



# Boomers Transform THE CRUISE INDUSTRY

By Marilee Crocker

**M**ore sushi bars and bistros. Fewer formal dining rooms and scheduled seatings. More elaborate spas and on-board recreational options. Fewer ties and tuxedos. More Internet Cafes and cell phone service.

More customized experiences.

What's behind this sea of changes that have transformed the cruise industry in the past decade or so? More than anything, marketing experts are pointing to the Baby Boomers, a generation that has embraced cruising, but wants it on their own terms. Far more than previous generations, they want activity and they want choice.

According to a recent Cruise Lines International Association survey, the average age of a person taking a cruise vacation is now 49, an age that fits squarely in the middle of the Baby Boomer generation, which is usually defined as people born between 1946 and 1964. Not surprisingly, cruise lines are taking

note. "More and more Boomers are cruising and the average age of our guests is falling because of this," said Andrew Poulton, director of strategic marketing for Regent Seven Seas. "This age group is not only important, but crucial to our continued success."

Marketing consultant Matt Thornhill, president of The Boomer Project in Richmond, Va., notes that the impact of the Boomer gen-

eration on cruising – and other forms of travel – is just getting started. "You're talking about 78 million people who during the next 20 years will have the time and money to travel," he says. "That's why you are seeing the cruise

lines offering things like rock climbing walls and scuba diving. Baby Boomers like activity, whether its ballroom dancing or fly fishing."

The preference of Baby Boomers for a wide range of activity choices is one reason why mega ships are dominating the industry, according to Carolyn Spencer Brown, editor of CruiseCritic.com, an online cruise magazine for consumers. "The Baby Boomers are different from previous generations – they may have the same

amount of money, but they want a bigger variety of options and activities," she said, adding that Boomers are also embracing the high-priced villas with private pools, butlers and concierge services increasing found on new mega ships. "Baby Boomers want more options, but they want to feel special at the same time."

Spencer Brown and others note that Baby

This influential generation has embraced cruising, but they want the experience on their own terms



Boomers are more likely than previous generations to bring their children on a cruise, another reason why mega ships with their rock climbing walls and boxing rings have appeal. "Family travel is huge among Baby Boomer cruise clients. We currently have two families on a cruise where there are a total of 22 people involved," said Doug Crosby, MCC, co-owner of Cruise Holidays of Las Vegas. "The mega ships have a lot of appeal for families because there is something for everyone. You can co-exist happily together."

### Destination Impact

Family cruising among Boomers is also having an impact on the popularity of certain cruise destinations. According to Spencer Brown, Europe is fast replacing Alaska and the Caribbean as the most popular summer family hot spot. "More big ships are being repositioned in Europe, partly because it's such a great way for families to visit Europe," she said. "There's no need to get on and off trains, or worry about where to eat."

At the same time, she says Boomers are not hesitating to take their kids to more exotic destinations and, to serve this growing market, more of the major cruise lines are placing ships in South America, New Zealand and Australia. "The Baby Boomer is a more sophisticated traveler than their parents and they want the exotic," she said. "And they are taking their kids with them to these exotic places."

Family cruising among Baby Boomers is only expected to intensify in the years ahead, particularly as more Boomers become grandparents. "Baby Boomers tend to get along better with their kids and grandkids than they did with their own parents, so they want to travel with them," says Denver-based marketing consultant Brent Green, author of *Marketing to Leading Edge Baby Boomers* (Paramount Market Publishing, Ithaca, N.Y.). "Multi-generational travel will continue to grow."

Consultant Phil Green, president of San Diego-based Generographics Inc. and the creator of an audio course called Boomer Marketing, agrees. "The Baby Boomer grandparents will travel more with their grandkids than any other generation in history," said Goodman, who has served as a marketing consultant for Starwood Hotels and the National Tour Association. "And they will be traveling with their grandkids in an active way. They, unlike previous generations, want their grandkids to be seen, heard and featured."

Of course, plenty of Baby Boomers are cruising without children and they are choosing ships of all sizes. At SeaDream Yacht Club, for example, the average age of passengers enjoying the line's fleet of 110-passenger vessels is just 47. "The creation of our cruise line was based on research from Baby Boomers," said SeaDream president Larry Pimentel, CTC, who says that Boomers are eschewing "formal elegance" in favor of "casual elegance." "Baby Boomers don't want to pack ties or tuxes, especially for the Caribbean or Mediterranean," he said. "Boomers have created a new social norm where they don't want formal dress in restaurants, at work or on cruises."

