ARE WE THERE YET? ARE WE THERE YET?
An exploratory study of Baby Boomers travelling with their grandchildren.

Frances Cassidy
School of Management and Marketing
The University of Southern Queensland, Springfield Campus.

Email: cassidy@usq.edu.au

JCU Symposium
31 October, 2008.
Cairns.

Theme: Grey nomads and baby boomers with increasing disposable income.
ARE WE THERE YET? ARE WE THERE YET? An exploratory study of Baby Boomers travelling with their grandchildren to or in Queensland.

Abstract

This paper is designed as an exploratory study to ascertain if ‘baby boomers’ who are grandparents want to travel with their grandchild/ren and what they are seeking when they do. It is anticipated that a typology of the ‘gran’ (either gender) who is a ‘baby boomer’ will be developed. Questionnaires will be used to research the level of service, facilities, choices, safety, convenience, security, destination, travel arrangements comfort and guest room facilities both they and their grandchildren will require.

Thus developing a profile of this exciting market for the tourism industry to be better equipped to develop and deliver products which will meet or hopefully exceed the expectation of the ‘baby boomer’ cohort.

Key Words: Baby boomers, Seniors, Grey Tourists, Silent Generation
The Introduction

Grey tourism is the term which is used to refer to the seniors market, whilst the term ‘seniors’ is usually used to refer to those aged 60 and over (Tourism Queensland 2004). However, the Australian baby boomers were born between 1946-1965 (Roy Morgan 1997) and so would constitute, in part, the seniors sector in relation to tourism. Research on the seniors sector indicates that there appears to be a tendency to retire earlier and it can be expected that more and more mature aged Australians will travel for leisure. It could also be argued that older Australians tend to travel domestically as opposed to internationally. Whilst there has been research undertaken on the seniors tourism market there has been a lack of research dedicated to the baby boomers tourism market and in particular their penchant or otherwise to travel with their grandchildren to or in Queensland. This is an area worthy of research.

In 2002 Tourism Queensland conducted research into the seniors market to gain a better understanding. It was discovered that the seniors or grey market presents an opportunity to expand Queensland’s domestic tourism and that seniors are the fastest growing market. This is not surprising as seniors have more discretionary income than younger people, and some choose to spend it on travel.

Development in both domestic and international travel and tourism destinations has increased competitiveness among the holiday destinations. As new destinations are established existing ones either progress or decline. It is therefore considered that such competitiveness is between tourism, leisure, and specific destinations, as opposed to countries because of the variety and different aspects and features of the destination within a particular country (Bordas 1994). Travel agents are the main contributors to the sale of travel products and often focus on selling destinations as opposed to countries (Klenosky & Gitelson 1998). The result of this has seen a demand for package holidays and destinations have also become more important than a ‘one off’ or individual attraction. This would then reflect tourist satisfaction with a destination, rather than an attraction or facility and would drive repeat business. These issues emphasises the need for destination managers to direct tourism supply and to ensure the needs of the tourist are met.

Tourism Queensland (TQ) is promoting internal (domestic) tourism by advertising the safety of Queensland holidays and is urging Australians and international visitors to visit and discover Queensland. In 2007/8 TQ concentrated its marketing on the ‘Where else but Queensland’ campaign which is targeted at the rest of Australia. TQ divided the market into primary and secondary segments and in both market segments the ‘mid life households’ with the head of the household being between 45-64 year of age appear. This market would therefore include the baby boomers. Research conducted by Wei and Ruys (1998) through the National Seniors Association of Australia, found that mature travellers required safety, convenience, security, service and comfort to be of importance to this market throughout Australia. Whilst these research findings are generally applied to the ‘seniors’ market segment are they relevant to the ‘baby boomer’ cohort?
The Literature

It is unclear what is known about the expectations and plans for the retirement and old age of the 5.5 million Australian baby boomers (born 1946-1965). However, consumer research has identified 10 lifestyle groups in the Australian Population (Roy Morgan Centre, 1997). Eighty three percent of the Australian baby boomer cohort belong to one of the four lifestyle groups: Socially Aware, Visible Achievement, Something Better and Conventional Family Life (Muller 1996). The remaining 17% are scattered among the other five groups.

Clever, Green and Muller (2000 p.267) conducted research in Australia, Canada and United States in relation to the baby boomer cohort and found that there was ‘much commonality across countries, and considerable segment disparity within a country’s baby boomers’. However, in this exploratory paper the Australian baby boomer cohort will be discussed.

