

# VISITING THE DESTINATION OR VISITING US? A LOOK AT VFR TOURISM

Elisa Backer  
Lecturer in Tourism  
University of Ballarat  
e.backer@ballarat.edu.au

## ABSTRACT

Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) Travel represents a large and significant component of tourism. However, despite this, VFR Travel has been largely ignored by tourism marketing practitioners, and has remained under-researched in many domains. VFR Travel tends to be overlooked in tourism marketing campaigns, in part because these travellers have been regarded as ones who cannot be influenced, and in part because of their perceived minimal economic impact. However, VFR travellers are not always attracted solely by the hosts. The attractiveness of the destination can also have an influencing role on VFR trips. Whilst little research has been done to examine these issues, this paper utilises a whole tourism systems model to examine the linkages between VFR travellers and destination regions. A comparative analysis compares VFR research undertaken in two different regions in Australia. Through this approach, it is shown that VFRs are often influenced to embark on VFR trips because of the attractiveness of a destination. As such, whilst any region can attract VFRs because of the hosts, the attractiveness of a region as a tourist destination can influence the length of stay and visitor spend and, as such, enhance the impact of VFR Travel on a local economy.

Key words: VFR, Hosts, Visiting Friends and Relatives

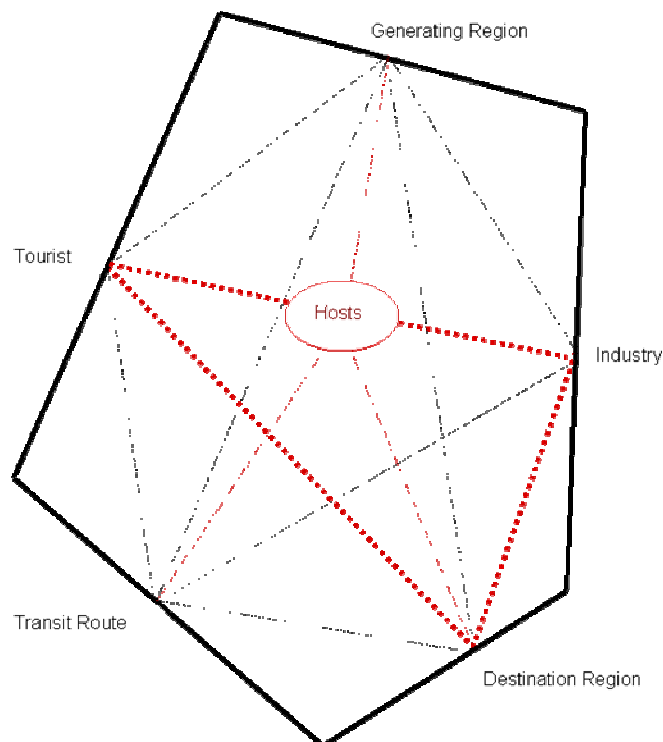
This research paper is based on a manuscript accepted for publication in Asian Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research

## INTRODUCTION

Whole tourism systems comprise five elements – tourists, tourist generating regions, transit routes, tourist destination regions, and tourism industries. It is all five of these elements and the relationships between them that make up a whole tourism system (Leiper, 2004). Models of whole tourism systems are useful tools to examine tourist flows in a holistic and systematic way. Applying such a tool to VFR travel is useful for understanding and exploring linkages and relationships between the various components. VFR travellers are not just tourists visiting friends and/or relations. They may also use services provided by tourism industries, although to what degree is unknown and has attracted little research.

This paper examines VFR travel using Leiper's (2004) model as a base. However, as shown in Figure 1 his model has been modified to show the central role of hosts. The VFR traveller is visiting the host and hosts are likely to influence, to varying degrees, the relationship of the VFR traveller with each other element in the whole tourism system. It is the relationship between the tourist (VFR) and the tourism destination region, through the VFR host, that this research considers. It does this by via a comparative analysis of two studies on VFR tourism in different destinations.

