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# Revisiting VFR and Pleasure Segmentation for Urban Canadian Destinations

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## ABSTRACT

*Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) is a major motivation for a significant number of domestic visits to Canada's urban destinations. This paper uses existing literature and data to suggest that VFR is understated and undervalued by the tourism sector and operationalizes a new definition that incorporates trip purpose and accommodation use to reexamine the impact this form of tourism has on Canadian cities. Opportunities for growth of this segment are presented based on the results, recommending that VFR be viewed as a untapped market rather than a low value segment that cannot be influenced.*

**Keywords:** Visiting friends and relatives, leisure visitor segmentation, Canadian cities.

## INTRODUCTION

Segmenting visitors is important for destination marketing organizations whose business it is to attract a diverse range of customers. The most common form of segmentation is to separate visitors according to their main trip purpose into business, pleasure, visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and other (Seaton 1994). These segments are typically based on the self-reported main trip purpose of respondents and as Seaton (1994) states are “enshrined in the rubric of countless international, national, and regional visitor studies and standard to their analysis” (p. 316). Within this segmentation pleasure and VFR visitors combined can be considered ‘leisure’. It is suggested that the trip purpose variable alone may not be the most appropriate for destination marketers to understand their leisure visitors, primarily as many respondents who may be considered as VFR by marketers may in fact report pleasure as their main trip purpose (Backer, 2007; Backer, 2011; Moscardo et al., 2000; Seaton and Palmer, 1997). Confusion exists in the conceptualisation of VFR as a trip purpose, activity, use of accommodation, or any combination of these different measures. Because of this, it is plausible that the VFR market is misunderstood with opportunities wasted. Previous studies have considered similar issues in various global destinations including Australia (Backer, 2007; Backer, 2010; Moscardo et al., 2000), the UK (Seaton and Palmer, 1997), the U.S. (Hu and Morrison, 2001; Lehto et al., 2001) and Ghana (Asiedu, 2008), but none have yet looked at Canadian destinations. As a VFR destination, Canada shares some characteristics with other countries, but is unique enough to warrant further analysis due to its size, population makeup, and tourism product. In order for VFR to exist to a significant degree there must be a sizeable population that has relationships with people outside of the destination. Urban centres have high population density and attract new residents on an increasing basis (Statistics Canada, 2007), presenting urban destinations with a greater opportunity for VFR than rural less populated areas. This is confirmed by Seaton & Palmer (1997) who suggest that “the total of VFR tourism to a region and the proportionate concentration of VFR tourism in a region...varies in direct proportion to the size and density of the region's population” (p. 349), therefore leading this paper to focus on urban destinations. Current conceptualizations of VFR tourism that use trip purpose alone may lead to its value being understated and the potential for growth unrealised. In an attempt to improve the understanding of VFR and its potential as a market segment, the

purpose of this study is to re-define VFR presenting new opportunities for the tourism sector. The study uses Backer's (2007) conceptualization of VFR and relies on secondary analysis of existing tourism data. Descriptive statistics are used to illustrate the size of the market and highlight the importance of personal relationships in the tourism market. This new conceptualization of VFR is then used to explore the missed opportunities in terms of visitor behaviour and expenditures. The analysis revolves around the assertion that segmenting leisure visitors beyond trip purpose alone will provide a more useful description for VFR volume and travel behaviour that can be used by destination marketers

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definition and Measurement Issues

