

ASK THE experts

Forget any stereotypes you have about the over-50s. Mature travellers might surprise you, says **Natalie Marsh**

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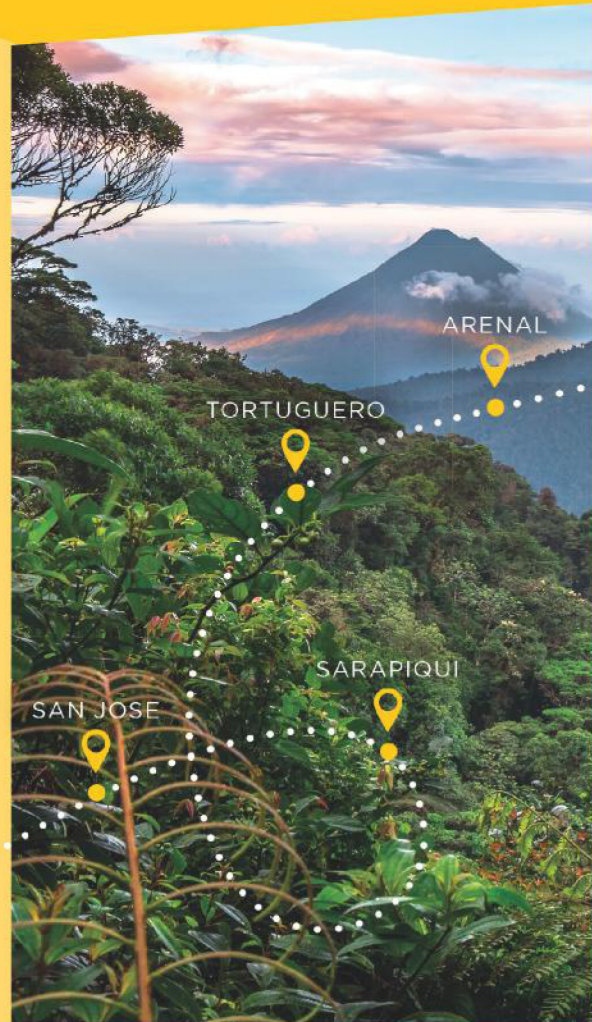
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T&C's APPLY

1 ESCORTED TOURS

Saga Holidays is the best-known brand for this age group, offering escorted tours, cruises and single-centre holidays for customers aged 50 and above. But are mature travellers really keen to go on an adventure holiday?



Saga Holidays
Iain Powell,
head of trade sales



It's a common misconception that the older generation is not particularly adventurous and plays it relatively safe. People are getting more adventurous and willing to travel, perhaps partly because average life expectancy has risen.

Over-50s are now visiting places that have been on their bucket list for years, but they've perhaps thought out of reach. Uzbekistan and Lebanon are examples that have done exceptionally well.

People in this age group have the time to travel, and tend to be more affluent. Don't make the assumption from the start that because of their age they're not going to want to do these adventurous things.

Gorilla trekking in Uganda is probably not something a lot of travel agents would think of when customers aged over 60 walk through the door, but they are doing it. There is also going to be a mix of abilities, so when agents are selling tours, it's important for them to be open and honest about how difficult and how strenuous a tour is.

About 22% of our customers who go on tours are single travellers. There could be a misconception that perhaps they're divorced or widowed, but that's often not the case. Often, people have different interests and want to visit places their partner doesn't.

2 RIVER CRUISE

Arena River Cruises has just rebranded from The River Cruise Line and added a ship to its fleet, so what better time to find out how misconceptions about river cruises – and the people who go on them – have changed?



Arena River Cruises
Steve Goodenough,
managing director



2 UK HOTEL STAYS

Shearings has Coast & Country hotels in some of the UK's top destinations, where customers can stay as part of a self-drive holiday or guided tour. But how can agents make a domestic holiday as exciting as an overseas trip?



Shearings Holidays
Jane Atkins,
managing director



Age is just a number, and 55-year-olds feel younger now than 55-year-olds did 20 years ago. Don't judge by appearance – you've got to really probe what their likes, interests and holiday aspirations are.

There are fewer stereotypes around age on self-drive breaks than on other types of holiday, because they've got the flexibility of having a car and they can get to the hotel in their own time. Generally on a self-drive, you'll find people want to drive a maximum of two to three hours.

Agents must ensure their product knowledge is good – and don't assume it is going to be a low-value booking. Average booking values are about £250-£300 on self-drive breaks, but older customers have high repeat levels – they will book more than one a year, so the agent will get repeat business.

And if they book a five-night self-drive to Weymouth, what else are they going to buy? Don't assume that this customer is only ever going to be a UK one. Even when they are travelling within the UK, they might want you to book other experiences. So try to sell them a more inclusive package.

Agents don't necessarily take a lot of UK breaks themselves, so they might perceive them to be expensive, when in fact, they are good value.

People travel well into their 80s, so when you talk about the over-50s, you're talking about a group spanning 30 to 35 years. The demands of those individuals are completely different. The over-50s demographic is the wealthiest segment – and they have time. We have people who take three, four, five or even more holidays with us a year.

There is a misconception that this age group is less active, but there's a lot of focus now around experiential travel. If you're retired and you're not so active at home, perhaps you go on holiday to be more active or follow a passion or an interest. They're a bit more ambitious in terms of destinations too, often choosing more long-haul and longer holidays.

River cruising doesn't just appeal to ocean cruisers – those who enjoy a touring holiday are more likely to go for a river cruise. Don't assume that a river cruise is for people who are extremely elderly and less mobile. To fully enjoy a river cruise, a degree of mobility is required, and while we welcome guests with disabilities, we obviously point out that there are gangways to navigate and short distances to travel between a ship and coach.

For short cruises, we get a lot of multigenerational families – grandmothers with daughters and grandchildren going for Christmas markets, for example.

DESTINATIONS

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