

Age And Stage Episode 9

Daisy McAndrew 00:03

Hello and a very warm welcome to Age & Stage. This is the podcast for everyone caring for, or supporting, elderly relatives, parents, friends or neighbours.

Annabel James 00:13

Well it's lovely to be here again. Daisy. The sun is finally shining!

Daisy McAndrew 00:17

We're all thinking about holidays and jetting off, but obviously, if you are, as so many of our listeners are, caring for somebody within your family, that makes holidays very difficult, thinking, is there a holiday, a multi generational holiday, that we can go on with the member of our family, that they can enjoy as well, or is it just too complicated? And I think a lot of people do think I just can't imagine that there would be something out there that would fit our needs, and particularly the person we're looking after fit their needs. But there is quite a big market out there.

Annabel James 00:51

I've done quite a lot of travel assistance for various relatives recently. You know, planes and trains and touch wood, everything's worked amazingly well. So hopefully, it's not about, it's about encouraging people to do the things they love to do and the things they want to do. And actually, there is help and support available, which is fantastic. So I'm really looking forward to this conversation.

Daisy McAndrew 01:16

Kerry, I'm so looking forward to chatting about holidays, such a brilliantly cheerful subject, but just tell us a little bit about Silver Travel Advisor. How did it come about, and how did you end up working for them?

Kerry Gallagher 01:27

I've worked in the travel industry for, gosh, the best part of maybe 15 years or so now. Silver Travel Advisor has also been up and running for 15 years. I haven't spent all my 15 years career here. I joined about three years ago now. So when the company was first established, we were a content publisher. So it was all about providing the over 50s, or as we call them, our silver travellers, with a genuine, authentic advice, recommendations and suggestions for holidays. So we did that in a number of ways. A lot of it was built on user generated reviews. So it was like branded individuals giving their opinions on holidays they'd taken, hotels they'd stayed in, cruise ships that they'd been on. We also work with an amazing team of travel journalists, again, all aged over 50, who they probably do have the best job, I have to say. They travel all over the world, and then they will come back and write beautiful articles for us, again with really authentic information in there, so that all of our members and customers and readers can be assured that what we're saying is a really first hand experience of what they can expect on that holiday. So we did all that through our website, social media, and we produce a magazine

called Silver Traveller twice a year. And then, I think it's about five years ago now, the company was purchased by a lady called Lisa McCauley. Me and Lisa, have worked together in the past before from quite a big tour operating background, and we were giving all of this amazing content and advice. And we kind of thought that there was maybe a missing step in there that we were sharing all this advice. But when customers actually came to us and said, Well, that sounds amazing, I want to go ahead and book that, we would always pass them back to the supplier directly or another travel agent. So we kind of thought, Okay, well, there's nothing stopping Silver Travel Advisor from being that booking agent as well. So we got our ABTA membership, and we are now an established travel agent as well, so everything that we talk about and recommenders suggest we can book as well, right through from finding the best packages, the right prices, all the way through to checking you in for your flights and making sure everything goes well on your holiday.

Daisy McAndrew 01:28

And Kerry, we know that things have changed dramatically in the last few years. Our demographics, our population is ageing, which has a knock on impact for the travel industry. People are in retirement for longer. How has that changed the market?