The literature available on VFR tourism is comparatively limited compared to other segments of the tourism industry (Backer, 2007; Lee et al., 2005; Morrison & O'Leary, 1995; Seaton & Palmer 1997; Seaton & Tagg, 1995; Young et al., 2007). The primary reason for this appears to be rooted in a lack of an accepted definition, leading to confusion and misperceptions. VFR can be thought of as a trip purpose, a trip activity and an accommodation use, an issue raised for the first time in Jackson's (1990) seminal paper. In terms of defining VFR it is evident that using the primary trip purposes of pleasure and VFR alone is not fully reflective of the multitude of traveller types (Lee et al., 2005, Moscardo et al., 2000). While VFR and pleasure are motivations for travel, it seems appropriate to incorporate accommodation use in further discussion of leisure visitors (Backer, 2007; Moscardo et al., 2000). Backer (2007) offers a definition of VFR as "a form of travel involving a visit whereby either (or both) the purpose of the trip or the type of accommodation involves visiting friends and/or relatives" (p. 369). Backer (2011) expands on this definition in a later article providing four leisure visitor segments based on accommodation use and trip reason with the sum of the first three categories equalling the total VFR number: Pure VFRs (PVFRs): VFR purpose and stay with friends or relatives; Commercial VFRs (CVFRs): VFR purpose and stay in commercial accommodation; Exploiting VFRs (EVFRs): Pleasure purpose and stay with friends or relatives and Non-VFRs: Pleasure purpose and stay in commercial accommodation (Table 1).

A recurring topic in the literature revolves around the heterogeneity of the VFR market (Lehto et al., 2001; Morrison et al., 1995; Seaton and Palmer, 2007; Seaton & Tagg, 1995). Undoubtedly there is a proportion of the VFR market that is purely motivated to spend time with friends or family and who have little interest in other activities. Conversely there are a number of VFR visitors who are motivated by a desire to experience a new destination and combine it with visiting friends or family (Lehto et al., 2001). Moscardo et. al. (2000) discuss these distinctions and argue that different visitors have various motivations and behaviours that require them to be viewed separately. They propose further sub-segments within VFR based on scope (domestic or international), effort (long or short haul), accommodation (commercial or with friends or relatives) and focus (visit friends, relatives or both). Seaton (1994) also stresses the need to consider the differences between visiting friends and visiting relatives, suggesting that each entails different motivations, expectations and obligations that lead to very different travel behaviours: "The VFR category can be seen as a conceptual aggregate, rather than a natural grouping that would be recognised by the actors who constitute it... It may draw attention to a significant number of people, but tells us comparatively little about them" (Seaton, 1994, p. 317).

**Table 1**  
**Leisure Visitor Segmentation**

		Accommodation Use	
		With Friends or Relatives	Commercial
Main Trip Purpose	VFR	PVFR	CVFR
	Pleasure	EVFR	Non-VFR

Adapted from Backer (2011).

Many tourism studies are based only the self-reported trip purpose of the respondent (Seaton, 1994) and therefore a number of visitors who stay with friends and relatives are recorded as pleasure. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that many who use the results from such studies are not instantly aware of this. This can lead to the volume of VFR being understated, reducing the perceived impact of the segment to a destination (Backer, 2010; Braunlich & Nadkarni, 1995; Morrison et al., 1995; Seaton & Palmer, 1997). The problems associated with understating VFR also impacts the perceived value and behaviour of vacation pleasure visitors who stay in paid accommodations as the data is diluted with those who are actually staying with friends or relatives. In addition the role that personal relationships between resident and visitor play in the level of tourism activity is undervalued. As a result of this, combined with pressure from the hotel community (Backer, 2007; Seaton & Palmer, 1997), destination marketers generally do not take advantage of the opportunities this market presents (Morrison et al., 2000).

### **What About The Host?**

VFR tourism, unlike all other tourism requires a personal relationship with a host. Whether providing accommodation or the motivation for the visit the residents' role in VFR is under researched. Word of mouth is one of the most sought after marketing channels and the VFR market relies on personal recommendations to a larger extent than perhaps all other tourism segments (Young et al., 2007). Aarsal et al. (2010) looked at advice offered to travellers by residents in online communities. They stress the importance of word of mouth marketing suggesting that peer reviews, whether face to face or online, are considered more up to date and reliable than industry sources. This aligns with Meis et al. (1995) who argued that "it is to Canada's benefit to ensure that Canadians themselves are well informed regarding tourist attractions, entertainment, sports and recreational activities, side trips, and other activities in the area where they live" (p. 32). A more engaged resident is a more informed cultural broker and will likely lead to more satisfying visitor experiences and greater word of mouth promotion. Morrison et al. (1995) continue this line of argument and claim that "in failing to establish long-term relationships with their own citizens and residents, (tourism marketers) may also be underutilising one of their most powerful marketing assets in influencing the flows and behaviour of VFR travellers" (p. 49).