**Figure 1 Whole Tourism Model for VFR Travel**



Source: Adapted from Leiper, 2004: 54

VFR Travel is an area of research that has been largely overlooked until the past decade. Jackson's (1990) seminal article, reprinted in 2003 (Jackson, 2003), led to a wave of research in VFR Travel in the mid 1990s, resulting in some interest in this area, and a realisation that VFR Travel had been overlooked and underestimated (McKercher, 1994; Seaton, 1994; Braunlich and Nadkarni, 1995; McKercher, 1995; Morrison, Hsieh, and O'Leary, 1995; Seaton and Tagg, 1995; Hay, 1996; King, 1996; Yaman, 1996; Seaton and Palmer, 1997; Backer, 2003; Backer, 2007). However, VFR Travel is still poorly understood, and remains misunderstood and overlooked by many tourism operators and marketing practitioners.

VFR Travel, in economic terms, holds secondary status in the tourism industry (Lehto, Morrison, and O'Leary, 2001). Marketing practitioners tend to overlook VFR travel in their marketing campaigns; considering it a form of tourism that occurs "naturally" and therefore cannot be influenced (Morrison, Woods, Pearce, Moscardo, and Sung, 2000). As a result there has been little championing of VFR travel and tourism organisations and tourism operators have tended to dismiss this segment in their marketing campaigns.

The real economic contribution of VFR travel appears not to have been assessed adequately. The breadth of the expenditure made by VFR travellers has been largely overlooked in research. VFRs exhibit different travel patterns from other travel segments, consequently there is little information concerning their tourism patterns (Young, Corsun and Baloglu, 2007). This lack of information results in the economic impact of VFR travel being underestimated and hinders marketing efforts (Young et al, 2007).

VFR research has typically focused on the demand (tourist) side, ignoring the supply side. As such, aside from a few research efforts (McKercher, 1994; Backer, 2007; Young, Corsun and Baloglu, 2007), additional tourist dollars expended by residents hosting VFR travellers have been completely ignored.

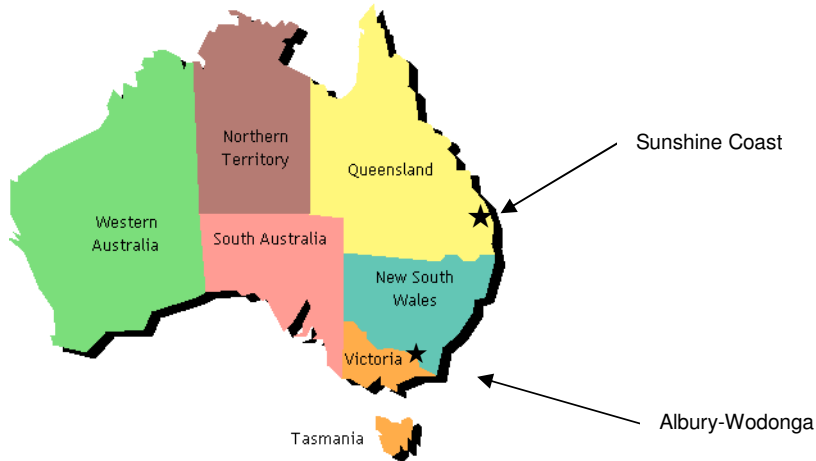
## **METHODS**

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the limited knowledge in the area of VFR travel, specifically to understanding and assessing the role residents hosting visitors have. Research undertaken in Albury-Wodonga (McKercher, 1994) is compared with research undertaken in the Sunshine Coast (Backer, 2008) to examine differences in host-VFR relationships at two contrasting regions within Australia.

Given that one region is coastal and considered one of Australia's key tourist nodes, and the other is inland and not considered a tourist destination, the degree to which it is the host or the region that is attracting the VFR traveller is examined. Whilst acknowledging the limitations of undertaking a comparative analysis involving research undertaken using different methodologies in different years, the usefulness of this comparison is to explore the relationship of VFR tourists with different destinations. In order to do this, key findings concerning Albury-Wodonga (McKercher, 1994) and the Sunshine Coast (Backer, 2008) were listed and elements that were explored by both pieces of research were tabled and compared.

