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# The Silver Generation's Outsized Influence on Family Travel



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## INDUSTRY RESEARCH BRIEF

*Why grandparents ages 61–80 are the most undervalued audience in travel marketing — and the most capable of driving demand.*

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## Family Travel's Real Power Center

More than half of U.S. household wealth sits in the hands of grandparents, yet travel marketing still targets their children.

Family travel marketing has long been built around parents in their 30s and early 40s under the assumption that the planner and the payer are the same person. The data no longer supports that assumption.

Across the U.S. grandparents are playing an increasingly central role in initiating trips, shaping itineraries and funding them. And in many cases, they are the catalyst. This is not a marginal trend, it is a structural feature of how family travel is organized and paid for.

This brief examines who this audience is, how much financial firepower they hold, and why travel marketers continue to misallocate attention and budget by ignoring them.

**51.4%**

of all U.S. household wealth held by Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), who now range in age from 61 to 80

**5x**

wealthier than Millennials as a generation, despite near-equal population size

Sources: Statista / Federal Reserve Distributional Financial Accounts, Q1 2025

# The Wealth Reality Behind Family Travel

## Baby Boomers Command the Capital

The conversation about family travel can no longer ignore a foundational economic fact: the 60-to-79-year-old cohort in the United States controls a disproportionate and historically unprecedented share of the nation's wealth.

In Q1 2025, Baby Boomers held \$83.3 trillion in household wealth — representing approximately 51.4% of all U.S. household wealth, according to data compiled from the Federal Reserve and the UBS Global Wealth Report. Millennials, who make up roughly the same share of the adult population, hold just \$17.1 trillion, roughly 10.5% of total wealth.

## Wealth Distribution Peaks Sharply in the 60-plus Age Range

As of 2025, approximately 65% of all U.S. household wealth sits in households over the age of 60 — a profound shift from 1990, when working-age households held nearly 70% of wealth. Affluence has migrated from an earnings-based model to an asset-appreciation model, and older Americans are its primary beneficiaries.

<p><b>65%</b></p> <p>of all U.S. household wealth held by Americans over age 60 (2025, Federal Reserve)</p>	<p><b>\$83.3T</b></p> <p>Total household wealth held by Baby Boomers in 2025 – more than half of all U.S. household wealth (UBS Global Wealth Report)</p>
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## Equity, Retirement Assets and Time Drive Wealth

In a K-shaped economic recovery, discretionary spending power is not evenly distributed across generations. Younger families — the ones most prominently featured in travel marketing — are navigating a very different set of financial pressures: housing costs, childcare, student loan debt, and higher everyday living expenses relative to income. This compression limits their capacity for large discretionary purchases, including travel.

Grandparents in the 61–80 age range, by contrast, operate with a different financial profile. Most are approaching or already in retirement, their mortgages are paid down or paid off, their children are no longer dependents, and they are drawing from accumulated assets rather than earning income. Family travel — particularly multi-generational and skip-generational trips — is frequently one of their primary categories of meaningful discretionary spending.

Among Boomers with a bachelor's degree, median wealth reached \$1,077,200. This is the audience that family travel brands are underserving.

***"Baby Boomers are collectively 5.2 times wealthier than Millennials — despite representing a nearly equal share of the population." — Self.inc / Federal Reserve Analysis, 2025***

Source: Pew Research Center, February 2026

# What the Data Says About Grandparent Travel Behavior

Wealth tells us what is financially possible. Behavior tells us what is actually happening. The 2025 U.S. Family Travel Survey, conducted by the Family Travel Association and NYU's Jonathan M. Tisch Center of Hospitality — the 10th edition of its kind, based on 818 grandparent respondents — provides some of the richest available data on this segment.