The hosts in VFR not only influence their guests' behaviour, but are likely to attend events, visit attractions and eat meals out while entertaining. The impact that the host activity has on the local tourism industry is also under researched. Hosts likely participate in some portion of the same activities as their guests; to what extent has been contemplated but little empirical research has been carried out (Seaton & Palmer, 1997). One exception is a study by Young et al. (2007) who found four cluster groups of hosts with varying levels of influence and participation in their guests' activities. They estimated that resident 'tourism' spending in a County region of 1.7 million people totaled \$80 million (unfortunately they did not provide equivalent numbers for the visitors that would allow for comparison). The economic value of a

VFR visitor is therefore greater than the sum of their own spending as they are a catalyst for additional resident spending.

## **Low Value**

VFR is perceived to provide a destination with a low level of economic activity. Some studies however have found that VFR visitors can have similar spending patterns as pleasure visitors at restaurants, entertainment and other categories (Backer, 2007, Seaton & Palmer 1997). The perception that VFR visitors do not use paid accommodation is flawed, with several studies showing the contrary (Backer, 2009; Hu & Morrison, 2002; Lehto et al., 2001; Morrison & O’Leary, 1995; Seaton & Tagg, 1995). For example, in a study of the travel behaviour of residents of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin, Braunlich and Nadkarni (1995) compared the demographics of those who travelled for VFR with those who travelled for pleasure. They found that 21.4% of VFR visitors stayed in paid accommodations, compared with 57.1% of pleasure visitors. Of those who stayed in paid accommodation VFR visitors had a longer stay than pleasure visitors (5.7 nights versus 3.3) but a smaller daily spend (\$38.67 versus \$47.88) making the total VFR trip spend higher (\$220.42 versus \$158.00). Backer (2010) found that 26.0% of VFR visitors to the sunshine Coast in Australia used paid accommodation, representing 10.6% of all those who used paid accommodation. The fact that VFR visitors spend less overall is not contested, but the value to tourism destinations is still significant. Despite the lower yield of VFR visitors an advantage is that VFR tourism is affected to a lesser extent by seasonality than other leisure tourism and this helps offset the peak seasons providing restaurants and attractions with business in the quieter months, supporting tourism infrastructure which benefits the destination overall, ultimately making it a more attractive place for high yield pleasure visitors (Hu and Morrison, 2002; Lehto et al., 2001; Seaton & Palmer, 1997; Seaton & Tagg, 1995; Young et al., 2007).

In summary the literature suggests confusion in the conceptualization of what VFR includes, leading to misinformed perceptions about the value and missed opportunities for new growth. Backer (2008) states that “while any destination can attract VFRs because of the hosts, the attractiveness of the destination region may result in a longer length of VFR stay” (p. 67), and this plays well for the destinations in focus here as established tourism destinations.

## **METHODS**

### **Survey Sample**

The basis of the discussion for this study is from an analysis of a secondary data, the Travel Survey of Residents of Canada (TSRC) (Statistics Canada, 2010). The survey is conducted as a supplement to the Labour Force survey, conducted monthly. Respondents are asked about their past travel. The 2007 file is used here which includes responses from 88,712 Canadians. Only respondents who spent at least one night in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver or Ottawa and reported their trip purpose as VFR or pleasure are included, reflecting the study focus. These are the four most populous cities in the country. The survey lists several types of accommodation, but only those who stayed in paid accommodation (hotel, motel or B&B) or with friends or relatives are included. Those who only reported other types of accommodation (camping, resort, farm stay etc.) are excluded. An issue with ratio level measures such as trip nights and spending is that outliers can skew the data, affecting mean scores and misrepresenting the reality for the majority of respondents. Therefore only those who reported a trip of 21 nights or less are included. This brings the skewness down from +8.589 to +2.771, removing only 0.8% of responses. In addition skewness in total spending was limited to \$3,600, reducing

skewness from +4.356 to +2.518, excluding 1% of responses. This group of respondents collectively will be referred to as ‘Canadian urban leisure visitors’.

