

Shaping the Future of Senior Tourism: A Conceptual Ecosystem Approach for Australasia Tourism



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Abstract: Australasia is experiencing rapid population ageing, fundamentally reshaping tourism demand and industry practices. Despite this demographic transition, the implications of senior tourism for sustainable and inclusive tourism development remain insufficiently explored.

This study adopts a conceptual research design based on an extensive review and synthesis of contemporary literature, demographic statistics, tourism industry reports, and policy documents relating to population ageing and tourism in Australasia. The reviewed literature was synthesized using NVivo 14 to identify key themes and relationships being the foundation for the development of the proposed conceptual model.

Senior travellers are becoming significant drivers of tourism innovation by increasing demand for health and wellness tourism, accessible travel experiences, multi-generational travel, cultural engagement, and digitally enabled tourism services. The findings further indicate that successful senior tourism ecosystems require coordinated business innovation, destination accessibility, digital inclusion, and supportive government policies.

This study proposes a novel conceptual model of senior tourism ecosystems specifically within the Australasian context by integrating demographic ageing, tourism innovation, sustainability, digital inclusion, and public policy into a single framework. It extends Active Ageing Theory by positioning senior tourism as not only a mechanism for promoting healthy and active lifestyles but also as a catalyst for economic development, social inclusion, and environmentally sustainable tourism practices.

Future research should test the model using quantitative and qualitative approaches across different Australasian destinations, examine behavioural differences among diverse senior traveller segments, and investigate the role of emerging digital technologies in enhancing tourism participation, accessibility, and inclusive destination development.

Keywords: Australian policy; digital inclusion; senior tourism; silver economy; wellness tourism.

JEL Classification: I31; L83; J14; O35; Q56.

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Introduction

Australasia is undergoing one of the world's most rapid demographic transitions, with extended lifespans and declining fertility reshaping population structures. In Australia, the share of residents aged 65 and over has risen steadily and is projected to reach between 21 to 23% by 2066 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020),

and as high as 25% to 27% by 2071 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Comparable trends across New Zealand and the wider Asia-Pacific suggest that by mid-century nearly a quarter of the population will be aged 60 or older, a shift with profound implications for tourism demand and supply. Within this demographic landscape, the “silver market” of older travellers and retirees has emerged as a critical segment. Empirical evidence increasingly demonstrates the health, psychological, and social benefits of travel for seniors whereby cohort data show older adults who engage in tourism have significantly lower mortality risks than non-travellers (Du *et al.* 2021), while mixed-methods evidence demonstrates that tourism fosters psychological well-being, emotional resilience, and active ageing, while fostering a sense of purpose and social inclusion (Qiao *et al.* 2022). Moreover, qualitative research reveals that older travellers increasingly prioritise meaningful cultural, social, and leisure experiences, moving beyond traditional “sun, sand, and sea” tourism to pursue wellness-oriented and enriching journeys (Carrera, 2025). This redefinition of senior tourism reflects broader socio-cultural shifts toward active ageing and lifelong engagement, challenging stereotypes of older tourists as passive or risk averse.

Technological innovation has become central to this transformation. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption among older adults, broadening their engagement with online booking systems, virtual tours, and technology-enabled travel services. Empirical studies confirm that immersive digital tourism can enhance well-being and older adults in residential care who participated in virtual reality (VR) tourism reported reduced anxiety, improved social engagement, and greater quality of life (Fiocco *et al.* 2021). Similarly, VR cycle-tourism simulations were associated with positive attitudes toward technology and improved perceptions of independence (Ortet *et al.* 2022). Other studies show VR and virtual touring can foster nostalgia, enjoyment, and social connectedness, with potential to reduce isolation among older adults (Muslu *et al.* 2025; Oppert *et al.* 2023). Furthermore, the emergence of tailored digital platforms such as ElderWander illustrates how accessible design and user-centred interfaces can empower older adults to independently plan, book, and navigate their travel experiences (Costa *et al.* 2025).

Despite these advances, critical challenges remain in ensuring equitable access, digital literacy, and inclusivity. Ageing cohorts are highly heterogeneous in terms of physical ability, economic resources, and digital competence, necessitating human-centred and adaptive approaches to technology design and service delivery (Fan *et al.* 2024; Gretzel *et al.* 2015). Moreover, geographic disparities in infrastructure and regional accessibility persist across Australasia, disproportionately affecting older travellers in rural and remote areas. Addressing these challenges requires not only technological innovation but also policy alignment and industry coordination to ensure that tourism systems evolve in ways that are inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to demographic change. Thus, this study addresses the knowledge gap whereby previous research has examined senior tourism motivations, few studies have integrated demographic, business, and policy perspectives to explain how population ageing reshapes tourism systems and their alignment with sustainable development goals. Accordingly, this paper conceptualises the “senior tourism” in Australasian tourism through an integrated framework encompassing four interrelated domains: demographic transformation, wellness and well-being benefits, digital innovation and accessibility, and policy and business adaptation. By bridging these traditionally siloed areas of research, the paper contributes a multi-dimensional understanding of senior tourism that reflects both theoretical advancement and practical relevance. The analysis aims to inform how tourism operators, policymakers, and communities can harness demographic ageing not merely as a challenge, but as a strategic opportunity for innovation, inclusivity, and sustainable growth in the Australasian tourism landscape.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Demographic Shifts and the Silver Economy

Australasia is undergoing one of the most significant demographic transitions globally, with ageing populations reshaping both social and economic landscapes. In Australia, the proportion of adults aged 65 years and older is expected to reach almost 23% by 2066 and 27% by 2071 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). Comparable patterns are observed in New Zealand and across the Asia-Pacific, driven by declining fertility rates, rising longevity, and the progression of the baby boomer generation into retirement. This shift has been described as the rise of the “silver economy,” a powerful force where older adults collectively hold greater disposable income, leisure time, and inclination toward lifestyle-oriented consumption (Balderas Cejudo, 2024). In the tourism sector specifically, seniors are not only travelling more frequently but also spending more per trip, particularly on comfort, cultural enrichment, and wellness-related activities (Alén, Losada, & Núñez Domínguez, 2016).