Table 1. Major Lifestyle Segments of Baby Boomers in Australia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socially Aware 18%</th>
<th>Visible Achievement 26%</th>
<th>Something Better 15%</th>
<th>Conventional Family Life 24%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most educated segment of the population</td>
<td>Wealth creators of Australia</td>
<td>Typically younger couples trying to stay ahead</td>
<td>Represent ‘middle’ Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding top jobs</td>
<td>Literate, confident, competent</td>
<td>Upwardly mobile and career driven</td>
<td>Include the working class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No money worries; tend to be wealth managers</td>
<td>Seek recognition and status</td>
<td>Both partners tend to earn good incomes</td>
<td>Skilled tradesmen and middle office workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community minded, politically and socially active</td>
<td>Traditional views on family responsibilities</td>
<td>Over half have small children</td>
<td>Average incomes and not ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy persuading others to their opinion</td>
<td>Demanding and smart strategic shoppers</td>
<td>Family is not central to their lives</td>
<td>Life is centred around their families and house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very green and progressive in attitudes</td>
<td>Conspicuous consumption to signal success</td>
<td>Avid consumers who want it all, now</td>
<td>Strive to give their children better opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avid arts goers</td>
<td>Prolific consumers of visible lifestyle products</td>
<td>Borrow heavily to finance their lifestyle</td>
<td>Have a down-to-earth practical mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential tourists; pursue stimulating lifestyle</td>
<td>Travel and recreation are important</td>
<td>Confident ambitious and progressive in attitude</td>
<td>Generally content and satisfied with life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are several results in these finding which will impact on the consumer purchasing decisions in relation to the travel experience of the ‘baby boomer’. For example in both the ‘Socially Aware’ and ‘Visible Achievement’ groups which comprise 44% of the segments, travel was seen as important and that the ‘baby boomers’ are experiential tourists who pursue a stimulating lifestyle. In the ‘Conventional Family’ group (24%) research indicates that their life is centred around their families. This gives an interesting combination of ‘family centred ‘baby boomer’ travellers.

Why not combine the love of travel with the love of grand children and all travel together?

The significance of mature aged travellers has been researched by Lago and Poffley (1993) who explored the demographic variability of the elderly in relation to health status, income and family structure. They suggested that careful review should be undertaken by tourism providers in relation to the age of their clientele and their needs. McGuire, Uysal and McDonald (1988) looked at the methods used by the tourism industry to attract the senior market and where they obtained their information from. The holiday patterns of senior Germans have been studied by Romans and Blenman (1989) who discovered that retirees had similar needs as the populous in general. In 1992 Van Harssel and Rudd researched the lifestyle profiles of single seniors travelling and Schlager and Tas (1992) researched the common characteristics and needs of the senior segment.

Tourist expectations are important to successful destination marketing because they often influence destination choice (Ahmed 1991). Many tourists have experienced other destinations and often use these past experiences to compare facilities, attractions and service standards (Lawes 1995). The decision to visit a particular destination is complicated when there is more than one person travelling and involved in the decision making process (Nicholas & Snepenger 1988).

Seniors travelling as tourists usually have expectations on the type and quality of service and the facilities which they want at various destinations. These expectations are often arrived at through information provided by family and friends, past experiences, tourism advertising, commercials, brochures, internet or travel documentaries or shows. The extent to which the senior’s expectations are met will determine the level of tourist satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Senior’s have the opportunity to receive information about the destination through multiple information sources. Both commercial and social environments have been shown to affect destination choice (Mill & Morrison 1992). However, will these findings be relevant to the ‘baby boomer’ market segment which is a particular market segment of the ‘seniors’ cohort?

Several approaches to understanding customer satisfaction have been explored over the last several decades but it appears that a consensus has not been reached despite there being many articles concerning customer satisfaction within the marketing literature (Oliver 1980; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985; Cronin & Taylor 1992).
Many different aspects of consumer satisfaction in tourism, travel, hospitality and leisure have been reviewed. For example, Hsieh, O’Leary & Morrison (1994) investigated packaged and non-packaged tours. Le Blanc (1992) investigated the operation of travel agencies and Bonjanic (1996) investigated guest satisfaction in hotels. The level of tourist satisfaction with the behaviour of local people was investigated by Pearce (1980) and recently by Cassidy (2002). Lastly, the tourist satisfaction with destinations was also researched by Cassidy (2002), Chon & Olsen (1991), Pizam, Neumann & Reichel (1978). Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml cited in Zeithaml and Bitner (2003, p. 74) write that “customers expect service companies to do what they are supposed to do. They expect fundamentals, not fanciness; performance, not empty promises.” Oliver (1997, p. 13) defines satisfaction as: “….the customer’s fulfilment response. It is a judgement that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment.”

Extensive research was undertaken seeking information on ‘baby boomers’ travelling to or in Queensland with their grandchildren. This search unsuccessful. Whilst information on how to travel with grandchildren, and tips for travelling with grandchildren were available, they were mostly ‘online’ articles with little academic worth or rigor and were American based. Information on Grandtravel was also available in a general context i.e. guided educational trip in the United States for grandparents and their grandchildren. However, no such information was available relating to Queensland or Australia.

However, a journal article by Pennington-Gray & Lane (2001) researched the ‘silent generation’ who were born between 1925 and 1943 (during the depression and/or WWII). The article, again based in the United States, notes that the senior market has the most discretionary dollars (Zimmer, et al. 1995) and according to Linden (1986) half the discretionary income is controlled by those over 50. The article also notes that in 1985 older Americans spent $20 billion on vacations (Lieux et al. 1994). And that 76% of seniors took at least one pleasure trip a year and that at least 60% took 2 or 3 trips a year (Shoemaker 1989).

