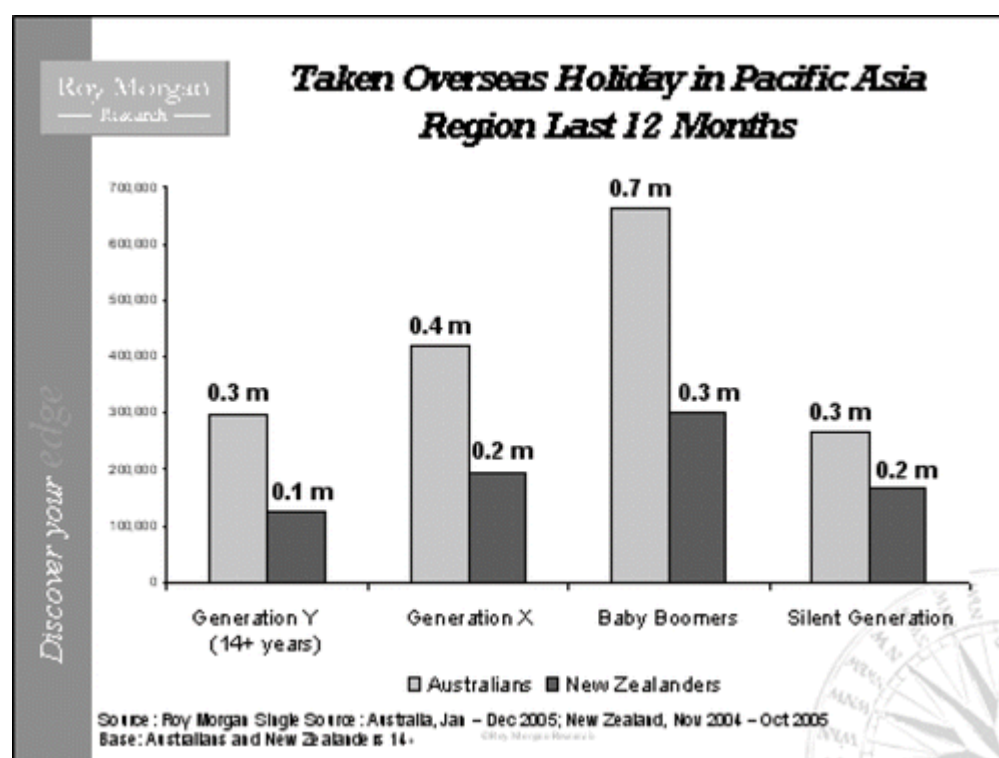
Older People and Tourism

On a global scale, the world is becoming increasingly aware of the significant impact that older adults will have on the tourism industry in the decades ahead ([Goeldner, 1992](#)). McNeil (1991) stated that, “... as amazing as it seems, over one-third of all Americans were born between 1946 and 1964” (p. 22). Baby boomers are turning 50 at the rate of one very ten seconds. This figure equates to more than 12,000 a day and over four million a year for the next decade. At more than 100 million strong, baby boomers make up one of the single largest consumer groups in America ([Gilmartin, 2007a](#)). In Canada, between 1946 and 1965 almost 10 million Canadians were born, representing the most significant demographic development in Canada since the Second World War ([McDougall, 1998](#)). Australia's ageing population is also increasing from around 12% in 1999 to between 24% and 26% by the year 2051, or one in four people will be aged 65 years and older ([Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999](#)). In Northern Europe, the number of older adults aged 65 years and older is increasing and

[Labour Organisation, 1997](#)). Europe's share of global tourism dollars has diminished over the years, which some sectors of the tourism industry have attributed to ignorance and a lack of information about the size and growth potential of the senior market. As a result, the promotional strategies that have been used to attract the senior market have lagged well behind the US ([Viant, 1993](#)). Germany and the United Kingdom are the largest senior domestic and international markets, while seniors in Scandinavia and Spain show the greatest propensity to travel.

On a global scale, the world is becoming increasingly aware of the significant impact that older adults will have on the tourism industry in the decades ahead ([Goeldner, 1992](#)). This trend is beginning to become noticed in the statistics that have been collected on travel in the Asia Pacific Region. In 2006, [Ianniello \(2006\)](#) from Roy Morgan Research reported that 40% of Australians and New Zealanders who were taking an overseas holiday in the Pacific Asia Region were baby boomers. In 2005, 664,000 Australian Baby Boomers and 302,000 New Zealand Baby Boomers took a holiday in the Pacific Asia region, spending \$AUD 4.1 billion and \$AUD 1.2 billion respectively (see [Figure 1](#)).

