

Interviews



Study Title:

- Navigating Later Life Journeys: A qualitative study to understand the travel experiences of adults over the age of 70.

Aim of the Study:

- The aim of this qualitative study is to explore and understand the travel experiences of adults, aged 70 and older.

Rationale for this study:

- With an aging population and increasing life expectancy, understanding the travel experiences and needs of older adults is crucial for developing age-inclusive tourism policies and practices. This study will provide valuable insights to inform the travel industry, interested parties, and service providers about how to better serve the growing demographic of people over the age of 70 travelling.

Transcript 1

I: Tell me a bit about your experience of traveling overseas in the past few years?

R: I have always loved to travel. I have continued to travel fairly extensively overseas -for both trekking and sightseeing for the last 20 years - since I retired aged 60. But in the last 10 years from 70 to 80 I have definitely confined my trekking and walking mostly to European destinations and rather than plan all my own sightseeing itineraries I now also enjoy letting touring companies sometimes do the planning - a trend which I expect will become more the normal. It is nice to know someone else can take care of the planning. I don't have to make sure everything falls into place when getting from one place to the next. It makes everything a little more straightforward if I let the companies do all that.

I: Has the experience changed for you in recent years? If so, why?

R: I used to positively enjoy the hardship aspects of travel and even the excitement of making the odd mistake. It always gave me a good story to tell my friends. I enjoyed the thrill and not knowing what was going to happen next. Now I prefer to know what is going to happen next [laughs]. I now either plan better or let a tour company take the strain.

But still now, I don't see a UK or Irish based holiday or break. I enjoy them, don't get me wrong, but they are not the same as going further afield. My definition of a foreign holiday is 'getting on a plane and ideally getting off where people speak a different language' and am happy with a mixture of new places and old favourites.

I: What do you think are the benefits, if any, of traveling regularly?

R: I suppose the benefits of regular travel are that you know your way to and through your local airports, have an idea what to expect on landing, might have a few words in the local language etc

Just a greater familiarity with the travel process I suppose.

I also have a few favourite places I return to where it is part of the fun that you know your way around.

Oh and for me? I guess the feeling of getting away, getting some sun, being active. That is all very important at our age, right? And a sense of satisfaction too I suppose that I can still do it. That I am well enough to get out into the world. I want to keep doing that for as long as I can.

I: What do you think are the challenges, if any, of traveling regularly?

R: Busy airports and motorways to get to the airports - at both ends of the journey.

And for the older traveller luggage seems to get heavier with every journey and whatever ailments one has as old age approaches only make travelling increasingly more difficult - particularly as luggage becomes filled with heavy 'aids to living' equipment.

Also travelling in the EU as a UK resident is made harder by unhelpful passport controls, not being part of the common currency etc. Queuing for a long time is not easy. Standing still is hard you know. I don't have arthritis or anything but even for me, I feel stiff after a while.

The increasing difficulty of learning even a few useful words in a new language- I have noticed that too.

I: Is there anything you feel should be put in place to help people over 70 travel more comfortably?

R: Travellators that actually move, lifts as well. It is annoying when you end up having to lug cases up a stairs. It seems as if we are

forgotten about. I don't have a wheelchair and I am not travelling with children so I have to get on with it like everyone else. People might say, "well if you are lucky enough to be able to travel, get on with it" But wouldn't it be great, if we could get a bit of help- we are still tourists, spending money on food and hotels. It makes sense to keep us travelling, so why not help us a little. Maybe something like an easy 'move your luggage from home to hotel' system. Also, maybe easier and quicker hotel check ins. Rooms that are easy to access.

Airport car parks close to terminals that have dedicated ground floor OAP [old age person] well marked spaces.

I: Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion?

R: It would be good if all staff involved in the travel industry would bear in mind the slogan 'Not all disabilities are visible' so again, what I said before. Just being helped and acknowledging that all steps of the journey are not as easy when you're 80!

Transcript 2

I: Tell me a bit about your experience of travelling overseas in the past few years?

R: I have been very fortunate to have travelled overseas all my life; with my parents, with my late husband and family and currently with my partner. Over the 7 years we have been together we have travelled in both Europe and Asia quite freely and confidently despite being in our mid to late seventies. I have done many more organised and guided tours rather than self-guided tours with my late husband whereas more recently many of the overseas trips have been totally self-planned and self-guided which has been a new experience for me.

I: Has the experience changed for you in recent years? If so, why?

R: My aspirations have definitely changed due largely to COVID which brought all travel to a total standstill. In December 2019 we spent 2 weeks in India and it seemed likely that we would return to that part of the world and possibly to Asia in the next year.

However, 2 years of restricted travel, a slowing down of the pace of life together with the ageing factor tempered any desire to travel long distances but the interest in exploring places and countries within 4 hours travelling time still remains. Yes so, I still have the travel bug, but just not as far away!

