

Chapter 6

Understanding Marketing Approaches to Older Tourists: A Selection of Case Studies

Abstract This chapter illustrates a selection of case studies that show different approaches to older tourists from a supply-side perspective. After presenting the purpose of the study, details about the research method are provided. Specifically, three companies in the tourism industry with different targeting and positioning strategies in the older tourist market are examined: a Canadian-based tour operator offering exotic adventure travels, a Slovenian-based tour operator and travel agency specializing in slow garden travels, and a United Kingdom-based company providing long-term accommodation solutions in Southern Europe. For each case study, a brief company profile is provided, followed by the description of the salient strategic choices and operative practices. Finally, the chapter offers some considerations about the challenges for the tourism industry in the next decades.

6.1 Purpose of the Study and Methodology

While the first two parts of the book (Chaps. 1–5) are demand-focused and aim at investigating older tourists' behavior, the third part (this chapter and 7) shifts the perspective to the supply side. Specifically, it intends to explore how companies in the tourism industry address this market (in this chapter) in order to identify some theoretical contributions as well as practical implications for marketers (Chap. 7). Since very few studies have addressed suppliers' marketing strategies regarding older tourists, a qualitative approach based on the case studies method was considered the most appropriate to gain in-depth information and insight into the phenomenon. Accordingly, this chapter presents three case studies of older-oriented tourism companies and analyzes their marketing strategies and operative practices. Before presenting the three studies, the methodology for the research is described. Finally, the discussion section highlights similarities and differences in the companies' marketing approach to older tourists.

6.1.1 A Qualitative Approach

Several scholars (e.g., Davies 2003; Pernecky and Jamal 2010; Wilson and Hollinshead 2015) have supported the use of qualitative methodologies in tourism research. Since the purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of tourism companies targeting older tourists, and the focus was on their own perspective, a qualitative approach was chosen and a multiple case study research design was adopted. Following Yin (2003), this method is appropriate for research where questions involving “how” or “why” are posed. The use of multiple case study research is not intended to generalize about companies’ marketing approach (Yin 2015), but rather to present real-life examples of marketing strategies and tools that can be used to target older tourists effectively.

6.1.2 Case Studies Selection

The case studies were selected after extensive research on Internet search engines by combining keywords describing the demographic segment (such as “older,” “seniors,” “over 50s,” “50+,” “over 60s,” “retirees”) and keywords identifying the industry (such as “travel/s,” “tourism,” “tour operator/s,” “hotel/s,” “accommodation”). In addition, travel blogs and websites dedicated to older persons or older tourists served as useful references to identify suppliers of travel services for this specific market.

Following Stake (2013), case studies were selected considering three main criteria:

- Is the case relevant?
- Do the cases provide diversity across contexts?
- Does the case provide the opportunity to learn about complexity and contexts?

Targeting mainly older tourists was a prerequisite for companies to be considered as potential candidates for the case study. In addition, the variety of case studies was considered important to gain different perspectives and marketing approaches to the older tourist market. An initial screening of the companies’ websites served to assess these aspects. Overall, 20 companies were purposefully selected on the basis of their peculiarities and their relevance to the study. They were classified by the researcher according to specific characteristics, such as type of business (e.g., tour operator or accommodation services) and type of offering (e.g., adventure travels or garden travels). Accordingly, companies were contacted in subsequent steps to ensure a variety of respondents in terms of travel type and business type. The companies were contacted via email or live chat through their websites and invited to participate in the research after a description the aim of the project. Five responded requiring further information and three finally decided to participate:

- ElderTreks, a Canadian-based tour operator specializing in adventure travel for older tourists
- Viaggi Floreali, a Slovenian-based tour operator and travel agency specializing in garden travel
- Algarve Senior Living, a British company specializing in long-term stay accommodation in Southern Europe.

6.1.3 Data Collection

In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with the companies' marketing managers or founders.¹ According to Malhotra and Birks (2003), the in-depth interview is the best way to approach business research with managers. A loosely-structured protocol was chosen to allow respondents to diverge from the main topics and further develop concepts and ideas. The protocol was developed around the following key topics to maintain a degree of consistency across all interviews:

- how the company started to target older tourists
- description of the target and its characteristics
- description of the company's distinctive elements
- use of the marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion strategies)
- analysis of the market context with a focus on active aging and the challenges for the tourism industry.

The outline of the questionnaire was sent via email to the participants a few days before the interview as a general guide to help them focus on the main topics, though it was specified that the interview would have a loose structure. Participants were also informed about the length of the interview. Considering that the companies were located in distant countries, for time and cost convenience the interviews were conducted personally by the researcher over the telephone or via Skype. The interviews ranged in length from 50 to 60 min. They were recorded, with the consent of the participants, to ensure that no subtle nuances or details would be missed because of the amount of rich data. In addition, the interviews were documented by detailed note taking (Rubin and Rubin 2011; Myers 2013).

¹The interviews were conducted with Amanda Dunnig (marketing manager for ElderTreks until November 22, 2016), Erica Vaccari (founder and director of Viaggi Floreali), and Luis Teixeira da Silva (founder and director of Algarve Senior Living).

6.1.4 Data Analysis

The interviews were fully transcribed by a professional transcription service for academics and double-checked for accuracy and reliability with the original audios and notes taken during the interviews. A theme analysis of the interviews was then undertaken to explore the companies' marketing strategies and practices taken. The text was segmented into discrete parts, "not according to syntactic rules (e.g., sentences) but with respect to change of meaning in the text" (Tajeddini et al. 2017, p. 54). The themes identified in the analysis included:

- target definition
- customers' expectations
- customer satisfaction
- positioning
- product offering
- price strategies
- place strategies
- promotion strategies
- terminological ambiguity in referring to older tourists
- active aging
- challenges for the tourism industry.

In presenting the results, particular attention was given to participants' key quotations regarding relevant aspects of the subject. In addition, even though the case studies are based mainly on the interviews, secondary information, such as company brochures, websites, and social media pages, was used to triangulate results (Decrop 1999).

In the remainder of the chapter, each case will first be analyzed separately and then the discussion section will search for cross-case patterns (Eisenhardt 1989).

