



GREY TOURISM (SENIORS)

Grey Tourism is the term used to refer to the seniors market. The term Senior is usually used to refer to a person aged 60 or over.

Research indicates that the seniors market presents a golden opportunity for expanding Queensland's domestic market. Seniors are the fastest growing market segment. They have more leisure time than younger people and choose to spend more of this time travelling. Seniors also have high levels of discretionary income, and choose to spend a greater percentage of this on travel than younger people.

In 2002, Tourism Queensland conducted a review of current research to gain a better understanding of the seniors market. Specific objectives of conducting the review were to:

- Develop a market profile of the seniors tourism sector in Queensland;
- Provide information on what seniors are looking for in a tourism experience;
- Identify any product gaps; and
- Identify core issues that confront both the operation and development of tourism businesses targeting the seniors market.

Market Insight

- Almost 3 million Australians, or 16 % of the population, are seniors.¹
- Approximately three quarters (75%) of Australian seniors travelled in 1998, with 80% stating they wanted to travel now or in the near future.¹
- It is estimated that Australia's 2.97 million seniors would have spent \$895 million on domestic travel in 1999. This is projected to grow to \$2.3 billion by 2051.¹
- 15% of visitors to Queensland are aged 60 years or over.²
- Brisbane is the most popular destination for senior domestic visitors to Queensland, attracting 31% of all visitors to Queensland aged 60 or over.²
- The Gold Coast is the second most popular destination for senior domestic visitors to Queensland, attracting 20% of all visitors to Queensland aged 60 or over.²
- Seniors make up a larger proportion of the total domestic visitors to a region for the Outback (23% of domestic visitors to the Outback are aged over 60 years) and the Darling Downs (21%) than for other major regions in Queensland.²
- Most seniors travelling in Queensland are residents of the state. New South Wales is the next biggest source market for seniors to Queensland.²
- Worldwide there were almost 600 million tourists aged 60 or over in 1999. This figure is likely to climb to at least 2 billion by the middle of the century.³
- The primary international source markets for senior travellers to Australia are the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the United States of America and Japan.⁴
- The most popular destinations for international visitors to Queensland are Brisbane (20% of international visitors to Queensland aged 60 or over visit Brisbane), Tropical North Queensland (18%) and the Gold Coast (17%).⁴
- Seniors make up a larger proportion of the total international visitors to a region for the Sunshine Coast (20% of international visitors to the Sunshine Coast are aged over 60 years), Darling Downs (17%), Brisbane (14%) and Mackay (14%) than for other major regions in Queensland.⁴
- Approximately three quarters (76%) of seniors feel travel is important to maintaining general health and wellbeing.¹
- Seniors tend to spend a higher percentage of their discretionary income on travel than younger people.¹
- Most seniors budget carefully and are conscious of value for money when travelling.¹
- Seniors typically spend more time planning holidays than younger travellers.¹
- Seniors are larger consumers of travel information than young people.¹
- Seniors are more likely than younger people to travel in off-peak periods.¹

- Seniors are more likely than younger travellers to demonstrate brand loyalty, including using favourite tour guides and choosing holidays based on past travel experiences.³
- Spending time with family and friends, getting a break from routine and visiting places that have always been of interest are important motivators for senior travellers.³
- Seniors seek reassuring information on available medical facilities, opportunities for personal assistance and health insurance when travelling.¹

Please note that most information pertaining to type of experience sought, activities, accommodation, transport and length of experience pertains to Australian travellers only.

Type of Experience Sought

Travel can fulfil a range of needs for seniors, including nostalgia, social interaction, learning, escape, adventure, the chance to see new places and try new things or mental/physical stimulation. New friends and memories are important 'rewards' of travel for many seniors. For some seniors, travel can replace working life as a means of social contact and mental stimulation.¹

Activities

Many seniors enjoy tours that show the "old Australia", including visits to nostalgic places or sites of historical significance. Seniors have a strong sense of national pride and are interested in the people, places and events that built Australia.¹

Tours that take in natural landmarks are also popular among travelling seniors. Older Australians have a strong desire to see first hand places they have only seen on television, such as Uluru and the Great Barrier Reef.¹

The most popular **leisure experiences** for senior travellers include:

