**Is on-the-road lifestyle sailing into the sunset?**

Rise of the blue nomads threatens balance of older traveller power

The growing popularity of cruises is taking grey nomads off the road and putting them out to sea.

New statistics show that 623,000 Australians – many of them older travellers – took a cruise last year. And, according to the International Cruise Council of Australasia, that’s a massive 34% increase on 2010. This at a time when the Australian tourism industry as a whole is in near-crisis.

Ross Dowling, a professor of tourism at Edith Cowan University, has no doubts that the cruise phenomenon is hitting grey nomad numbers.

“Cruises are more accessible and more affordable than ever before and that makes them very attractive,” he told the GNT. “Traditionally, when Australians retire, they hook up the caravan and go … but now they have other options to weigh up.”

Professor Dowling says that, with couples now able to take a two-week cruise for $4,000 or so, finance is a factor.

“The cost of buying a luxury rig and a 4WD to travel Australia is huge, and there is also the extraordinary cost of fuel,” he said. “Older Australians are now starting to think they can spend that money on a cruise where they will be waited on hand and foot, and live in the lap of luxury for a few weeks … and they can afford to do it every year.”

Circumnavigating Australia, which takes about a month, is proving a highly popular option. The ships stop at regional centres, such as Exmouth and Kangaroo Island, as well as the big cities.

It seems that would-be grey nomads who try cruising find themselves hooked. Cruises have approximately 70% repeat business. It is conservatively estimated that one million Australians will be cruising annually by 2020.

“Like grey nomaddling, cruising is very social but it is a totally different experience to travelling in the Outback,” Professor Dowling said. “You will never have that freedom to go where you choose or to stay where you want for as long as you want.”

He says that cruises will continue to persuade some grey nomads to give up their on-the-road travels and, more importantly, will stop people from taking up the idea in the first place.

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“If we wait for fuel prices to drop to where we want them, our rigs would stay parked in our yards forever,” said Jim C. “Go for it now; we could be dead tomorrow!”

Gerry and Tom broadly agreed. “However, with a bit more diesel for our dollar we may do a bit more sightseeing which means we would travel a few more kilometres,” they said.

Jim and Jean, who are shortly travelling from Western Australia to Victoria and back in their Coaster bus are a lot more fuel cost sensitive.

“Running on ULP and LPG, a few cents less at the pump will mean big dollars saved over the whole trip of around 10,000 kilometres,” they said.
Couple’s love for the road inspires them to get off it

Kiwis Valerie, 63, and Dan, 64, have been travelling since March 2010

What do you travel in?
Our 17ft Coromal Seka Poptop and Mitsubishi Pajero took us on a 38,000km trip in two years. A month ago we changed to a 14ft Jayco Starcraft Outback towed by a Ford Ranger XL Utility 4x4. We use solar panels for power when not in a caravan site and use an inverter to power the phone and laptop. We plan to do more off-road travel and the smaller caravan will be easier to use and take us to the more remote places.

Where do you like to camp?
We love to visit national parks as we love bush tramping. We also like free camps as we meet like-minded people and share our experiences of the road. Free camping also helps with the budget. We use caravan parks sometimes, mainly in the smaller towns, and find them friendly and accommodating. We have also done some house-sitting which gives us a base while we visit the local district.

Likes and dislikes?
We love being able to travel at our own pace, the relaxed lifestyle, meeting new people and seeing the ‘real’ Australia. We don’t like seeing rubbish left on the side of the road or at wayside rest stops.

On the-road hobbies?
We enjoy reading and crosswords. Valerie does cross-stitch when time is available, and we both enjoy fishing. We have also done some volunteer work with Blaze Aid helping farmers who have been flooded.

Best spot visited?
Our favourite place so far is Keep River National Park, near the border of NT and WA. Beautiful scenery and we sat outside ‘til almost midnight one night, looking at the stars. Awesome.

Scariest experience?
Getting bogged in black mud on our first free camp near Chinchilla and a tyre blow out on the road to Lake Argyle.

Advice for grey nomads … ?
Don’t plan too much and don’t have too many deadlines. Slow down and take time to smell the roses. The road will still be there whether you stay in one spot for one day or one week. Always talk to your fellow travellers, sharing information on places to go and sometimes places not to go.

