TRAVEL FOR HEALTH
A recent survey of American travelers shows that
• 93% feel happier after a vacation,
• Over 77% believe that their health improves after a vacation
• About 80% believe that vacations result in greater productivity, energy and focus

--from “Destination: Healthy Aging: the physical, cognitive and social benefits of travel” from globalcoalitiononaging.com
Scientific study:
The **Framingham Study**, which gathers details about thousands of participants’ lifestyles and behaviors asked female participants how often they took vacations. In a 20 year follow-up study, even after taking into account traditional risk factors such as blood pressure, results showed that women who vacationed every six years or less had a significantly higher risk of developing a **heart attack or coronary death** compared to women who vacationed at least twice a year. Another study showed that women who do not take vacations are more than twice as likely to suffer from **depression** as women who do.
In a nine-year study men who did not take an annual vacation had a 20% risk of death and a 30% greater risk of death from heart disease.
In all the studies, researchers concluded--

Vacationing is a restorative behavior with an independent positive effect on health.
Americans average 2 weeks of paid vacation per year compared to Europeans who have 4 or more weeks guaranteed. Many people look forward to retirement when they will finally have time to travel.
If you stay healthy, you can travel
If you travel, you can stay healthy
Why?
When you travel
• You increase your physical activity
• You spend more time interacting with other people
• You spend more time in natural settings
• You encounter new ways to think about things
• You learn new approaches to deal with stress.
• You increase self-confidence
Being in Nature
Lake Bled, Julian Alps, Slovenia
Plitvice Lakes, Croatia
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
Older adults who are physically active have lower rates of
• Heart disease
• High blood pressure
• Stroke
• Diabetes
• Cancers
• Injuries from falling
AND
• Better lung health
• Better cognitive function
Increasing your activity level can make you live longer. If you stop being inactive, your life expectancy increases almost as much as if you eliminated obesity or stopped smoking.
For older adults the net health benefit is likely to be higher if your main focus in on moderate-intensity activities, such as those experienced while traveling.
• Speaking of obesity—
• Will you gain or lose weight when you travel?
• Don’t let the all-you-can-eat buffets and free wine with dinner make you lose sight of good eating habits.
• If necessary, find fresh fruits and vegetables (if you are in a country where it is safe to do so) at Farmers’ Markets.
• Make sure to stay hydrated and keep a water bottle with you all the time. Check to see if local water is safe to drink from the tap.
STRESS REDUCTION
Stress Reduction is among the best benefits of vacations and travel.
Stress is a suspected factor in many health problems:
Immune system
Asthma
Obesity
Headaches
Gastrointestinal problems
Alzheimer’s Disease
Not taking a break from everyday stressors can elevate cortisol in your body, which speeds up the aging process.
Will you experience some stressful moments when you travel?
Most likely!
Plans gone awry: airport chaos, delays, missed connections, flight changes
Set schedule with group travel
Dealing with personality or values differences with other travelers
Uncertainty
BUT
This leads to finding new solutions
Being open-minded,
Learning to go with the flow
Building confidence that you can handle things.

You can take home with you this new attitude. When you know you can deal with what life throws at you, you will feel safe to take more risks. It’s good to think outside the box and pull yourself out of your comfort zone. You can also learn how people in other cultures have learned to deal with their much more serious stresses (Sarajevo).
Travel is good medicine for the brain
Your brain is challenged with new and different experiences and environments.
This builds brain health and resilience.
Mental challenges of travel can include:

- Trip planning and research
- Packing
- Learning some words in a new language
- Calculating currency exchanges
- Navigating in unfamiliar territory using street maps or GPS
- Visiting museums or attending concerts
- Learning about history of other areas
- Challenging your long-held opinions with new facts

All of this exercises your brain.
You may even wish to have some hands-on experience with art and music.
You might keep a watercolor travel journal of places that impressed you or a written journal to help you remember special experiences.
Isolation is a condition that seniors frequently face that is detrimental to health. Partners, pets, and friends can all keep you from being isolated. So can travel. With group travel you will meet new people who are interesting and eager to learn. Even if you travel on your own, you can make connections with the people you meet in new countries.
Meeting the locals on the bus in Kyoto
Dinner with host Emilla in Sarajevo
“Social relationships can mediate the effect of stress on health.”
Travel helps you build new relationships and deepens your understanding of the experiences of others.
Don’t overlook the benefits of multi-generational travel
Many travel groups cater to family travel
Taking a grandchild on a trip can build bonds and expand your horizons.
Multigenerational Travel

With Summer in Anglesey

With Erin on the Rhine

With Maia in Japan
How should you travel?
Alone?
With a friend or family member?
With a large or small group?