The growing influence of senior travelers is compelling destinations and service providers to rethink tourism products, delivery systems, and policy frameworks. Scholars argue that this market is heterogeneous, encompassing subgroups such as the “young-old” (60 to 74), the “old-old” (75+), and retirees with varying health

statuses, mobility levels, and income profiles (Papcunová & Levický, 2023; Taloş *et al.* 2021). Age-friendly infrastructure, accessible transport, and experiential offerings tailored to slower paces and intergenerational needs are increasingly recognized as competitive advantages (Kežman & Goriup, 2022). At the policy level, governments in the region are encouraged to incentivize inclusive infrastructure and regulate accessibility standards to capture the socio-economic benefits of silver tourism (Yao & He, 2025; Gupta, 2025). Ultimately, the ageing demographic represents not just a challenge but a structural opportunity whereby tourism providers who effectively align with the preferences and capabilities of older adults are positioned to tap into one of the fastest growing and most resilient segments of the global travel market.

Despite widespread recognition of the economic significance of population ageing, much of the existing literature continues to conceptualise senior travellers primarily as a homogeneous market segment characterised by age and purchasing power. This perspective overlooks the considerable diversity within older populations in terms of health conditions, digital capabilities, travel motivations, cultural preferences, and socio-economic circumstances. Consequently, existing silver economy research has predominantly adopted an economic or consumer behaviour perspective, with relatively limited attention given to how demographic ageing interacts with destination governance, technological innovation, sustainability, and accessibility within an integrated tourism ecosystem (Buhalis, 2000; Sedgley *et al.* 2011). Furthermore, while studies acknowledge the growing market potential of senior tourism, they rarely explain how tourism stakeholders can coordinate across public policy, industry, and communities to respond strategically to demographic transformation. This conceptual fragmentation provides a strong rationale for developing a broader ecosystem perspective that extends beyond market segmentation alone.

1.2 Tourism, Health, and Well-Being in Ageing Populations

A growing body of evidence demonstrates that tourism exerts positive effects on the physical, psychological, and social well-being of older adults. Large-scale research in China shows that participation in tourism is associated with significant reductions in mortality risk among older populations, suggesting that travel can contribute to longevity as well as improved quality of life (Du *et al.* 2021). Evidence from cross-national studies similarly indicates that leisure travel among seniors enhances physical health by encouraging mobility, stimulating engagement in outdoor activities, and supporting functional independence (Zhang *et al.* 2025). These findings highlight tourism not merely as a discretionary activity, but as a meaningful contributor to public health and healthy ageing strategies.

Beyond physical health, tourism fosters psychosocial resilience and enriches cognitive functioning among older adults. Research demonstrates that travel encourages social interaction and companionship, helping to mitigate loneliness and strengthen intergenerational ties (Qiao *et al.* 2022). Engagement in leisure tourism has also been associated with greater psychological vitality, self-esteem, and adaptability, promoting sustained participation in community and cultural life (Li *et al.* 2019). Taken together, these outcomes suggest that tourism operates as both a preventive health intervention and a catalyst for social inclusion, making it an increasingly relevant dimension of ageing policy in societies facing demographic transitions.

Although empirical evidence consistently demonstrates positive relationships between tourism participation and healthy ageing, the causal mechanisms underlying these relationships remain insufficiently theorised. Existing studies largely focus on health outcomes, including physical activity, psychological well-being, and social connectedness, but pay comparatively little attention to the organisational and destination-level conditions that enable these benefits to occur (Hu *et al.* 2023). Moreover, much of the evidence originates from Asian and European contexts, limiting its direct applicability to the unique demographic, geographic, and policy characteristics of Australasia. There is therefore a need to move beyond individual-level health outcomes towards a broader systems perspective that examines how tourism destinations can intentionally design experiences that simultaneously promote healthy ageing, economic sustainability, and social inclusion.

1.3 Wellness Tourism and Healthy Ageing

Wellness tourism is defined as travel motivated by the pursuit of health and well-being which has emerged as a vital dimension of senior travel. Older travellers increasingly favour experiences linked to relaxation, holistic wellness, and cultural enrichment over traditional consumption-driven tourism (Carrera, 2025). Research indicates that wellness-oriented tourism products, such as spa retreats, cultural immersions, and nature-based activities, are particularly appealing to older cohorts because they align with lifestyle goals of maintaining vitality and enhancing quality of life. Moreover, these activities contribute to psychological restoration and stress reduction, reinforcing tourism's role in positive ageing (Qiao *et al.* 2022). Within Australasia, the wellness tourism sector has grown in tandem with ageing demographics, positioning destinations to capture both domestic and international senior

markets. However, scholars highlight that wellness offerings must be culturally sensitive, affordable, and inclusive to avoid excluding less affluent ageing groups.

Existing wellness tourism research generally positions wellness as a specialised tourism product rather than as an integrated destination strategy. Most studies concentrate on spa tourism, medical tourism, or wellness retreats, while giving comparatively limited consideration to how wellness principles can be embedded across mainstream tourism experiences. Furthermore, current research rarely examines the interaction between wellness tourism, accessibility, digital technologies, and destination governance (Hu *et al.* 2023; Smith & Puczkó, 2014). As a result, wellness remains conceptually isolated from other dimensions of senior tourism despite increasing evidence that older travellers simultaneously seek physical comfort, social engagement, lifelong learning, cultural authenticity, and technological support. This fragmentation highlights the need for a more holistic conceptualisation of wellness within senior tourism ecosystems.

1.4 Accessible Tourism and Inclusion

Accessible tourism is defined as enabling people of all abilities to participate in tourism equitably that has become a critical area of innovation in response to demographic ageing. Physical accessibility remains a priority, with older adults facing challenges in transport, accommodation, and destination infrastructure. Yet accessibility also encompasses digital inclusion, especially as seniors increasingly interact with tourism services online. For instance, personalised, human-centred digital platforms can support older adults in planning and managing travel experiences (Costa *et al.* 2025).