… and for wannabe nomads?
Don’t let anyone tell you shouldn’t do it. Do your research and go for it! People tell us we are lucky to be doing this, but luck has nothing to do with it – you can choose your own path ahead – or in this case ‘the road ahead’.

Nomads in Brief
Highway horror
Two people have been killed in a crash on the Stuart Highway near Wycliffe Well. The victims were the 60-year-old male driver of a Holden Jackaroo and his female passenger. Police say it appears the driver lost control. The NT road toll for 2012 stands at 13, compared to six for the same period last year.

NT ‘crisis’
Central Australian tourism operators have called a series of crisis meetings to find solutions to the dramatic downturn in tourism there. Tourism NT chief executive John Fitzgerald said the industry had to work with government to try to resolve the major challenges.

Tech savvy
A survey of 2500 senior Australians has shown that 63% begin planning their trips online. The study shows iPad and iPhone use is widespread with mature travellers, with social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Skype becoming more popular.

Devil plan
The Tasmanian Government is considering turning Maria Island national park into a last refuge for the disease-plagued Tasmanian devil. The proposal follows the rejection of an earlier plan to fence healthy devils into Tasmania’s north-west corner.

Quiz Corner
How it all begins
1. In which Queensland town should Masterchef be filmed?
   A) Townsville B) Coffs Harbour C) Rockhampton
2. What is the road distance from Hobart to Launceston?
   A) 115km B) 198km C) 277km
3. Which roadhouse sits at the junction of Stuart and Carpentaria Highways?
4. After the Murray, which is Australia’s next longest river?
5. What is the lowest point in Australia?

Do you know
(Answers on p. 5)
Dear Editor,

Re: Jaclyn and Heidi column (GNT: Issue 19). Will, get out there and do it. It is great your wife of 44 years is understanding and it is a real pity she will not give it a go. She may just love it. Can I suggest buy, or better still, hire an ensuite caravan and take her somewhere she would love to spend some time at, that is not too far away. Hope it helps! I am lucky my wife of 34 years loves the caravanning lifestyle.

Gary

Dear Editor,

I think the matter is between Will and his wife. I have met a few men who travel alone, and the wife loves hearing his stories. When he’s been home “too long”, she ask him where he’s going on his next trip, and when. That’s love. I haven’t met a woman travelling alone because the old man doesn’t want to leave the shed and bowling green. There are a lot of women travelling alone because of lack of choice. To each his/her own, and may they live happily ever after.

Chris (Cruising Granny)

Dear Editor,

Who gives a rat’s what other people think? Will, if you are both happy with the arrangement, who cares? There will always be something that someone won’t like. No one else pays your bills, so they should butt out. Have a good holiday.

Kerrie

Dear Editor,

Life is short, Will. Go live your dream. It’s a shame you can’t share it with your wife but there are many lone travellers out there. I wonder if it was the female partner going for a six-month trip if everyone would be so encouraging.

Carolyn

Dear Editor,

Re: Joe’s pension letter (GNT: Issue 19). Joe, it is not that hard. In our case we fitted our van with solar panels and batteries, three water tanks, a washing machine and a satellite TV. We can, and do, camp at free sites 95% of the time and we love it. If you go into a caravan park and have been on the road for 12 months you get rent assistance from Centrelink. Regarding the pension, on payday one of us buys the food and puts some away, and the other puts the money to fuel while travelling and try to put some away (we do eat well). We have been doing this for over 12 months and love it.

Peter (Hillbillypete)

Dear Editor,

Regarding being on a pension and travelling: My husband and I have been grey nomads since December, 2010, and haven’t looked back. We are pensioners. We sold everything, and took off to Tassie. There are so many great free camps there that we stayed 10 months before returning to the mainland. It costs us $5 a night on average for camps. We incorporated a couple of housesits (petsits really) which enabled us to build up our pension to follow our dream again. You can do it, Joe. You will never look back.

Marg & Leon

Dear Editor,

You can travel cheaply. Travel slowly, both in distance and speed. We have short travel days and rarely go over 80kph and always pull over for those who wish to travel faster. We also travel the smaller roads, more interesting that way. It is inconceivable to travel at 80kph on highways. Become self-sufficient and use freebies. We have been doing it for years and have never had a security issue.

