



*Photo courtesy of Glen Lancaster*

# Attracting Seniors

## First Rule: Don't Call Them Seniors

*by Chris McBeath*

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Ever since the first boomer was born in 1946, the baby boomer generation has disrupted traditional values and expectations with every passing decade. Now entering their senior years, not only are boomers redefining the term “senior citizen”, they are set to reshape much of the travel industry.

Today, these once cash-strapped backpackers and globetrotters of yesteryear are expanding their horizons even more, only this time they're doing it with an eco-passion, a bucket list, and an affluence of money and time.

Ready or not, the boomers are here.

## Snapshot Profile

*Keywords: active, healthy, travel savvy*

These seniors are far from the traditional blue rinse brigade. Rather, they are healthy, youthful (most perceive themselves 15 years younger than their chronological age) and wealthy. They control more than three quarters of North America's wealth and are responsible for half of all discretionary spending. As these 60-something youngsters start releasing some 26 million homes between now and 2030, there's no let up in sight.

Many larger hotel chains are beginning to offer services that cater specifically to this ever-burgeoning demographic with the Preferred Hotel Group leading the pack. Working with some of the industry's top travel, leisure, and lifestyle market research companies, the results of their studies are compelling.

"What we found is extremely encouraging," says Lindsey Ueberroth, President, Preferred Hotel Group. "The boomer generation is more physically active than any in history. They are veteran travellers. And now with more time available as they reach traditional retirement age, they say they are going to intensify their pursuit of travel, new experiences, and adventure. Boomers want it all - former luxuries are now considered necessities, including travel and fine dining."

Bus tours and meager senior discounts no longer make the grade. Instead, boomers seek self-fulfillment, authentic world cultures, and active involvement with every travel experience, and they will comparison-shop to get it. Culinary tourism, learning a new language, and eco-adventures all fit the bill - as do activity-pampering packages.



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## All In The Family

*Keywords: multi-generational, legacy, ease of planning, value choices*

Four out of ten boomers are now grandparents who will be in family leadership positions for some time to come. As a consequence, legacy is an important value making multi-generational travel one of the hottest trends in tourism and hospitality. In top travel companies such as Austin-Lehman Adventures, family trips now account for more than 10% of their entire business. Even the cruise lines have seen the light, ramping up the ante to lure more multigenerational families to the high seas. According to the Cruise Lines International Association, 2,000 new beds were added in 2013 to bring sea-faring capacity up to more than 35,000, and companies are actively promoting off-peak vacations for groups larger than 16, as well as free beds and points that can be traded for services. Hotels would do well to follow their example.

Most large boomer-initiated family trips are planned around a life event such as a birthday, anniversary, family reunion, or wedding, so pave the way for value-added programs such as group pricing, celebration event packages, multiple-room packages, and reunion activities as well as all-inclusive meal plans. Like cruise ships, hotels need to offer itineraries for many age groups from zip lining, hiking, and spa services to golf and shopping.

Plan for longer-term stays with week-long and month-long rates, especially at properties offering multi-room suites, lodges, and self-catering villas.

## The Wellness Factor

*Keywords: getaway travel, stress-free, choices, eco, giving back, self-improvement*

Since boomers deny growing old, health-oriented activities rank high on their list - whether that's trekking, biking, yoga retreats, art classes, or spa getaways. Big sellers will be anything that can connect them to nature, a stress-free environment, or a self-improvement experience. And since 58% of boomers are married, romantic getaways where couples can share a new endeavour together are still popular options.

While perhaps not spoken, older travellers also start to seek out meaning, either within themselves or in helping others. Volunteer vacations are fast gaining traction and need not take place in an expensive-to-get-to, remote part of Africa. Teaming up with local farms, orchards, and organizations that specialize in creating altruistic activities is a three-way win that will have boomers sit up and take notice. This is the generation that suggested green be the new black. Their purchase preferences include staying at eco-conscious properties with operators who give back to the larger community.

## Boomer Facts

- >>> Born between 1946-1964, boomers number 450 million worldwide.
- >>> The 60+ population is the fastest growing segment worldwide, and predicted life expectancies are at an historical high.
- >>> By 2016, half of this generation will already have celebrated their 60th birthday
- >>> An estimated 10,000 people per day turn 65 (an American turns 50 once every 7 seconds).
- >>> In 2050, the number of North Americans aged 65 years + will outnumber those under the age of 18.
- >>> By 2060, it is expected that Americans aged 65 and older will soar to 92 million.
- >>> People over 60 in China are more numerous than the entire population of Russia.
- >>> Boomer seniors purchase 47 billion per year online.
- >>> Seniors account for 80% of all luxury travel.
- >>> 68% have a valid passport.
- >>> By 2016, mature travellers will account for one third of overnight domestic (Canadian) expenditures