6.2 ElderTreks—Small-Group Exotic Adventures for the Over 50

6.2.1 Company Profile

ElderTreks is an adventure travel company designed exclusively for individuals aged 50 and over. It is based in Toronto, Canada, and was established in 1987 by Gary Murtagh. ElderTreks offers trips in over 100 countries and includes destinations in Africa, the Americas, the Asia-Pacific Region, Europe, the Middle East, and the Polar regions. Some of the travel proposals include, for example, wildlife and tribal African safaris, active hiking trips to the Rockies, Himalayas and Andes,

expeditions by icebreakers to the Arctic and Antarctic, and cultural journeys throughout Asia and South America. ElderTreks proposes small group experiences. For example, the maximum group size for land adventures is 16, and expedition ships rather than cruise ships are used for ship-based adventures. Smaller vessels allow for more personal interaction and reduce the impact at the sites visited. Before the establishment of ElderTreks, Gary Murtagh was running trips all over the world to exotic destinations and he realized that there was not a specific adventure travel company targeting the 50-plus market. He thought this was a lost opportunity and he aspired to provide active, adventurous experiences for older people besides the traditional sightseeing tour buses that were available on the market at the time. ElderTreks aims to support the values of being able to see more and do more even in later life, so that adventurous individuals can still explore and experiment as they used to when younger, but just within a more comfortable situation. In the words of the marketing manager:

Some of these people were backpackers. They were the ones that were exploring, they were going through Europe, they were checking out Southeast Asia with a backpack on their back and staying in hostels and as they grew up they didn't want to lose that spirit of adventure, but obviously, some things change. You don't want to be sleeping in a hostel, you want to be sleeping in a more comfortable bed and you might not be quite as adventurous going to certain places, so you wanted the help of a group to guide you along. Those are the types of considerations that led to the idea and the creation of ElderTreks.

6.2.2 *The Target*

ElderTreks designs its products for well-educated and well-traveled tourists aged 50 years and older. ElderTreks considers travel motivation as a key segmentation criterion for the older adult market. Even though the active adventure traveler represents the core market for the company, the target also includes tourists who are interested in getting to know a culture in a broad sense. Accordingly, when possible, ElderTreks uses local transport, and organizes home stays and dining in local restaurants. Soon, the company intends to potentiate segmentation criteria and to offer more interest-specific tours rather than just appealing to everyone. For example, hikers represent an interesting target on which ElderTreks intends to focus more.

In terms of country of origin, most customers are from the United States (60%) and Canada (27%), and a few from other English-speaking areas such as the United Kingdom (1.14%), and Australia and New Zealand (about 1%).

Regarding age, even though ElderTreks targets the 50-plus age group, most customers are aged from 65 to 75 years old. The company is now trying to increase the number of “younger” older adults to balance the age mix within travel groups.

6.2.2.1 Customers' Expectations

ElderTreks' customers are looking for good value for money because many of them are no longer working and they are dependent on their income and retirement savings. Even though they might have a limited budget, they still look for good value with interesting experiences and they expect to be well taken care of before and during their trips. That is the main reason that they choose a tour operator rather than organizing travel by themselves. This means, for example, that they expect all the information about the trip to be provided in advance by the company; they expect to be guided step-by-step in what they need to do, to be provided with practical help with requirements such as visas, and not to have to worry about any aspects of travel organization. With this regard, the marketing manager explained:

We have to provide that value by helping them along the way, answering all their questions, making it easy for them and basically helping them to just kind of show up.

Customers also expect to be taken care of at the destination, and in this sense the tour leader is a key figure for ElderTreks. The tour groups include up to 16 people who might have not only varying interests, but also varying health requirements. Therefore, tour leaders need to take care of customers, helping them move from place to place and providing assistance if there are any health-related issues. Even though ElderTreks does not provide luxury travel, prices are still higher than do-it-yourself travel; therefore, travel participants expect great customer service and assistance from start to finish to feel that they receive value for money.

In addition, since ElderTreks' customers have high levels of education and have already traveled extensively during their life, they expect new experiences that are unlike anything they have done in the past. The words of the marketing manager well describe this expectation:

They want to be well taken care of. They want to sleep on a comfortable mattress, they want those comforts. They're also expecting that the tours are unique and something a little bit different and something that they can share with their friends [...] and a good mix of highlights and culture.

Customers also have expectations about the other group participants. Since ElderTreks provides active travel, participants expect to find people of about their age and they expect everybody will be able to keep up with the group and the proposed activities. In general, a 50-year-old as well as an 80-year-old prefers to travel with people of a similar age, who have a similar pace or rhythm.

Solo travelers also expect to meet people with similar interests and to develop friendships, or least be able to meet some people to get along with during the travels. Some customers may have lost their partners, but they want to continue traveling. Hence, organized tours enable them to continue pursuing their interest and passions.

6.2.2.2 Customer Satisfaction

ElderTreks has a 35% return rate of customers purchasing more than one tour. To improve customer loyalty, the company believes it is important to constantly monitor customer satisfaction. Customers receive a post-trip questionnaire aimed at understanding customer satisfaction about several aspects of the service experience, including, for example, the booking process, the information received, the actual trip, and the tour leader. According to the marketing manager, customers' feedback sometimes provides really great ideas that the company tries to integrate into its products. In addition, the company has recently introduced an annual customer survey to explore the introduction of possible new types of products and destinations, especially for loyal customers who are always interested in finding new stimuli. Further, there is a loyalty program (i.e., ClubTrek), which includes discounts for continuing travel.

6.2.3 Positioning

ElderTreks promotes sustainable and responsible travel by offering “active, off-the-beaten path, small group adventures all over the world.” The company aims to offer the best possible service quality at good value for money. The following sentence, reported in the company's brochure, describes the company's desired positioning:

Our goal is not necessarily “5 star” accommodation, but rather a “5 star” experience. We do not support conveyor-belt tourism, where groups are pushed through a rigid itinerary at the expense of spontaneity. Instead, we bring you a genuine, one-of-a-kind travel experience.

6.2.4 Product or Services Offered

ElderTreks provides all-inclusive small group tours, which comprise from five to maximum 16 participants. Most of the tours take place either in spring or in the fall, which is the busiest time of the year, while summer is the lowest season. In summer, the company has the time to focus on product development activities.

The company has arranged their tours on activity levels ranging from 1 (easy) to 5 (challenging) to respond to different desires and to inform customers about the type of activities and experience they can expect. The activity levels are reported in Table 6.1.

The tours have set departures and fixed itineraries. On certain conditions, and within the limits of the destinations already offered, tailor made itineraries are possible upon the request of a travel agent or a group of people. Even though the company is not currently focusing on tailor-made tours, this might be an opportunity for the future. Besides land tours, the company offers hiking trips and sea

Table 6.1 Tour classifications based on activity level

Activity level	Tour description
(1) Easy tours	Participants must be able to hike up to one or two hours in different contexts and conditions (i.e., often walking through archeological sites, towns/cities and/or rainforests with varying levels of rugged terrain). They are also required to be able to walk at least 1 mile (1.6 km)
(2) Moderately easy	Participants must be able to hike up to three hours in different contexts and conditions. They must be able to walk at least 2 miles (approximately 3 km)
(3) Moderate	Participants must be able to hike up to four hours in different contexts and conditions. They must be able to walk at least 3 miles (approximately 5 km)
(4) Moderately challenging	Participants must be able to hike up to five hours in different contexts and conditions. They must be able to walk at least 4 miles (approximately 6 km)
(5) Challenging	Participants must be able to hike five or more hours in different contexts and conditions. They must be able to walk at least 5 miles (approximately 8 km)

Source Author's elaboration of www.ElderTreks.com

journeys. These are ship-based programs organized in partnership with specialized operators and on small expedition-style ships rather than on large cruise ships. The choice of working with small expedition-ships encourages more personal interaction, reduces the environmental impact at the visited sites, and fits with the company's values and product style.

