



Enlightening Tourism.

A Pathmaking Journal



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It pays to keep a close eye on your market - particularly when it is transforming right before you! Seniors' tourism and leisure markets are growing as rapidly, as stereotypes of passive pensioners are shedding like outworn snake skins.

The profile of the world's population is changing - forever. The ageing population is increasing at a rate that is as unprecedented as it is pervasive, and the impact is being felt across every continent in the world. The United Nations estimates that by 2050, more than 2 billion people will be aged 60 and older, accounting for 22% of the world's population, compared with only 10% in 2000. That is a big market increase. The ageing population is also healthier. Better health promotion, health care and medical advances/technology mean people are now living healthier lives, for longer. The focus is very much on maintaining vitality, a sense of purpose and quality of life.

This demographic transformation is redefining the traditional concepts of work and retirement. It can offer a future where people may live for up to twenty years as a retiree - and one where many (though certainly not all) have the freedom and leisure, as well as the time and disposable income to travel. Leading this transformative

charge into retirement are the Baby Boomers - that massive cohort of people born in an era of post WWII posterity. They bring with them, not only the critical mass of numbers to effect change, but also attitude. Better educated, healthier, and more affluent than previous generations, the baby boomers have ripped up the guide books for every decade of their lives - and they are certainly not stopping as they enter retirement.

Ian Patterson captures the essence, and opportunities, of this profound global change, in his book *Tourism and Leisure Behaviour in an Ageing World*. He makes it clear that later life is now a time of growth rather than inevitable decline by opening with a quote from renowned feminist, Betty Friedan (1994), 'Ageing is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength'. Awareness of this transformation has implications across the tourism and leisure industries – for operators, marketers, government policy, researchers, and consumers. The early adopters are alert to the market change. They acknowledge that senior travellers in general, and baby boomers in particular, comprise a primary market, and one that is now more sophisticated in its travel choices, more discerning, and more demanding, than previous generations. They understand that older travellers are no longer a broad, homogenous blend of people who happen to be aged over 50, but rather a vast, ethnically diverse, multi-faceted and profitable range of (often networked) niche segments. Critically, they also understand that appealing to the cognitive, or subjective, age of people in this market is far more effective than efforts to market to their chronological age.

It is very clear that baby boomers, who see themselves as trendsetters, display no interest in leisure or travel experiences tagged with a senior's label. This is complex territory, and many could benefit from a guiding hand to understand the characteristics, motivations, tourist behaviour, and leisure needs of baby boomers, and older travellers. They will find one in this new edition of an earlier textbook by Patterson which draws on the huge increase in interest in this market from the tourism industry over the past decade – both from operators and researchers.

Patterson links classic theories of ageing, tourism/leisure definitions, motivational theory, research findings, and case studies to provide a comprehensive overview of the field. He builds a framework to help understand this new breed of travellers who will be staying healthy as they age, maintaining active lifestyles, and travelling well into their 70s, 80s, and beyond.

A series of chapters offer insights into the niche tourist streams blossoming in response to these diverse sub-markets, including cultural/heritage tourism, cruise, and educational tourism. A chapter on health/wellness/spa tourism includes a discussion on the ethical, legal and health aspects of the growing medical tourism market.

Special interest tourism and (soft) adventure travel are other markets on the increase, though there remains a market for people who prefer the psychological comfort of all inclusive package tours. Such tours are particularly attractive for single travellers, including women, who are drawn by perceived benefits of cost, safety and opportunities for social interaction. Smaller escorted programs are also on the rise, offering more leisurely, less regimented itineraries, and featuring flexible transport, from small cruise ships to bicycles. The key to the future of these programs is the ability of operators to incorporate unique elements that travellers cannot organise on their own.

There is a detailed analysis on the modes of leisure travel - including the drive market, caravan and long distance Recreational Vehicle (RV) travel, particularly for Grey Nomads (Australia) and Snow Birds (Canada). A discussion on the motor coach industry examines the slow decrease in numbers of older travellers and suggests ways companies might respond to these changes and adjust their products and services to meet the diverse needs of the baby boomers. Such insightful discussions, offering areas for industry improvement, as well as topics for future research, are a feature of the book, and at times could be more clearly signposted. Another example is the discussion examining technology, particularly the impact of the stellar growth of internet usage on pre-travel behaviour, and the implications for the role of travel agent.

Patterson suggests that value-adding through strong personal relationship-building skills, superior destination knowledge, and an understanding of the specific needs of the older adult market will be critical for their survival. Indeed, reading this chapter, it appears the impact of technology is an area where operational knowledge appears to have outstripped research, and I would suggest this is a field that could particularly benefit from research co-creation and knowledge sharing. At this point, I echo Patterson's observations on the need for more qualitative research to deepen understanding of the older traveller experience.

This book is a useful resource for both researchers and people working in the leisure and travel industries. I would like to see the audience widened to include people working in health/aged care policy to help deepen their understanding of the ways travel, and leisure, contribute to psychological and physical health, for all ages, but particularly for a post-retirement population.

The benefits are clear, at both the individual and societal level. Tourism delivers social, health and personal returns which are worth far more than just the economic returns it generates. A whole of government (health/ageing/tourism) approach to reviewing and reforming tourism policy - could usefully focus on the health benefits for the population - as well as the economic returns.