I: What do you think are the benefits, if any, of travelling regularly?

R: In order to travel anywhere involves planning and organisation and to continue to do this is enormously beneficial mentally. To go away from home needs confidence in one's ability to cope with the unexpected. Meeting new people, experiencing new cultures, hearing different languages and seeing new places is always stimulating. So, I think it keeps my brain sharp. Keeps me thinking and organising. From preparing to go, navigating my way around new places, downloading various APPS and maps, and then of course all of the unpacking at the end! It keeps the mind busy.

I: What do you think are the challenges, if any, of travelling regularly?

R: An airport is always a challenge. Dealing with heavy luggage is the biggest challenge. Lifting suitcases and bags into overhead lockers and off carousels becomes increasingly difficult. The unreliability of departure times and the prospect of spending several hours on a hard seat in an airport waiting for a delayed flight have to be considered. Currently the unpredictability of strikes by train drivers, baggage handlers etc often cause stress.

And of course, I am English, so have the extra headache of not having an EU passport. Handling of passport control both incoming and outgoing from countries in the EU now often causes long waits and long periods of standing which can be difficult for elderly people.

I: Is there anything you feel should be put in place to support people over 70 travelling?

R: Assistance with luggage and with transport from check in to departure gate is available but not easy to obtain unless pre-planned. Possibly the fact that this facility is available should be made more obvious.

If the over 70s are reasonably physically fit and have no obvious sign of disability then in this day of anti-ageism I do not really think the over 70s should receive any support other than common courtesy. If they have problems it is surely a personal matter for them to make their own contingency plans.

I: Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion?

R: As Robert Louis Stevenson said " It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive".....trying to enjoy the journey.. sometimes is!

Transcript 3

I: Tell me a bit about your experience of traveling overseas in the past few years?

R: We used to travel an awful lot but with Covid travel has been limited over the past few years. Once we, the wife and I, got vaccinated, we got back into it. We have managed 3 Spanish Island trips now. Always wearing masks on board planes and inside airports when shopping etc. But it is nice to be back on a plane again and getting some sunshine

I: Has the experience changed for you in recent years? If so, why?

R: Not really, just to realise how lucky we have been to 'get away' but only after 4 vaccinations. It was frustrating when we couldn't travel. But now, we just look for the sun really and spend most of our time outdoors when we are away anyway. Twice we have booked a villa with close family so not mixing too much with others. Our most recent trip was to a resort so we mixed a bit more, but really we just like to sit out in the sun and warm our bones.

I: What do you think are the benefits, if any, of traveling regularly?

R: The main benefit of course is the sunshine, that always makes you feel better, and a more relaxed environment. My wife has had a knee replacement, about a year ago now, so we are not interested in touring about too much. We just like a change of scene and some time in the sun. Food and drink is always enjoyable too (laughs)

I: What do you think are the challenges, if any, if traveling regularly?

R: Several things seem harder to do, like the airport parking, the long walk to departure gate and handling cabin baggage. Also the stress of going through security when all your valuables disappear for a short time and you pray it is all still in the tray at the other end. Especially now that we have medicines and such. It is just some of the hassle we could do without.

I: Is there anything you feel should be put in place to help people over 70 travel more comfortably?

R: Apart from a personal assistant to help with it all, or a moving staircase to all departure gates, not much. I guess we have always travelled so it is not strange for us. But it does get a bit more

uncomfortable, standing around and worrying about our bags and things. Maybe just a bit more help getting from A to B you know.

I: Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion?

R: That any one over 70 who is able to afford to travel – do it while you still can.

Transcript 4

I: Tell me a bit about your experience of traveling overseas in the past few years?

R: Up until the pandemic, I very regularly travelled both for work. I am retired technically but do some consultancy work for several agencies of the European Commission. But also for pleasure. Unfortunately, the pandemic had a dramatic impact on my lifestyle. The Commission stopped all face-to-face meetings and travel for leisure was no longer possible. I used to greatly enjoy my foreign travel and got a great deal of pleasure from the excitement of travel and from the many and varied experiences. The easing of restrictions has helped a little but meetings in Brussels are now very rare, I only got to go twice last year, and leisure travel is now much more stressful and unreliable and increasingly expensive. We, my wife and I, have taken more holidays in Ireland and, yes they are enjoyable, but they lack the challenge and the variety of the foreign experience.

I: Has the experience changed for you in recent years? If so, why?

R: In the past, I loved the thrill and stress of visiting new and strange foreign locations and experiencing the challenge of different foods, languages, lifestyle and art. However, age is beginning to take its toll and I am now less able, physically, mentally or emotionally, to cope with these stressors. The thrill of a strange new airport, transport system, or hotel does not give me the same level of pleasure and I am increasingly worried by the challenges. I am less able to deal with discomfort and am physically more vulnerable.

