

Golden years

Asia demand is rising and over-50s care about sustainability too, finds **Adam Shaw**, as the mature travel sector gets its groove back

With more than 90% of over-50s planning a holiday in 2023, according to a recent Silver Travel Advisor report, the mature travel sector looks like it's bouncing back. There's also been a jump in mature travellers booking several trips a year – Silver Travel Advisor's report showed more than three-quarters (76%) of over-50s intended to travel more than once this year, compared with 58% in its 2022 poll who said they planned to take two or three holidays.

Several operators have reported a clear increase in demand too. Explore, whose average customer age is 56, is on track for its best-ever year of trading, something

managing director Michael Edwards says has been "driven by the mature market".

Richard Forde, head of trade sales at Newmarket Holidays, says: "We've seen mature customers return again and again to book with us. One thing we've noticed for this year is they'll often book one long-haul trip, then a shorter trip in Europe and perhaps a discretionary purchase like a festive break."

DREAM DESTINATIONS

Dream trips are high on the agenda for over-50s, with a TTC Brands 2023 survey finding that 72% of customers in this age bracket would prioritise a wish-list tour. Examples include Insight ➤

DESTINATIONS

MATURE TRAVEL | TRENDS



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Intrepid tour in Nepal; a walking trip in Portugal with Sunvil; Antarctica wildlife; travelling in Costa Rica

PICTURES: Matt Cherubino Photography; Little Grey Box



Vacations' week-long Enchanting Canyonlands trip, which takes in a 4x4 ride past the red rock formations of Monument Valley, a journey through Navajo Tribal Park with a Navajo guide and a sunrise viewing at the Grand Canyon. Prices for trips in January and February 2024 start at £2,385, including internal transport, accommodation and some meals, but not international flights.

Elsewhere, Forde says safaris have been a "standout" at Newmarket for over-50s this year, including its 15-day On Safari in South Africa with Mauritius Beach offering, which covers several game drives in Sebatana and Welgevonden, wildlife talks with local guides and a champagne sundowner. It can be booked from £4,223 for a January 14, 2024, departure, including flights, internal transport, accommodation and meals.

NOW OR NEVER

Explore's Edwards notes that there is a sense of "seizing the moment" when it comes to clients planning big, adventurous trips. For example, the company's polar bookings have doubled this year, and that has been "predominantly driven by the over-65 market". Its 10-night Classic Antarctica Expedition, which gives guests the opportunity to spot marine wildlife including whales and penguins and hear from expert guides about the landscapes of Antarctica, can be booked from £5,625 for a November 22 departure, including accommodation, most meals and Zodiac excursions. International flights are extra.

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SOUTHEAST ASIA IS KEY

Kuoni store manager Jane Griffiths says senior travellers remain "the bread and butter" of her shop in Liverpool, as they "work through a list of places they want to visit". Among the most popular wish-list destination requests she receives from mature travellers are southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Vietnam. Kuoni has a four-night stay at the Park Hyatt Saigon in Ho Chi Minh City, home of the Independence Palace and close to the Cu Chi Tunnels and Mekong River, from £1,485, including flights and B&B accommodation, departing on September 5.

Uniwold has seen increased demand for its exotic range for 2023, including an 80% year-on-year increase for its Timeless Wonders of Vietnam, Cambodia and the Mekong itinerary. The 15-day trip sails on the Mekong River, taking in rice fields, floating islands and Buddhist temples, as well as bustling metropolises such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and iconic sites including Angkor Wat. Prices start from £7,599 for a November 28 departure, ➤

TOP 3 ADVENTURES FOR WOMEN OVER 50

According to a 2023 Saga poll, women in this age group tend to be more adventurous than men, with 51% of women saying they wanted to explore more this year, compared with 43% of men. Here, we highlight three adventurous trips to suggest to female travellers.

India: Women's Expedition Intrepid Travel

A local female leader will show India through the eyes of women, from a rollicking rickshaw tour through Jaipur with a female driver to a 4x4 ride into the Thar Desert, followed by a women's Kalbeliya dance performance. From £1,069 for 12 days, departing October 8. intrepidtravel.com

Iran Unveiled, Wild Frontiers

This extensive itinerary includes visits to the bazaars of the old Silk Road city of Yazd and the ancient capital of Persepolis, as well as a home-cooked meal with a family up in a remote mountain village. From £4,285 for 15 days, departing September 10. wildfrontierstravel.com

Real Costa Rica, Just You

Solo travellers can enjoy the variety of Costa Rica, from spotting iguanas and spider monkeys on a guided boat tour in Tortuguero National Park to kayaking on a lake below the towering Arenal volcano. From £4,399 for 12 days, departing January 6, 2024 (trip is exclusively for solo travellers, no single supplement). justyou.co.uk

ASK THE experts



“One of the main things to consider for mature clients is that preferences change with age. Regular customers may be looking for that little bit extra, whether that be business-class flights, extra-special hotels or trips to those places they’ve always wanted to visit.”

Jane Griffiths, store manager, Kuoni



“Trips can vary, so have as much information as you can on driving times, standards of hotels and levels of fitness required. Most tour operators will indicate this on their website and it’s usually one of the first things mature travellers want to know.”

Michael Pullman, head of marketing, Wild Frontiers



“Mature travel has changed in the past 20 to 30 years, and our customers like to try new things – they want to experience local cultures, see a natural phenomenon, be adventurous and visit places of historical and archaeological interest.”