Lynne

Dear Editor,

Re: Revolving campchair (GNT: Issue 19). What a great idea. Where do you get them in Australia?

Darren

Dear Editor,

Re: If anyone wants to buy one or more of these chairs, here is a link to the website: www.campingworld.com which is an American site. They have an internet sale on these chairs now, and yes, they do ship to Australia, and no, it doesn’t cost a fortune to do so.

Myra (Romy5152)

Dear Editor,

Best chair on our camping trips was basic yet comfy $7.95 from a department store. Worst was a brand name, large, bulky-to-store $79.90 one that fell apart. To me it looks like a great idea and a goer – even at that price!

Mike

Dear Editor,

Yes, I would buy two Revolve campchairs so the race to the best chair had a great second prize.

Rose

Dear Editor,

Hey, Jezza, you don’t need a revolving chair with a radio in it to have some fun. Just get yourself a carton of stubbies and a bottle of Jacks, and I reckon the missus will spin you around. Lol.

Douglas

Dear Editor,

Re: front page story (GNT: Issue 19). In answer to the question: what luxuries could I not do without? The answer is books. I cannot travel without reading material so I have bought an iPad and loaded it with books.

Robert

Dear Editor,

I couldn’t do without water and toilet paper.

Kezza

Dear Editor,

We thought the whole idea of travelling and going ‘bush’ was to see and experience what was out there and that includes the wildlife. If it was all fenced and heaven forbid ‘culled’ what would be the point in going? We echo Matt’s sentiments: “If you can’t live with the wildlife, stay at home.”

Pauline (Lilliputians)

Dear Editor,

I agree with Matt, if the wild-life is a problem stay home.

Wayne

Dear Editor,

The sharks belong in the ocean, crocs in the rivers, dingoes, snakes, goannas etcetera in the bush, no less than birds belong in the sky. They were there long before white man started walking this earth. Learn to share this rock we call earth, because it is all that we have.

Greg

Dear Editor,

Re: older drivers (GNT: Issue 19). The big problem is that there are some people – both old and young – who aren’t able admit to themselves or others that their driving time is up.

Phil
The dawn of the driverless car era could be about to revolutionise the way grey nomads travel. The US state of Nevada has just put science in the driver’s seat by approving America’s first self-driven vehicle licence. The first to hit the highway will be a modified Toyota Prius which uses video cameras on the roof, radar sensors and a range finder laser to detect other cars and obstacles. The car faced rigorous testing and apparently covered 220,000 miles with no accidents … other than being hit from behind at traffic lights. Bruce Breslow, director of Nevada’s Department of Motor Vehicles, says he believes driverless vehicles are the “cars of the future”. He says the long-term plan is to license members of the public to ‘drive’ such cars. Other states, including California, are now planning similar changes. Experts say the vast majority of vehicle accidents are due to human error, and that autonomous vehicles are capable of analysing the driving environment more quickly than people and of operating the vehicle more safely. The implications for future grey nomads are endless. Perhaps there will be a reduced chance of hitting a stray camel, or perhaps, a ‘boring’ outback drive will now be a good opportunity for everyone to take a nap. At the very least, all vehicle occupants will be free to take in the scenery without having to ‘watch the road’. And, perhaps most excitingly of all, losing a driving licence due to a medical condition may no longer be deterrent to setting off on the Big Lap.

Van crash a reminder to take care

The terrifying aftermath of a recent caravan crash on the Gregory Development Road, near Clermont in Queensland, has been photographed (right) by GNT readers, Dave and Bren. The couple came across the scene of utter devastation shorty after a 4WD and the caravan it was towing rolled while attempting to pass a truck. As reported in the last GNT, a Victorian couple was seriously injured in the accident. ‘We were very concerned for the people in the crash and we could not find out anything about it until we read the ‘Times’ when we arrived home,” said Dave. “This has eased our minds some.” He says the road where the accident happened has a slight downhill slope and is very wavy with a two-metre verge on either side. Clearly, it can be a very sobering experience to see at first-hand a crash scene that could so easily have claimed a life. “So slow down people,” said Dave. “You are supposed to be on a holiday.”
High tech or no tech?