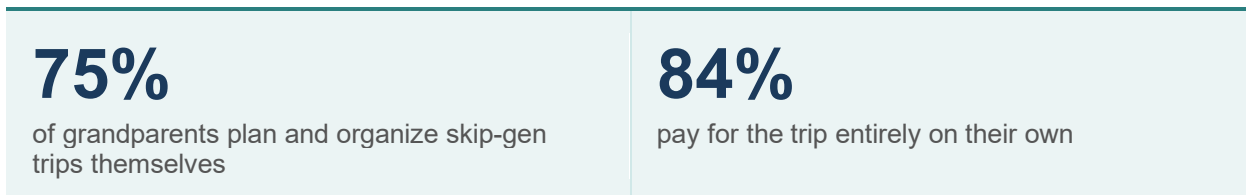
## Multi-Generational Travel: Large Scale, High Frequency

71% of grandparent respondents have taken a multi-generational trip in the past three years. 44% are likely to take one in the next three years. For domestic multi-generational trips, 42% of grandparents expect to spend more than they did in 2024. Only 9% expect to spend less.

Grandparents are not passive participants in these trips — they are the organizing force behind them. 40% say they personally plan and organize the multi-generational trip. 45% say the group plans together, with grandparents frequently driving that process. Most tellingly, 37% of grandparents pay for the entire multi-generational trip themselves.

## Skip-Generational Travel: Highest Engagement, Sole Ownership

Skip-generational travel — trips taken by grandparents with grandchildren, without the parents present — represents the clearest expression of grandparent-as-buyer in family travel. The ownership dynamics here are unambiguous.



Source: 2025 U.S. Family Travel Survey

Skip-generational travel also shows the strongest spending growth signal: 48% of grandparent respondents expect to spend more on domestic skip-gen travel in the coming year.

## The Motivations Are Distinct — and Commercially Relevant

Grandparents do not frame family travel the way younger travelers do. They are not managing logistics or chasing deals. They are pursuing something more durable: the chance to shape a grandchild's experience of the world before that window closes.

- 82% of grandparents say skip-gen travel is a great way to bond
- 80% enjoy spending extended time with their grandchildren
- 75% cite family bonding as their top reason for multi-gen travel
- 73% want to see their grandchildren's joy in experiencing new destinations and activities
- 62% say there are places they want to travel with grandchildren before they outgrow them

Source: 2025 U.S. Family Travel Survey

This motivation set — legacy, connection, time-sensitivity — is highly valuable from a marketing standpoint. It responds to emotional resonance, rather than price signals.

## Multi-Generational Travel as a Structural Trend

Multi-generational travel is defined as trips involving three or more generations. It's not a new concept, but its prevalence is growing. The 2025 Family Travel Survey found that 57% of parents are planning a multi-generational trip in the next 12 months, up from 55% in 2023. Extended family travel (with aunts, uncles, cousins) climbed to 48% from 41% in the same period.

These trends converge on the same conclusion: family travel is increasingly organized across generations. And when it does, the economics shift upward.

### The Parent-Grandparent Dynamic: Who Enables the Trip

The 2025 Family Travel Survey reveals a nuanced decision-making structure within multi-generational trips. Parents are managing the schedule. Grandparents are frequently making the trip viable.

**73% of parents cite affordability as their top travel challenge** — up from 59% in 2023. This financial pressure does not disappear when grandparents are involved in a trip but it is substantially offset.

When grandparents fund or co-fund a multi-generational vacation, the family's combined budget expands meaningfully. The average family spent \$8,052 on travel in 2024 — a 20% year-over-year increase. Multi-generational trips, by nature, involve more people and more spending than any single-family trip. Grandparents are often the reason those trips happen at the level they do.

Source: 2025 U.S. Family Travel Survey

***"73% of parents cite affordability as their top challenge. Grandparents are frequently the financial bridge that makes the trip possible."***

## How Marketers Often Miss the Silver Generation

### The Wrong Buyer is in the Creative Brief

Despite the data, most family travel marketing continues to feature the same buyer: a parent in their mid-30s, budget-aware, logistically focused, scrolling Instagram for inspiration. This persona is not wrong — but it is incomplete, and in some segments, it is the wrong target entirely.

The people initiating skip-gen trips are age 60 to 79 years old. They are planning and paying independently. They are motivated by legacy and time, not by cost optimization. And they hold over half of all household wealth in the United States.

### Digital Misconception

A common rationalization for neglecting older travelers is the assumption that they don't use digital channels. The data does not support this.

This is not a digitally disengaged audience. They research thoroughly, they use trusted platforms, and they favor authoritative sources over social media influencers — making them less susceptible to trend-chasing and more likely to act on substantive, credibility-anchored messaging.