*Sources: agelab; Nielsen Netratings Research; Stats Canada; US Census*

## Restyle Amenities & Services

*Keywords: self-drive tours, intriguing itineraries, quality dining, wired*

When not searching out a bucket list destination or planning a legacy trip with their family, boomers take to the road on touring trips, getaways, and in pursuit of fun. Since most seniors travel by car (79% hold a driver's license), and also account for 41% of new car purchases, behold the new rubber-tire trade. Not just in cars, but in cruisers, ridden by boomers reliving their days riding Harley motorcycles. Chains such as the western-based Sandman Group, Prestige Hotels and Resorts, Accent Inns, and others are superbly positioned to take full advantage of their locations. For example, while Sandman's Lucky 13 (stay 12 nights get the 13th for free) and its 55Plus "seniors" benefits program speak to loyalty and the relative youthfulness of the seniors' market, its StatusPlus points rewards program is geared to registered mobile app guests, which clearly targets wire-savvy boomers as well as the younger generations.



*Boomers want it all - former luxuries are now considered necessities, including travel and fine dining.*

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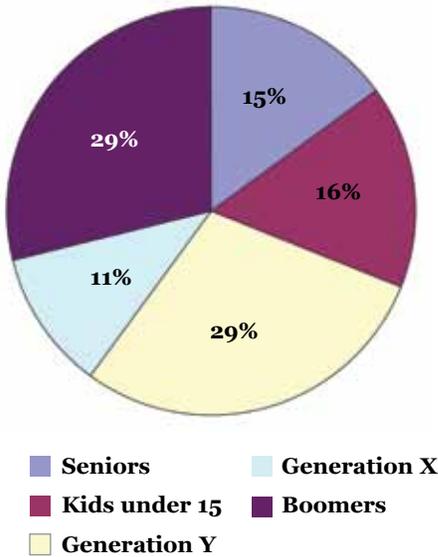


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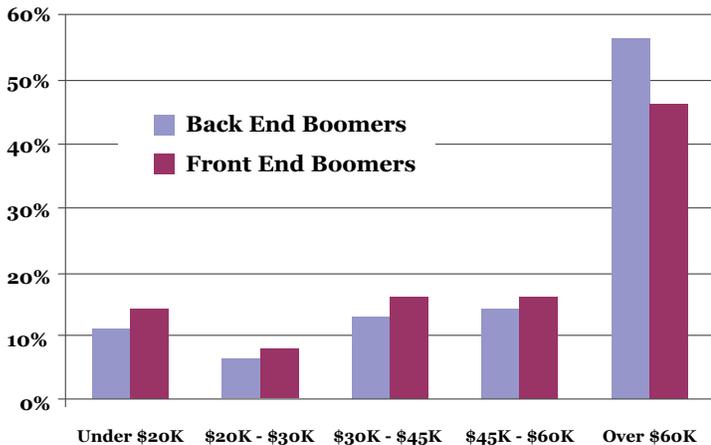
Canadian Generations



Source: NPD Group's Report on Canadian Baby Boomers 2010

### Household Income of Boomers

About 50% of boomers have income over \$60,000/year



Source: NPD Group's Report on Canadian Baby Boomers 2010

### Dining Out

Boomers and retirees are also driving the restaurant industry; they eat out an average 195 times per year - almost every other day - and those aged 55-65 dine out even more. Menu presentations, content, and style of service will need to include larger print, a few comfort food options alongside fusion choices, and above all, attentive service. These are careful consumers. Relationship, trust, and the ability to demonstrate that you understand and can cater to their diverse needs will go a long way in securing their business and loyalty.

### Social Media Savvy

Whether it's to stay in touch with younger family members, or being a member of the mobile workforce, boomers are social media savvy. Over 70% have broadband Internet access and use the net to research diligently and comparison shop. Although 34% cite word-of-mouth conversations with friends and family as a key prompter for researching a purchase further on the net, this leaps to 67% when combined with direct mail and offline media advertising, according to the *No B.S. Guide to Marketing to Leading Edge Boomers & Seniors* by Dan S. Kennedy and Chip Kessler. Not only does this emphasize the need to have a significant online presence, it also talks to aligning advertising dollars to specific organizations and publications that are geared to the boomer market. *Zoomer Magazine* is one example.

When all is said and done, it's really a question of re-evaluating a property's full range of amenities and services, and considering things like installing handrails in tubs, increasing lighting, and improving accessibility in future renovations. Items that appeal to today's seniors won't appeal to seniors a decade from now. Mick Jagger is 70; so are the fans that helped rocket him to fame, and their nostalgia is very different than those elders remembering big band music from the forties. Think Rock 'n Roll and Motown elevator music.

Ueberroth is highly optimistic and believes that the travel industry is on the verge of a truly golden age. "The opportunities to serve the boomers are vast," she concludes. "For professionals that are not focusing on this, it will be their mistake." ❖

### Wired Resources

- >>> **The Boomer Blog**  
[www.boomer-blog.com](http://www.boomer-blog.com)
- >>> **Boomer Consumer**  
[www.boomerconsumer.com](http://www.boomerconsumer.com)
- >>> **The Mature Market**  
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- >>> **The Age Lab**  
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- >>> **Mature Market Institute**  
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