

CULPEPER TIMES, AUGUST, 2023 / Ellen Phipps, Editorial

Traveling is often seen as one of those things that goes hand in hand with retirement and older age. Having more time on our hands can bring opportunities to make plans to explore at home and abroad. Traveling can bring lots of benefits to older adults, including the positive side-effects cited in this study and others:

“The correlation between travel and the physical and mental health of seniors was also noted by Hunter-Jones and Blackburn, who found that vacations induce subjective feelings of relaxation and well-being in seniors, and, in some instances, lead to reported improvements in certain chronic diseases, such as asthma and arthritis.”

Over the course of my life, travel has been a joyful and enriching experience. Just over 40 years ago in the summer of 1982, I boarded an Icelandic airplane flight to Luxembourg. I was 25 years old and was going to do my time-honored “backpacking” through Europe thing. Alone. Well, there would be friends to meet up with along the way, but what began as a summer excursion ended up as a year-long trip around the world including Europe, Egypt, Israel, Pakistan, India and Nepal! I even met my future husband on this trip! I was fearless and do not recall any anxieties about traveling alone. But, fast forward to now - I am 66 years old and setting off for a week away visiting friends and family. The first part of my journey involves some alone travel via Uber and trains. Will my Uber app work? Will I miss the train? Will I find the hotel? These are thoughts occupying my brain at 2 am. I am a much more anxious traveler at 66 than I was at 25.

Of course, we experience changes as we age, that is to be expected. As it turns out, there are some pluses as well! if you are over 65 you get pulled from the end of the Amtrak boarding line for priority boarding - I am so excited to be 66! And though I am more anxious, I am also thrilled to be traveling, connecting with friends and family especially after these past few years of isolation. As an older traveler I know I need to be flexible, stay hydrated in the heat, choose indoor activities that align with the weather, pack sensible walking shoes, and bring comfortable clothing. I also bring lots of water, so I don't run out on the different legs of my trip. I like to plan ahead and have hard copies as opposed to an electronic version of my tickets for fear of my phone dying at a critical moment. I still wear a mask in crowded indoor areas. But, I'm taking a trip! So, my message to older adults who want to travel is “go for it!” Recognize those little things that may make you anxious and plan accordingly, and regardless of a weekend jaunt or trip to Europe, have fun!!