One of the non-negotiable accommodation services customers require and the company strives to provide is a private bathroom. Even though this seems an obvious and trivial facility, it may not be so easy to obtain during adventure travels in wild destinations, such as in the middle of the desert. In addition, when selecting accommodation services, the company considers proximity to the destination and the activities a core choice criterion, so that the itinerary can flow smoothly.

6.2.5 Price Strategy

The company's price strategies are mainly cost-based and reflect seasonality and demand flows, as the marketing manager points out:

Sometimes certain seasons are definitely lower, so we will reflect that in the price. Even though it's one tour and you have two departures of that tour, one in the spring and one in the fall, if the fall is lower season we will price it a little bit lower if we can. Some particular trips have specific festivals and events included in them, so that means that availability will be more difficult and as a result the price has to be higher. We just try and be fair with our pricing.

In addition, the company offers a kind of guarantee for solo travelers, in the sense that they do not have to pay a single supplement if they are willing to share a room. However, if there is not another person of the same gender in the group with whom to share the room, the customer will receive his or her own room without any supplements. A double room at a single-room price is not sustainable in economic terms given the small nature of the groups; however, the marketing manager explains that the company is willing to continue to increase offerings for solo travelers because they represent a huge market opportunity. The company also organizes an annual sale for all customers in late fall in which certain trips go on sale and customers can obtain early booking discounts for the following year.

6.2.6 *Distribution Strategy*

Currently, direct sale to customers represents the main distribution strategy. Customers contact the company mostly online and book over the phone. A small percentage of bookings (about 5%) come from travel agents, but this is a minor option at present. The company is working to build another distribution channel through travel agencies and tour operators. This process implies developing in-depth travel agent programs, commission structure and advertising strategies. Online direct booking (e-commerce) is not possible yet either, because the company believes that it is extremely important to interact directly with customers in order to qualify them and understand their needs and expectations concerning the travel.

Booking online isn't yet a possibility just because it's difficult for us to really make sure that that person is capable of walking or make sure that person knows that they have to have a particular visa. [...] We talk until we can figure that out.

For these reasons, even though many customers contact ElderTreks through the company website, reservations are mostly made on the phone.

6.2.7 *Promotion Strategy*

Promotion strategies include the use of print advertising, brochures, web marketing and, more recently, social media. Since both ElderTrek's tag line and logo report the words "exotic adventures for travelers 50 and plus," the company appeals directly to the target market in all communication activities.

Most promotion strategies have been implemented through traditional print advertisement. Specifically, ElderTreks has been collaborating with a publication called ITN—International Travel News—which is based in California, and with some other specific 50-plus magazines. In addition to advertising, brochures represent a strategic communication tool for the company. Even though an online

brochure is available on the company website, most customers prefer a paper brochure. As emphasized by the marketing manager:

Fifty-one percent of people still like a print brochure, and I think this age group still likes that tangible aspect of travel because travel is so intangible and it's hard to put \$5 to 10,000 per person down on a trip, and you have nothing in your hand.

Moreover, the website represents an important vehicle to communicate with customers. It includes several sections with detailed information about the company, the tour guides, the types of tours and destinations, and the loyalty programs. It also includes a newsletter section and a photo-contest section. Through search engine optimization and search engine marketing activities, the company tries to drive people to the website to increase brand awareness. The website also represents a means for customers to get in touch with the company through a contact form. Recently, the company has also started to use social networks. Facebook, particularly, seems to fit well with the 50–75 age group, as explained by the marketing manager:

They [older tourists] are actively using Facebook and a lot of them use it on our tours to stay in touch with their grandkids or their kids, or even their friends.

For these reasons, ElderTreks is willing to experiment to potentiate its presence on Facebook and attract older tourists' attention.

One of the challenges in the promotion strategy is the company's brand name because the term "elder" might arouse negative connotation among the target market, and the company is aware of that. The brand name might represent a barrier to the extent that some customers prefer not to tell their friends and acquaintances they are traveling with ElderTreks because of the brand name.

We live in a world where everyone wants to be young. People aren't always as comfortable with growing older or they don't want to necessarily be determined or just put in a box because of their age.

However, the brand name was created about 30 years ago, and it has developed an important brand equity so far. In addition, the brand name ElderTreks is also "an instant qualifier" of the type of target and people can recognize themselves in a certain age group.

6.2.8 Active Aging and the Challenges for the Next Decades

In ElderTreks' vision, active aging means pushing the boundaries of age-related stereotypes and labels, staying active, and keeping healthy without the fear of growing older:

It's about forgetting about the stereotypes of aging and just not letting age define you. It's about continuing to do what you've always done, maybe in a modified way.... It's about continuing to be active and healthy and just like not letting this vision of being old and not

able to do anything get you down, and just continuing to grow older and wise and continue to be healthy and take care of yourself.

The main challenges for travel companies in the next decades derive from the increasing interest the 50-plus market has gained among the tourism industry and, consequently, the increasing competition among travel professionals. One of the key points for gaining competitive advantage will be the company's ability to develop effective segmentation strategies in order to target the right customer with the right product and develop long-term relationships:

Everyone [older tourists] is going to be targeted by all the travel companies, it's about really finding those customers that are our fit and finding them, and nurturing them and creating very brand loyal customers.

The main challenge regarding destinations willing to attract older tourists will be accessibility. In other words, destinations should increase their accessibility—for example, by limiting the steps clients need to take to enjoy attractions and by providing free Wi-Fi connection. In the words of ElderTrek's marketing manager, destinations need to be “easy to book, easy to get to, and offer a comfortable experience from start to finish” if they want to target older adults.

6.3 Viaggi Floreali—Slowly Walking Among Flowers and Gardens

6.3.1 Company Profile

Viaggi Floreali is a Slovenian-based tour operator and travel agency that defines itself as a “small artisanal workshop specialized in the creation of slow travels, for very small groups, to discover gardens and natural areas of great beauty.” Travel destinations are mainly located in the United Kingdom, but each year the company proposes new European destinations.

Erica Vaccari founded Viaggi Floreali in 2012, moved by her passion for traveling and gardening and supported by her long experience in the industry of nature-based niche tourism, and specifically with older tourists. Before creating Viaggi Floreali, she had been organizing cultural and naturalistic walking tours for a United Kingdom-based tour operator and then designing trips to the Italian countryside for British tourists. In 2012, she organized the first itinerary in the Cotswolds, United Kingdom, for a small group of Italian friends, who afterwards started to spread enthusiastic word of mouth about their experience. This news reached a gardening magazine, which began to publish articles about Viaggi Floreali trips on a regular basis. Subsequently, Erica Vaccari was invited to conferences at high-end gardening exhibitions, gardening clubs and associations in northern Italy. From that experience, she conceived the opportunity to organize “slow” travel tours for Italian tourists willing to discover the beauty of British

gardens outside the mass-tourism market and she started to plan new itineraries in new destinations.