Immersive technologies like virtual reality (VR) have also expanded the scope of accessible tourism. Studies show that VR-based tourism can reduce anxiety, enhance social connectedness, and improve perceived independence among seniors (Fiocco *et al.* 2021; Ortet *et al.* 2022). VR “time travel” experiences and virtual touring provide nostalgia, enjoyment, and social engagement for older adults, including those unable to travel physically (Muslu *et al.* 2025; Oppert *et al.* 2023). Nevertheless, gaps in digital literacy and the “digital divide” persist, underscoring the need for inclusive design and targeted training to ensure seniors can fully benefit from accessible tourism innovations (Fan *et al.* 2024).

Although accessible tourism has expanded significantly beyond physical infrastructure to encompass digital accessibility and inclusive service design, the literature remains fragmented across multiple disciplinary perspectives including disability studies, information systems, and tourism management. Consequently, accessibility is frequently treated as a compliance issue rather than as a strategic driver of tourism competitiveness and destination resilience. Existing conceptualisations also continue to focus predominantly on removing barriers rather than creating enabling tourism ecosystems that proactively support diverse ageing populations (Darcy & Dickson, 2009; McCabe *et al.* 2011). Moreover, limited research has explored how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, smart destinations, and personalised digital platforms can complement physical accessibility to enhance senior travel experiences. These gaps suggest that accessibility should be repositioned as a multidimensional capability embedded within destination governance and innovation strategies rather than viewed as an isolated operational function.

1.5 Policy and Industry Adaptation

Tourism policy in Australasia is increasingly shaped by the demands of ageing populations, with wellness, accessibility, and digital innovation receiving greater attention. Yet, as current research notes, industry adaptation remains fragmented. While progress has been made in wellness tourism and assistive digital tools, integration across demographic, technological, and policy dimensions is limited. Scholars argue for holistic strategies that frame the “senior tourism” not simply as a market opportunity, but as a structural transformation requiring systemic change in infrastructure, services, and governance (Carrera 2025; Fan *et al.* 2024). Despite growing policy recognition of demographic ageing, industry responses remain largely incremental and reactive. Existing policy frameworks tend to address accessibility, wellness, workforce participation, and digital transformation independently, resulting in fragmented implementation across tourism systems. Likewise, industry initiatives often concentrate on individual service innovations rather than destination-wide coordination involving governments, local communities, healthcare providers, transport operators, and tourism businesses. This disconnect between policy ambition and industry practice suggests that existing approaches lack an overarching conceptual framework capable of integrating demographic, technological, environmental, and governance dimensions into a coherent tourism strategy. Addressing this fragmentation represents one of the principal motivations for the conceptual model proposed in this study.

1.6 Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in four complementary theoretical perspectives which are the active ageing theory, the silver economy framework, sustainable tourism theory, and the technology acceptance paradigm. Together, these frameworks provide an integrative foundation for understanding how demographic ageing, innovation, and inclusivity converge to reshape Australasian tourism. Active ageing theory (World Health Organization, 2002) positions older adults as active, engaged participants in society who pursue well-being and purpose throughout later life. Within a tourism context, this theory reframes travel as a means of enhancing physical health, psychological resilience, and social connectedness (Qiao *et al.* 2022), supporting the view that tourism contributes to public health and quality of life in ageing populations. Building on this, the silver economy framework conceptualises population ageing as both a social transformation and an economic opportunity, emphasizing the spending power, lifestyle orientation, and market influence of older consumers (Balderas Cejudo, 2024). Sustainable tourism theory further situates senior tourism within the global development agenda, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 3, 8, 10, 11, and 12) to promote inclusivity, equity, and intergenerational well-being. Finally, the technology acceptance paradigm (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh *et al.* 2003) provides insights into how digital innovation influences seniors' engagement with tourism, focusing on perceived usefulness, ease of use, and confidence in technology (Fan *et al.* 2024). Integrating these perspectives enables a multidimensional conceptualization of senior tourism as a socio-economic system shaped by demographic trends, technological adaptation, and sustainability imperatives across the Australasian tourism landscape.

While each of these theoretical perspectives has independently contributed valuable insights into ageing, tourism, sustainability, and technology adoption, they have rarely been integrated within a single conceptual framework. Active Ageing Theory primarily explains individual well-being and participation; the Silver Economy Framework focuses on demographic and economic opportunities; Sustainable Tourism Theory emphasises destination resilience and responsible development; and Technology Acceptance Theory explains individual adoption of digital innovations. However, none of these theories independently explains how demographic ageing simultaneously influences destination governance, tourism innovation, digital inclusion, accessibility, business competitiveness, and sustainable regional development. Existing conceptual models therefore remain largely disciplinary and linear, limiting their ability to explain the complex interactions among multiple tourism stakeholders operating within ageing societies (Hu *et al.* 2023; Sedgley *et al.* 2011). The framework proposed in this study addresses this theoretical gap by integrating these complementary perspectives into a multidimensional ecosystem model that conceptualises senior tourism as an interconnected socio-economic system rather than as a collection of independent tourism products or consumer behaviours. This integration represents the principal theoretical contribution of the present study.

1.7 Research Gap and Conceptual Contribution

Although senior tourism has received increasing scholarly attention over the past decade, the literature remains fragmented across several parallel streams, including active ageing, wellness tourism, accessible tourism, digital tourism, and the silver economy. These research domains have evolved largely independently, resulting in conceptual models that explain only selected aspects of senior tourism. Existing frameworks typically focus either on individual traveller behaviour, destination accessibility, wellness experiences, or demographic trends, with limited attention given to the interdependencies among these dimensions. Consequently, there remains no comprehensive framework that explains how demographic ageing influences tourism through the combined effects of policy, technological innovation, accessibility, sustainability, industry adaptation, and stakeholder collaboration.