## The Comparing Regions

**Figure 2: The Two Regions**



Source: adapted from Greenwich Meantime, 2007

### *Albury-Wodonga*

Albury-Wodonga is one of Australia's largest inland population centres, with over 90,000 people living within the recognised statistical district (Encyclopedia Britanica, 2007). The centre comprises two border cities, with Albury straddling the Murray River in New South Wales and Wodonga straddling the Murray River in Victoria. Albury-Wodonga is located on the Hume Highway, the major inland corridor between Sydney and Melbourne. The centre is around three-hours drive from Melbourne and Canberra and around six-hours drive from Sydney.

Man-made tourist attractions include Ettamogah Pub, Ettamogah Sanctuary, Lake Hume Trout Farm, P S Cumeroona River Cruise, and Frog Hollow Tourist Attraction. Natural attractions include Lake Hume and the Victorian Alps and tourists also engage in shopping, visiting clubs, sightseeing, and visits to the historic towns of Beechworth and Yackandandah. The clubs are well-established and previously attracted tourists from Victoria who came to play the clubs' poker machines, before these were introduced in Victoria in 1992.

Visitor numbers to the Murray Region, of which Albury is the dominant centre, indicate that over 0.9 million domestic overnight visitors stayed in the region for the year ending December 2005 (Tourism NSW, 2007). Overnight international visitors to the Murray Region were around 20,000 for the same time period (Tourism NSW, 2007). Domestic overnight visitors spent \$103 per night in the region while international visitors spent \$53 per night. Domestic overnight visitors stayed an average of 2.8 nights. Data are not available for international visitors due to insufficient sample size (pers. comm. Roger Evans, Tourism NSW, October 4 2007).

Data can be used to offer some insight into tourism behaviour, but do not provide definitive travel data for Albury-Wodonga twin cities due to these cities falling across different states and belonging to different regions. Albury belongs to Tourism New South Wales' Murray Region, and whilst it is

the dominant urban centre within that region, travel patterns in other parts of the region may differ to that of Albury. As such, using the Murray Regional data offers some limited understanding of visitor numbers.

### ***The Sunshine Coast***

The Sunshine Coast encompasses the three local authorities of Caloundra, Maroochy and Noosa Shires, a region including around 65 kilometres of beaches and headlands and over 260,000 people (Sunshine Coast Australia, 2007). The region is one of Australia's most popular holiday destinations, with well-established and highly recognised man-built tourist attractions such as Australia Zoo, Underwater World, Forest Glen Deer Sanctuary, and The Big Pineapple. Natural attractions, such as Noosa National Park, and the series of beaches along the three shires, as well as the shopping and climate, contribute to the region's reputation as a popular tourist location.

Transport options include Sunshine Coast Airport, serviced by regular direct jet flights from Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne. The nearby Bruce Highway offers a direct route to the state of Queensland's capital city, Brisbane, which is around a one-hour's drive from the southern-most point of the region.

Visitor numbers to the Sunshine Coast, indicate that 2.7 million domestic overnight visitors stayed in the region in the year ending December 2005 (Tourism Queensland, 2007). Overnight international visitors to the region were around 233,000 for the same time period (Tourism Queensland, 2007). Expenditures per night are higher than that of the Murray Region. Domestic visitors spend \$139 per night, while international visitors spend \$82 per night. The average length of stay is four nights for domestic overnight visitors and nine nights for international visitors.

Tourism visitation is considerably higher for the Sunshine Coast than for the Murray Region, as shown in Table 1. Three times more domestic visitors and ten times more international visitors stay in the Sunshine Coast than the Murray Region. Expenditures per night are also higher for both domestic and international visitors staying in the Sunshine Coast.

**Table 1: Data for Murray Region and Sunshine Coast Region for the Year ending 2005**

	Murray Region		Sunshine Coast	
	Domestic overnight visitors	International overnight visitors	Domestic overnight visitors	International overnight visitors
<b>Visitors</b>	0.9 million	20,000	2.7 million	233,000
<b>Average length of stay</b>	2.8 nights	na	4 nights	9 nights
<b>Average expenditure per night</b>	\$103	\$53	\$139	\$82
<b>VFR purpose of visit</b>	30.7%	29.7%	32%	19%
<b>VFR by accommodation</b>	38.7%	59.3%	33%	na

Source: Tourism NSW, 2007 and Tourism Queensland, 2006

### **Outline of Research at Albury-Wodonga**

The research at Albury-Wodonga (McKercher, 1994) involved 225 telephone interviews with local residents during March and April 1994. The interviews were conducted between 7:30pm and 9:30pm during weekday evenings by around 15 university students. The sampling technique employed for the study involved selecting names from each page of the local telephone book and if the telephone was answered, the caller asked to speak with the head of the household. It was not always possible to speak with that person though so in some instances the interview was conducted with someone else in the household.