Viaggi Floreali is a self-run company, and the founder follows each phase from destination selection to the creation of the itinerary and accompanying travelers on tours. To fully understand the core values that inspire how Viaggi Floreali designs its tours and what customers' expectations are, it might be useful to recall the concept of slow tourism and its pillars:

Slow Tourism must follow two essential principles: taking time and attachment to a particular place. Taking time means modification of the daily time relationship, specifically a different perception of nature and living in harmony with a place, its inhabitants, and their culture. The environment is not merely perceived by sight, but by using all five senses. Tourists must be able to change pace, to look rather than to see, to experience the area rather than to endure it. (Yurtseven and Kaya 2011, p. 91)

Hence, the slowness encompasses different elements of the tourist experience:

... the importance of the travel experience to, and within, a destination, engagement with the mode(s) of transport, associations with slow food and beverages, exploration of localities in relation to patrimony and culture at a slower pace and, what might best be described as, support for the environment. (Dickinson et al. 2010; cited in Dickinson and Lumsdon 2010, p. 2)

Viaggi Floreali shares this concept of travel and arranges its itineraries accordingly, as will be discussed in Sect. 6.3.4.

6.3.2 The Target

Even though Viaggi Floreali does not explicitly target older tourists, most customers have an age ranging from 50 to 65 years. This can be explained by several reasons. First, gardening is more frequently practiced by adults and older adults than by younger people; hence, naturalistic tours aimed at the discovery of gardens is a much stronger travel motivation for older adults than for younger generations. Second, the concept of "slow travel" particularly fits older individuals' needs. Third, the proposed itineraries cost about 2000 euros per week and are hardly affordable by the Generation Y. However, more so than age, what characterizes the company's target is that they are very well-educated individuals, often teachers, academics, or economists, who are passionate about gardens, gardening, and the related cultural dimension. Most have their own garden, even if they might have different levels of abilities and experience.

Customers are mainly from Italy, but there are also Swiss, German, Slovenian, and British customers. Most are women who travel with their partner or with a friend. In other cases, there are groups of female friends who choose to travel together on a private tailor-made tour. For short breaks, there are several single solo travelers. It is interesting to note that the tours represent an opportunity for solo travelers to meet people who share their interests and who often become their travel

companions for future tours. Tourists with mobility difficulties can participate as well. Almost all British gardens are accessible to people who use wheelchairs. In addition, a private coach is always available during the journey if anyone needs to rest.

6.3.2.1 Customers' Expectations

Most customers joining Viaggi Floreali's tours expect to spend a relaxing time discovering beautiful natural scenery and gardens with people who share their passions, but without feeling the pressure of competing over their gardening abilities. They want to enroll in off-the-beaten-track itineraries, and take part in pleasant and quiet activities. In addition, they expect to engage with the local culture and try the local food. In the words of the founder:

Participants expect great relaxation, beautiful places, slowness, good food. This is what you would expect, especially to relax, not to go there with the idea "There is someone who knows more than me, I know nothing."

These types of traveler represent the company's core target. In addition, there are a few customers who are moved more by curiosity or "the fashion of the moment" than they are by a profound interest in gardening. They typically get to know Viaggi Floreali from magazines and do not have precise expectations about the travel.

6.3.2.2 Customer Satisfaction

So far, Erica Vaccari has had a direct relationship with each single traveler, from the pre-trip phase, when customers may contact her online, by phone, or personally during an event, to the post-trip phase, when she invites them to write a travel review on the company website. The close relationship with customers during the travel facilitates a precise understanding of their needs and expectations, and thus she can monitor their satisfaction constantly. The slowness of the itineraries also permits her to adapt the pace of the travel according to specific needs that might arise on site, as explained in the interview:

Many customers need to use rest rooms quite often. Therefore, we keep a slow pace and we make frequent breaks. We also have short transfers between destinations and points of interest. We eat always at the same time, quick lunches, but no sandwiches on the go.

Customer satisfaction is extremely high; there is a 90% return rate and new customers very often decide to travel with Viaggi Floreali because of positive word of mouth. This further enhances customers' expectations and stimulates the company to continuously improve service standards and the quality of the experience.

6.3.3 Positioning

The core values that most inspire Viaggi Floreali are health, well-being, quality, beauty, and nature. The attention to these aspects of life distinguishes the company's products from competing offerings. In the words of the founder, there are a few tour operators and agencies that propose garden travels, but they usually arrange itineraries for larger groups of people, whereas Viaggi Floreali focuses on very small groups and highly selected gardens. The aim of a tour is not to see as many things as possible, but rather to go deep into detail, to listen and observe, and to taste and appreciate the richness each single garden has to offer. For example, a one day itinerary includes a visit to a maximum of two gardens, sometimes only one, and travelers can spend up to four hours in the same garden.

In addition, while competitors organize study trips with an expert, such as a well-known gardener or a landscape architect, Viaggi Floreali proposes cultural trips in a broader sense in which every participant can share his or her experience and knowledge with others. There are no formal teaching classes, even if there happen to be tourists with 40 years of gardening experience. In fact, visiting gardens offers an unconventional means for getting in touch with different people and different cultures, and learning from them in a relaxed and non-competitive atmosphere. The following is an extended passage in which the founder describes how the travel experience can influence a tourist's cultural experience:

I never choose famous gardens. I rather look for something unique about the owner's gardening method, or ethical choices or the garden's story. Through the garden, we understand that there are different cultures. I try to bring tourists closer to the greatest thing of British culture: respect for nature, respect for public parks and gardens, the foresight. People return home culturally enriched. They begin to love more their environment and their own green. They become more critical and aware in their purchases, they learn to go to greenhouses and ask for untreated seasonal products. So, this is definitely a cultural journey.

6.3.4 Product or Services Offered

The process for organizing a tour starts by investigating the gardens available in a certain area. After an extensive research on websites, blogs, and books, Erica Vaccari selects a few gardens or historic houses with gardens on the basis of their peculiarities and unique features. For example, she looks for the oldest garden in a certain area, or the most recent garden, or the garden that presents only one plant species. Then, she visits the site for reconnaissance, in order to select stunning locations and points of interest—such as parks, coastlines, natural landscapes, and historic villages—in the surrounding areas. In terms of time scheduling, the tours respect older individuals' biological rhythm and need for pauses. They usually start a little later in the morning and they cover only small areas. Transfers between

Table 6.2 Types of Viaggi Floreali travel

Types of travel	Target	Age	Length	Season
Master travels	Gardening lovers, mainly retirees	50–85	1 week	Off-season
Light travels	Garden neophytes	40+	1 week	Summer
Short trips	Garden lovers, still working	40–55	3–4 days	Off-season
Carefree travels	Families with children	30–45	3–4 days	Summer
Tailor-made tours	Groups of minimum four people or associations interested in gardening	Customized		

Source Author's elaboration

points of interest usually take 20–30 min; only in the circumstances of an essential attraction to visit would the transfer take up to an hour. The company's decision to cover small areas is motivated by the desire to give tourists the opportunity to stay outdoors for as long as possible and to experience destinations rather than just visiting them. This feature further distinguishes Viaggi Floreali's travels from competing offerings, as emphasized by the founder:

Other competitors already offer tours with hours-long transfers and a huge amount of things to see, but in my opinion it is important to know in depth small areas.