Kerry Gallagher 03:49

There are some shifts that we've seen so things like long stay holidays. Because obviously retirees have more time on their hands, so long stay holidays are incredibly popular, where people, especially in the winter, maybe want to avoid the cold British weather and sort of jet off somewhere a bit warmer for whether it's 6, 7, 8, weeks, maybe even longer. So the industry and hotels have been become really good at providing those sorts of packages. I also think as well, there's less pressure on the exact timing of when they need to go on holiday. So really, being able to travel in low season or shoulder season is a massive benefit for older travellers, because they then manage to get sort of the better prices outside of those school holiday windows as well. And with that flexibility of travel often becomes the fact that they can kind of book and go within a very short space of time. So if there is still availability, they can, you know, at times, get great offers in terms of operators and hotels wanting to fill that availability. So, so, yeah, there are certainly, I guess, trends that suit the the silver travellers more. So a hilarious one that I heard earlier this year I was at an event speaking to a couple who said they'd just come back from a 'ski' holiday. So I said, that's amazing, like, where did you go? And they said, we went to China. And I thought, oh, China's not necessarily a ski destination. Oh, that's interesting. Where did you ski in? In China? They said, No, no, no, not Ski holiday. It was an SKI - spending kids inheritance holi. Absolutely brilliant. I said, your kids won't want to hear that, I'm sure. But again, there is, there is that kind of mentality. And I don't like to go back to the sort of COVID days too much, but I do think it has had an impact in that people, not just the older generation, but we are seeing it with our customer base, where there is kind of a don't wait kind of mentality, and if there is something you want to do, go and do it and enjoy the time that you've got, and make sure that you're ticking off all the things that you want to do on your bucket lists.

Annabel James 05:56

And I presume part of that sort of explosion in travel is also an explosion in different kinds of holidays. So, you know, you can go on bird watching holidays to Costa Rica, or, you know, walking in the lakes, or, you know, painting holidays. There's sort of something for everybody. I think?

Kerry Gallagher 06:14

You're absolutely right. And again, we love an acronym in the travel industry. So the phrase spin holiday has been coined, which is a special interest holiday. And you're absolutely right. I saw some research that said that in 2024, spin holidays had grown by 64% which I think, as you rightly said, shows the sort of interest in those types of holidays. And these days, you know, you can get so granular into you know whether you want to go on a cookery holiday or learning a foreign language, as you said, walking, photography, bird watching, there's all sorts of holidays out there which, yeah, really do appeal to people who want to say, if they've got a hobby in the UK, want to take that overseas and just immerse themselves even more in it.

Daisy McAndrew 06:58

As Annabel said, there are lots of different interests that can be met by the market now, whether it's you're into an arty holiday or an active holiday, or whatever it might be, but also people now, as they get older, their physical needs change. How is the market meeting those different physical needs?

Kerry Gallagher 07:16

Again, the industry has become a lot, say, better at making sure that customers can find the information they need on things like that, so in terms of whether it's accessible rooms in a hotel or assisted support on airlines, so there is all of that available, and we can certainly help ensure that customers are using the right companies and operators, whether it is a fully assisted holiday, which we can absolutely do through to I just need a room on a lower floor, and I just need to make sure I'm in a resort where it's not too hilly and there's no steps. So yeah, from small levels of support right through to full support, we can absolutely we've got some great partners that we work with who are experts in this area that can really look after the customer, make sure they've got everything that they need,

Annabel James 08:03

And do those kind of holidays, come with a carer.

Kerry Gallagher 08:07

Sometimes they can, yeah, sometimes they can, absolutely, as I said, it all depends on what the customer needs. But there are some companies, especially in the UK, I'm not too sure about abroad, but certainly in the UK, there are absolutely retreats and resorts that do offer full care, while the customer is on holiday.

Annabel James 08:23

I know in particular that you have a relationship with Dementia Adventure, which I think is a fabulous organisation.

Kerry Gallagher 08:30

Yeah so Dementia Adventure, we've worked with them for a long time, and they've been a partner of ours, and essentially across the UK, they absolutely offer pretty much what you said. So it's retreats for people living with dementia and their family members to go and stay and enjoy a holiday where there is

support on hand and on site. So whether it's a partner, a spouse or a child that goes with them, they can also have some time to themselves while the person with dementia is being looked after and doing other activities with their carer. And then all come together. There's several places across the UK in some lovely, beautiful locations, and really, really well kitted out to cater for that audience. They do amazing work. They really do.

Daisy McAndrew 09:17

And Kerry, what about solo travellers? I know that's a big proportion of your market?

