



Visiting Friends and Relatives Travel as a form of Sustainable Tourism Development

What is the issue?

Many travel decisions are influenced to vary degrees by the relationships that exist between visitors and residents of a destination. Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) travel has been disregarded by many practitioners, and received comparatively little attention from academics, as interest has focused on other 'high-yield' travel segments. A major impediment to understanding the impact of VFR travel on a community are the traditional and simplistic metrics used to measure tourism success. VFR travel often pails in significance compared with other visitor groups when considering daily spend and hotel nights. However, there are many benefits that this segment brings to a community in pursuit of sustainable tourism development. This paper attempts to consider VFR in a broader framework of community capital development.

What did the researcher do?

Flora and Flora's (2008) framework of community capitals was used to consider the sustainability of VFR travel for a community. The framework considers a community's resources around seven capitals: social, cultural, financial, built, political, natural, and human. An extensive literature review on sustainable tourism and VFR travel was conducted to provide a foundation for discussion on the benefits that VFR travel can provide for a community. VFR's impacts and influences on a community and sustainability are more fully understood using this framework instead of a focus solely on visitor spend and hotel use.

Why is this research Useful?

By repositioning the impacts of VFR travel within a sustainable tourism framework a fuller understanding of the benefits of this type of tourism behavior is provided. It is hoped this research helps provide justification for the engagement and appreciation

of VFR travel, and the influence that residents often have over much tourism activity within their communities.

What were the outcomes?

This study proposes that VFR travel has positive impacts for a community and sustainability that are distinct from other types of tourism development, but are missed in traditional metrics. Financial gains include increased repeat visitation, a greater return on investment for marketers compared with first time visitors, a greater dispersal of visitors' spending outside of typical tourism centres, and keeping resident tourism spending from leaking outside of the community as hosts take vacation days themselves to entertain at home. In addition, there are benefits that VFR brings through the increased engagement of residents in their community as hosts, with sustainable gains in social, cultural, and built capitals.

About the Researcher

Tom Griffin is an Assistant Professor at the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Ted Rogers School of Management, Ryerson University, whose research focuses on residents and tourism activity.

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Ted Rogers School of Management
55 Dundas Street West
9th floor, TRS-3-175
www.htmresearch.ca