

Tourism and Demography

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VFR Travellers of the Future

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VFR Travellers of the Future



Elisa R. Backer

Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to:

- ◆ Highlight the importance of visiting friends and relatives (VFR) travel now and in the future;
- ◆ Discuss key demographic trends related to VFR travel and analyse the findings from a study of VFR tourism to two Australian destinations, including:
 - ◆ VFR travellers represent a substantial form of solo-travellers and single-person households are forecast to grow in the future;
 - ◆ VFR travel represents a hidden form of travel for children travelling without parents (linked with the emerging niche market, the 'grand-traveller');
 - ◆ VFR travellers utilise commercial accommodation, and their usage of this is likely to increase;
 - ◆ VFR travel has important social benefits to families;
 - ◆ VFR travel will grow as a market segment for older travellers, especially those in the final stages of the family life cycle.

Introduction

It is important to consider the role of visiting friends and relatives (VFR) travellers in the future since one of the largest forms of travel in many countries around the world is VFR travel. The previous research in the field has shown the significance of VFR in terms of the size of the segment, as well as the benefits to destinations. This chapter reports data from a study of VFR travellers, non-VFR travellers, as well as residents, in two Australian destinations: Ballarat and the Sunshine Coast, and relating to demographic trends, focuses on the importance of VFR travel in the future.

Literature Review

The notion of travelling to visit friends or relations would predate most if not all other forms of travel, with the exception possibly being travelling for medical purposes. However, as a field of study, VFR is relatively new. This area of research was largely neglected until Jackson's (1990) seminal article, which 13 years later was reprinted (Jackson, 2003). His research contended that VFR travel was larger than official data suggested, and more research in the field was needed. This led to a wave of interest in the mid-1990s, resulting in an international conference (VFR Tourism: Issues and Implications, 1996) and a special edition of an international journal (The Journal of Tourism Studies, 1995) being dedicated to this subject area. This special issue combined research on VFR travellers undertaken in Australia, the USA, Canada, the Netherlands, and Northern Ireland, to provide a broad analysis of VFR from various parts of the world. All studies (Braunlich and Nadkarni, 1995; Meis *et al.*, 1995; Morrison *et al.*, 1995; Seaton and Tagg, 1995; Yuan *et al.*, 1995) found that VFR travel represented a significant part of the overall travel market in those parts of the world. The interest that was generated in the immediate years following Jackson's article (1990) resulted in a realisation that VFR travel had been previously overlooked and underestimated (McKercher, 1994, 1995; Seaton, 1994; Braunlich and Nadkarni, 1995; Morrison *et al.*, 1995; Seaton and Tagg, 1995; Hay, 1996; King, 1996; Yaman, 1996; Seaton and Palmer, 1997).

Since those earliest contributions were made, research advanced in the early 2000s through segmented analysis, resulting in an improved understanding in the field. Morrison *et al.* (2000) considered the perceptions of VFR travel by destination marketing organisations (DMOs) and highlighted the importance of offering specific marketing campaigns targeting

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