Andy Squirrell, managing director of touring, Saga Travel Group



ABOVE: Angkor Wat features on Intrepid Travel’s Premium Cambodia tour PICTURE: Shutterstock/Sean Heatley

including most meals, onboard drinks (house wine, local beers and spirits, soft drinks, tea and coffee), accommodation, transfers, 13 excursions and gratuities. International flights are not included.

SEEING IT ALL

Sunvil has reported an increase in the number of over-50s booking multi-destination trips, such as its island-hopping packages in Greece and Croatia.

“Island-hopping, where travellers visit multiple destinations in one holiday and can discover a variety of places, traditions and landscapes, have soared in popularity and continue to perform well for 2024,” says Rachel Jelley, sales and marketing manager at Sunvil. Its Island-hopping in the Dodecanese trips, which cover the lesser-visited Leros and Lipsi islands, can be booked from £850, including flights, B&B accommodation, ferry tickets and transfers, based on a September 2 departure.

This desire to see as much as possible – a similar theme to bucket-list bookings – is driving demand, says Matt Rushbrooke, product manager at Inspiring Travel. His company offers a 10-night Singapore and Borneo trip, with seven nights in Kota Kinabalu, where there’s the chance to learn about the area’s commitment to protecting wildlife, such as slow lorises and long-tailed macaques, before a three-night stay in central Singapore. Prices start at £4,759 for dates in 2023, including flights, transfers and room-only accommodation.

“Island-hopping, where travellers can visit multiple destinations in one holiday, have soared in popularity

SUSTAINABILITY CONCERNS

It’s often assumed younger generations are the ones forming more sustainable travel habits, but Intrepid Travel’s head of business development Joanna Reeve feels that plenty of over-50s place just as much value on these when planning a holiday. “Research shows [mature] travellers are highly engaged in sustainability and the world that might be left for their grandchildren,” she says.

As well as taking in key sights such as Angkor Wat, Intrepid’s Premium Cambodia tour supports the local community with visits to the Sala Bai Hotel School, which teaches hospitality skills to underprivileged youths, and the Santuk Silk Farm, which offers weaving courses to local women. Plus, to help reduce carbon emissions, the tour no longer features domestic flights – a flight between Phnom Penh and Siem Reap has been removed, with guests travelling by private minibus instead. The six-day tour costs from £1,110 for an August 26 start date, including accommodation, internal transport and some meals. International flights are not included. ➤

PICTURE: Rachel Thornhill



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Women's expedition in Morocco with Intrepid Travel; a couple relax in Mauritius; gondola ride, Venice; Pyramids of Giza, Egypt
 PICTURES: Shutterstock/Resul Muslu, givaga, Jenny Sturm

WHO'S TRAVELLING?

Both Newmarket and Intrepid have seen an increase in multigenerational family groups with older family members holidaying together. "We are seeing more inter-generational travel and parents in their 60s and 70s travelling with their adult children. People want to reconnect," Reeve says.

One of Intrepid's top-selling tours for inter-generational groups is its Premium Egypt trip, which includes a three-day Nile cruise, visits to the Pyramids of Giza, Valley of the Kings and Karnak Temple, dinner with a family in Cairo and sunset drinks on a traditional felucca sailing boat. Prices for the nine-day trip start from £2,805 for a December 8 start date, including accommodation, internal transport and some meals, but not international flights.

Although operators including Uniworld have seen increased appetite for solo travel among mature clients, most said couples are still the main bookers when it comes to the over-50s market.

LUXURY OR VALUE

Having more disposable income doesn't necessarily equate to a desire to spend, but Rushbrooke says there's a clear appetite among over-50s to book luxury trips. "Covid has played

“The over-50s are financially resilient, which allows them to choose destinations that are considered more exclusive

a massive part – client feedback is that while they are healthy, they want to travel and are happy to splurge,” he says.

He adds that top destinations for 2023 include South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Inspiring Travel's three-night stay at luxury desert camp Longitude 131 in Australia's Northern Territory costs from £3,299 for travel dates up to December 28, including flights, transfers, two spa treatments and a guided Uluru walk.

Blue Bay Travel has also seen an increase in over-50s booking trips to luxury destinations, particularly to places in the Indian Ocean. Tom Malbon, head of business intelligence at Blue Bay Travel, says: "Around 30% of all [mature] bookings are for travel to Mauritius or the Maldives, in part due to the 50-plus cohort being

financially resilient, allowing them to choose destinations considered more exclusive."

A seven-night stay at Hondaafushi Island Resort in the Maldives can be booked with Blue Bay Travel from £1,677, including flights and half-board accommodation, departing October 15.

However, operators have still seen plenty of over-50s looking for good value too. Anna Neville, TTC Tour Brands' marketing director for the EMEA region, says its Costsaver brand has seen the biggest increase in bookings among mature travellers. "I think that's leaning into the cost-of-living narrative – there are customers out there looking for a deal," she says. "Although research shows people are prepared to pay for luxury, the reality is, in terms of year to date, people are looking at budget tours."

An example is Costsaver's seven-day Jewels of Italy tour, which includes visits to Rome, Pisa, Florence, Verona and Venice, while the 'flexible choice' option means clients can add on a series of experiences along the way, such as a guided tour of the Sistine Chapel or a scenic drive to the hilltop town of San Gimignano, for additional charges. It costs from £846 for a December 3 start date, including B&B accommodation, two evening meals and internal transport, but not flights. **TW**