Furthermore, existing conceptual models have been developed predominantly within European or Asian contexts, despite Australasia representing one of the world's fastest-ageing tourism regions with distinctive institutional, geographic, and socio-economic characteristics. The region's emphasis on sustainable development, digital transformation, Indigenous tourism, and regional accessibility creates unique opportunities and challenges that are not adequately reflected in current theoretical models. Accordingly, this study proposes a novel Senior Tourism Ecosystem Framework for Australasia. Unlike previous models that primarily examine isolated dimensions of senior tourism, the proposed framework adopts an ecosystem perspective by integrating demographic ageing, active ageing principles, silver economy dynamics, accessibility, digital innovation, sustainable tourism, destination governance, and stakeholder collaboration into a unified conceptual model. In doing so, the framework extends existing theory by explaining how these interconnected elements collectively shape inclusive and sustainable tourism development for ageing societies. This represents the principal theoretical contribution of the present study and provides a foundation for future empirical testing across Australasian destinations.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design, which is well-suited for addressing the theoretical and empirical fragmentation across the intersecting fields of ageing and tourism. Rather than generating new primary data, conceptual research aims to synthesise, interpret, and integrate existing literature to develop a coherent framework that advances theoretical understanding and informs future empirical inquiry. This approach is particularly appropriate for emerging and multidisciplinary areas such as senior tourism, where conceptual boundaries, definitions, and methodological approaches remain fluid. By systematically analysing demographic and policy evidence from Australasia, the study constructs an integrative model linking population ageing, tourism adaptation, and sustainable development priorities.

2.1 Research Approach

A narrative synthesis method was applied to organise and interpret findings from multidisciplinary literature spanning tourism studies, gerontology, sociology, economics, digital innovation, and public policy. Narrative synthesis allows for the aggregation of diverse forms of evidence such as qualitative, quantitative, and conceptual subsequently transforming them into coherent analytical categories. The process followed the structured steps recommended by Popay *et al.* (2006):

- (a) Developing a theoretical framework for synthesis;
- (b) Developing a preliminary synthesis of findings;
- (c) Exploring relationships within and between studies; and
- (d) Assessing the robustness of the synthesis.

This systematic yet interpretive approach ensures that conceptual patterns are not self-fulfilling but grounded in a transparent review process.

2.2 Literature Selection and Selection Strategy

A structured literature search was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar to identify studies relevant to the research question: How do ageing populations in Australasia shape emerging patterns and preferences in senior tourism? Following reviewer feedback, the search strategy was refined to ensure closer alignment with this research focus and to capture both foundational and contemporary work in the field. To ensure theoretical breadth, the temporal scope was extended to include publications from 2000 onwards, capturing foundational research on senior tourism, active ageing, accessibility, and tourism behaviour, as well as contemporary studies reflecting post-COVID behavioural shifts. Search strings were developed through a concept-driven iterative process across three domains which is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Keywords search

Domain	Example of Keywords
Ageing and Tourism	"senior tourism", "older adults AND travel behaviour", "active ageing AND tourism"
Experience Dimensions	"accessible tourism", "wellbeing tourism AND ageing", "cultural participation AND older adults", "nature-based tourism AND seniors", "heritage tourism AND ageing"
Regional Context	"Australia", "New Zealand", "Australasia"

Source: Own Elaboration

Boolean operators (AND/OR) were used to combine search terms within and across domains, and results were limited to English-language publications. Reference lists of included studies were also screened to identify additional relevant works.

Inclusion criteria required sources to (a) address ageing and tourism within Australasia or comparable OECD contexts, (b) be published since 2000 onwards, and (c) provide conceptual or empirical insights relevant to older travellers, tourism innovation, or policy. Grey literature such as industry white papers, tourism board reports, and government strategies was incorporated to capture practice-based perspectives often omitted from academic discourse. The expanded scope directly responds to reviewer concerns by ensuring representative coverage of adventure, nature, and cultural tourism domains alongside wellness and accessibility. These inclusion and exclusion criteria are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion Type	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Temporal	Published from 2000 onwards	Pre-2000 publications
Geographical	Focus on Australasia or comparable OECD contexts	Non-OECD regions
Topical	Ageing, tourism behaviour, accessibility, or regional tourism	Studies unrelated to tourism or ageing
Source Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles; grey literature (industry, policy, government reports)	Non-academic media, editorials, or opinion pieces
Language	English	Non-English

Source: Own Elaboration

The search yielded 476 records. After removing 112 duplicates, 364 records remained for screening. Based on title and abstract relevance, 178 sources were retained for full-text review. Following detailed assessment against the inclusion criteria, 112 peer-reviewed articles were selected. To capture practice-oriented insights, an additional 23 grey literature sources including government tourism strategies, ABS/Stats NZ demographic reports, and industry white papers were incorporated. In total, 135 documents were included in the final synthesis as shown in Table 3. The study selection process is illustrated in Figure 1.