I have traveled both with my husband and on my own on trips I planned myself.
I have also traveled with several groups, each of which has its own advantages and focus.
Peru-Far Horizons through UCLA
Sardinia- Road Scholar mixed with visits to friends and travel alone
Alaska-Road Scholar
Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Bosnia- OAT
Japan-Intrepid Travel
Germany-Trafalgar
Anglesey, Wales- Anglesey Walking Holidays
Orkney-Orkney Archaeological Tours
Egypt-Small group tour organized by Sue Monroe
The best way to plan a trip is to do research online AND talk to your friends who have travel experience.
The following information is from a series of four articles I wrote for the Senior Moment Column in the Chico Enterprise Record in 2017.

To gather travel tips, I interviewed friends who travel, many of them OLLI members. Thanks to

• Mary and Mark Kowta,
• Nancy Gipson
• Nancy Loeffler
• Lynn Wilson (Shared Travel)
• Sue and Stewart Monroe
• Linda and Scott Perry
• Joyce Groshong

I recommend that you talk to your friends who travel for tips based on their experiences.
To begin with, here are some insights about how to choose the best type of travel for your current stage of health and how to make graceful age-related adaptations for easier safer travel.
From Mark Kowta:
Think carefully about your goals and expectations for your trip and choose a destination and method of travel that will help you meet those goals.

How much free time for independent exploring and relaxing do you want?
Make a realistic appraisal of your current physical condition and limitations.
Those who are in great physical shape may wish to do “Adventure Travel” that includes hiking, biking, kayaking or other physically challenging activities.

Several friends I spoke with feel that cruises are the best choice for their current stage of life. Since she moved to the West Coast, Nancy Gipson avoids long plane flights to Europe and takes advantage of cruises that depart from San Francisco.

Cruises, whether on oceans or rivers, allow you the luxury of unpacking only once and sharing good food, fun activities onboard, and interesting excursions in the ports of call.
Lynn Wilson:
“River cruises allow for seeing a country on the freeway of 200 years ago with cities that are built along the rivers.”
Small ships are more intimate that large ships. Excursions in ports of call vary depending on interests and activity levels.
Singles have many opportunities to mingle with others.
A health caution about large cruise ships—

On Royal Caribbean’s gargantuan Oasis of the Seas 561 passengers and 31 crew members fell ill from norovirus. 189 deaths were reported on cruise ships according to the CDC.

On Royal Caribbean’s gargantuan Oasis of the Seas, 561 passengers and 31 crew members fell ill from norovirus. 189 deaths were reported on cruise ships according to the CDC.
One downside to traveling alone is having to increase your trip costs by paying a costly single supplement charge.

Websites for most tour groups show some trips for which the single supplement is not required. Overseas Adventure Travel (OAT) is known for not charging single supplements, but only a few single room options are offered each trip, so you must plan ahead and sign up early.
Sharing Travel Expenses with a Group of Friends

Joyce Groshong reported that in years past she was contacted by a friend made on a previous trip who organized a group of friends to share a house in France for a month. The friend also rented a car and organized trips to a nearby language school and other outings. Everyone shared expenses.
Shoulder Season Travel
If you travel “off-peak” season, usually April through mid-June and September through October--
• Prices for transportation and accommodation are reduced
• Attractions are less crowded
• Weather is usually just as good, or even better than summer in hot areas.
Caveat:
Services and open hours for attractions may have reduced hours so you should make sure that what you want to see and do will be available.
Cavalcata Sarda, Sardinia
Travel Agent or Self-Planning?
The services of a travel agent well-informed about the area of the world and mode of travel you choose can be very valuable. Travel agents know the best values and can pass them on to you.
Traveling with Physical Limitations

Travelers with specific physical limitations who need to use a walker or wheel chair will have to do careful research to find out if a particular mode of travel, hotel, or city can accommodate their needs. Many European cities have pedestrian zones with few curbs. Some have “sidewalk Braille” and auditory cues on street lights to help those who are visually impaired.
Tokyo, Japan

Ljubljana, Slovenia

“Sidewalk Braille”