In line with the concept of slow travel and the desire to bring tourists closer to the local culture, the accommodation is organized mainly in small family-run bed-and-breakfasts.

Since 2015, Viaggi Floreali has classified its offering in three main types of travel, which are differentiated according to the level of knowledge and passion for gardens of the participants, as summarized in Table 6.2.

The first category, master travels, is aimed at true gardening lovers and includes a visit to two gardens per day escorted by the gardens' owners or the chief gardener. Participants usually prefer to travel off-season. Their age ranges between 50 and 85 years, but the majority of travelers in this category are 50–65 years old. The second category, light travels, is designed for individuals who could be defined as "garden-neophytes," that is, tourists who are curious about gardens but who give more importance to the naturalistic and relaxing dimensions of the trip. They usually do not have a garden and prefer to travel in summer, motivated by the desire to experience something different from their usual routine. Light travels include more free time than master travels, more visits to manors and villages, and fewer visits to gardens. The third category, short trips, is aimed at individuals with a strong interest in gardens who cannot take a week off work in low season and therefore prefer short breaks. Participants are usually 40–55 years old. Finally, since 2017, the company has proposed a new type of trip called "carefree travels," aimed at families with children. These itineraries for eight people combine the slowness of countryside lifestyle with the beauty of landscape, and visits to small private gardens with big parks. In addition, Viaggi Floreali organizes tailor-made tours for groups of British tourists to a maximum of 20 participants to visit the Italian region of Friuli Venezia Giulia.

6.3.5 Price Strategy

Viaggi Floreali positions its products at a high-end market price. The prices for the proposed itineraries are fixed and are available on the website, whereas for tailor made tours prices are personalized according to the requests of a certain group of customers.

6.3.6 Distribution Strategy

Viaggi Floreali has no intermediaries and sells directly to customers. This decision is motivated by the founder both as an ethical choice and as a personal attitude to travel:

I decided to eliminate all intermediaries to contrast the global trend [of big intermediaries] and to support small companies, such as local B&Bs rather than big international hotel chains. In addition, I like the personal contact, I know I can only trust the people with whom I have a personal relationship. And that's why people keep coming on tours with me, because I take personal responsibility for what I do. I also like to go back to the same destinations to support the local economy.

Customers can contact Viaggi Floreali online through the company website, or by phone, or personally during one of the several exhibitions and events the founder attends. Tourists usually book the travel well in advance, from six to 11 months before departure.

6.3.7 Promotion Strategy

Below-the-line activities² represent the main promotion strategy of Viaggi Floreali. The founder often participates in gardening exhibitions and events at which she narrates stories of her travels, shows pictures and circulates a form for participants to sign to subscribe to the company's newsletters. When new travel itineraries are available, customers on the mailing list receive a newsletter and usually, within 24 hours, the group of participants is complete.

Travel proposals are also presented on the website. The concise description of the itineraries, enriched by numerous photographs, provides a narration of the travel atmosphere, a plunge into the beauty of the places rather than a list of technical details. Given the importance that the company attributes to personal contact and relationships, the website includes personal information about the founder and how

²Below-the-line activities include direct, often personal communication with the target, such as direct mail and public relations. Above-the-line activities usually refer to advertising (Smith and Taylor 2004).

she established Viaggi Floreali. In addition, a section is dedicated to tourists' reviews of their travel experiences. Finally, the website presents a project called "Women of flowers", which consists of flower-composition workshops targeted at women and located mainly in Italy. This initiative was inspired by the sustainable flower movement, which promotes the use of organic, local, and in-season flowers.

Viaggi Floreali also has a Facebook page, but in the words of the founder it is mostly a window to show pictures of the travels and post upcoming events. Customers rarely use it to communicate with the company.

Regarding above-the-line activities, only once, back in 2013, did Viaggi Floreali pay for a print advertisement in *Gardenia*, a well-known monthly gardening magazine distributed in Italy. Afterwards, *Gardenia* started to publish articles about Viaggi Floreali travels and initiatives on a regular basis, for free, thus representing a useful promotion tool.

6.3.8 Active Aging and the Challenges for the Next Decades

According to Viaggi Floreali's experience, education plays an important role in supporting active aging. In general, older individuals who like gardening are active both physically, because they practice outdoor activities in their gardens, and mentally. In this sense, active aging can be described as being open to new experiences and new stimuli, and being curious.

In the next decades, one of the main challenges for the older-tourist market will be related to time and money. Erica Vaccari believes that the next generations of older individuals will have less available time because they will be increasingly involved in providing childcare to their grandchildren. In addition, they will probably have also less discretionary income because of the rapid changes in the welfare and pension system of European countries, in particular Italy.

To face these changes in demand without compromising on service quality, Viaggi Floreali proposes the need to "resize", especially for small companies. This "resizing" implies accurately segmenting and selecting customers, reducing intermediaries to keep the costs down, and reducing the length of the trip to provide high quality experiences at a reasonable price.

In addition, health represents an important challenge for companies willing to target older tourists. Travel organizations need to provide thorough assistance to older tourists to reassure them and encourage a desire to travel, even when they might not have a travel partner. Viaggi Floreali believes that small-group tours represent a particularly supportive environment for older tourists with health issues, as described by the founder:

The older you get, the more likely you are to have health needs, the more you need to know that you will not be ignored during the trip. In small groups, it is easier to monitor if everything is going fine, because often people do not have the courage to say "we are going too fast, I cannot keep up," or "I do not find anything I can eat on this menu." [...] In

addition, one thing that scares older persons is to be alone, not having a partner to travel with, to be set aside, not only in travels, but also by society.

Finally, the founder emphasizes the importance of increasing “familiarity” in the travel offering. Familiarity can be communicated, for example, through handmade products, homemade cakes, and personalization of the hospitality services.

Nowadays the world of tourism is very impersonal [...] Let us remember that people aged 70 today are those whose mothers and grandmothers did everything in the house. Therefore, through homemade products they remember their own childhood, or what they do now for their grandchildren, or what they used to do for their children. Therefore, familiarity and a personal touch are essential.

Often, older tourists prefer to rely on professionals, not because they no longer feel able to arrange their travels or they have health-related needs, but rather because they no longer have the energy to do that; they need to relax, unwind, and feel they are looked after and cared for. To conclude, organizations in the tourism industry willing to attract older tourists should provide high quality customer services and a personal touch.