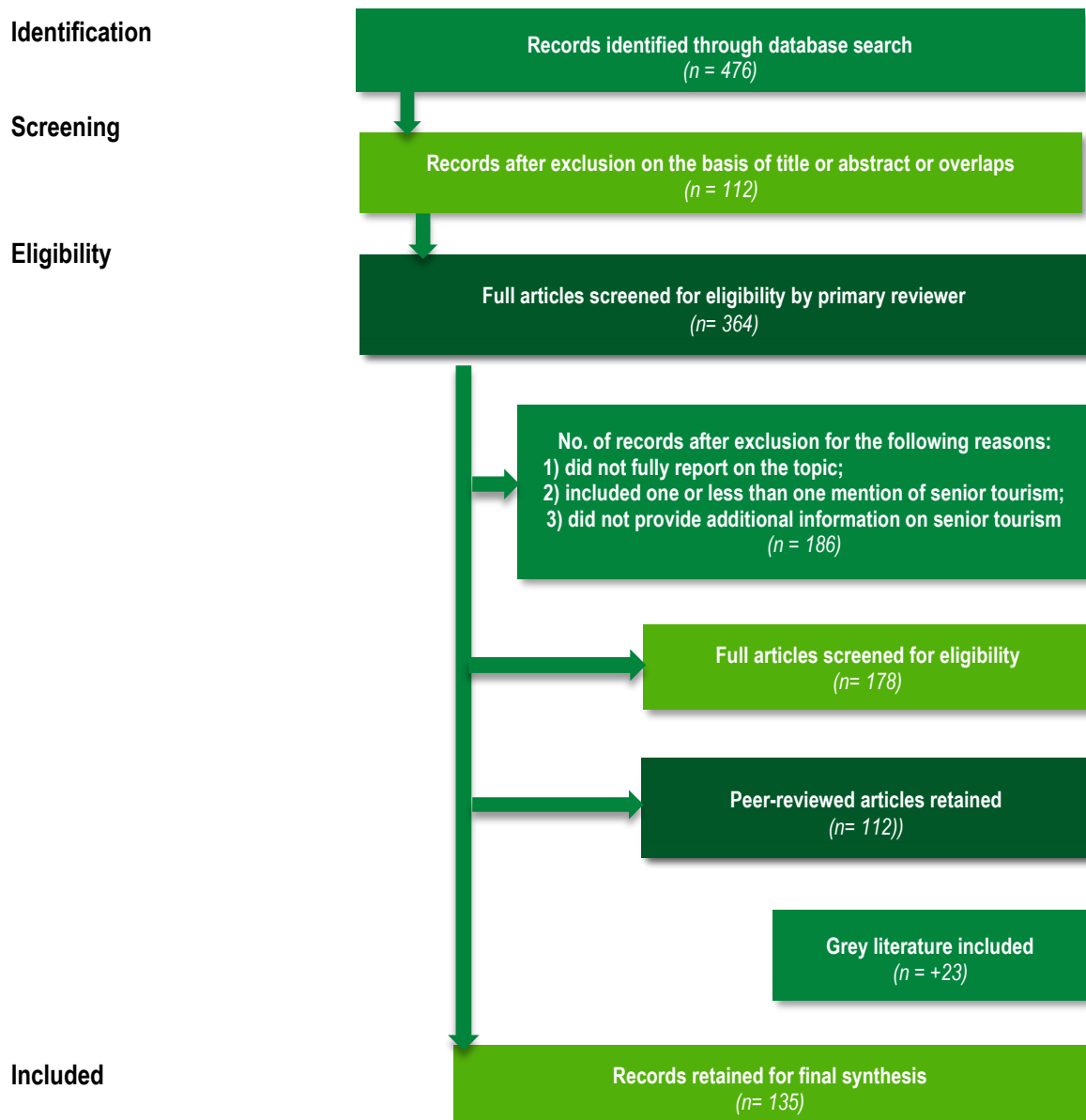
Table 3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion Type	Number of Records	Exclusion Criteria
Records identified through Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar	476	Initial search results
Duplicates removed	112	Overlaps eliminated
Records screened (titles or abstracts)	364	Relevance assessment
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	178	Detailed evaluation
Peer-reviewed articles retained	112	Final academic sources
Grey literature included	23	Industry or government sources
Total included in synthesis	135	Final dataset for analysis

Source: Own Elaboration

The study selection process is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram on schematic view of search strategy



Source: Page et al. (2021)

2.3 Analytical Framework

An integrative thematic analysis approach was employed, following the principles of Whittemore and Knaff's (2005) framework for mixed-method synthesis. Analysis proceeded in three iterative stages:

(1) Extraction: Each publication was imported into NVivo 14 and coded under initial, deductively derived categories such as demographic change, travel motivations, tourism typology (wellness, adventure, cultural, accessible), and enabling factors (technology, policy, infrastructure).

(2) Synthesis: The coded data were compared, clustered, and refined to identify recurring patterns, contradictions, and theoretical gaps across studies.

(3) Conceptual integration: The findings were synthesised into an emergent conceptual model illustrating the interplay between demographic, technological, and policy drivers shaping senior tourism in Australasia.

A hybrid coding strategy combined deductive coding (based on the conceptual framework) with inductive coding (emerging from the data). Coding consistency was ensured through iterative refinement, memoing, and cross-checking of a random subset of records to maintain reliability. This process enhanced analytical transparency and mitigated confirmation bias, allowing both convergent and divergent insights to emerge. These are the four iterative stages:

(a) Stage 1: Familiarisation and Initial Coding

The selected publications were read multiple times to achieve familiarity with their objectives, theoretical perspectives, methodologies, and principal findings. During this stage, meaningful text segments relating to senior tourism, ageing populations, accessibility, wellness, technology, sustainability, governance, and business innovation were identified and imported into NVivo as coding units. An initial coding framework was developed using a hybrid coding strategy that combined both deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive codes were informed by the study's theoretical foundation and research objectives, including Active Ageing Theory, the Silver Economy Framework, Sustainable Tourism Theory, and the Technology Acceptance Model. Initial deductive nodes included:

- demographic ageing
- silver economy
- travel motivations
- wellness tourism
- accessible tourism
- digital technology
- tourism policy
- destination management
- sustainability
- business innovation
- stakeholder collaboration
- social inclusion

Simultaneously, inductive coding allowed new concepts emerging directly from the literature to be incorporated without being constrained by the initial framework. Examples of emergent codes included digital confidence, hybrid tourism experiences, intergenerational travel, virtual tourism, community resilience, personalised tourism services, age-friendly destination design, and ecosystem collaboration. This iterative coding process resulted in 68 first-order codes (nodes) representing recurring concepts across the reviewed publications.

(b) Stage 2: Pattern Coding and Theme Development

Following initial coding, related nodes were systematically compared using NVivo's coding comparison and matrix query functions to identify conceptual similarities, overlaps, and recurring relationships. Similar codes were merged into broader analytical categories through constant comparison, allowing patterns to emerge across different geographical contexts, research methodologies, and theoretical perspectives. The first-order codes were progressively refined into eight higher-order themes that consistently appeared throughout the literature:

- Demographic Change and the Silver Economy
- Wellness Tourism and Healthy Ageing
- Accessible and Inclusive Tourism
- Digital Transformation and Technology Adoption
- Policy and Governance
- Business and Industry Innovation
- Social and Economic Outcomes
- Sustainability and Destination Resilience

Throughout this stage, analytical memos were maintained within NVivo to document coding decisions, conceptual reflections, emerging relationships, and alternative interpretations. These memos provided an explicit audit trail linking raw coded evidence to the development of higher-order themes, thereby improving analytical transparency.

