

Baby Boomer Travel Market is on the Increase!

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On a global scale, business operators are becoming increasingly aware of the significant impact that baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are having on the tourism industry [1]. In fact, this growing segment of this population is already starting to exert its significant 'economic clout' by demanding a diverse range of tourism services not previously considered mainstream offerings for older individuals [2,3]. Tourism researchers and practitioners alike now readily appreciate that as a direct consequence of global aging patterns, baby boomer travellers will increasingly account for a larger share of all vacation spending globally [4-6].

In 1999, over 593 million international travellers were aged 60 years and over. This level of tourism activity accounted for approximately a third of the total amount spent on holidays in that year. By 2050, this figure is projected to grow to exceed two billion trips per annum [7]. These future population projections imply that becoming older does not necessarily restrict people's desire to travel. Furthermore, the baby boomer market is becoming increasingly attractive to travel businesses and is often promoted in Europe, especially in response to the fluctuation in seasonal demand [8].

This significant population shift is starting to have a notable impact on the type of holidays undertaken and the destinations that are chosen [9]. For example, the volume of beach holidays is likely to fall markedly, and educational or cultural tourism will increase as baby boomers prefer to take holidays where they can learn something new, and/or embark on different historical and cultural experiences [7].

Part of this reasoning relates to the fact that baby boomer travellers are healthier, wealthier, better educated, more independent, have an abundance of leisure time and a lessening of social and family obligations than younger people [10,11]. According to Huang and Tsai [12], "seniors will soon be one of the largest prospective market segments for the hospitality and travel industries", and they will significantly contribute to the leisure sector. This is because they possess a relatively large share of discretionary money which they want to spend on travel, as those who are 65 years of age and older are the second richest group in society [13,14]. In addition, there is every indication that baby boomers will prefer to take longer holiday trips and stay away from home for a longer time period [15,16] while at the same time have a greater concern for personal safety and security while travelling [17], than other age cohorts of the population.

A word of warning! Researchers need to be careful not to lump all people together as 'older' or 'mature' if they are over an arbitrary age such as 55, 60 or 65 years. If they do, this shows a lack of understanding about what each age cohort is really like, especially in relation to their individual needs, interests, and lifestyles [18]. It is important to understand that each cohort group of older adults has lived through a specific time in history that adds to their distinct characteristics, needs and interests. At the same time, there is individual variability in a person's physiological changes, health status, psychological wellbeing, socio-economic circumstances, social and family situation and ethnic minority status. Despite this age variability, travel businesses are beginning to appreciate that the senior market is an important segment and because of this, have started to shift their advertising dollars away from other target groups to the growing baby boomer travel market.

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