

Travel Tips for Seniors - Age is No Barrier for These Veteran World Travelers

BLOOMFIELD, CT, June 17, 2009 -- As veteran travelers move along in years, they learn the ways of the world and the ways to make sure that world is a continuing part of their lives. "There's still plenty out there to go and see and do," says Frances Cobb who, along with her husband Stephen, has traveled the world from China to every state in the US for over six decades. Over the years, she and her husband have developed some strategies for dealing with the challenges of traveling as they get older.

The Cobbs now live at Duncaster Retirement Community in Bloomfield. Recently they and several of their other neighbors at Duncaster shared a few secrets for lifelong travelers.

Group Tours Offer a Little Extra Comfort for Seniors

The biggest piece of advice from veteran travelers was to learn how to get help in their travels. "As we've gotten older, we've found that we like to have a little help with our trips rather than doing everything ourselves," says fellow Duncaster resident Katie Reynolds. She and her husband, Phil have traveled the globe biking, hiking and even hitchhiking (okay, those were her post-college days). They have been to Europe, Eastern Europe the Far East and throughout North America.

The Cobbs and the Reynolds are big fans of organized tours and groups. The Reynolds have traveled with Elderhostel on ten trips to Europe, North Africa and Central American. The Cobbs have seen the US with Elderhostel and Tauck Tours, which combine travel and learning. They'll be taking a Tauck Tour at the end of August where they'll travel from Bucharest to Budapest via riverboat. "These trips give you a lot of options. You can choose to go on side trips that add to the experience. On the other hand, if you don't feel like it you can skip the side trips and just enjoy the surroundings," says Mrs. Cobb. "We can sit there and look out on the world if we're in the mood." She favors the organized trips because they handle the details of travel. "There's something to be said for having everything' taken care of. You don't have to worry. Also, these groups often offer travelers the ability to do things that an individual can't on their own. For example, they might be able to get us into museums before the crowds or point out things that tourists never know about. We especially like the idea that when our plane lands there's someone there to meet us and take us to where we're going. That's becoming more important as we get older. It's a little extra care for us so we don't have to worry when we arrive."

The Cobbs gave up renting cars to get them around awhile ago. "I think renting a car in an unknown area is not the best thing for us and for the area," jokes Stephen Cobb.

Travel Agents Can Make the Difference

Some older adults have come to depend more on professional travel agents in recent years, feeling they make travel for seniors a great deal more palatable. Their feelings are that such professionals really prove their worth especially when they encounter difficulties en route.

Getting Around

When you get to your destination, another Duncaster resident, Jane Carpenter, suggests foregoing the walking tours and traveling by car. "As my husband got older, we found that we planned more trips by car. It was easier to sightsee when the legs aren't as limber as they used to be." She offered one important tip if you're going to plan a trip this way: "Make sure that you look for hotels with on-site parking when you plan your trips ahead of time." She and her husband could definitely be called world travelers as they traveled in close to 20 countries from Europe to the South Pacific, to Australia and New Zealand throughout North America.

Where to Stay

Many seniors want to make the most of their travel dollars and Jane Carpenter gave some tips for picking the best values in accommodations: "Don't automatically pick four-star hotels, especially in Europe," she cautions. "We always went for three-star hotels because the European ratings are more stringent than US ratings. Three-star hotels in Europe are better values and they are good and clean and of higher quality than three star hotels in this country."

She also advises that you pick your hotels for what you want. "Don't go to hotels that have a lot of amenities you aren't going to such as the spas you find at four-star hotels. You pay for them and get no benefit."

Older travelers often have the luxury of taking longer trips. "If you're staying more than a week, it may be more cost-effective to rent an apartment than to stay in a hotel," she advises. "There are a number of world-wide services that will help you find an apartment. We used a service call Clévacance (translation, *Key Vacation*) but there are many others." These places also offer you the option to save some money by making your own breakfast in the apartment, and having your main meal in town as you drive around ('Always ask the locals and you'll get good food, few tourists, and a good price,' she says.). In the evening, you can go back to the apartment and prepare something light."