## SELLING TO BOOMERS

When it comes to selling cruises – or any other kind of travel – to Baby Boomers, there are certain generational patterns and preferences to be aware of, say marketing experts who study the buying habits of this influential generation. Here are a few things to consider:

**Not Branded.** In contrast to their parents who tended to visit the same vacation spot every year, Baby Boomers want a variety of vacation experiences. "Baby Boomers have little brand loyalty," said Phil Goodman, president of Generographics, Inc. in Carlsbad, Calif. and creator of the course Boomer Marketing. "This is the generation that pioneered generic brands. They will not want to take the same cruise or even stick with the same cruise line from year to year."

**Women Rule.** Who makes the leisure travel buying decisions for Baby Boomer households? According to Goodman, it's the woman of the house 80% of the time. "Baby Boomer women have more power than any other women in history," he said. "They take into consideration the travel needs of their kids and then sell the idea to the husband. Not only that, but Baby Boomer women are the greatest source of word of mouth marketing around."

**Better Educated.** The reason that Baby Boomers tend to like a little learning packed into their cruise vacations is that they are the best educated generation in history, according to Brent Green, author of *Marketing to Leading Edge Baby Boomers*. "Over 30% of Baby Boomers have a Bachelors degree or above, making them better educated than their parents and better educated than the younger generations," he said. "They have also traveled more than any other generation."

**Forever Young.** No matter what their actual age, Baby Boomers tend to see themselves as at least ten to 15 years younger than their parents did at the same age. "The travel industry has to get away from the traditional senior travel mindset because Baby Boomers will always try to act much younger than their chronological age," said Goodman. "It's important for travel agents to not look at the age of their clients as much as the generation they belong to." – M.L.

Similarly, Oceania Cruises, which does not offer children's programs and operates a mid-size fleet of ships in the 700 passenger range, is also finding success among Baby Boomers. According to Jeff Drew, CTC, senior vice president of sales for the line, passenger surveys have shown that Boomers like the fact that the line offers a choice of restaurants and does not require formal dress. "Baby Boomers are a generation that like to be in control, so they would rather make dining reservations at

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a restaurant of their choice than have set seating times in a dining room where you eat with the same people every night," he said. "They also like the fact that we're country club casual – no tuxes required."

Consultants and cruise specialists also say that Boomers are influencing the trend for lines to offer more in-depth onboard learning programs and more personalized shore excursions. "Baby Boomers want more of an immersion experience, whether on land or sea," said Green. "They want to know about historical figures, mythical stories, local traditions – anything that helps them appreciate the destination better. They like to travel with an expert such as archaeologist or leading photographer."

Crosby agrees. "Baby Boomers are not people who want to sit on a deck chair and watch the scenery roll by," he said. "We recently had a client in St. Petersburg who opted for a private tour of the Hermitage with an art historian. They didn't want the usual tour where you are herded through."

Among the many cruise lines responding to this trend is Regent Seven Seas which offers the Regent Travel Concierge, allowing passengers to customize their shore excursions, and Circle of Interest, a series of special-interest learning programs devoted to topics such as photography and wellness. "Our research indicates that these travelers are looking more to unique and enriching experi-

ences rather than just being pampered," said Poulton.

But pampering, particularly as it relates to spa treatments, is also high on the Baby Boomer agenda, a major reason why ships both large and small are more likely to feature extensive spas these days. "Baby Boomers are really squeezed for time in their daily lives and they really want to unwind," said Pimentel. "That's why we have eight masseuses on board a ship with just 55 cabins."

While Baby Boomers are still likely to

opt for shorter cruises than their retired elders, the fact that more ships are enabling people to stay in touch via e-mail and cell phone is enabling Boomers to spend a longer time at sea. "The length of cruises that Boomers and young professionals are taking is definitely increasing and we're starting to see more interest in those that are longer than seven days," said Crosby. "It's because you can stay connected now. We've had clients who work on their computers in the morning and then spend the afternoon with family." 