Dear Jaclyn and Heidi,

I am a self-confessed 'techno-phobe' but I get more nagged about why I haven't got this or that device than I did before I headed off. I'm sick of condescending people telling me how easy it is to use emails and to attach photos. I'm sure I could work it out if I wanted to … but I don't! Now hubby is suddenly hassling me to get an e-book reader because he reckons my books are putting a strain on the van's axles! What's so terrible about 'old-fashioned' letter writing and book reading? And I don't want a 'sat nav' instead of a map, or a reversing camera instead of a mirror, and I want to keep a private diary not a public blog. Who is going mad … me, or the rest of the world?

Oh, dear Helen. I don't know what to say! I certainly don't think you're going mad but I do think it is important to open your mind to the possibilities around you. The fact that you became a grey nomad in the first place proves you are no stick-in-the-mud. However, those who are encouraging you to try technology are doing so because they know how much easier it could make your life. Sometimes, when you read a good book or see a good movie you just want to share it, I liked black-and-white television better than colour, and I know my mum used to miss going to the well to fetch water. It's not us, Helen. It's everybody else. Stick to your guns, girl.

Hooray! Finally, someone who can see that the emperor has no clothes on! Yes, the boffins are all very clever inventing this and that, but are people really any happier with their Ipads, Ipods and solar-powered wotsits than they were before? I'm like you, Helen. When I'm travelling, I want to get away from it all … I don't want to be bombarded by emails every five minutes. And, do you know what? I preferred crossing the Nullarbor before they bitumened it, I liked black-and-white television better than colour, and I know my mum used to miss going to the well to fetch water. It's not us, Helen. It's everybody else. Stick to your guns, girl.

Click to comment

Heidi

Click to comment

Ask Jaclyn and Heidi

Our experts solve your grey nomad etiquette dilemmas

The Summerland Way is a scenic alternative to the Pacific Highway

As most grey nomads contemplate heading north to avoid the winter chill, the discussions about the best routes to take are well under way. For some in the east, the name of the game is to avoid the crowded coast and to enjoy the more relaxing and often more scenic inland highways.

The Summerland Way, stretching from Grafton in NSW to Woodenbong near the Queensland border, bills itself as a 'shorter, scenic alternative' to the Pacific Highway. When used in conjunction with the Orara Way and the Mount Lindesay Highway, it can take nomads all the way from Coffs Harbour to Brisbane. Travellers may miss out on some spectacular ocean glimpses but – as they drive through the beautiful hinterland – they'll also miss out on heavy traffic, costly and often crowded camping areas.

Sitting on the banks of the Clarence, Grafton is an attractive, historic city. In October/November, its lilac-blossomed trees take centre stage as the Jacaranda Festival draws visitors from across the country. Heading north, the traffic is generally extremely light and the countryside delightfully gentle. The 199km Summerland Way is, for the most part, a wide, well-maintained, gently undulating road perfectly suitable for big rigs. The route passes through state forests, including Banyabba, Whiporie, and Ellangoran (where camping is allowed at Braemar roadside rest area).

From here it's just 30km into Casino. Situated on the Richmond River, the city claims to be Australia's 'Beef Capital'. For nomads heading here soon, Casino’s celebrated Beef Week runs from May 19-29.

Driving on towards the charming country town of Kyogle, it is clear that cattle grazing, dairy farming and forestry are the primary industries here. Kyogle is known as the gateway to national parks including Toonumbar, which boasts extensive subtropical rainforests, and Border Ranges. Border Ranges, located on the rim of an ancient volcano, is well worth a detour down a bit of gravel. It offers spectacular views to Mt Warning and there's also rainforest, waterfalls, creeks, ridges and a host of bushwalking and wildlife watching opportunities. There is camping here.

The final northern section of the Summerland Way is as scenic and as relaxing as the rest although slightly narrower. For many carefree grey nomads, it will soon though be time for an unexpected decision. “Do we turn right towards Brisbane as planned, or do we turn left towards Warwick and more country magic?” This relaxed, inland driving is addictive!