FIGURE 1 Overseas holidays taken in the last 12 months by Australians in the Pacific Asia region ([Ianniello, 2006](#)).



Display full size

[Green \(2006\)](#) has argued that those born particularly between 1946 and 1955 are poised to shatter traditional assumptions about the sixth and seventh decades of life. For example, he argued they will have little tolerance for stereotypes or ageism. Importantly, as consumers they will have an increased expectation of products and services that instil value beyond mere utility. That is to say they will seek out products and services that speak to deeper values, and they will reward those that crack the marketing code ([Green, 2006](#)). Such a shift in mindset will thus have an immediate and notable impact on the type of holidays undertaken and the destinations that are chosen by older adults. For example, there is a likelihood that in the future, the volume of beach holidays will fall significantly, while at the same time it is likely that educational or cultural experiences will increase as older people show a marked preference to take holidays where they will learn something new, and/or embark on different historical and cultural experiences (World Tourism Organization, 2001).

It has been generally accepted that not all older people want to do the same sorts of things, and they need to be seen as a heterogeneous group of people with different motivations, destination preferences, preferred modes of travel and personal values ([Cleaver, Muller, Ruys, & Wei, 1999](#)). Some prefer to travel with their family in their own cars and caravans. Others are more adventurous travellers who travel with a companion or friends and explore new and different locations, while others prefer to totally enmesh themselves in a different culture, living in a new country for an extended period of time.

Leisure and Tourism Experiences in Retirement

Retirement is a time when older individuals begin to experience new feelings of freedom to do what they want, when they wish, as well as an opportunity to take risks and to try something that they were never able to do when they were working ([Leitner & Leitner, 1996](#); [McGuire, Boyd, & Tedrick, 2004](#)). [Cohen \(2000\)](#) substituted the term 'creativity' for 'leisure' to describe a powerful inner resource that older people yearn for, that they regard as something that should be seen as more than just merely 'filling in time'. He gave several examples where these feelings of creativity can be achieved through undertaking hobbies, arts and crafts, new relationships, revitalized interests, a challenging new job or involvement in volunteerism. [Stebbins \(1982; 1992; 1998\)](#) coined the term 'serious leisure' to conclude many older people that achieve great satisfaction and fulfilment from being amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers and that this

commitment has helped them to keep busy, make new friends and enhance their older years.

Specifically in regard to the travel experience, [Wei and Millman \(2002\)](#) were interested in ascertaining whether a tourist's psychological well-being was positively affected by the variety of leisure activities that they engaged in while on a vacation trip. Data was collected from a sample of over 300 senior travellers (of which 60.5% were over 70 years of age) who were travelling on several 7-day North American escorted tour itineraries. The most popular activities that travellers participated in while on tour were found to be city sightseeing (89.3%), visiting historical places (88.1%), restaurant dining (85.7%), and shopping (77.4%). Less popular activities are hunting and fishing (1.2%), water sports and sunbathing (1.2%), and camping and hiking (3.6%).

The researchers found that a positive and significant relationship existed between senior traveller's participation in leisure activities, their overall satisfaction with the travel experience ($p = .236$, significance = $> .031$), and their level of psychological well-being ($p = .358$, significance = $> .01$). As a result of their findings, [Wei and Milman \(2002\)](#) concluded that marketing campaigns needed to focus more on the types and range of leisure activities that are provided at different tourist destinations. This would help to ensure that the senior tourist's satisfaction and psychological wellbeing would be at a high level throughout their vacation.

Shopping has also been identified as a favourite leisure experience and acknowledged as a primary means of generating tourism revenue as well as contributing to economic development. For example, tourists spend three to four times more money on shopping while travelling than the average shopper ([Travel Industry Association of America, 2004](#)). Shopping tourists expressed strong preferences for shopping in unique or different kinds of stores where they can buy something special for others, or to hunt for a bargain ([Kinley, Josiam, & Kim, 2003](#); [Littrell, Paige, & Song, 2004](#)).

[Littrell et al. \(2004\)](#) concluded that two types of older tourists surveyed showed preferences for different types of leisure experiences and as a result needed to be marketed to differently. The first were the 'younger-at-heart' seniors who generally felt healthier, sought fun and enjoyment out of life and used travel to fulfil their priorities. They also valued a sense of accomplishment, achievement and personal pride. As a result, the researchers suggested that the tourism product should be marketed as

implemented were to stress the importance of challenging oneself and achieving sensory stimulation, and this concept needed to reflect a self-image of usefulness. The second group were the 'older-at-heart' seniors were more concerned about security and danger, travel arrangements falling through, and/or becoming ill while on vacation. A greater proportion of females were in this group, and they were more likely to prefer travelling with either a group of friends, or with family members.