Travel Light and Pack Smart

The one thing all these veteran travelers agreed upon was that people invariably pack too much in their bags. "If you can't pick up your bag, take something out of until it's light enough for you to manage on your own," advises Mrs. Cobb. "In an airport or a train station you need to be able to handle your own bag in all travel situations. For example, you are responsible for getting your bag through customs." Mrs. Reynolds adds that you should only take a suitcase on wheels.

Katie Reynolds adds to that advice by saying: "The key to comfortably handling your bag is to pack fewer clothes than you think you'll need." She and Mrs. Cobb offer these packing tips:

For women:

- Multipurpose clothes
- One pair of black pants
- A couple of tops
- One black jacket,
- One pair of jeans or chinos for day trips
- Scarves and jewelry (not good jewelry).
- Sandals
- Raincoat with a removable lining

For men:

- One sports jacket (wear it on the plane)
- One dress shirt
- Jeans or chinos
- Two or three casual shirts.

Fran and Stephen Cobb also offer the following tips for both men and women:

- Bring seersucker shirts. They are the best travel companions because they don't need to be ironed.
- Make sure you bring inflatable plastic hangers so you can wash out small things. They help items dry overnight.
- Take quick-drying underwear. You'll find them at stores that sell camping gear like EMS or REI
- Pack clothes that can be left behind. "Years ago, a veteran traveler gave me this tip. She suggested traveling with clothing that are on the verge of wearing out," says Mrs. Cobb. "These are the clothes that you say 'I can get one more wearing out of this.' Then, when you're packing for home, you leave them behind with no regrets and you gain some valuable space in your suitcase."
- Bring paperback books. "When you're done with paperbacks, you can leave them and free-up suitcase space for the treasures you pick up while traveling," suggests Mrs. Cobb.
- Pack a good knife for cutting cheese and a cork puller in your bags, especially in France and Italy.

- Take lots of ball point pens and pads to take notes. Even better, keep a diary
- Pack a photocopy of your passport and visa

Develop Strategies for Dealing with the Challenges of Flying Today

Lastly, now that you've planned and packed, the last piece is getting there. Both the Cobbs and the Reynolds pointed out just how taxing flying can be for everyone today, especially seniors. They've developed some strategies to make that more palatable, too. These include:

- Reserve aisle seats. They are easier to get in and out and they give you the bonus of being able to stretch your legs on a long trip without bothering your seat-mate.
- Prepare for the unexpected wait. "Flying today teaches you patience," says Mrs. Cobb. "Make sure you have a book or something to entertain yourself in case you are delayed. You don't want to be sitting there mad because you can't fly out when you thought you would. That's wasted energy. Just bring a few things to take your mind off the difficulties of flying today."
- Assume the worst when it comes to food. "Take a snack because you don't get anything on most flights," suggests Mrs. Reynolds. She's a big fan of stashing a few energy bars where she can get to them, just in case.

In general, these world-wise veteran travelers say getting older shouldn't keep people from going new places and learning new things. With these strategies in place, they expect their lifelong passion for travel to continue for many years. They think of it as exercise for the mind and the body, no matter what age they are.

For a list of travel tips for older adults, send a request to proohr@duncaster.org or go to www.duncaster.org.

About Duncaster

Duncaster is Bloomfield's signature retirement community. Celebrating 25 years, this campus of 190 independent residences, assisted living and Duncaster's Caleb Hitchcock Health Center is designed to help residents live life to the fullest by providing security and fulfillment. The community includes an aquatic and fitness center and an on-site health clinic. Residents can participate in ongoing education, social and cultural programs. For more information, see www.duncaster.org or call (860) 380-5005.

Media Contact

Andrea Obston aobston@aomc.com
(860) 243-1447 (office) (860) 803-1155 (cell)
(860) 653-2712 (home)