6.4 Algarve Senior Living—Accommodation Solutions for Long-Term Stays

6.4.1 Company Profile

Algarve Senior Living offers rental-based independent living propositions for 50-plus, typically retirees or near retirees from more than 20 countries around the world, in Southern Europe. It currently has a focus primarily on the Portuguese market, on the Algarve and the Lisbon coast, and has a presence via preferred partners on the Silver Coast³ and Madeira.⁴

The business has two core activities. First, it assists anyone who is 50-plus, typically retirees or near retirees, to find accommodation solutions to spend extended periods of time, usually in the winter, in southern Europe. Second, it aims to help the same group of people retire or move permanently to southern Europe.⁵

³The Silver Coast (Costa de Prata) begins north of Lisbon and stretches about 150 km to beyond the coastal town of Nazaré.

⁴Madeira is a Portuguese archipelago situated in the north Atlantic Ocean, south-west of Portugal.

⁵According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2010, pp. 101–102), a visitor is “any person travelling to a place other than that of his/her usual environment for less than 12 months and whose main purpose of trip is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited.” More specifically, a tourist is a visitor traveling for leisure purposes. In this sense, older people who retire or move permanently to another country cannot be considered tourists, even though they represent an extremely interesting market phenomenon. Therefore, in line with the purpose of this book and its focus on older tourists, this case study will focus only on the long-stay rental activity provided by Algarve Senior Living.

For this reason, Algarve Senior Living includes both long-term rental-based accommodation and the sale of real estate.

Algarve Senior Living was born because Luis Teixeira da Silva, founder and director, had been working with northern European investors who were looking to create living villages for older persons in the south of Europe, specifically in the Algarve region. Before launching the business in 2014, the Algarve Senior Living team conducted extensive market research about “senior living,” including both primary research among national retirees, international expatriate retirees, and foreigners looking to emigrate to Portugal, and secondary data analysis of industry reports and interviews. What emerged was the existence of a significant demand for accommodation solutions for older persons in southern Europe and an opportunity to fill a gap in the market. Therefore, a big institutional investor acquired land in the Algarve region to build a “senior village” along the lines of United States, Australian, and South African models. However, that project became embroiled in a protracted planning process and the company decided not to wait but to enter the market with other types of partnerships and solutions. Even though the company’s official name is Senior Living Villages, the brand used in most communications activities for the Portuguese market is Algarve Senior Living.⁶ In fact, the pilot market was Portugal and the regions within Portugal, the Algarve in particular. The Algarve is the southern coastline of Portugal, renowned for its beaches, the picturesque historic towns, and the mild weather all year round. The Algarve also provides good value for money, especially when compared with other north European or North American countries. Hence, this area was chosen because it demonstrated high attraction and demand.

6.4.2 *The Target*

Customers come from about 20 countries, mainly northern Europe and North America, and the majority (about 95%) are active and independent. They are usually individuals who have already traveled extensively, or who used to have an international job or international posting, and who are looking for new experiences. Therefore, they are predisposed to long-term stays in a country or to permanently move there, as explained by the founder:

We’re looking at people who have characteristics of having traveled and looking for an adventurous streak [...] the ability and the willingness to think of new opportunities and new challenges, even at a more advanced stage of life.

In addition, the target includes individuals who are conscientious about financial and retirement planning, and who are willing to drive down their retirement costs.

⁶Since the interview was conducted, a new brand name has been introduced in the Portuguese market (i.e., Portugal Senior Living) and a similar brand strategy will soon be adopted for Spain.

According to the company, southern Europe can offer this possibility, especially for individuals from the northern European or Northern American markets.

About 70% of customers are couples and 30% are singles. However, there has been an increase in the number of single people showing interest in long-term stays in Portugal. The founder emphasizes the fact that Portugal is a particularly safe, hospitable country and a friendly destination, also for single travelers:

There are existing single people that have been widowed or they're divorced or they have never married. I think people understand that there is actually no stigma attached to being single, either for men or women.

There are no age-related limitations, even though people interested in accommodation within a "senior village" usually share interests and have similar age profiles. However, customers might be biased with regard to this type of solution:

We get age-related questions, such as, "Do you have an age limit?" or "Do you need to be a minimum age?" The 50 or the 55-plus question often arises. The answer is, we do not, but the customers often in their heads have some age-related preconceptions.

6.4.2.1 Customers' Expectations

According to the founder, customers' expectations concern two key elements, which the company strives to satisfy, namely, personalization and choice. Regarding personalization, customers expect the company to provide a tailor-made service:

They want to feel that you are considering their particular requirements, which means that you have to have a fairly intense engagement process with the customer. They're expecting you to engage with their individual situation.

In addition, customers want the company to guide them through the decision-making process by helping them choose the solution that best fits their needs:

Customers know more or less what they want, but they don't know exactly what's available. It's often a unique experience to guide them through the process of showing them the options.

Besides these two main points, customers expect reliability and good value for money. Specifically, they want an appropriate type of accommodation. In this regard, the company devotes great attention to selecting only certain types of accommodation that respect accessibility requirements, as explained by the founder:

It's almost all accessible, it's either single floor or it's all served by elevators. We try to reduce the number of stairs. Usually people are independent. They come to the point where they might not wish to climb stairs, so we don't have many duplexes, for example, or townhouses, those are two floors. This is not the type of accommodation that will be appealing for most seniors.

In addition, all accommodation services are in close proximity to amenities and services. In the company's experience, older people tend to move away from isolated, lovely countryside or mountainside areas, and toward destinations that are close to facilities and where there is no need to drive to find basic services. In relation to this, the founder clarifies:

[If you stay in isolated areas,] then you need to drive half an hour to get a loaf of bread or some milk, or if you have an emergency your neighbor is too far away. Or there is no hospital or medical clinic close by. Customers want those services and amenities such as restaurants, some sort of proximity to a health professional [...] and they want many of these things to be walking distance. The fact that they don't want to use a car is something that we are hearing more and more.

Moreover, for destinations such as the Algarve, there is an implicit expectation of proximity of accommodation to the coast, especially for customers coming from inland towns or industrial areas.

6.4.2.2 Customer Satisfaction

Even though customer satisfaction is not systematically monitored, the company receives plenty of informal feedback from customers. As explained by the founder, this is a very small, very personalized business, which focuses much of the effort on delivering the customers' services rather than on perhaps collecting structured feedback. Nevertheless, the long interaction with customers and the personalization of the services make it possible to observe their behaviors and monitor their levels of satisfaction. From informal feedback, it is evident that customers are highly satisfied. In the near future, the company is willing to further increase customer satisfaction analyses.

6.4.3 Positioning

There are a few points that distinguish Algarve Senior Living from its competitors:

- a focus on the older market
- a vast choice of possibilities
- rental and sales opportunities
- the geographic region.

First, the company is focused exclusively and explicitly on the older market. In the words of the founder, there are several businesses around the world, such as hotels or tour operators, that have turnovers of older tourists in the range of millions or billions. However, very few of these businesses actually identify themselves in their branding and positioning strategies as exclusively for the older market. Conversely, Algarve Senior Living targets only older people, and even in the brand name there is an explicit reference to the target market.