Grandparents are also less reactive to price signals and more responsive to message quality.

### Creative that Misses the Emotional Center

Even when campaigns do target older audiences the creative often misses. Family travel messaging built around logistics like kids eat free, extra beds and discounted rooms does not speak to the grandparent's motivation.

The grandparent deciding where to take their grandchild for a week is thinking about one thing: whether this experience will matter. They want meaning, memorability, and the feeling that they made the most of the time available. Messaging that leads with deals and amenity checklists fails that test.

The most effective messaging for this audience leads with connection and consequence. Focus on what happens to the family's relationship when a truly meaningful trip is made.

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# Strategic Implications for Travel Brands

## 1. Reframe the Buyer, Not Just the Traveler

In many family travel scenarios, the traveler and the buyer are not the same person. Marketing efforts need to account for who is evaluating value — not just who appears in the photos. Grandparents in the 60–79 cohort are the financial decision-makers across a significant and growing share of family travel. Personas and media targeting should reflect this.

## 2. Lead With Meaning, Then Support With Practicality

Grandparents are motivated by purpose before price. Emotional justification precedes financial decision-making. Effective messaging for this audience emphasizes time together across generations, experiences that feel distinctive and lasting, and opportunities to pass down values or create new family traditions. Practical considerations — accessibility, ease of planning, what's included — reinforce the decision once the emotional connection is made.

## 3. Clarity Builds Confidence. Confidence Accelerates Commitment

Whether planning a skip-gen trip or coordinating a multi-generational group vacation, grandparents consistently value simplicity and certainty. This creates strong advantage for destinations and brands that communicate clearly what's included, reduce planning friction, and anticipate the needs of multiple age groups simultaneously.

## 4. Treat Multi-Gen Travel as a Core Segment, Not an Edge Case

Multi-generational and skip-generational travel are structural features of family travel demand, not niche interests. They represent repeat-traveler opportunity, higher per-trip spend, and longer planning horizons. Brands that cultivate this segment build relationships with buyers who are likely to return — and to bring family with them when they do.

## 5. Follow the Money

In a K-shaped economy, discretionary travel demand is uneven. Travel marketers who continue to optimize exclusively for price-sensitive younger parents are competing intensely for a segment with limited spending headroom. Baby boomers who control \$83.3 trillion in household wealth are highly motivated by family travel and represent a more durable and higher-value commercial opportunity.

***" Brands that pivot toward earning the confidence of grandparents will capture the highest-value segment in the market."***

## A More Accurate Picture of Family Travel

Family travel has evolved. The model of a nuclear family of two parents in their 30s booking a summer vacation no longer captures how trips are planned, funded, or justified.

Grandparents between 60 and 79 are shaping the future of family travel: emotionally, financially, and behaviorally. They hold the wealth. They are writing the checks. They are deeply motivated by a category of experience including precious time with their children and grandchildren that travel uniquely delivers.

Destinations and travel brands that recognize this shift and adapt their marketing strategies accordingly are better positioned to capture demand that is already there from a buyer who is looking, capable and underserved.

*This industry brief was brought to you by:*



*A collaboration between Global Voyages Group and Premier Travel Media*

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### DATA SOURCES

#### Primary Research

- 2025 U.S. Family Travel Survey, Family Travel Association & NYU School of Professional Studies Jonathan M. Tisch Center of Hospitality (n=1,596: 778 parents, 818 grandparents)

#### Wealth & Economic Data

- Federal Reserve Distributional Financial Accounts (DFA), Q1 2025
- UBS Global Wealth Report 2025 — U.S. household wealth by generation
- Pew Research Center: "Are Baby Boomers Wealthier Than Previous Generations?" (February 2026, based on 2022 Survey of Consumer Finances)
- SmartAsset / Federal Reserve: Wealth Distribution by Generation (2025)
- Self.inc: The Generational Wealth Gap in America (2025)

#### Travel Industry Research

- Skyscanner Travel Trends 2026 — "Family Miles" trend; global survey of 22,000 travelers via OnePoll, June–July 2025
- Skyscanner: Gen Z Travel Trends 2026, U.S. Results (PR Newswire, December 2025)

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