Kerry Gallagher 09:21

Yeah, so about a third of our customers are probably solo travellers. We do have a huge amount of experience, and people approach it in a couple of different ways. They're either travelling by choice, so they're excited, and they're quite comfortable, maybe confident about what they're looking for, or if it's by circumstance, and it could be the first time they've travelled alone, there's a bit of apprehension, bit of nervousness, and we can absolutely hold their hand through that process from start to finish. We've got heaps of experience for solo travellers. Most of our team have all travelled solo. I'm a huge advocate of travelling solo. I think everybody should do it once in their life, because it's just, yeah, it's very empowering, and it's a wonderful thing to do. So a few tips that we'd sort of suggest to people, people who are feeling a bit nervous and a bit unsure, we'd recommend that they perhaps try a shorter trip first of all, so if they're looking at maybe a cruise, they could do a three or a four night sailing just to see how they feel, which is not too long they've not tied themselves into two weeks, and then they find out after a few days that they're not enjoying themselves. Joining group tours is another great one, so that you know that you've got company to share those experiences with. There are some companies we work with that are purely solo travellers, so they know that everybody in that group is travelling alone, all in the same boat. They've all got shared experiences. Or there are other companies where you can join a group that will absolutely have some singles, but maybe some couples and some friends in there as well. I think that's a really great way to feel comfortable, and you've got your tour guide there with you at all times to make sure you're okay, and if you've got any questions, cruises are also really good, because they cater so well for solo travellers in terms of having a meet up, having special dinner tables for solo guests, so that you can all be dining together solo excursions, where, again, you know that you're going with a group of people who are in the same situation. And can, you know, share experiences, share conversation and meal times. So there's, yeah, there's lots of different things. For us, it's really, I guess, understanding what someone wants out of travelling on the road, are they looking for immersing themselves in culture? Are they do they just want to get away, and it's the first time they've travelled alone, and they kind of feel like I've just got to take the plunge and do it. So we'll absolutely work with somebody to understand what they're looking for and make the right suggestions to them.

Annabel James 11:36

Yeah I think dinner on a cruise that's perfect. The thing that has always put me off travelling alone is what to do for dinner on my own somewhere.

Kerry Gallagher 11:44

That's it. Yeah, it is. And that's why cruises and tours are really good, because you've got immediate company around you, which is great. I've often said I think one of the most empowering things is finding yourself alone and going to eat alone, whether you take a book or something, and I can guarantee that people say like, oh gosh, no. That would make me so uncomfortable. But if you, if you do it at the end, you kind of feel like I've done it. If I can do that, I can do anything!

Annabel James 12:14

You're listening to, Age & Stage. Are there any questions you have or topics you'd like us to discuss on future episodes? Do, please email ageandstage@agespace.org or follow the links in the show notes to this podcast. Now back to the show. I mean, is the dreaded single supplement still a thing, and are there ways around it?

Kerry Gallagher 12:37

Yeah it is a thing, and I have to say that it's probably one of, as a solo traveller, of course, it's a bug bear of mine. Nobody wants to pay, sometimes up to double the price because you're travelling alone. I think what's happened over the last few years is that more and more companies are becoming understanding of that and trying their best to do what they can. So there's a few ways. So with certain tour companies, there is the option if you want to share a room with somebody of the same gender, so that you can keep that cost a bit lower if you're comfortable doing that, if you absolutely do want your own room. Again, as I said, there are companies dedicated to solo travel, so when you book, you have that room and it's included in the price. So there isn't, technically a supplement. Other areas, whether it's cruising or especially hotel stays, what we suggest is working with an agent, wait for the promotional opportunities where they reduce that supplement, or they get rid of it completely. It will only be a short term, so it might be for like, a month or so. But if you're working with someone who maybe gets a heads up as to when that's going to happen and can give you some, some maybe advanced warning, or certainly, when that offer lands, give you a call and say, we've just got no no supplement on this river cruise, whatever it might be, that's the best way to look out for it and to make sure that you're booking at the time where you're keeping those costs as low as possible. A lot of cruise lines will have solo cabins, and a few of them actually do offer no single supplements. Again, that's really good. Find out who they are, again, speak to an agent, because, like I said, I think more and more companies are understanding that people are travelling along for whatever reason, and they probably do need to cater to them, a little bit more.