Second, the company offers a great variety of choice. Specifically, a concierge style service allows customers and potential customers to engage with the company

at any point in the process, whether they have already selected a destination and are looking for a place to stay, or whether they just want some information about a destination. As explained by the founder:

I think the lifecycle of our relationship with our clients is much, much longer than the typical business.

Third, the company works in rentals and sales, even though it is not a real estate agency in the traditional sense of the word. Algarve Senior Living intends to provide accommodation solutions taking into account customers' needs in a destination as a whole:

If customers come and ask for advice or information about the cultural lifestyles and activities that are happening, for example, in the greater Lisbon area in the winter, we can talk to them and they can talk to us without any pressure, thinking that they now have to go and rent an apartment or buy a house.

Finally, the company has purposefully not identified itself in terms of a specific geographical market of origin, such as “the British specialist” or “the German expert.” Even though most of traditional older tourism to the Algarve derives from the English or German markets, the company has invested in expanding the target across more than 20 countries and it has specialists that speak eight languages. In addition, although at the moment Senior Algarve Living is working directly only in the Portuguese market, the plan is to expand the offering into Spain and other European markets. As summarized by the founder, the aim of the company is first to develop the business model toward a multi-stream and multi-destination market, and afterwards to grow in volume.

6.4.4 Product or Services Offered

The two main types of offering include accommodation rentals and real estate options. Most customers look for independent living; however, the company also provides semi-independent or assisted living, and shared or dependent living. Assisted living or care solutions are for now directed mainly to persons willing to retire or move to Portugal, although the company is willing to develop these types of accommodation for tourists with assistance needs that want extended stays (e.g., over winters) in Portugal or southern Europe:

Our next projects include to finding operators in other countries, in particular colder countries that have guests or residents who have an element of care and that would like to spend their winters or some months of the winter abroad.

Around this core business, the company has developed a range of other services, which aim at helping people make their decision: either to permanently retire to or move to the destination, or to spend time in the destination on a periodic, recurring annual basis, for example in winter. The company also has a department that deals with immigration and visas to support customers with practical requirements. To

help customers choose the right destination according to their needs, Algarve Senior Living organizes discovery trips and discovery tours, which allow people in a short time to obtain an overview of the type of environment, lifestyle, and culture of a certain region. On these trips, tourists usually stay one month or longer to experience the destination before making a decision about whether to buy or rent accommodation for a longer period, as explained by the founder:

We have other people that come in the winters for one, two, three, four, five months [...] If your objective is to move permanently or to retire abroad or to spend winters abroad, going on a holiday for a week does not give you the same impression and idea of the market as would a longer stay.

However, for people coming from far away, the company organizes very intensive experiences over a short period, typically about two or three weeks. This is mainly because some pre-retirees may still be working and they cannot take much leave from work. The preferred locations for these discovery visits to form an idea of the region include most of the characteristics and facilities of a four-star hotel, and they also ensure independency.

6.4.5 Price Strategy

The price strategy depends on rental or buying solutions and on the degree of independent living required by customers. Pricing is not per person but per destination property. For rentals, the price ranges from about \$500 to \$2000 a month per apartment or per suite. The pricing model also depends on a number of factors, such as the number of bedrooms, the location, and the number of on-site services and amenities. For example, some accommodation solutions include a reception, an indoor heated pool for the winter, and sporting facilities like a gymnasium. In such cases, that price will be higher than that for accommodation in a single floor apartment with a nice view in a good location but without any of the on-site amenities.

6.4.6 Distribution Strategy

Senior Algarve Living has around 18 different distribution channels, including both direct and indirect. Partners comprise a variety of service providers. Some specifically work in the travel industry, such as travel agencies or tour operators; others belong to related business, such as real estate agencies, financial advisory firms, and health providers, to name a few. This is a particularly important strategic marketing tool for the company and it also offers a competitive difference. In the words of the founder, Algarve Senior Living is very strongly partner-oriented:

We like working with partners because we feel that this is one of the ways in which we create distribution. We are much less present in terms of social media and online presence because

we have specifically focused our first years of the business on creating the start of an international distribution network through our partners.

6.4.7 Promotion Strategy

The company employs mainly below-the-line promotion activities. As mentioned above, direct relationships with distribution partners are considered extremely important to attract customers. In addition, Algarve Senior Living participates in a number of industry-related events, especially in several northern and southern European countries and in the United States.

The website provides information, both for tourists intending to spend long-term stays and for older persons willing to retire to southern Europe. In addition, the website includes information about the locations in the Algarve, the types of accommodation options, and auxiliary services available.

Currently, advertising is not a priority. However, the company would prefer to work with selected industry publications available across different countries using a results-based approach because, according to the founder, it is very difficult to measure the benefit of promotion strategies such as advertising.

A key point in promotion strategy is the use of the brand name Algarve Senior Living. The founder explained that there was huge debate for many months before making a decision. Several terms were taken into consideration, including, for example, retirement; however, this last word was discarded because of the different meaning it can assume in the United States and in the United Kingdom, which represent two important markets for the company:

In the US, a retiree is seen as an active, participative, very independent person. Whereas in the UK for example, a retiree is seen as somebody that is maybe not so active anymore, and therefore the word “senior” is a little bit more proper to them, less care dependent. Even among the English-speaking markets, we have a divergence of this understanding or the interpretation and the connotation of the word. At the end of the day, it was important to us to make clear to the market what demographic we were targeting and addressing.

6.4.8 Active Aging and the Challenges for the Next Decades

In the company’s vision, active aging is synonymous with choice. Older people who want to age actively need to feel that they can do this just as they envisage or wish. Hence, active aging is not only linked to being physically engaged, but also to actively leading one’s own life, notwithstanding age. In the following quotation, the founder emphasizes that the word active may be ambiguous at times and he provides an interesting interpretation of aging actively as being able to choose:

The word active is sometimes a little bit misleading because some people see it as everyone running around doing radical sports, climbing mountains or skiing. It is about engaging

with the process of aging, whether it be physical, mental, intellectual, or social. That often is linked to the personality of people and to choice [...] For example, if you're somebody who worked very hard physically all your life and you just want to relax now, to read books and maybe just spend some time in certain locations, visiting museums [...] this is mentally stimulating, this is active aging, as well [...] The term "active aging" for me is all about the ability to define and conduct your aging process, and that has fundamentally to do with being able to choose, to pick the options that you most want.

According to Algarve Senior Living, one of the main challenges for the tourism industry will be to provide a sufficient level and quality of services and solutions for an aging market. Specifically, there are three main areas that the tourism industry, as well as tourist destinations, need to focus on providing:

- accessible accommodation
- comfortable accommodation
- the right location and services.