One of the new emerging markets is adventure tourism that focuses on more challenging, exciting and authentic experiences, and has become a new niche market for baby boomers who may be bored with being a mass tourist and a passive sightseer.

Adventure Tourism Experiences and Older Adults

A new generation of retirees have emerged that are 'hungry to go off the beaten path' resulting in the adventure travel business now growing to a \$500 million segment and at a rate of 30% per year, and is driven in partly by, "... more and more retirees with time, money, and a yen for the exotic" ([Symonds, 1998](#), p. 102).

Many want to escape the stress and boredom of their everyday routine, to spend their vacation time on pleasure filled trips with a range of exciting and new physically challenging experiences, as well as expressing their need to meet people and build new friendships. Gene Wellman, 71 years old, is a retired environmental consultant from Klamath Falls, Oregon, USA and typifies this type of traveller. "Wellman has no desire to be herded onto sightseeing buses. So he and his wife Genevieve have joined a small group trip to French Polynesia and Peru" ([Symonds, 1998](#), p. 102).

Why are older adults attracted to adventure tourist experiences? Why do they choose a particular type of adventure experience over another? If this is a new and largely untapped market, what marketing approaches are best utilized to attract this older cohort of people? Few studies have really addressed the needs, motivations, and expectations of older adults as dimensions of tourism behaviour within the concept of adventure tourism ([Fluker & Turner, 2000](#)).

The literature has found that many baby boomers have a greater desire for self-fulfilling experiences that are physically challenging, more meaningful and authentic ([Muller & Cleaver, 2000](#)). They have more time to travel and one of the first things that recent retirees do is to take a trip, whether it is around Australia or overseas ([Muller & Cleaver,](#)

years and older ([Travel Industry Association of America, 1998](#)). Their love for adventure tourism is particularly reflected in the comments by 74 year-old Elaine Carr,

Over the last 10 years, I have slept in a mountain hut while climbing 19,300 ft. Uhuru Peak on Mount Kilimanjaro and pitched a tent in a sandstorm in the Gobi desert. I have been to Mongolia, Madagascar and Peru and I am already planning this year's trips to the Andes and Ethiopia. When I first began travelling after her husband died in 1993, my friends could not understand why I did not choose more relaxing vacations in Hawaii or California. I told them that those were very nice places, but I can visit those places when I get older. ([Bierman, 2005](#), p. 53)

Therefore, one area that is attracting greater attention in the tourism and leisure literature is the need to cater for the very active, able, adventurous traveller. There is a greater demand for the travel experience to become a learning adventure in itself. Lipscombe (1996) stated that travelling is an important aspect of one's life adventure and exemplifies the search for meaning in later life. He suggested that the taste for new adventures might be more intense and addictive as we grow older. Older people are craving new experiences with a substantial adventure component, and are requesting that they be part of the decision-making process, and these, "... involve physical challenge, if not actual danger, travel that involves an inner journey, intellectual challenge, as well as exploration of new places and cultures" (Friedan, 1994, in [Lipscombe, 1995](#), p. 44).

[Muller and Cleaver \(2000\)](#) concluded that 'baby boomers' preferred soft adventure activities rather than hard adventure, because soft adventure activities are usually conducted under controlled conditions and are generally led by trained guides that supply the educational component that older people prefer. One older woman recounted an adventure experience with the Colorado-based company 'Walking the World',

"I made arrangements through the company for a seven-day hiking tour of the Canadian Rockies, specifically Banff and Jasper National Parks. I was in a group of six women and two men and two guides, a man and a woman. All of us were older than 60, nevertheless everyone was fit and had some hiking experience. Our guides were expert naturalists and planned daily walks that

enjoyed the trip very much. I thought many times during the trip that travelling with my contemporaries increased my enjoyment. The vistas were the same but the pace was more leisurely. My group of “elderlies” outwalked many younger people, and good spirits and fitness carried us further on the trail than some other groups ventured. ([Harnik, 1998](#), p. 42)