### **Outline of research at the Sunshine Coast**

The research at the Sunshine Coast (Backer, 2008) involved street surveys of visitors and residents between January and May 2002. In total, 812 visitor surveys and 629 resident surveys were conducted. Day tripper data were disaggregated, leaving 567 overnight visitor surveys; comprising 167 staying with friends / relatives. An additional 33 visitors reported staying in commercial accommodation but whose main purpose of visit was VFR.

Surveys were taken at seven different places around the Sunshine Coast, at both coastal and inland locations, to reduce the bias associated with any particular “node”. People walking down the street were approached and asked if they would participate in the survey. If they agreed, they were asked whether they were a local resident or a visitor, and then the appropriate survey was filled out. As soon as that survey had been completed, the next person who walked along the street was approached. Thus, convenience sampling was used.

## RESULTS

This section compares the VFR data collected at Albury-Wodonga and the Sunshine Coast. As both studies examined different aspects, it has only been possible to interpret comparable issues. Data relating to the length of stay, utilisation of man-made attractions, expenditures and travel party size are compared.

### Length of stay

The recorded data from McKercher's (1994) resident survey is compared to the data from Backer's (2008) VFR visitor survey. The combination of VFRs staying with friends and relatives and VFRs staying in commercial accommodation is used to compare with McKercher's (1994) data, since those data incorporated VFRs who stay in commercial lodgings.

The length of stay of VFR travellers in Albury-Wodonga was considerably shorter than for those VFRs in the Sunshine Coast (Table 1). The medium length of stay for VFRs at Albury-Wodonga was 2.0 nights, compared to 9.68 nights at the Sunshine Coast. Most VFRs (70.6%) only stayed up to three nights at Albury-Wodonga, with less than half of that number (32.8%) only staying up to three nights in the Sunshine Coast.

**Table 2: Length of Stay in Albury-Wodonga and the Sunshine Coast (nights)**

Length of stay	Albury-Wodonga	Sunshine Coast
	%	%
1 night	22.7	8.4
2-3 nights	45.9	24.4
4-6 nights	11.9	22.9
7 nights	11.3	9.9
8-14 nights	6.7	20.4
15+ nights	1.5	14

Source: McKercher, 1994 and Backer (2008)

### Utilisation of Built Tourist Attractions

Residents at the Sunshine Coast and Albury Wodonga were asked to identify key attractions / appealing aspects from their own perspective. This was approached in each survey with a somewhat different focus. McKercher (1994) referred to the "most appealing aspect of a trip" whilst Backer (2008) referred to "activities and attractions". However, both were aimed towards discovering what regional attributes might appeal most to visitors. Mentions involving built tourist attractions have been italicised in Table 3 and 4. As these tables indicate, VFR hosts in the Sunshine Coast are more inclined to recommend VFR travellers visit man-made tourism attractions. Given the dependency of VFRs on word of mouth (Backer, 2008), this is likely to lead to VFRs being more engaged in industrialised tourism activities than VFRs at Albury-Wodonga.

