

What goes on tour stays on tour (no matter how old you are)!

As increasing numbers of older people seek new ways to have fun, **DICK LUMSDEN** predicts the rise of a new trend

If you, like me, have had occasion to pass through Stansted Airport recently, you cannot fail to have noticed the modern day phenomenon that is the “stag” trip.

On any given day, dotted round the departure lounge are groups of young men – and women – unselfconsciously decked out in fancy dress, or matching T-shirts and heading off for a few days of over-the-top fun in Prague, or Berlin, or Ibiza.

A far cry from when I got married in 1977. My “stag” do was in a local pub, and the highest I flew was when I fell off a table during a rendition of “Old Macdonald’s Farm”... but it seems nowadays that the “stag” or “hen” do has to involve foreign travel and a not insignificant outlay of cash.

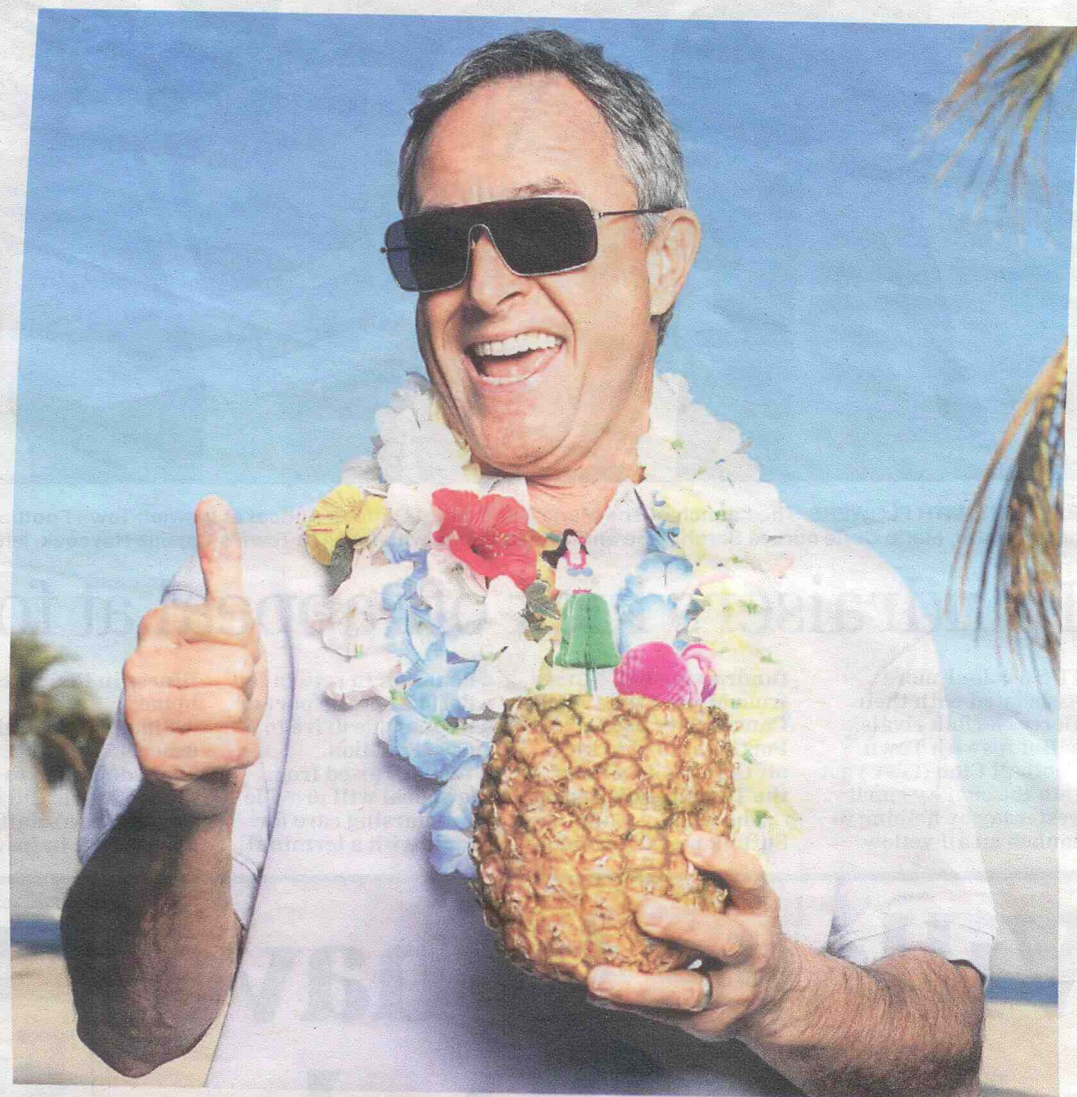
For a young adult with real friends – as opposed to the hundreds of virtual ones on their social network of choice – then it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that they could go on three, four or five of these trips in a year while their peers settle down around them.

With each one costing a few hundred pounds for the trip and the same again for food and drink, that adds up to a pretty sizeable percentage of their annual disposable income and it must be very difficult to say no when your best friend from university insists on your company as he lays waste to the bars of the Hamburg Reeperbahn!

Undeniably though, they all seem to have fun. I’m sure the tattoos will fade with time, and who’s ever going to find out about the night spent in the cells sans trousers if what goes on tour stays on tour?

So I suppose it was only a matter of time before the concept spread to the fun-loving older generations, who, generally speaking, have more disposable income, more free time and considerably more experience of life to draw on when they go abroad.

Instead of the nervous young groom, substitute someone about to enter retirement, and instead of the testosterone-fuelled young bucks, substitute work colleagues, golfing buddies or already retired friends and



CHEERS: Forget the carriage clock – book up a retirement ‘stag’ do!

a couple of years now to celebrate as they all enter retirement one by one.

With the numbers of over-50s and over-60s rising every week, this trend can only get bigger. Even I have started making plans with my friends Dave and Phil for a coast-to-coast road trip in the USA when any one of us decides to retire.

So far, only a few companies seem to be switched on to the possibilities here. One of them is Grape Escapes (www.grapeescapes.net) who offer escorted group trips by coach to the vineyards of France, including fine wines and fine dining – with the opportunity to try your hand at sabrage (cutting the heads off wine bottles with a sword) or abseiling down the side of a chateau.

Another is Ecoventures (www.ecoventures.co.uk) which offers retirement party groups the

the days off with a good single malt or six.

Traditionally, retirement has been viewed by the travel industry as a “milestone” event, which was likely to trigger the booking of a major cruise, or a round-the-world trip for the retiree and their spouse.

The celebrations would probably kick off with a glass of champagne and a small presentation speech as they left work for the last time with a watch or a set of garden furniture (metaphorically) under their arm.

I’m sure many of these big trips will still happen, but I also foresee a rapid rise in “retirement stags” as groups of friends and colleagues kick back on everything from golfing trips to the casinos of Las Vegas.

I’m not going to pretend that as we get older we get better behaved and I’m sure a group of a

likely to get into fights, throw up in the street, or pester the local womenfolk. We will turn up on time for coaches and flights, and we almost certainly won’t get tattoos or lose our trousers.

With some proper planning, we could tick off a whole load of “must see” places and events on our wishlist before we’re all too old to remember what was on it in the first place.

The travel industry should take this new phenomenon seriously and start preparing customised trips and itineraries to suit. And employers should forget the garden furniture and spring for a plane ticket to Prague instead. Count me in!

■ Dick Lumsden is Managing Director of Owl Marketing Solutions, specialising in marketing and advertising to the 50+ group. If you have any views on this article, or are