Many tourism providers have scaled back the physical demands of their trips for older people, such as reducing the number of miles travelled per day, lighter backpacks, optional rowing on a white water trip, and providing a choice of vans or tents. Generally, tour companies warn clients that adventure travel can be taxing and even risky at times, and they need to prepare for strenuous hiking and rustic conditions on five-day backpacking trips to Uganda for example. As a rule, many of these trips offer training beforehand especially for hiking and biking, as decent medical care may be many miles away. Some firms require older tourists to fill out a medical questionnaire before the trip, and may even request a physical examination if there are potential health problems ([Silver, 1994](#)). Therefore, travel companies need to be more diligent and mindful about the physical capacity and health of their older clients before sending them off to rugged destinations. They also should need to heed older people's preferences for slower paced tours, choosing their own food menus, and avoiding too many early morning departures ([Massow, 2000](#)).

Marketing Leisure Experiences to Older Tourists

The boundary between leisure and tourism research is becoming increasingly blurred and more fluid because of the growing realisation that leisure and adventure experiences are an integral part of tourism ([Milman, 1998](#)). Milman concluded that leisure and adventure experiences helped to contribute to the traveller's psychological wellbeing and level of happiness. While the visitor to a resort is traditionally classified as a tourist, most of the activities that tourists pursue while at a tourist destination are seen as leisure related. [Coke and Perkins \(1998\)](#) reinforced this when they stated that adventure tourism is fundamentally about active leisure participation and that the emphasis of marketing campaigns and slogans should be placed on new metaphors based on ‘doing’, ‘touching’ and ‘seeing’, rather than merely ‘seeing’.

In the past, leisure researchers have made better use, and showed greater understanding of social psychological theory to describe the actual feelings that

such words as enjoyment, fun, excitement, optimal arousal, sensation seeking, flow and intrinsic motivation need to be better emphasised by marketers to describe the leisure experience that is associated with adventure tourism. In other words, the emphasis should be on the actual feelings and emotions that people experience while participating in tourism.

Based on an examination of the current research literature, future marketing campaigns should place greater emphasis on the authentic statements used by older people that enable them to describe their “real” experience – such as a sense of adventure, escapism and the challenge of actual involvement. Terms such as enjoyment, flow, optimum arousal, and meeting new friends should be emphasised so as to encourage feelings associated with a sense of freedom, fun and escape from a mundane and sometimes boring lifestyle at work and perhaps an unhappy family life. In addition, marketing strategies that promote images of older people doing soft and hard adventure activities so that they can feel younger and healthier by literally ‘buying back their youth’ should also be encouraged by the media.

Segmenting the Market

The tourism industry must not consider older adults to be one single distinct group, but rather as a heterogeneous group of people that include many distinct market segments. The broad range of people that we classify as older aged adults actually includes a wide range of ages ranging from approximately 50 years to 100 years or more. Every cohort group (50 to 60 years; 60 to 70 years; 70 to 80 years, etc) has lived through a particular time in history that makes them distinct from other cohort groups because they possess their own distinct characteristics, needs and interests.

Psychographic variables such as age, income, gender, education, and health are important to consider as they are based on different aspects of older people's lifestyles. For example, [Shoemaker \(2000\)](#) concluded that segmentation studies have clearly shown that there are different segments of older travellers who travel for a variety of motivations and are based on a wide range of psychographic variables that remain fairly stable over time.

Segmentation based on age

Recent research has indicated that marketing to chronological or a person's actual age rather than to his/her cognitive age may be a dangerous precedent. People generally

assess their subjective age as different from their chronological age. That is, seniors typically feel a decade younger (average of 10.2 years) than what their actual age is, and as a result often prefer to spend their holiday activities with younger people ([Cleaver & Muller, 2002](#)). This age difference gap seems to become larger as a person ages, for example, travellers from the United States who were aged 80 years and older still felt that they had a subjective age of around 65 years ([Smith & Jenner, 1997](#)).

Segmentation based on income

There is a growing market of wealthy seniors that are able to afford a higher quality of travel. [Penalta and Uysal \(1992\)](#) noted that the financial health of a large number of older people made them with an excellent market for luxury goods and services. As a result, resorts and hotels are specifically designing programs and activities that target older people. Group travel and package tours were also popular with older travellers, as well as the provision for quality travel, and travel related products and services. Package tours are very popular because many middle and upper class people are often too busy to spend time organising their trip plans themselves, and as a result prefer to leave this task in the hands of professionals such as travel agents.