**Table 3: Activities and Attractions Sunshine Coast Residents Recommend to Visitors**

Rank	Feature	# Mentions	% Households
1	Beaches	104	65
2	Hinterland	74	46
3	<i>Underwater World</i>	65	41
4	<i>Big Pineapple</i>	52	33
5	<i>Australia Zoo</i>	50	31
6	Noosa	32	20
7	<i>Ginger Factory</i>	30	19
8	Mooloolaba	24	15
8	Eumundi	24	15
10	Shopping	20	13
10	<i>Aussie World</i>	20	13
12	Restaurants	17	11
13	Clubs / Pubs	11	7
14	<i>Forest Glen Deer Sanctuary</i>	10	6
15	<i>Super Bee</i>	5	3
15	Fishing	5	3
15	Bushwalking	5	3

Source: Backer (2008)

**Table 4: Most Appealing Aspect of a Trip to the Albury-Wodonga Region According to Residents**

Rank	Feature	# Mentions	% Households
1	Lake Hume	93	41.6
1	General / unspecified	93	41.6
3	Victorian Alps	57	25.4
4	Albury	30	13.4
5	Rutherglen wineries	29	13.0
6	Historic townships	25	11.2
7	Pleasant Climate	19	8.5
8	Licensed Clubs	15	6.7
9	<i>Ettamogah Pub</i>	10	4.5
10	<i>P.S. Cumberoona</i>	9	4.0
11	<i>Lake Hume Trout Farm</i>	6	2.7
12	Golfing	5	2.2
13	<i>Frog Hollow Tourist Park</i>	1	0.4

Source: McKercher, 1994



The degree of utilisation of tourism industries by VFRs can also be seen by examining their likelihood of staying in commercial accommodation. VFRs to the Sunshine Coast were relatively high consumers of commercial accommodation, with 16.5 per cent of VFRs using commercial accommodation rather than staying with friends or relatives (Backer, 2008). A smaller proportion of Albury-Wodonga VFRs used commercial accommodation, with only five per cent not staying with friends or relatives but instead, specifically staying in either local motels or caravan parks (McKercher, 1994).

### **Types of expenditures incurred by hosts**

Residents in Albury Wodonga and the Sunshine Coast reported additional expenses incurred as a direct result of hosting VFR travellers. However, McKercher's (1994) research did not quantify each expenditure category, so it is not possible to directly compare them. However, both research studies ranked these category response levels. McKercher (1994) ranked these data based on the percentage of responses, so that the category in which most households reported experiencing additional costs was ranked highest (1). Sunshine Coast residents were asked to indicate the actual additional outlay incurred by hosting VFR travellers, and as such these data are ranked in order of highest dollar amount. The highest financial outlay item is therefore ranked highest (1).

The level of engagement in tourism industries by VFR hosts is greater in the Sunshine Coast than in Albury-Wodonga. By examining the expenses itemised in Tables 5 and 6, hosts from the Sunshine Coast are more likely to be engaged in leisure shopping, visiting restaurants and cafes as well as other forms of entertainment. Dining out and entertainment were reported by hosts to follow very closely behind additional expenses on groceries (\$70 per household per trip compared to \$74). By contrast, this was mentioned by far fewer hosts from Albury-Wodonga (27.1% compared to 38% of households). Leisure shopping was rated high by Sunshine Coast hosts, who expended an average of \$43 per household per trip on this category. By contrast, this was mentioned by very few (5%) of the Albury-Wodonga households. Hosts at both destinations were most likely to experience increased grocery bills as their primary additional expense.

**Table 5: Types of Additional Expenses Incurred by Albury Wodonga Residents**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Type of Expenditure</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
1	Groceries (food)	38
2	Dining out & entertainment	27.1
3	Entry fees	13.1
4	Petrol	11.8
5	Leisure Shopping / gifts	5.0
6	Unspecified	3.6
7	Transport	0.9
8	Commercial accommodation	0.5

Source: McKercher, 1994

**Table 6: Types of Additional Expenses Incurred by Sunshine Coast Residents**

Rank	Type of Expenditure	\$ per household per trip
1	Groceries (food)	74
2	Dining out & entertainment	70
3	Leisure Shopping / gifts	43
4	Entry fees – attractions & activities	26
5	Petrol	22

Source: Backer (2008)

### Travel Party

Similar types of travel parties were VFRs at both destinations. At Albury-Wodonga, most VFRs (74.4%) were adult travel parties without children, and 22.4% were adults travelling with children. The remaining 3.2% were children travelling without adults. The travel parties at the Sunshine Coast were similarly reported, with 65.2% of residents and 76% of friends being adults without children. Residents (31.7%) and friends (22.3%) travelling with children comprised a smaller group. The number of children travelling unaccompanied by an adult was the smallest group (2.6% residents; 1.5% friends).