Annabel James 14:21

Travel assistance seems to be something that's getting better and better. I mean, I know there are some awful, awful stories of people stuck on a plane for hours, waiting for the lift, or waiting on a train for somebody to bring a ramp. You know, I know it's not perfect, but I know from my own experience of organising travel assistance for relatives that actually it does, touch wood, we haven't had a bad experience yet, presumably, and I know people are a bit reluctant sometimes to take advantage of these sorts of things, but presumably, really, if you need it, everybody should really have a go.

Kerry Gallagher 14:59

Yeah and it's a really interesting point that you just made in saying that people might be reluctant to ask for that, because I think there's always that part of not wanting to bother people, and I think that's the

hurdle of getting over that that's what they're there for. It's absolutely not a bother. They're there to make you more comfortable and make your journey easier and less stress free. You're right. We've all heard the stories in the press about where things have gone wrong, but I just from my experience, I would say that that is few and far between. It's probably the exception and not the rule. Most of the time, things do go really well, and I think that comes back to working with an operator that understands assisted travel inside out and can make sure you've got all the correct arrangements in place.

Annabel James 15:44

Going on from that. I mean, there did seem to be a bit of an explosion in people who would take your bags for you. I know younger people, working people, moving countries or moving jobs, have used bag services. Is that something that's on the rise, or is that me just being hopeful that I don't have to carry my bag to the to the airport ever again?

Kerry Gallagher 16:07

No, you're right, it is. There are the operators that you can work with who will, you know, literally, pick you up from your door, take you to the airport, take you to check in, somebody over there to meet you on the other side of the plane, take you through passport control, etc. So there absolutely is those kind of services. Should you want them, or just a small element of them, or whatever. But I think in certain destinations, maybe like Dubai and some of the UAE countries, it's becoming more and more popular that you'll meet someone very special on arrival and during your stay there

Annabel James 16:41

And travel insurance in later life, that, again, feels, you know, from the outside, something that, well, we can't go away because I'm too old and I'll never get the travel insurance. How do we go about that?

Kerry Gallagher 16:53

Yeah it's something that we get asked about a lot, and I should say here that we don't sell travel insurance. We're not regulated in any way to sell travel insurance. However, we do work with a couple of preferred suppliers who we know understand our silver travellers and some of the requirements that they would have from travel insurance. So I would recommend doing your research in terms of companies that have got sort of good feedback, whether that's on Trustpilot or FIFO or whatever review site you're looking at. Unfortunately, I guess with pre existing conditions, it is, it is something that you you will have to declare some companies, obviously, it doesn't necessarily push your premium up, but they do need to know about it. So again, my advice would be to always, just always be honest. Don't be tempted to leave some something off because you think it might give you a better price, and just be honest upfront. Because obviously the worst thing would be needing travel insurance when you're abroad and not having the right cover or not being able to be helped because maybe something wasn't declared, and it's a tough one is, yeah, when people saying nobody will insure me. Do you know who else can I go to? And of course, we, like I said, we can recommend certain partners, but it's all very regulated, isn't it?

Annabel James 18:10

And presumably that really ultimately comes down to cost. And it, I think, it depends on the country you're going to and how long you're going for. And of course, as you say, all your pre existing conditions.

Kerry Gallagher 18:22

Yeah it does. It does. And I guess what you're doing while you're away as well. Because if you're going on a walking ho

Annabel James 18:28

Bungee jumping!

