

The Mature Age Market in Europe and Its Influence on Tourism

Mature age travellers already form a major part of the travel market. As the population ages, travellers can likewise be expected to age and mature age people will represent an increasingly significant proportion of the tourism market. The continued growth of tourism industry in many countries over the next ten years may well depend on how companies understand demographic trends affecting consumer behaviour.



Mature Age Travelers

As far as the mature age market is concerned, there appears to be a misconception in the industry about the type of products and services suitable for elderly people. Many hotels and tour operators consider that everyone over the age of 55 is looking for the same type of products and services. The industry must consider that elderly people think different than young people, in order to reach the single market efficiently. The elderly people have more money and prefer having "experiences" instead of owning many possessions.

On the other hand, mature people are better educated and more sophisticated. They demand and expect quality in all aspects of their travel. Many elderly people also have more free time and mature age travellers are more flexible with their time and can contribute to a longer tourism season as they can travel during "off-peak" periods. The older part of the market (65+years) tends to have a longer length of stay than younger seniors for whom work commitments often influence the length of holidays.

Seniors will be the demographic discovery of this decade for two reasons. First, they are abundant in number. Secondly, their life styles are remarkably different from those of previous generations. With no models to guide them, the independent elderly are making new choices about how they want to live during a prolonged retirement.

Recently, business attitudes towards senior travellers have begun to change. For example, airlines and hotel chains, being conscious that the elderly are a potentially huge market, have designed special discount programs for seniors. Moreover, a number of tour operators have specialised in the market for older people, with packages meeting their requirements in Southern Europe during the winter off-season, when even if the climate is not at its warmest, it is certainly much milder than in Northern Europe.

Many mature age travellers seek relaxing, quiet and more passive holidays that include time with friends and family and visits to places they have always wanted to go. Others take shorter trips, have higher levels of spending and seek new experiences, soft adventure and opportunities to socialise and meet new people. Many older people are interested in heritage and cultural experiences and seek growth and enrichment from travel".

Favourite trip activities by mature travellers include shopping (29 %), visiting historical places or museums (15 %), attending cultural events or festivals (12 %), gambling (11 %), outdoor activities (11 %), visiting national or state parks (8 %) and going to the beach (7 %). According to a report in Modern Maturity, "over-50s" report they are likely to travel 3+times per year (68 %), travel by car (46 %), for relaxation (42 %) or adventure (32 %), and prefer to travel either their mate (39 %) or family (22 %) or as part of a tour group (16 %). Although, the number of holidays which are taken declines with advancing age, the elderly people taking holidays abroad rather than at home have increased significantly.



Travel Propensities of the Mature Age Market

Marketers should take into account the travel propensities of the elderly people. Older people are also more likely to spread their holidays into off-peak months than are the general population. A significant trend in recent years has been the increasing numbers of winter holidays taken by senior citizens.

The time spent on holiday by the elderly is longer on average than spent by the rest of the population; winter holidays could last for a period of 4-28 weeks, usually between October and May. Many elderly people from northern Europe spend the winter in countries on the Mediterranean, with Spain the most important destination. Mature holiday makers of Europe stay 4 to 7 nights in holiday destinations. German and Dutch travellers show the highest propensity for taking holidays of four-nights plus, with 76,9% and 67,9% of the population respectively. Portugal, at 31,2%, has the lowest holidaymaking rate in the European Union.

Although private or hired vehicles are the mode of transport used most frequently by the European tourists, senior travellers tend to use intermediaries such as travel agents and tour operators. Air transport is popular with British tourists.

European senior holidaymakers differ in their destination preferences. Tourists from Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Finland and Sweden tend to spend their holidays in their own country. More than 95% of holidays taken by Greeks are in Greece itself, and the equivalent for Spain is around 90%, while Belgians, Danes, Luxemburgers, Dutch and Austrians tend to travel abroad. In Belgium, the 45-64 age bracket boosts this trend with a rate of 77,2% and Danes in this age group show a similar preference for trips abroad (63,9%).

Expanding Tourism Market

Older international and domestic travellers offer an emerging and expanding tourism market. Europe possesses a number of qualities and attractions with potential to attract this market but it is important to offer the type of travel experiences that the mature age market seeks. Despite the size of the senior citizen market, the travel and tourism industry in Europe has not taken full advantage of the opportunities of this market. It is clear, that the mature market is already a good stable market for the hospitality industry. The tourism industry needs to understand changing demands, needs and opportunities of the elderly people and be in a position to provide for and benefit from them.

The shifts in the total population of Europe have several implications for the tourism industry in targeting the mature age market. From a practical perspective, some outcomes and practical solutions can be drawn:

- The travel and tourism industry should think of seniors as a heterogeneous group which has many distinct segments.
- The market needs to be segmented in order to meet the diversity of demand such as income, age groups, gender, values, attitudes, lifestyles and interest across older people.
- While developing tours, it is important to organise activities and tours that offer a heritage/cultural theme and a learning component.
- Mature age people generally show above average levels of newspaper readership and television watching. It is therefore useful to use the media means above in order to target the mature age market.



- Senior travel clubs and other associations to which older people belong could be used more effectively by the tourism and travel industry to promote sales.
- Some events and festivals should be offered to appeal to senior travellers because seniors tend to extend their stays to participate in these events. Such events also provide for seniors' interests in social opportunities and meeting new people.
- While today's seniors enjoy better health than older people before them, it must still be recognised that health and disability issues are more important with increasing age. Therefore, the travel and tourism industry need to be conscious of and provide for, the special needs of senior travellers in this market.
- Most coach and other transportation terminal facilities need improvements to meet the needs of seniors.
- Some other issues for the senior travellers are also important. In particular, the accommodation industry needs to give more importance to some important issues such as cleanliness, friendliness of staff, security, comfortable rooms, opportunities to meet new people, good maintenance, help with bags, easy access, close proximity between car park, room and check-in.
- Loyalty schemes are also important for seniors as they like the discounts and some other programmes offered.
- There is also a need of cooperation between the industry and organisations related to elderly people.
- Finally, the industry should carry out continued market research and public relations and promotion programs to take full advantage of the growing and changing senior travel market.

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Current Demographic Trends in EU

Spectacular increase in senior population in EU and industrialized countries along with decline in birth rates Zero population growth and even decline in population Decline in number of younger people

Some examples of demographic trends

Netherlands: 45% increase in 50 + population within 25 years Germany - Persons aged 60 year or older:

Increase of 4 million between 2000 and 2020

In 2020 28,5 % of population

In the same period 11 % decline in number of children under 15 year

Worldwide: In 2025 the population over 60 will double compared with 2000

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