Special interest tourism has become more popular in recent years and trips are very expensive because of the tour companies desire to cater for the older adult's need to travel to remote areas of the world, sometimes with limited access by air. This is because guided tours such as soft adventure activities that include wildlife safaris, white water rafting trips, mountain treks and sea kayaking are generally more expensive to organize. These increased costs have been attributed to the specialized nature of the trip and their related insurance costs, increased travel fares to remote locations, and the need to employ more highly skilled and qualified guides ([Sorenson, 1993](#)). However, overall, the economic statistics suggest that there is a general trend toward more discretionary dollars being budgeted for travel purposes, and this type of leisure activity appears to have become more popular than ever before with older adults ([Javalgi et al., 1992](#)).

Segmentation based on gender

Women generally outnumber men in their later years, and if they are well educated and have a higher income, they are more likely to want to travel overseas than any other age group ([Hawes, 1988](#)). For many older women, their strong need to socialise and

cultural and heritage activities, and festivals. Many single, widowed or divorced older women prefer to join a group package tour because it provides them with greater opportunities for social interaction as well as increased safety and protection from terrorism. Men on the other hand prefer activities that are outdoors and emphasise their health and fitness through such sporting activities as golfing, fishing and hiking.

[Statts and Pierfelice \(2003\)](#) found strong support for the belief that travel is a frequently desired and continuing activity for groups of long-term retirees, most of whom were women. [Lehto, O'Leary and Lee \(2001\)](#) also found that females were more sensitive to safety issues than men, and requested greater opportunities to socialise and interact with other people. Most women prefer shorter trips possibly because they do not want to be away from their family and pets for longer periods of time.

Segmentation based on education

When baby boomers reach their later years, they will have attained significantly higher levels of formal education than their predecessors. In 1990, about 46% of Americans aged 65 and over had completed less than four years of high school, 33% had received a high school diploma and 13% had completed 4 years or more of college (United States Department of Commerce, 1993). In contrast to this, presently, well over half of all baby boomers have earned at least a high school diploma, and approximately 1:4 will have completed four years of college ([McNeil, 2001](#)). Similarly, Australian baby boomers have more years of formal education than the average Australian, with 27.3% of baby boomers completing a university degree compared to 13% of Australian full-time workers aged 15 years and over ([Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996](#)).

The research indicates that people with higher education, income levels, life satisfaction scores and who spent more of their discretionary income on recreation and leisure prefer to travel to destinations that are further away from Canada or the United States ([Zimmer et al., 1995](#)).

Segmentation based on health

Health status is generally at a higher level for many older adults than previous cohorts, with greater numbers of baby boomers enjoying a more active lifestyle, have a greater knowledge about the health risks associated with a sedentary lifestyle, and have greater access to higher levels of health care. Because of the trend toward healthy and

physical activities as walking and gardening, eating more nutritious and low-fat foods as well as still remaining socially active ([Kendig et al., 1996](#)). Because many seniors are now more health-conscious, retirement communities are promoting health and fitness through their emphasis on swimming pools and spas, gymnasiums and walking trails. Swimming and aqua aerobic classes have become popular because of their well known therapeutic benefits, particularly for older people who have arthritis and osteoporosis.

Retirement communities such as Sun City in Arizona, USA has emerged from nothing but desert in 1959, to a large community of 46,000 seniors. The success of Sun City has encouraged DEVCO, the developer to expand their concept to provide residents with the choice of living in eight different retirement communities in Arizona, South Carolina, and California. The emphasis of their advertising campaigns has been to promote active adult communities and is pitched at encouraging older people to enjoy the freedom of a range of leisure activities such as croquet, ceramics, golf, gardening, and swimming that highlights a 'golden' or 'treasured' time of life ([Luken & Vaughn, 2003](#)).

These 'young at heart boomers' prefer to enjoy their holidays with younger people and still want to be involved in active and more adventurous leisure experiences ([Cleaver & Muller, 2002](#)). It has also been found that many older people are becoming younger in outlook, with similar types of leisure behaviour overlapping with younger and older age groups. As a result, leisure activities such as going to the movies, undertaking do-it-yourself renovation activities, eating out, and watching DVD's at home were found to be blurred across a range of different age groups ([Henley Centre, 1992](#)).