**Table 7: Travel Parties of VFRs to Albury-Wodonga and Sunshine Coast**

Travel Party	Albury Wodonga	Sunshine Coast	
	(%)	Relatives (%)	Friends (%)
1 adult	22.5	21	30
2 adults	28.3	35	36
3 + adults	23.6	9.2	10
2 adults with children	14.4	23	15.4
1 adult with children	3.2	4.1	4.6
3 + adults with children	4.8	4.6	2.3
children	3.2	2.6	1.5

Source: McKercher (1994) and Backer (2008)

### Origin of VFR Parties

VFRs, on average, travelled longer distances to reach the Sunshine Coast as a destination compared with Albury-Wodonga (Tables 8 and 9). Albury-Wodonga attracted only a very small number of international VFRs (1.9%) while the Sunshine Coast attracted more than 11 times that percentage (21.5%). A large proportion (72.4%) of VFRs staying in Albury-Wodonga travelled up to four hours from their usual residence to reach their destination. Whilst this same distance travelled also represented an important component for the Sunshine Coast (32.5%), VFRs in general were more inclined to travel greater distances to visit their friends and relatives residing in the Sunshine Coast.

**Table 8: Origin of VFR Travel Parties to Albury-Wodonga**

Point of Origin	Albury Wodonga (%)
Melbourne	29.9
Country NSW	18.7
Sydney	15.0
Country Victoria	11.7
Other Australia	10.7
Regional (within 100km)	7.9
ACT	4.2
Overseas	1.9

Source: McKercher (1994)

**Table 9: Origin of VFR Travel Parties to the Sunshine Coast**

Point of Origin	Sunshine Coast (%)
Brisbane	18.5
South East Qld	14.0
North Qld	8.0
NSW	21.0
ACT	1.0
SA	3.5
NT	1.5
Tasmania	0.5
Victoria	10.0
WA	0.5
Overseas	21.5

Source: Backer (2008)

## DISCUSSION

Figure 1 depicts the central position of hosts in VFR travel, since by its very nature, VFR travel critically involves the host. Whether it be to see the host or stay with the host or both, the host is central to the trip type. What is interesting in this tourism system, is the role of the host versus the role of the destination in attracting VFRs.

The preceding comparative analysis has shown that tourists who travel to visit friends and relatives who live in the Sunshine Coast stay longer than tourists who travel to visit their friends and relatives in the Albury-Wodonga area. With the average length of stay for the Sunshine Coast VFRs over Albury-Wodonga VFRs being so much longer, the attractiveness of the destination appears to have a role in the relationship. If people are travelling for obligatory trips, there should be no need for them to stay any longer in one destination than another. Whilst the distance of the trip could influence the length of stay, there should be no need for them to be more inclined to travel further to see their friends or relatives who reside in one destination over another (Tables 8 and 9). Thus, whilst any destination can attract VFRs because of the hosts, the attractiveness of the destination region may result in a longer length of VFR stay. The attraction of visiting the host in itself would not be likely to result in such a long length of stay as seen at the Sunshine Coast. This indicates that, as well as the host, an attractive destination, has an important role in VFR travel. The relationship in which the destination versus the host attracts VFRs is therefore seen to be apparent.

VFRs not only stay longer but are more inclined to use commercial accommodation in the Sunshine Coast. More than three times the percentage (16.5% versus 5%) of VFRs stayed in commercial accommodation at the Sunshine Coast compared to Albury-Wodonga. This is a form of tourism industry usage by VFRs that has traditionally not been associated with VFR travel. There is an implied notion in the literature that VFRs are travellers who stay with friends and relatives. This concept is reinforced by definitions such as that by Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2006), that "VFR, as the name suggests, are people that stay in the homes of friends and relatives" (p. 748). The greater likelihood for VFRs staying in the Sunshine Coast to use commercial accommodation may indicate the attraction of other elements within the destination apart from the friends and relatives they are visiting. As such, these VFRs may want to engage in other tourist activities, so that their VFR trip can be highly pleasure-based, so they may choose commercial accommodation to be able to have more freedom in their planning and activities.