(c) Stage 3: Cross-Theme Synthesis and Gap Identification

The higher-order themes were subsequently examined to identify convergent findings, divergent perspectives, and unresolved issues within the existing literature. Rather than merely summarising previous studies, the synthesis focused on identifying conceptual fragmentation across research domains. The analysis revealed that existing studies predominantly examine individual aspects of senior tourism such as wellness, accessibility, digital technologies, or demographic ageing in isolation. Limited attention has been devoted to understanding the interactions among these dimensions or to explaining how governments, tourism businesses, technology providers, healthcare systems, transport agencies, and local communities collectively influence senior tourism development. These analytical gaps provided the theoretical justification for proposing an integrated ecosystem framework that connects demographic, technological, business, governance, accessibility, and sustainability perspectives within a single conceptual model.

(d) Stage 4: Conceptual Integration

The final stage involved translating the synthesised themes into a higher-level conceptual representation. Relationships identified during thematic synthesis were mapped to illustrate how demographic ageing acts as the primary contextual driver influencing tourism demand, business innovation, digital transformation, accessibility, policy adaptation, and sustainability outcomes. Rather than presenting these themes as independent constructs, the proposed framework conceptualises senior tourism as an interconnected ecosystem in which multiple stakeholders interact to support healthy ageing, inclusive tourism experiences, regional economic development, and sustainable destination management across Australasia. The resulting framework therefore represents an interpretive synthesis of the reviewed literature rather than a simple aggregation of previous findings.

2.4 Ensuring Analytical Trustworthiness

Several procedures were employed to enhance the credibility, dependability, and transparency of the qualitative synthesis. First, the hybrid deductive-inductive coding strategy reduced the risk of imposing predetermined theoretical assumptions while remaining sensitive to concepts emerging directly from the literature. Second, coding was undertaken iteratively, with previously coded publications revisited whenever new concepts emerged to ensure consistency across the dataset. Third, analytical memos were maintained throughout the coding process to document coding rationale, conceptual decisions, and evolving interpretations, thereby providing an audit trail for the analytical process. Fourth, a random subset of publications was re-coded following completion of the initial analysis to assess coding consistency and refine node definitions where necessary. Finally, the resulting themes were continuously compared against the original publications to ensure that interpretations accurately reflected the evidence and that contradictory findings were retained rather than excluded. Collectively, these procedures enhanced methodological transparency, minimised confirmation bias, and strengthened the credibility of the conceptual framework developed in this study.

2.5 Conceptual Contribution

Through the integration of multi-disciplinary perspectives, this review develops a multidimensional conceptual framework of senior tourism that unites economic, social, cultural, and technological dimensions of older travellers' behaviour. The framework captures how demographic trends, digital inclusion, and policy interventions interact to influence tourism participation, destination preferences, and experience design among older adults in Australasia. The NVivo coding structure is further explained in Table 4.

Rather than testing hypotheses, this study's contribution lies in theorising the structural relationships that shape the evolving market for senior tourism. The resulting framework provides a foundation for:

- (1) Empirical validation through future quantitative or qualitative research; and
- (2) Policy and industry applications, supporting inclusive and sustainable tourism development for ageing populations.

Table 4. Example of NVivo Coding Structure

First-Order Codes (Nodes)	Categories	Final Themes
Ageing population, longevity, retirement	Demographic transition	Demographic Change & Silver Economy
Physical health, mental wellbeing, active lifestyle	Health benefits	Wellness Tourism
Universal design, mobility barriers, digital accessibility	Inclusive tourism	Accessible Tourism
AI, VR, mobile apps, smart tourism	Digital innovation	Technological Innovation
Government policy, destination planning	Governance	Policy & Governance
Senior-friendly services, product innovation	Business adaptation	Business & Industry Innovation
Social participation, community engagement	Wellbeing	Social & Economic Outcomes
SDGs, resilience, inclusive development	Sustainable tourism	Sustainability Integration

Source: Own Elaboration

3. Findings

By bringing the three domains together, the analysis highlights the interdependencies that shape tourism outcomes, such as the demand for accessible infrastructure, the growing importance of digital literacy, and the emergence of wellness, cultural, and nature-based travel as key forms of senior tourism. These interactions, and their implications for future tourism development, are synthesised and presented in Table 5, which outlines the core factors, their mechanisms of influence, and the expected impacts on tourism in the Australasian context.

