

ASK THE EXPERTS

Laura French canvasses three experts for their tips on selling to the retired market



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DESTINATIONS

RETIRES | MATURE TRAVEL

1 “Retired clients appreciate a personal touch”

Iain is responsible for travel agent sales of Saga Travel holidays, as well as the development of commercial partnerships with advertisers and membership organisations. He has received several awards, including Young Manager of the Year at the British Travel & Hospitality Hall of Fame 2019.



Iain Powell
head of trade sales and commercial partnerships, Saga

Retired customers expect a different level of customer service from their agents but, in turn, they reward this with unparalleled loyalty. They really appreciate a personal touch where possible. For example, when we launched our British Isles cruises, we called each guest who had experienced a cancellation to give them a first chance to rebook. This gave us the opportunity to explain to each guest their options clearly and fully, which helped us to retain many of these customers.

Maintaining an open conversation and building strong relationships will be key for travel agents in retaining customers, especially as many people over the age of 50 have become increasingly used to digital technologies during the pandemic. I think one of the biggest myths around older travellers currently is that they will be hesitant to return to travel. We have seen an incredible desire from our customers to get away, and the interest in both our holidays and cruises has vindicated our view that a significant pent-up demand exists among people over 50.

While demand hasn't diminished, we have seen some changes in the types of holiday being booked. An increasing number of people are looking to book the once-in-a-lifetime trip they've been dreaming of, with destinations such as Uganda and Uzbekistan proving popular, and with average durations rising from 13 to 18 nights.

2 “Avoid assumptions about what retirees want”

Penny has worked in the travel industry for 35 years, including roles at Thomas Cook, Going Places and Avis Budget Group. Her current role involves working with new and existing business partners to provide content for Silver Travel Advisor's membership community.



Penny Worthy
business development director, Silver Travel Advisor

My biggest piece of advice would be to not make any assumptions about the types of holiday or destination retirees want. While some may not be as physically able as they used to be, agents shouldn't assume. There are lots of products that have been adapted for the mature market, such as cycling holidays using e-bikes and walking holidays at a slower pace. But equally there are many retirees who are just as fit as they were decades before – the oldest person to climb Kilimanjaro was an 89-year-old grandmother!

There are also some misconceptions; for example, don't assume that retirees aren't tech-savvy. The pandemic has forced older people to get to grips with technology faster than previously, so suggesting a video call is a good way to offer support through the booking journey. And social media, in particular Facebook, can be a great way to tap into this market. However, new initiatives such as QR codes on NHS apps or in-resort menus may not be familiar, so taking time to explain things like this can make a big difference.

It's also important to ask questions to understand the customer's needs. There's a lot of confusion right now, so they're likely to be relying on you for the latest information.

3 “Make the most of upselling opportunities”

Sarah began her career in travel in 1998. She worked for Travelsphere and Just You from 2013 to 2016, before leading a team of regional sales managers for one of the UK's largest cruise brands. She joined G Touring in 2018 and has since taken the B2B business to double-digit growth.



Sarah Weetman
head of sales, Just You and Travelsphere

This is an important market for agents to tap into; retirees are likely to have more time to travel and we find they tend to have set aside a specific budget for their holidays.

Many come to us because they're concerned about travelling alone and want the support of a tour manager, as well as the chance to travel with like-minded people. They might be concerned about booking in the current climate, so highlight safety protocols and flexible policies to provide peace of mind. Our Reassurance Guarantee means customers can amend their holidays for free and cancel up to 45 days before departure, for example, and we have an independent trust fund so customer money is 100% protected.

It's also worth thinking about upselling opportunities. For example, we offer a Private Chauffeur Airport Transfer as a £50 add-on to our European holidays (complimentary on all our long-haul holidays), giving you the chance to boost the booking value while providing customers with an added level of comfort. In terms of destination, Europe is always popular, especially Italy, Spain and Croatia, and with travel opening up again, we have seen customers booking Australia, the Far East and North America.

My top tip would be to not stereotype when selling to the mature market. Our customers have a hunger to explore the world.