CONCLUSION

As noted by [Grant \(2007\)](#), tourism offerings have a limited shelf life in a world where today's savvy older consumers are seeking leisure and tourism experiences that best satisfy their functional and subjective age needs. This notion was supported by the Coming of Age Group (2007) who argued that as people age; emotional triggers linked to past experiences largely determine how they respond to offerings of new products or services in the marketplace. With this in mind, marketing strategies for tourism destinations must attempt to integrate empathy, openness and honesty in their messages to spark (and hold) the attention of baby boomers. "These attributes are considered necessary in terms of building trust and are essential for sustaining optimal

As noted previously in this article, the boomer market is a growing market whose particular needs are now beginning to be considered more seriously by tourism operators. Not before time it should be added, as researchers have indicated that many boomers are already bypassing the high street travel agent and ignoring the well-intentioned tour operator packages specifically targeted at their age bracket as they do not want to be tagged as “goldies,” nor do they want to be directed to the limited range of passive offerings for individuals they perceive to be much older and senior to themselves ([Juliet, 2003](#)).

While it can be said that the renewed interest in better servicing the needs of baby boomers is in part because tourism agencies have begun to appreciate more fully the sheer size of the market numbers involved, it also has much to do with the recognition of the diverse lifestyle patterns and consumption habits of this cohort where the “one size fits all” mindset just does not cut it. It is a group which is very clearly different across a range of characteristics in comparison to previous generations of older people. The average age of retirement is falling and many people in this “young old” age group are now ‘empty nesters’ whose children have left home. They are generally healthy, more highly educated and financially secure, and as a result, this group wants to increasingly enjoy special interest travel that caters for new and innovative ‘hands on’ experiences. This is especially true for older women and those who are widowed and single who will become a much larger segment of the older adult market as their needs become further recognized.

Because of this, travel will become a high priority among all age groups up to and around the age of 75 years. One of the main reasons for this is the intangible quality of travel and the fact that seniors often prefer to buy experiences rather than material possessions. They feel that travel will help to enrich their lives and to help them feel young again. For example, the extreme adventure activity of jet boating in New Zealand is increasingly attracting older people as potential customers because it enables them to feel young again ([Cater, 2000](#)). This he concluded was related to the need for older people to rejuvenate their bodies through participation in adventure type activities, and that they could buy (or bring back) their youth and helped them to feel ‘forever young’.

Recent trends are showing that many baby boomers have the desire to feel young again, or at least to relive some of the more pleasant experiences that characterised

when they were younger and more active. They also want to engage in exciting and adventurous activities in which their younger family members might also wish to participate with them. [Goodman \(2007\)](#), noted that companies looking for ways to motivate the 'been there, done that' boomer cohort need look no further than creating tourist opportunities that tap into their renewed interest for history and nostalgia that they perceive as adventurous or new, but relatively safe. Strategies for selling these opportunities need to be aligned with how baby boomers think and act. That is,

- As a cohort, baby boomers are more resistant to absolute propositions. The implication of this is that tourism agencies need to present information on services and products in a qualified, even differential manner.
- They are more sensitive to metaphorical meanings, nuances and subtleties. The implication of this is that tourism agencies need to take greater heed to the importance of expanding the content of a given message, especially in terms of its metavalues. That is, to emphasise values that transcend the generic value of a service or product and expand its perceived attractiveness.
- They are more sensitive to narrative-styled presentations of information, and less responsive to information presented in an expository style. The implication of this is that tourism agencies should make greater use of story-telling techniques to convey information to baby boomers.
- Their perceptions are more holistic. In response, marketing strategies should focus on projecting an interest in the 'whole' person and not just a facet that might need a particular product or service. ([Coming of Age, 2007](#), p. 2-3,).

The research has shown that baby boomers are indicating that they prefer real life experiences where they can learn and broaden their minds. Many have attained high levels of formal education than previous cohort groups, and now have the time to travel to new and exotic locations to visit and learn about different cultures from a variety of first hand experiences. They are now more interested in enriching their lives through the gaining of knowledge rather than being entertained so as to satisfy their needs for self-expression, creativity, and internal growth. Whether it is a wine tour to France or a hiking trip of the Scottish Highlands, the focus will increasingly be on interacting with local residents and gaining an in depth knowledge about a local area.

At present, the tourist industry is focussing on the young, wealthy and able-bodied tourist, however this is beginning to change as marketers become increasingly aware of the more active and adventurous older, baby boomer market. This type of tourism is poised to become a larger part of the leisure market. The over 50's are more adventurous than their parents, and are driven to discover new destinations and to try new and exciting leisure activities. Tourism operators must quickly adapt their marketing strategies to this emerging market otherwise they will be left behind. As noted by [McDougall \(1998\)](#), those products and services that can best cater to the sophisticated travel tastes of the baby boomer generation and, at the same time, meet the sensitivities of older travellers may well be the winners in the market place in future years.

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