The relationship between the tourist and the destination when hosts are involved becomes blended. As such, when visiting friends or relatives who reside in more popular tourist destinations, the nature of the trip may change. The obligatory component linked to the attraction of the host combines with the level of attractiveness of the tourism destination. Length of stay becomes extended beyond what is 'necessary' and other factors, such as visiting tourist attractions and other typical holiday activity components become part of the trip. This has been demonstrated by the greater utilisation of purpose-built tourist attractions by VFRs to the Sunshine Coast, compared to those visiting Albury Wodonga.

The role of the tourism system element, the destination region, in VFR travel, may be potentially stronger than realised. Acknowledging this can lead to potentially better capitalisation on this travel segment by destinations. VFR travel will offer any destination a form of tourism, and a form of economic injection; a form of tourism that it may normally not be able to realise to any great degree. However, what this analysis indicates is that more popular tourist destinations may be particularly well-positioned to grow this segment. This would enable attracting a segment of travellers who stay longer than non-VFR tourists (Backer, 2007), and utilise tourism industries through visiting built attractions, restaurants, activities, retail shops, and commercial accommodation. This linkage could be strengthened through local advertising and rewards schemes for local residents. This would ensure that local attractions are well known by the local residents as well as known well. This is particularly relevant for destinations with local man-made attractions. In Albury-Wodonga, man-made attractions were barely capturing VFR travellers, with local residents not actively encouraging visits to these establishments (McKercher, 1994).

Operators of commercial accommodation premises could also benefit by developing programs to attract VFRs. As the research conducted at Albury-Wodonga and the Sunshine Coast indicated, the VFR travel parties were primarily without children. At the Sunshine Coast, 59% of travel parties of VFRs staying with friends or relatives comprised one or two adults. By comparison, 48% of VFRs staying in commercial accommodation at the Sunshine Coast were travel parties involving only one or two adults. Larger travel parties and families travelling with children are more inclined to use commercial accommodation and as such may be particularly receptive to commercial accommodation options.

The results of this analysis contradict some earlier assumptions concerning VFR travel. This analysis indicates that VFR travel can have a strong pleasure-based role, with the length of stay for VFRs in the Sunshine Coast going beyond an obligatory trip. This contradicts some earlier assumptions about VFR being motivated to visit friends and relatives out of obligation (Bull, 1995). This research also indicates that VFRs do utilise commercial accommodation. This is consistent with findings by Braunlich and Nadkarni (1995) but contradicts definitions (Kotler et al, 2006) that only recognise VFRs staying with friends and relatives.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This analysis has contributed to the field of tourism knowledge in several ways. Firstly, it expands on research in the field of VFR travel, which has been acknowledged through the literature reviewed as requiring further study. Secondly, it recognises that the host has an important role in VFR travel, which involves influencing what local attractions are visited by VFRs and incurring additional expenditures through hosting VFRs. Thirdly, this study highlights that the visitor–host relationship in a whole tourism system may also be affected by the destination in which the host resides. This indicates that not all VFRs undertake trips based on the attraction of the host; that some undertake trips based on the attractiveness of the destination. This raises the interesting question of whether there is a new tripology to explore, that of EFR (exploiting friends and relatives).

The ability to generalise the results of this analysis is limited by the study's focus on those destinations subject to existing research in Australia. These studies were conducted nine years apart with different methodologies. As such, it is difficult to be precise about what other variables may be contributing to the results. Issues such as the general trend of more travel, cheaper airfares, increasing price of petrol, could all contribute to the different results. Factors specifically linked to the nature of the different destinations, such as migratory issues, could also be an influencing factor. However, this analysis does highlight some significant differences, which indicates there is a significant role that the destination has in attracting VFRs. More research to explore this relationship would encourage understanding and assist in marketing efforts towards this group of travellers and their hosts. Whilst this study raises more questions than answers, it is in this way that this analysis also contributes to the field of knowledge.

Understanding more about the role of the host and destination in a whole tourism system seems important. This study is a step that assists in raising an understanding of this significant aspect of travel.