Table 5. Silver Economy in the Context of Australasian Tourism

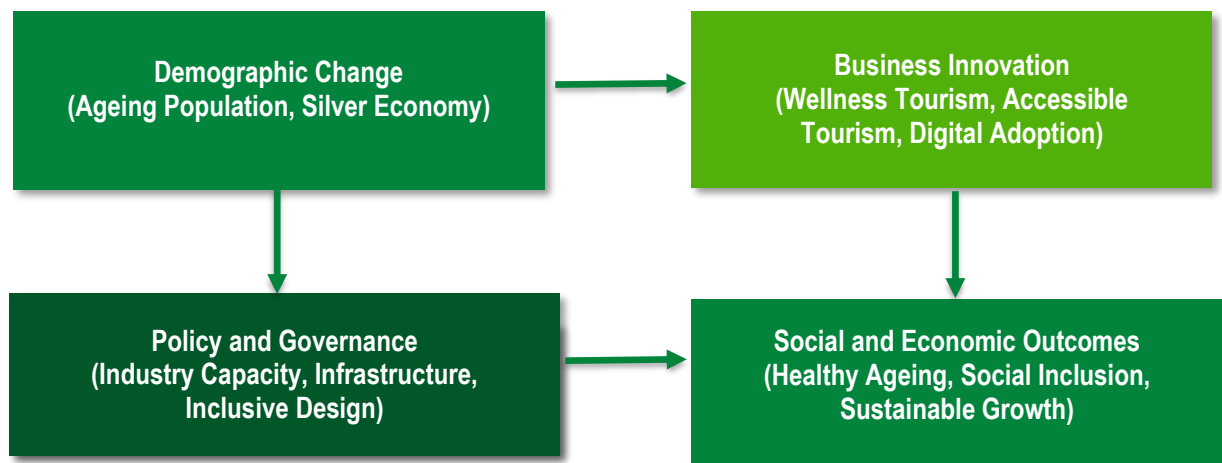
Core Dimension	Key Findings / Thematic Insights	Implications for Tourism in Australasia
Demographic Change	Ageing populations in Australia and New Zealand are redefining tourism demand through greater mobility, higher spending power, and preference for meaningful, health-oriented travel.	Tourism strategies must reposition seniors as an active and influential consumer group, driving product diversification and innovation.
Wellness Tourism	Travel linked to physical and mental wellbeing fosters preventive health outcomes and aligns with national health priorities. However, access remains skewed toward affluent participants.	Opportunities exist for public-private partnerships to expand affordable wellness and nature-based experiences for diverse senior groups.
Accessible Tourism	Seniors face multiple access barriers such as mobility, sensory, and digital but emerging technologies such as virtual reality offer inclusion alternatives.	Investment in universal design, digital literacy, and hybrid (physical-virtual) tourism models will expand participation and equity.
Technological Innovation	Digital tools enhance personalization and accessibility but risk excluding digitally marginalised older adults.	Need for digital inclusion initiatives and age-friendly technological design within tourism infrastructure.
Policy and Governance	Fragmented governance limits alignment across tourism, health, and ageing policy domains.	Cross-sector coordination is critical whereby integrating tourism with aged care, transport, and digital policy to support active ageing through travel.
Business and Industry Innovation	Firms are experimenting with senior-friendly services, but efforts remain fragmented and reactive.	Strategic industry adaptation through capacity building and market segmentation is essential to capture the “silver economy.”
Social and Economic Outcomes	Tourism engagement contributes to healthy ageing, social connectedness, and regional economic vitality.	Viewing older travellers not as a welfare concern but as contributors to sustainable growth strengthens both policy and industry agendas.
Sustainability Integration	Age-inclusive tourism aligns with broader sustainability goals when designed around equity, accessibility, and community wellbeing.	The term “senior tourism” becomes a driver of social sustainability linking profitability with inclusion and resilience.

Source: Based on synthesis from NVivo 14

4. Conceptual Framework

Based on the synthesis, which was done, the conceptual framework was proposed which is shown in Figure 2. This framework positions demographic change as the central catalyst influencing demand across varied tourism segments which includes wellness, adventure, cultural, and accessible tourism. These domains intersect with business innovation, digital transformation, and policy mechanisms (such as infrastructure investment, training, and inclusive design). Together, these dynamics shape outcomes including healthy ageing, social inclusion, regional economic vitality, and environmental sustainability. The framework thus extends beyond wellness and accessibility to encompass the full spectrum of older travellers' motivations, aligning with both academic and practitioner concerns for comprehensive, evidence-informed analysis.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for Senior Tourism in Australasia



Source: Own Elaboration

5. Discussions

5.1 Demographic Change as the Structural Driver

Australasia's ageing population represents both a fundamental challenge and a strategic opportunity for the future of tourism. By 2050, nearly one in four Australians and New Zealanders will be over 65, a demographic shift that will reshape demand structures and service delivery models (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024). This cohort is not only financially empowered but also markedly different from previous generations in terms of lifestyle aspirations. Today's seniors are more mobile, digitally literate, and wellness-oriented, redefining what constitutes "retirement travel." Consequently, their tourism engagement will transcend traditional leisure motives, gravitating toward experiences that emphasise authenticity, learning, connection, and self-care. The sector must therefore innovate by designing products that cater to differentiated needs while leveraging seniors' strong intergenerational influence on family and community travel behaviours.

5.2 Wellness Tourism as Preventive Health

Growing empirical evidence highlights the positive health externalities of tourism, with travel shown to alleviate stress, enhance psychological wellbeing, and strengthen social connectedness (Du *et al.* 2021; Qiao *et al.* 2022). Within this context, wellness tourism emerges as both an economic opportunity and a preventive health strategy. In Australasia, wellness-oriented travel ranging from nature-based ecotourism in New Zealand to spa retreats and mindfulness centres in Australia can complement national health policies aimed at promoting active ageing and reducing healthcare expenditure. However, the current wellness tourism landscape is often skewed toward affluent participants, limiting accessibility for lower-income or mobility-restricted seniors. This inequity poses a policy challenge and without inclusive design and targeted subsidies, wellness tourism may inadvertently reinforce health and social disparities among older populations. To truly function as a public health partner, the sector must embed equity and affordability into its core business models.

5.3 Accessible Tourism as a Core Market Imperative

Accessibility is increasingly recognised not as a niche consideration but as a foundational pillar of senior tourism strategy. Older travellers encounter multifaceted barriers ranging from physical and sensory limitations to digital exclusion that constrain participation (Fan *et al.* 2024). Emerging technologies such as virtual and augmented reality offer promising alternatives, allowing seniors with limited mobility to engage in immersive "virtual travel" experiences that yield measurable psychological and social benefits (Oppert *et al.* 2023; Muslu *et al.* 2025). In the Australasian context, where geographic dispersion and uneven infrastructure present additional obstacles, investments in accessible transport, universal design standards, and digital literacy programs are imperative. Integrating hybrid tourism models by combining physical and virtual engagement can extend inclusivity while mitigating environmental and logistical constraints. Failing to prioritise accessibility risks excluding one of the fastest growing and most loyal consumer bases in the tourism economy.

5.4 Policy and Industry Alignment

Effective responses to demographic transformation require coherent governance that bridges the traditional silos between tourism, health, transport, and social policy. While the industry has begun innovating through age-friendly services, technology-driven platforms, and personalised offerings (Costa *et al.* 2025), efforts remain fragmented and largely market-driven. A more strategic policy alignment is needed where tourism planning intersects with aged care strategies, regional transport networks, and digital inclusion agendas. Cross-sectoral partnerships between tourism boards, healthcare providers, and community organisations could institutionalise tourism as a formal component of active ageing frameworks, positioning travel as a legitimate contributor to physical and mental wellbeing. Such alignment would also strengthen regional resilience by stimulating demand across both urban and rural destinations.