Kerry Gallagher 18:30

Don't knock it until you've tried it! But absolutely, if you're scaling mountains or bungee jumping or doing you know certain activities, again, you'd need to make sure that your insur company knows so that they can assess what you need to cover for

Annabel James 18:44

You're listening to Age & stage from Age Space, if you'd like to find out more about how we can help, Age Space is a one stop online resource for anyone caring for or supporting elderly parents and relatives. It's packed with information on funding, on care, on legal matters, then do just please head straight to agespace.org. Now back to the conversation. I think there's this terrible dilemma, I think, for lots of us, about sustainable travel and, you know, understanding where we are at the moment in the world, how do you sort of approach the kind of the concept of sustainable travel, and how would you suggest that us punters might think about it as well?

Kerry Gallagher 19:30

I think there's a couple of different things there. I think the mode of transport is important. So one of the things that's been really popular over the last few years is cruises that depart from the UK. So you actually don't need to fly somewhere to catch the ship. So if, even if you're doing a Caribbean cruise, you can absolutely join in the UK, sail to the Caribbean and then enjoy your holiday. So that's something that is it is really, really popular, even holidays in Europe now you can absolutely go flight free. So whether that's taking a train instead of flying or different modes of transport, they are on the rise. So there are options out there to, I guess, be greener, a lower carbon footprint. But I think it's really important another aspect of sustainability is, I guess where you're going and what you do and why you're there. So again, we work with quite a few different operators who run amazing programmes in terms of giving back to the communities that you visit. They'll give their tours a score in terms of how much it's giving back, and I guess, just really making sure that as a tourist, you're being respectful and giving back to the communities that are giving you the experience in their country and in their destination. So I think that's a really important part of travelling sustainably as well, and making sure that you're I guess, but not over tourism in certain areas, and that we are just respectful. You'll find again, most these days, hotels, cruise ships have a no plastic policy on board or in their rooms, and there will be various measures in place while you're away in terms of how much water is used, how many times you need bedding changing or towels changing, or whatever it is. So I think together, the industry has made huge strides to ensure that we're operating as sustainably as we can be.

Annabel James 21:22

And things like cruise ships sort of no longer stopping in Venice. Is that all part of the sort of same thing, if you like?

Kerry Gallagher 21:32

Yeah, and I think that it's understanding where pressure points are coming, because obviously you've used the example of Venice, absolutely stunning destination, but when too many people are getting off a ship at the same time, or the ship itself is sort of doing damage to the land, essentially, then absolutely, the industry works together to try and solve that problem. So there isn't necessarily a pushback. The industry wants to help, and the industry is keen to find solutions to balance being sustainable and responsible versus giving their guests experiences in different destinations. So even in terms of cruising to really sort of precious destinations such as Antarctica and the Arctic, the amount of rules and regulations that are in place to keep that to being responsible while we're there, in terms of how many people are on land at the certain times where the ship is allowed to go, all those things in the industry has been really welcoming in terms of making sure that they're adhering to standards and suggesting things that can be done. A lot of cruise ships are also starting to lower their carbon emissions. There are even some cruise ships who can say that they're carbon neutral when the ship isn't sort of sailing. So again, I think people look at cruise sometimes as an industry that's quite responsible for large carbon emissions, but the work that's been done to reduce that and to make sure it is a sustainable way of travelling is really, really impressive.

Annabel James 21:56

I haven't yet to sort of pop my cruise cherry, but I'm very interested. The thing that has always worried me about it is, how do you find the right room? All I can see is rows and rows of bedrooms, and I think where in the ship is best to be?

Kerry Gallagher 23:24

In my opinion. And I have sailed the dreaded Drake Passage, and it's meant to be one of the worst channels for storms and high waves. Yeah, just with that, I've always been told, and it's always worked for me. So midship on a high deck is the preferred placement, yeah.

Annabel James 23:47

And presumably that's where everybody wants to be. So is that very expensive as well?

Kerry Gallagher 23:51

I mean, as with hotels, cruise ships have different categories of room, so yeah, depending on position, size of the room, whether it's got a balcony or whether it's just a French balcony, there are a lot of contributing factors to the price of a cabin, but yeah, there are premium places on a ship, as there will be with a hotel

Annabel James 24:09

And big boat or little boat?