## REFERENCES

Albury-Wodonga (2007). Retrieved September 27 2007 online, <http://www.albury-wodonga.com/docs/albury-wodonga.htm>

Backer, E. (2003). VFR tourism – the forgotten tourism phenomenon. *Issues and Developments in Tourism Futures*, ed. H. Richins, Proceedings from the Second National Conference on Tourism Futures – Sustainable Growth, Strategic Alliances and Positive Futures in Challenging Times 2003, 1-12.

Backer, E. (2007). VFR Travel: An examination of the Expenditures of VFR Travellers and their Hosts. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 10 (4) 366-377

Backer, E. (2008). VFR Travellers: Visiting the destination or visiting the hosts? *Asian Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 2 (1) 60-70.

Braunlich, C. Nadkarni, N. (1995). The Importance of the VFR Market to the Hotel Industry. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, 6 (1) 38-47.

Bull, A. (1995). *The Economics of Travel and Tourism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Melbourne: Longman.

Encyclopædia Britannica, (2007) Retrieved September 27 2007, from Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9005481>

Greenwich Meantime (2007), Retrieved September 27 2007 online: <http://wwp.greenwichmeantime.com/time-zone/australia/>

Hay, B. (1996). An Insight into the European Experience: A Case Study on Domestic VFR Tourism within the UK. *VFR Tourism: Issues and Implications*, ed. Y. Raman, Proceedings from the Conference held at Victoria University of Technology, 52-66.

Jackson, R. (1990). VFR Tourism: Is It Underestimated? *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, 1 (2) 10-17.

Jackson, R. (2003). VFR Tourism: Is It Underestimated? (original 1990 article reprinted), *The Journal of Tourism Studies* 14 (1) 17-24.

King, B. (1996). VFR- A Future Research Agenda *VFR Tourism: Issues and Implications*, ed. Y. Raman, Proceedings from the Conference held at Victoria University of Technology, 85-89.

Kotler, P. Bowen, J. Makens, J. (2006). *Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Lehto, X. Morrison, A. O'leary, J. (2001). Does the Visiting Friends and Relatives' Typology Make a Difference? A study of the International VFR market to the United States, *Journal of Tourism Research*, 40 (November) 201-212.

Leiper, N. (2004). *Tourism Management*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, Australia: Pearson.

McKercher, B. (1994). *Report on a Study of Host Involvement in VFR Travel to Albury Wodonga*, Tourism Albury Wodonga.

Morrison, A. Hsieh, S. O'Leary, J. (1995). Segmenting the Visiting Friends and Relatives Market by Holiday Activity Participation. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*. 6 (1) 48-63.

Morrison, A. Woods, B. Pearce, P. Moscardo, G. Sung, H. (2000). Marketing to the visiting friends and relatives segment: An international analysis *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 6 (2) 102-118.

Seaton, A.V. (1994). Are relatives friends? Reassessing the VFR category in segmenting tourism markets *Tourism: The State of the Art*, ed. A.V. Seaton. Wiley: Chichester, 316-321.

Seaton, A. Palmer, C. (1997). Understanding VFR Tourism behaviour: the first five years of the United Kingdom tourism survey. *Tourism Management*, 18 (6) 345-355.

Seaton, A. Tagg, S. (1995). Disaggregating Friends and Relatives in VFR Tourism Research: The Northern Ireland evidence 1991- 1993. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, 6 (1) 6-18.

Sunshine Coast Australia (2007). Retrieved September 27 2007 online: <http://www.sunshinecoast-australia.com/100634.php>

Tourism New South Wales (2007). Travel to the Murray: Year ended June 2007.

Tourism Queensland (2006). Sunshine Coast Visitor Survey June 2006, Tourism Queensland Research Department.

Tourism Research Australia (2007). National Visitor Survey, YE June 2007.

Yaman, H. Ruhi (Ed.), (1996). *VFR Tourism: Issues and Implications*, Proceedings from the Conference held at Victoria University of Technology.

Young, C. Corsun, D. Baloglu, S. (2007). A Taxonomy of Hosts: Visiting Friends and Relatives. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34 (2) 497-516.