The results also suggested five distinct clusters for preferences for travel; active travellers, urban mobile travellers, mobile budget travellers, educational cultural travellers and uninvolved travellers. Whilst the findings by Pennington-Gray & Lane (2001) are based on a different submarket (silent generation) of the ‘senior’ market they are the parents of the current ‘baby boomers’. One could suggest that there would be different travel preferences between those born during a depression and/or WWII and those ‘baby boomers’ who are considered to be the wealthiest generation to have ever lived (Pennington-Gray & Lane 2001).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) notes that the number of people aged over 65 will almost double between 1995 and 2021. Note that only some of the baby boomers will be included in ABS figures as some are as young as 43 and it would suggest that the seniors continue on over 65 thus adding another ‘sub’ market to the mix. Australia’s ageing population is not unique as many counties have also experienced increased life expectancies, decreased fertility rates and the move to pre-retirement or early retirement of the ‘baby boomer’ group. Again, the information relates to ‘mature’ or ‘senior’ as described by the ABS and not specifically to the ‘baby boomer’ cohort.
A recent research bulletin by Buys et al. (2005) surveyed the National Seniors member’s nation wide with a comprehensive 177 question survey (taken from existing studies) which encompassed 10 different dimensions of life for older Australians. (The National Seniors are marketed as the voice of the over 50s. Some of the Baby Boomers do not fall into this category yet). The ten dimensions included in the Australian Active Ageing (Triple A) Study include; paid and voluntary work, learning, social, spiritual, emotional, health, vision, home, life events and demographics. The summary of this study found that the over 50s in Australia are happy, healthy and active with 80% indicating excellent or good health. This is consistent with 80% of respondents being happy ‘most or all’ of the time. The majority of respondents were very satisfied with their lives while 70% felt contented and that their life was ‘useful and well-spent’.

Research by Goodfellow and Laverty (2003) into ‘Grandparents supporting working families’ found that:
- significant development of grandchildren’s development in the critical early years was fostered by the grandparents;
- grandparents should become ‘care negotiators’ with their children in relation to the care arrangements of the grandchildren and that their personal needs should be considered;
- grandparents needed personal choices and a degree of autonomy and sense of self;
- grandparents needed to have the right ‘balance’ in their lives while managing family contribution, obligations and independence in care negotiations.

This research demonstrates that grandparents play a very important role in fostering and nurturing the needs of the grandchildren in their early and information years and that the grandparents are prepared to become a part of the grandchildren’s lives but they want to be able to negotiate their involvement.

The research mentioned previously in this paper suggests that many grandparents are well, healthy and active and wanting to be a part of their grandchildren’s lives. Why not put all of these positive aspects to use and suggest that grandparents travelling with grandchildren would be a very worthwhile and educational way to spend time together.

Godbey (2006) argued that in today’s business environment, leisure and tourism service providers must become increasingly agile in terms of working with, and for, its customers. That is, they need to better focus on the needs and wants of their consumer and design products and services that will satisfy their needs and wants. A notion supported by Sontag and Dugger (1998) who stressed that marketers and consumer researchers, in the age of globalisation and cultural diversity, must be able to understand, predict and satisfy the needs and wants of consumers - whatever they are like, whatever they want and wherever they live.
Methodology

Questionnaire Design

Combining qualitative and quantitative research methods have become acceptable research practice in tourism and hospitality (Belson 1986; Patton 1990). By itself, quantitative research may not be able to give sufficient insight into the views of the respondents (Denzin & Lincoln 1998) hence qualitative research also needs to be considered in the chosen research design. Qualitative research may also be employed to gather background information on the areas that are subject to quantitative research (Guba & Lincoln 1989). It is intended that both qualitative and quantitative research will be used in this research.

A key requirement for effective research is the development of a research design that is based on the problem or problems to be investigated. The research design will then be used to identify the methodologies to be used in the research, set research parameters and identify the target population of the research. Ritchie and Goeldner (1994) suggest that the research design should include the following elements:
- the selection of a data collection method
- design of a data collection instrument
- the selection of subjects for the sample

It is anticipated that the primary research will take place via the National Seniors voice of the over 50s. However, as some baby boomers are only 43 then the establishment of a website for uploading a questionnaire would also be established. A questionnaire was considered the most appropriate form of exploratory research. Alternative methods of research such as mail surveys, telephone surveys and observations were considered inappropriate due to time and monetary constraints.

The questionnaire will consist of two sections. Section one will contain questions relating to the demographics while the second section of the questionnaire will consist of questions designed to elicit the ‘baby boomers’ suggestions or recommendations which would lead to understanding the baby boomers travel requirements and develop a profile of the baby boomer travelling with their grandchild/ren. Their responses may cover areas of service, facilities, choices, safety, convenience, security, destination, travel arrangements, comfort and the guest rooms or any general observations they may have.

Results

These results will then be analysed to determine the level of support for Grandtravel (travelling with grandchild/ren), where they would travel in Queensland and what their requirements would be. Thus developing a profile of the exciting market for the tourism industry to be better equipped to develop and deliver products which will meet or hopefully exceed the expectations of the ‘baby boomer’ cohort. Future research is needed to explore the difference age groups of grandchild/ren and their needs or wants.