Kerry Gallagher 24:11

The big ships have a lot to offer, especially if you're travelling as a multi generational family. That's what they're really good for, because there will be everything on board that will cater to grandparents, parents, children. There is a lot to be said for big ships as well, in terms of being able to have multiple dining venues, lots and lots of different entertainment and yeah, catering, catering for all the family really.

Annabel James 24:32

What are the sort of top holidays and top destinations this year, sort of both near and far?

Kerry Gallagher 24:38

Europe-wise, I would say the ever popular places like Spain and Greece, always a firm favourite. Italy has actually been getting a lot of attention recently, and especially from a touring perspective. So not necessarily just going for a city break to Rome, but wanting to see quite a bit of the country. So Italy is a really good one, Austria, as well has been really popular for city breaks. So Vienna has been really popular, certainly since the startup of the year. I was surprised when I saw it come up on a report quite a few sort of weeks and months in a row. Long haul, Japan is incredibly popular, and it's not the cheapest destination at all, unfortunately. But I think especially if you want to go and do your cherry blossom kind of tour, it is very, very popular. Vietnam is another, another really, really popular destination. Again, there's just so much to do between a mix of being quite active and seeing things, immersing yourself in culture, and also enjoying a bit of downtime on the beach as well.

Annabel James 25:41

Gosh, I'm being envious already.

Kerry Gallagher 25:43

The hardest thing about this job is that you're very lucky in some senses, that you can tick some places off. But that tick list just grows and grows and grows because every time you hear about a certain other destination like that needs to go on the list. So yeah, it's a never ending list of where I want to go in the world.

Annabel James 25:59

Well, thank you. And I know that your website is packed full of fantastic advice, holiday ideas and ways to go about it. So we will send everybody to silvertraveladvisor.com. But thank you so much. It's been really, really interesting. I've really

Kerry Gallagher 26:18

I've really enjoyed it Annabel, thank you so much for having me. It's been great.

Daisy McAndrew 26:24

Well, Kerry told us so much. Some of them really made me laugh, like the ski holiday, not being at apres ski and, you know, down piste. But what was it, spending the kids inheritance?

Annabel James 26:38

Yeah. So I thought the Yeah. I think, as I said, the prospect of eating alone is the thing that puts me off travelling solo. And I think hearing about the cruises and tables for solos and tour guides who make sure you don't eat alone, or if you are alone, take a good book. I thought that was really interesting, and might nearly encourage somebody like me to do that.

Daisy McAndrew 27:01

See I've never minded particularly eating alone. I wouldn't want to do it every meal of a whole holiday, but I, but I quite but actually, then take a good book thing. You need your hands so you can turn the page, and then you put find something heavy to hold the page down while you use your knife and fork to put something in your mouth. And then you finish the page. It's really irritating.

Annabel James 27:26

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Age & Stage.

Daisy McAndrew 27:30

If you found this show useful, and we do hope you have we bring you a new episode every week with the latest advice and knowledge from experts in all aspects of later life. So click follow or subscribe in your podcast app to make sure you don't miss any editions.

Annabel James 27:45

Next time on Age & Stage, we mark Dying Matters Week with Liz Pryor from the Anne Robson Trust. And whilst it is, for sure, a bit of a downbeat subject, we definitely get to have a positive and valuable conversation with loads and loads of advice given from Liz.

Liz Pryor 28:01

I had somebody in a workshop who said something very funny. She said, You know, I suppose you're right. Talking about death doesn't mean you're gonna die. I mean, it's a bit like saying talking about having a baby makes you pregnant, isn't it? And I said, Yeah, I suppose it is.

Daisy McAndrew 28:14

Thank you so much. If you have rated or reviewed our show, it's been great to see the value that so many have gained from Age & Stage already, but if you haven't, leaving a review, can recommend new listeners to the show, and we would really appreciate you taking a moment to write a few words, and please do tell a friend who you think would benefit from hearing Age & Stage. Thank you so much, and we'll see you next time.