- Visiting historical sites
- Visiting the countryside and natural wilderness
- Shopping
- Going on guided tours
- Visiting beaches, lakes and rivers.⁵

The most popular **trip elements and tour activities** for seniors include:

- Sightseeing (88%)
- Live theatre and entertainment (71%)
- Historic areas and events (68%)
- Museums and exhibits (68%)
- Festivals and events (65%)
- Boat and train excursions (64%)
- Gaming trips (58%)
- Shopping (53%)
- Education and learning experiences (47%)
- Nature, eco-trips and outdoor activities (46%).⁵

Only younger seniors are interested in attractions involving big cities, nightlife and entertainment, sports and recreation, indigenous cultures and other cultures.¹

Accommodation Preferences¹

Currently, many seniors prefer mid-priced accommodation to budget luxury accommodation. Three-star hotels and motels are popular as they provide home comforts. Mid-priced motel chains enjoy senior patronage as they offer a consistent level of acceptable quality.

Almost half of seniors (45%) prefer to have accommodation offered as part of a package tour covering all the best tourist spots. For other seniors (25%) it is more important for them to have accommodation that offers an escape from other tourists, where they can explore new places, meet new people and enjoy different experiences.

Run-down exterior appearances and poor maintenance deter senior travellers who value safety, security and cleanliness in accommodation facilities very highly. Seniors also tend to avoid accommodation with stairs or where there is a long walk from the car park to check-in, or a long walk to their room.

Other important characteristics affecting seniors' purchasing choices for accommodation are the friendliness of staff, comfort of the room furnishings and layout and the condition and maintenance of the room itself.

Facilities

- Ensuite bathrooms are desired by a majority of seniors, especially older seniors and single women.
- There is greater demand for accommodation with access and facilities for seniors with disabilities than is currently being offered by accommodation providers.
- Availability and proximity of medical assistance is important to some seniors who may be concerned about becoming ill while travelling.

Transport¹

Private car and **air** are the main modes of transport seniors use to travel **to** their destination.

Private car is the most used transport for travel **at** the destination.

Air travel is the most popular way for seniors to cover large distances, but is not always used as price can be a barrier. Very few seniors are aware of special seniors deals available.

The lower cost of **coach travel** makes it particularly popular among singles and full pensioners. The fact that coach travel can be organised at short notice is also appealing. The over 50 segment tends to hire coaches for their trips, often liking to use the same company and the same driver to allow for the development of a level of trust.

Most seniors view **rail travel** in a positive light. It is seen as an affordable method of transport, provided you book ahead. Seniors appreciate discount offers for rail travel.

Seniors express a desire to use **public transport** when visiting other cities however a lack of information about transport availability and deals deters them from doing so. Currently, only 15% of travelling seniors use public transport at their destination.

Information Sources

The most popular sources of information for seniors, in order of importance, are:

- Travel agents
- The Internet
- Tourist offices / Visitor information centres / Government tourism Commissions
- Motoring associations
- Travel guide or book
- Advertising in newspaper, magazine, TV or radio²

When selecting destinations, seniors are also likely to get help from family or friends or to have knowledge of their destination from having visited there previously.⁶

Many seniors do not seek any information prior to embarking on their trip. These seniors often collect information whilst on the road (at Visitor Information Centres or through word of mouth, for example).⁷

Length of Experience

Seniors have more leisure time than younger people and choose to spend more of this time travelling. They can, and do, take longer holidays.³

The average length of holiday for domestic travellers to Queensland is 4.1 nights for those aged under 60 years and 7.4 nights for those aged over 60 years.²

Demographic Profile¹

Basic demographics of the Domestic Seniors Market are as follows:

Demographic	Percentage
Male	45.2%
Female	54.8%
Aged Under 65	24.4%
Aged 65 to 74	43.6%
Aged 75+	32%
Married/defacto	59.5%
Separated/divorced	7.9%
Widowed	27.1%
Never Married	5.5%
Employed, aged 60-64	31.5%
Employed, aged 65+	5.7%

Categories¹

Australian senior travellers have been separated into three categories, depending on their motivations for travel and their expectations of the experience.

Vacationers (26.5% of the seniors market) generally have a partner, are enjoying retirement, seek breaks in their routine and are prepared to pay good money for travel. These travellers value feelings of comfort and security.

