At 86, veteran travel agent still cruising along, with special advice for seniors

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When people ask â??Whatâ??s next?â?• Martha Nell Beatty responds, â??Whereâ??s next?â?• The consummate world traveler has visited more than 110 countries and five continents in her 86 years and still has many miles to go.

When interviewed she had two trips booked back to back â?? first off to Portland and then to Cabo San Lucas.

Sheâ??s no vagabond; travel is her business as well as her pleasure. As an independent consultant with the international travel agency FROSCH, she has slowed down a bit, working out of her home office. Now she only sells leisure travel with an emphasis on cruisesâ??whose advantages she can particularly appreciate.

â??Cruising is ideal for seniors, especially those with challenges to their mobility,â?• she said. â??Handrails everywhere, a swimming pool for low-impact exercise and even access to on-board doctors.â?•

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â??Keep traveling,â?• says Martha Nell Beatty. â??Itâ??s good for your head and your heart.â?• (Photos by Myra Krieger)

She reminisces about a certain client who went on a cruise (Christmas in the Caribbean) at the age of 102. â??She is now 107. I actually went with her â?? as a friend, not a caregiver. Because she was the oldest person to ever sail on Silversea, the captain had us to his quarters for a special celebration. She didnâ??t have a cane at that point.â?•

Another popular variation on senior travel is tours.

With age comes expertise

â??There are tour companies that are set up for seniors; they have tremendous choices from the Ashland Shakespeare Festival to all kinds of overseas trips,â?• she said. â??A favorite on the top 10 list for seniors is Road Scholar (formerly Elderhostel).â?• This tour company also focuses on singles, people on a budget and grandparents.

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She has become an expert on places especially accommodating, if not perfect, for seniors. She also knows which destinations are too challenging to enjoy: too many stairs, too many hills, too much climbing, too much walking over cobblestones, etc.

â??Take Ethiopia which is just emerging as a go-to destination, but has not enough developed infrastructure,â?• she said. â??In the last five years, I have been to Sri Lanka, Morocco and Cambodiaâ??all of which were challenging for me, and I would warn seniors.â?•

There was no epiphany in her youth when she carved out a career in travel. â??I didnâ??t know anything about travel agencies,â?• she said. â??Opportunities presented themselves, and I seized them.â?•

She heard about a job opening at Thomas Cook, the premier travel agency, and landed the position of typing itineraries. When she asked for more responsibility, she said, â??my boss couldnâ??t figure out how to give it to me.â?•

After she married and started a family, she rebooted her career and became an outside sales consultant for American Express in its Travel Division. Her first client was her motherâ??s friend who wanted a train trip from Los Angeles to San Francisco.

Hard work leads to her own business

â??Not a great start,â?• she said, â??but I worked hard and built lucrative and loyal relationships through word of mouth. Often I had clients who would just give me a destination, a budget and their schedule and I would go at it.â?•

After trial and error and working for others, she partnered and opened Unravel Travel in downtown San Francisco. She even taught tourism at CaÅ?ada College. When the partnership later dissolved, she went solo for 25 years. She hired and managed 15 agents and drove the influx of corporate accounts. She eventually sold the business to Sundance Travel.

While ever expanding a thriving client base, she travelled the globe. There was no limitation on the venues she chose â?¦ Provence, France; Marrakech, Morocco; Havana, Cuba, and many more. She discovered boutique hotels, unique eateries and iconic places of interest that morphed into insider tips she wrote for Frosch.

When looking back now, she said, â??I hardly ever had a difficult client.â?• She credits her success to some good advice she got early on from a cruise manager who told her, â??Check all the paperwork: times, dates, destinations and then double check, and then check it again. Itâ??s a business that is totally right brain and left brain.â?•

Her favorite destination remains London. â??A great walking town,â?• she said. â??Last summer I did a tour which included Queen Victoriaâ??s Buckingham Palace, which involved walking from room to room and we were given explanations of what the monarch had done there. In London there is always a new show, a new museum exhibit, a new restaurant to explore.â?•

If there is one idea that Beatty wants to convey, itâ??s â??Keep traveling; youâ??ll stay healthy, curious, and active â?? learning history, customs, traditions, and cultures is good for your heart and your head.â?•

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She added that here in the United States, due to the Americans with Disabilities Act, travel can be particularly comfortable, life-enhancing, and always worth talking about. â??In the U.S., all public and commercial buildings are accessible. If facilities are remodeled, they have to conform to ADA requirements.â?•

Sheâ??s even written an ode to the agency:

HURRAY FOR THE ADA

In London eight steps to our hotelâ??s front door,
Then to the dining room many steps more.

In our bedroom a step to the bathroom;
I hope it isnâ??t my doom.

At the theatre stairs to my seat,
Although they werenâ??t very steep

Then at our hotel in Copenhagen,
Ten steps to the front door where we were taken.

A tub with a shower to greet me.
To use it Iâ??ll have to wait and see.

The safe is on the floor,
Thatâ??s one problem more.

For our first event stairs twenty-six;
Now I am in a fix.

I can only think â??Oh, my,
I guess Iâ??ll just have to try.â?•

Paris cafÃ© bathrooms are not down the hall.
Theyâ??re reached by stairsâ?? just asking for a fall.

But on our ship, everything is good.
Step up to the bathroom is just understood.

Now Iâ??m home I appreciate without the fuss:
The ADA is looking after us.

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