First, a key requirement is accessible accommodation. For example, it is of the utmost importance in hotel rooms to have ramps instead of stairs, because this kind of infrastructure significantly increases the quality associated with the accommodation, even if customers do not have mobility problems. Accordingly, the founder suggests that there is a need for accommodation operators to be much more conscious about accessibility requirements. This could also represent a distinctive positioning feature. Secondly, as emphasized by the founder, older persons like comfort. For example, they expect to find accommodation that is easy to use, with heating and cooling, and the bathrooms should have showers with easy access. Overall, accommodation should focus on these elements as a key design component. Third, older persons tend to prefer proximity to services and facilities. Therefore, the location of accommodation, be it a hotel or an apartment, is crucial for satisfying older persons' preferences, especially tourists looking for long-term vacations such as winter stays.

Finally, from a wider, policy-maker perspective, the founder highlights the importance of promoting the research participation of different institutions, governments, and public bodies in the solutions that enable people to travel easily across international borders, especially within the European Union.

6.5 Discussion

The three case studies refer to different types of business, target, and product offering. Accordingly, the challenges the organizations must face and the marketing practices they adopt present a number of peculiarities, but they also share some common characteristics (Table 6.3). For example, in terms of customers'

Table 6.3 A summary of case studies profiles

	ElderTreks	Viaggi Floreali	Algarve Senior Living
Type of business	Tour operator	Tour operator and travel agency	Accommodation solutions (rental and sale)
Location	Canada	Slovenia	UK
Destinations	Africa Americas Asia and Pacific Europe Middle East Polar	Mainly UK The Netherlands	Portugal (mainly Algarve) Spain Southern Europe
Target	Adventurous tourists	Gardening lovers/cultural tourists	Independent tourists
Age	50+	Mainly 55–65	50+
Customers' expectations	To be taken care of	Relaxation	Personalization Choice Accessibility Proximity
Degree of personalization	Low (fixed packages)	High (for tailor-made tours) Medium (for inclusive packages)	High
Customer satisfaction	Post-travel survey	Informal feedback Travel review on website	Informal feedback
Positioning	Responsible and sustainable adventure travel	Slow travel among gardens	Vast choice possibilities Rental and sales Geographic region
Product	All-inclusive tours Different levels of activity	All-inclusive tours with garden visits	Long-term stays accommodation
Price	Good value for money	High-end	Ranges according to type of property and services
Place	Mainly direct sale	Direct sale	Direct and indirect channels
Promotion	Print advertising Brochures Web marketing	Gardening exhibitions and events Website Publicity	Industry events Website
Terminological ambiguity	Elder	Not relevant	Senior versus retired

Source Author's elaboration

expectations, a common element that emerged is that customers want a personalized service; they want to be taken care of and simply relax during their travel, without having to worry. For this reason, all three companies devote much time to listening

to customers, from before the trip to after the trip. In the pre-trip phase, listening to customers is particularly important because it helps companies to understand customers' needs and expectations. In this regard, ElderTreks conducts long phone calls with its customers before booking a tour, Viaggi Floreali participates in several events dedicated to its target and the founder talks to tourists in person. Algarve Senior Living has a "concierge-like service" that provides a wide spectrum of information. In the post-trip phase, customers' feedback is considered very important by all companies, but whereas ElderTreks and Viaggi Floreali systematically conduct customer satisfaction surveys or monitoring after the trip, Algarve Senior Living relies on informal feedback from customers and is more business-to-business oriented.

Regarding the target, ElderTreks and Viaggi Floreali identify their potential customers mainly on the basis of travel motivations, while Algarve Senior Living focuses on destination preference and length of the trip as major segmentation criteria. In addition, while ElderTreks and Algarve Senior Living explicitly refer to demographic age in their brand name and communication activities ("elder" and "senior," respectively), for Viaggi Floreali, age is the result of a type of motivation that is more widespread among older tourists than among younger generations.

According to the different targets, different expectations and requirements emerged. However, comfort seems to be a common ground for older tourists, be it in a tent in the desert, while visiting gardens in the United Kingdom, or when spending winters on the Algarve coast. Comfort can therefore assume different meanings: the presence of facilities (ElderTreks), respect for biological rhythms (Viaggi Floreali), and accessibility (Algarve Senior Living).

All companies have a clear, distinctive positioning and classify their products according to different levels of activity (ElderTreks), intensity of travel motivation (Viaggi Floreali), and independency (Algarve Senior Living). Prices can range from medium to high but, as pointed out by the interviewees, older tourists are attentive to how they spend. They expect good value for money and high quality services. They are not prepared to negotiate on high service standards.

With regards to distribution strategies, ElderTreks and Viaggi Floreali prefer direct sale, while Algarve Senior Living invested the first two years of its activities to developing partnerships with other companies in the tourism industry and other contexts. Consistently, Algarve Senior Living focuses its communication on business partners, while ElderTreks and Viaggi Floreali prefer to communicate with their final customers. Because of the different dimension of the company, ElderTreks uses traditional print advertising, whereas Viaggi Floreali participates in numerous exhibitions and events for gardening lovers. All companies use their websites to inform customers about their products, upcoming news, and events. However, direct contact over the phone or in person is considered a preferred communication strategy.

An interesting point that emerged during the interviews with ElderTreks and Algarve Senior Living is the difficulty of finding the most appropriate terminology to refer to older tourists because of the ambiguity of age-related terms even among

Table 6.4 Context overview

	ElderTreks	Viaggi Floreali	Algarve Senior Living
Active aging	Going beyond stereotypes Not having fear	Being curious Being open to new experiences	Having choices
Challenges	Segmentation Accessibility	Time and money constraints Health Familiarity and personalization	Accessibility Comfort Location and facilities (e.g., for health)

Source Author's elaboration

English-speaking countries (see Chap. 7). For Viaggi Floreali, this is not a priority since the company does not refer explicitly to age in its brand name or in its communication activities.

Finally, some interesting context considerations emerged regarding active aging and the challenges for the tourism industry in the next decades, as reported in Table 6.4. All companies agree that active aging is not defined mainly by being physically active. Further, they attribute specific connotations to aging actively. For ElderTreks, it means pushing beyond age-related stereotypes toward aging without fear. For Viaggi Floreali, it implies being curious and open to new experiences, while for Algarve Senior Living, it means most of all having choice, having the possibility to decide how to age. Concerning the challenges for the future, the companies emphasize the importance of offering services specifically designed for older tourists, both in terms of intangible characteristics and physical requirements. For example, Viaggi Floreali highlights the need to provide a personal touch and familiarity, while ElderTreks and Algarve Senior Living both underline the importance of accessibility. In addition, time and money constraints (Viaggi Floreali), as well as health-related issues (Viaggi Floreali and Algarve Senior Living), will be major challenges in the decades to come. Accurate segmentation strategies can help to develop the most suitable offerings for specific targets and develop long-term relationships with loyal customers.

To conclude, the analyses of the case studies make three major contributions to the research:

- They provide an original perspective of older tourists' characteristics from a supply-side point of view.
- They offer useful insight into companies' marketing strategies and practices regarding older tourists.
- They widen the field of analysis from single case studies to the broader market context by enriching the meaning of active aging and helping to define the main challenges for the next decades.

These aspects will be addressed in more detail in Chap. 7.

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