

Worldwide Travel and Tourism Expert is Featured NARA Speaker

One of the world's top tourism experts, Dr. Simon Hudson (see: www.tourismgurus.com), the newest Endowed Chair at the Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism at the USC, believes travel and tourism professionals should refocus and target travelers 55+. He calls them "Zoomers."

Dr. Hudson pondered several questions in a recent interview. When travel and tourism organizations make marketing and advertising decisions, are they looking at themselves, often as decision-makers in their 20s-30s??? Are they speaking to a peer audience? Does the need to be trendy and youthful come into play? Or, does routine or "the way we've always done it" influence decisions?

For whatever reasons, little travel and tourism advertising is directed to people over age 55. Although almost 80 percent of all the financial wealth in America is held by people 50+, marketers persist in targeting their messages to young singles and young families. This demographic is often the most cash- and debt-strapped group in America.

Dr. Hudson thinks that travel and tourism marketers' focus is somewhat misguided. He sees a need for change.

In 2009, Hudson was shocked at the lack of research into the 55+ traveler cluster so he took on the project himself. The result is the wonderfully insightful new report: "Wooing Zoomers: Marketing to the Mature Traveler," recently published by [*Marketing Intelligence & Planning*] magazine.

Hudson presented his findings and the highlights of his report at the 11th Annual National Active Retirement Association (NARA – see: www.retirementlivingnews.com) "Power Tools" Business Conference in Columbia (SC).

Lured to the University of South Carolina from the University of Calgary in Canada, Dr. Hudson has held academic positions at two universities in England, and has worked as a visiting professor in the U.S., Austria, Switzerland, Spain, Fiji, New Zealand and Australia. Prior to working in academia, he spent several years working in the tourism industry in Europe and has written five books.

Tourism is South Carolina's largest business enterprise, estimated to employ 200,000 and foster up to \$17 billion in spending. But, Dr. Hudson feels that marketers and the state could do more. Suffice to say that he believes that travel and tourism organizations should "follow the growth in population and follow the money." That's the 74 million aging baby boomer segment.

“As America ages, we are faced with enormous challenges and opportunities to serve this burgeoning market segment,” said NARA Director Dan Owens. “Every six seconds, an American turns 50 and professionals need to get attuned to this marketplace to be successful in our changing economy.”

“A large number of active retirees have moved in early retirement in the past five years bringing hundreds of millions of investment dollars to states. As the economy starts to recover, you see home buying being led by those 55+ buyers who have the financial ability to move ... and often pay cash for their new home.”

The National Active Retirement Association (NARA) is a 10-year old, grassroots trade organization that organizes and helps marketers, builders and professionals, businesses and organizations that provide products, housing and services to people age 55+. A dozen experts in Destination Marketing and Boomer Psychographics enthralled conferees for the two-and-a-half day conference.