Live-wires (28.1%) enjoy living it up and crave new experiences. These travellers are keen to meet new people and socialise.

Explorers (21.5%) are the most extroverted, craving surprising experiences, activity and meeting new people. These seniors want to be active and involved when travelling.

Barriers¹

- Three quarters (75%) of seniors feel their health is good to excellent, but health does become more of a concern with increasing age. Seniors seek reassuring information on available medical facilities, opportunities for personal assistance, and health insurance when travelling.
- Finance is the greatest barrier to travel for seniors. While this does not always prevent travel, it does encourage seniors to budget carefully, travel selectively, and be conscious of value for money.
- Very few seniors are aware of special seniors deals available for air travel. Because airfares to some overseas destinations are cheaper than domestic airfares, many seniors decide to travel overseas (even though many would like to travel more within Australia).
- Many single and widowed seniors feel that lack of a travel companion reduces their enjoyment of travelling. While lack of company is sometimes a barrier, travel is also seen as a way to meet new people and enjoy social contact.

- Approximately one quarter (27%) of seniors have a moderate or severe disability, the main cause being arthritis. This can act as a barrier, requiring more careful selection of travel experiences and access to information about accessibility.
- Car rental companies have policies for older travellers, mainly those over 65. Some of these policies may incur excesses or extra charges that may deter older travellers.

Opportunities

Domestic

- The number of seniors in Australia will increase rapidly from 2006 onwards when the post World War II “Baby Boomers” start turning 60. The number of Australians aged 65 years and over could triple in the future, increasing from 2.3 million in 1999 to 6.4 – 6.8 million in 2051. By 2051 they could make up 24 – 27 per cent of the population compared with 12 per cent in 1999.⁸
- In early 1999, as an initiative of the International Year of Older Persons, each State and the Northern Territory introduced the Seniors Card Tourism Scheme. This scheme should help to encourage Australia’s 2.97 million seniors to increase domestic travel.³
- Seniors travel expos are held in different states of Australia. These expos can be used as an opportunity to try to increase the market share of seniors tourism.³
- The health conscious Baby Boomer generation will become the new seniors market. The emphasis on health and well-being in this segment and more recent advances in science and technology may lead to an even healthier seniors market. This will result in increased travel life expectancy, allowing seniors to travel more, travel longer and travel even later in life.¹

International

- Worldwide there were 0.2 billion people over 60 in 1950, but in 2025 this is expected to reach 1.2 billion.⁹
- The Australian tourism industry enjoys some important selling points for inbound senior travellers, including:
 - reduced risks of getting ill while travelling, a major issue for seniors travelling overseas;
 - high standards of health care in case of illness;
 - the perception of Australia as a “safe” destination, an important asset for security-conscious Seniors; and
 - an absence of language barriers.³

Marketing¹

- Inform seniors about access, facilities and assistance available to reassure the market about choosing an establishment.
- Value for money and quality of experience are more highly regarded than discounts amongst the seniors markets. Discounts can, however, influence purchasing choices made.
- Seniors are a vibrant, diverse group of people and wish to be treated this way. Package offers that ‘lump’ seniors together into one homogeneous group seeking rest and relaxation have limited appeal.
- Seniors are a very loyal market and tend to return to operators who provide good service. Seniors also listen to and value word of mouth recommendations offered by their peers. As such, the service offered by an operator is a very important component of the marketing mix.
- Have rigorous maintenance and cleaning programs in place to assist in attracting “drive-by” traffic.

¹ Not Over the Hill, Just Enjoying the View, Golik, 1999

² National Visitors Survey, BTR, 2001

³ Notes on Seniors Tourism Market, Destination Development, Tourism Queensland

⁴ International Visitors Survey, BTR, 1999

⁵ “Senior TRAVELtips’ Subscribers and Their Seniors Groups”, www.seniortraveltips.com/readers.html - March 2002

⁶ Roy Morgan Research Holiday Tracking Study, December 2001

⁷ Road Travellers Qualitative Research, Taylor Nelson Sofres, 2001

⁸ www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/NT0001226E – April, 2002

⁹ “Why Grey is Golden”, www.findarticles.com – March, 2002

Further Information

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