I: What do you think are the benefits, if any, of traveling regularly?

R: I love art and history and travel has given me the opportunity to experience wonderful art works around the world. The effort of interacting with different cultures keeps the mind active and alert and promotes confidence and mental agility. Working in foreign locations encourages versatility and adaptability. Increasingly, with age, the body needs warmth and comfort and to enjoy foreign sun and fresh air during the Irish winter is very welcome.

I: What do you think are the challenges, if any, if traveling regularly?

R: With age comes reduced strength and mobility and air travel is now very challenging. Carrying heavy bags for long distances in airports, lifting bags onto conveyors or luggage racks, keeping track of your possessions as you go through security. Carrying your luggage from the airport to bus, taxi, train, or hotel is hard. The worry about having the right tickets, documentation, medication is tiring. Delayed flights and uncomfortable airport seating is a burden. Uncomfortable seats on planes and complex requirements about the baggage that can be taken on board are bewildering.

I: Is there anything you feel should be put in place to help people over 70 travel more comfortably?

R: Airports should implement practical policies to aid the elderly in handling the problems of carrying luggage and waiting in long security queues. There should also be common, agreed rules about the amount of luggage that can be carried on a flight. It is sometimes very difficult to travel out with one airline and return with another because of the incompatibility of their luggage rules.

I: Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion?

R: In spite of all the problems of post-pandemic travel, I still love the anticipation of arriving in a new city and visiting the galleries, museums and landmarks, eating new foods and dealing with the novelties of getting around and interacting with the locals.

Transcript 5

I: Tell me a bit about your experience of travelling overseas in the past few years?

R: I have travelled fairly extensively over the last few years but since 70 this has not included any long haul flights. Planes are too uncomfortable for anything over 5 hrs.

Holidays have either been visits to family. I have one son living in Iceland and one living in the UK. My husband and I go canal barging with a friend in the UK twice a year. Oh and we love sun seeking in Lanzarote, Ibiza or Tenerife. Yes we still go away quite a lot [laugh].

I: Has the experience changed for you in recent years? If so, why?

R: Yes the experience has changed greatly. Increasing age and the numerous structural and medical conditions that it has brought with it has meant we tend to return to places and activities that we know and have done before. We can then be more confident that we can cope with any difficulties that may arise. For example a broken tooth on the first day of a holiday in Lanzarote 2 years ago was easily resolved because we knew the area and the location of a nearby dentist.

Traveling has also changed in the last few years because of the uncertainty of air, train and road travel. Itineraries have to be planned much more carefully to allow for holdups especially when traveling by road to catch flights or boats. We no longer have the stamina for sleeping in airports !!!

I: What do you think are the benefits, if any, of travelling regularly?

R: I really do feel that regular travel - at any age but especially in later years - is beneficial to mental and physical health. Especially if sun is involved. In moderation of course! New people to talk to and swap experiences with, a change of diet, different vistas and memories to talk over when returning home. That's it isn't it? It is good to have different things to talk about- not just your aches and pains, or talking about the kids and grandkids. It is about having your own adventures and stories to tell.

I: What do you think are the challenges, if any, of travelling regularly?

R: The main challenge in my opinion is leaving our house unattended for any length of time. Break ins and vandalism are rife in any area and I do worry about the house when we are gone. My daughter is good for checking in on the house and a neighbour collects the post so it doesn't build up.. But still it is a worry.

Decreasing memory can also add to this worry eg has everything been switched off ? I don't know how many times I have sat at a departure gate trying to remember if I locked everything, turned everything off. I have a check list now- I print it off each time we go away so I can be sure.

I: Is there anything you feel should be put in place to support people over 70 travelling?

R: I also feel that more effort should go into making travel easier for over 70's.

Firstly, and very importantly.. there should be a staff member on every flight before take off specifically allocated to stow cabin baggage in the overhead lockers. Nobody over 70 finds it easy to lift 10kg over head height and it would speed up boarding greatly if we didn't have to ask the nearest young man to help.

Secondly airports should provide more readily available and frequent transport to and from gates. It is quite a challenge after a flight - especially where catching a bus is concerned- to reach passport control. Included in this should be WORKING moving pavements.

Thirdly the sooner the 100ml limit is removed the better. The "pharmacy" section of over 70's luggage increases dramatically and we like to have it safely in our hand bags. Even an increase in volume would help.

I: Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion?

R: Only to repeat that the morale boost that comes from having achieved an overseas holiday as we approach 80 is invaluable. Sitting at home and worrying about ailments is no use - especially to the health services - so the more that can be done to help us the better.