5.5 Towards Inclusive and Sustainable Growth

Taken together, the framework underscores that addressing the ageing demographic is not merely a market adaptation exercise, it is an opportunity to redefine tourism as a lever for social sustainability. By integrating wellness, accessibility, and policy alignment, the Australasian tourism sector can evolve into a system that supports healthier, more inclusive, and resilient communities. The “senior tourism” thus becomes a vehicle for shared value creation where economic returns are coupled with improved wellbeing and social cohesion. Future strategies should move beyond short-term profitability metrics to embrace a holistic vision of tourism as a catalyst for longevity, dignity, and intergenerational equity.

6. Conclusions and Further Research

6.1 Conclusion

Australasia’s rapidly ageing population is reshaping the region’s tourism landscape. By conceptualising “senior tourism” through the integration of demographic change, wellness and accessible tourism, and policy alignment, this paper provides a multidimensional framework that addresses a critical gap in current scholarship. Unlike studies that focus on single dimensions (example: market demand or accessibility), the framework highlights the interdependence of demographic, business, and policy factors in shaping tourism for older adults. The analysis demonstrates that tourism can play a transformative role in supporting healthy ageing, enhancing social inclusion, and contributing to sustainable economic growth. However, achieving these outcomes requires systemic approaches that align industry innovation with policy frameworks and ensure inclusivity across diverse ageing cohorts.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

This paper makes several theoretical contributions to the study of ageing and tourism. First, it advances existing scholarship by proposing a holistic conceptual framework that integrates demographic change, wellness and accessible tourism, and policy alignment, thereby moving beyond fragmented approaches that treat these elements in isolation (Alén *et al.* 2016). Second, it bridges interdisciplinary perspectives including tourism studies, gerontology, digital innovation, and policy research, highlighting the value of cross-field integration in addressing complex demographic challenges (Balderas Cejudo, 2024). Third, by reframing tourism not merely as an economic response to ageing populations but as a social intervention that supports health, inclusion, and well-being, the paper challenges dominant market-centric narratives of the silver economy (Papcunová & Levický, 2023). Fourth, it highlights the need to conceptualise tourism as part of broader sustainability and resilience frameworks, where ageing populations are understood as active contributors to, rather than passive beneficiaries of, social and economic systems (Taloş *et al.* 2021). Finally, the framework offers fertile ground for future empirical testing and theoretical refinement where researchers could, for example, apply it in comparative regional studies and explore its adaptability to other ageing societies beyond Australasia, or interrogate how digital transformation reshapes traditional models of wellness and accessible tourism (Yao & He, 2025). Collectively, these contributions position the study as a conceptual springboard for advancing theory at the intersection of tourism, ageing, and social sustainability.

6.3 Practical Implications

This study also generates significant practical implications for both industry and policy stakeholders. For tourism businesses, the framework underscores the need to design inclusive and affordable wellness tourism products that cater to diverse senior cohorts, moving beyond luxury-oriented models that risk excluding less affluent older adults.

Integrating accessible tourism principles through age-friendly infrastructure, barrier-free transport, and user-friendly digital tools can expand participation and strengthen brand positioning within the competitive Australasian market (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Gonda, 2024; Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023). For policymakers, the findings point to the importance of embedding tourism within broader active ageing and public health strategies, recognising its role in preventive healthcare and social inclusion. Policies that incentivise investment in accessible infrastructure (example: transport subsidies, universal design standards) and digital inclusion initiatives (example: senior-focused training programs, subsidised technology access) could significantly enhance seniors' ability to engage in tourism. The interdisciplinary model of healthy aging through tourism developed by Hu *et al.* (2023) highlights that cross-sectoral frameworks linking tourism boards, health systems, and aged-care services can amplify both social and economic benefits (Hu *et al.* 2023; Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023). Taken together, these implications suggest that "senior tourism" in the context of Australasian tourism is best advanced through inclusive innovation in the private sector and enabling support from public policy and infrastructure investment.

6.4 Future Research Directions

As this is a conceptual paper, further empirical research is essential to validate and refine the proposed framework. One critical step is to examine its applicability across diverse Australasian contexts. Ageing populations are not homogenous, and experiences differ between urban and rural environments as well as between domestic and international travel markets. For example, seniors in metropolitan areas may have better access to infrastructure and digital tools than those in regional destinations, while international senior tourists may bring different expectations for accessibility and cultural engagement compared to local travellers. Comparative case study research and cross-sectional surveys across these contexts would provide important insights into the flexibility and limits of the framework, ensuring its relevance to a wide spectrum of ageing cohorts.

Another avenue for research involves investigating the long-term impacts of wellness and accessible tourism on older adults' health and well-being outcomes. While existing studies suggest that travel can support physical vitality, cognitive stimulation, and social engagement, few have evaluated these effects longitudinally. Empirical research using longitudinal surveys, mixed-method designs, and health outcome tracking could establish stronger causal links between tourism experiences and healthy ageing. Such evidence would not only enrich academic understanding but also support the integration of tourism into public health and active ageing strategies, positioning it as more than a leisure activity but also as a contributor to preventive healthcare.

Finally, digital adoption among seniors represents a rapidly evolving research frontier with significant implications for inclusive tourism. Although older adults increasingly use online booking platforms, mobile applications, and virtual tours. However, gaps still remain in digital literacy and confidence that can act as barriers to participation. Future research should employ qualitative interviews, digital ethnography, and usability testing to explore how seniors engage with technology at different life stages, and how design choices can reduce exclusion while enhancing accessibility. Insights from such work would guide both policymakers and industry in developing digital tools tailored to senior needs, ensuring that technology serves as an enabler rather than a divider in senior tourism. Collectively, these research directions highlight the importance of methodological diversity and empirical grounding to build a resilient, inclusive, and evidence-based foundation for the future of senior tourism.

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