## Data Analysis

The first stage of analysis seeks to demonstrate that VFR is underestimated using the traditional method that segments leisure visitors by trip purpose alone. Descriptive statistics using weighted data will be used to show actual volumes of visitors, person-nights and expenditure. Although some visitor segments may have a higher propensity than others to spend more or participate in more activities the size of the market is important when considering the significance to a destination. Results will be presented to compare the volumes using the traditional method with the new method as per Backer’s (2007) original definition. In addition, Backer’s (2011) sub-segments are adapted and will be analysed also, labeled by trip purpose then accommodation. They are: VFR + FR (friends or relatives), VFR + Paid, Pleasure + FR and Pleasure + Paid. The TSRC allows respondents to report more than one type of accommodation, therefore two new segments are added: VFR + Both and Pleasure + Both. A simple cross tabulation shows the number of respondents in each category (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Respondents by Segment**

Trip Purpose	Accommodation			Total <i>n</i>
	FR <i>n</i>	Paid <i>n</i>	Both <i>n</i>	
VFR	3,006 (63.5)	196 (4.1)	85 (1.8)	3,287 (69.4)
Pleasure	603 (12.7)	756 (16.0)	87 (1.8)	1,446 (30.6)
Total	3,609 (76.3)	952 (20.1)	172 (3.6)	4,733 (100.0)

Percentages of total shown in parentheses.

The second stage of analysis will involve the use of inferential statistics on unweighted data to discuss the opportunities for Canada’s urban destinations to engage the VFR market. The use of weighted data with most inferential statistics becomes meaningless due to inflated sample sizes. These tests are therefore reserved for use with unweighted data only. Five specific activities were selected as most appropriate for urban destinations: attending a festival, museum or art gallery, historic site, play or a concert and spectator sports. Participation by each segment will be presented and chi square testing used to understand significance. Trip spend will be examined also using factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) to consider the effects of accommodation and trip purpose on visitor expenditure.

## RESULTS

### Visitor Volume, Expenditure and Person Nights

In 2007 there were 12.4 million Canadian urban leisure visitors spending a total of \$4.1 billion. Table 3 shows results for each of the six sub-segments and compares the results using the traditional method of trip purpose only, with Backer's (2007) definition of 'Total VFR' including accommodation use. Of these visitors 71.5% were travelling for VFR trip purpose, accounting for 52.1% of total spend. Under Backer's (2007) definition VFR represents 86% of visitors and 70.7% of total spend, a substantial increase. When looking at the six sub-segments it is clear that VFR visitors who stay with friends or relatives (VFR + FR) comprise the largest number of Canadian urban leisure visitors (66.7%) and total spending (42.9%). Pleasure visitors who stay with friends and family (PL + FR) are almost as many in number as those who stay in paid accommodation (PL + Paid), but account for around only half the expenditure.

**Table 3**  
**Visitor Volume and Spending**

Segment	n	Weighted Data Results			
		Visits	%	Total Spend \$	%
VFR+FR	3,006	8,291,262	66.7	1,767,256,060	42.9
VFR+Paid	196	445,217	3.6	290,180,607	7.0
VFR+Both	85	148,099	1.2	91,002,289	2.2
PL+FR	603	1,658,645	13.3	638,511,415	15.5
PL+Paid	756	1,743,350	14.0	1,210,271,387	29.3
PL+Both	87	142,928	1.1	126,479,888	3.1
<i>Trip Purpose</i>					
VFR	3,287	8,884,578	71.5	2,148,438,956	52.1
Pleasure	1,446	3,544,923	28.5	1,975,262,689	47.9
<i>Backer (2007)</i>					
Total VFR	3,977	10,686,151	86.0	2,913,430,258	70.7
Non-VFR	756	1,743,350	14.0	1,210,271,387	29.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,733</b>	<b>12,429,501</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4,123,701,645</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 4**  
**Person Nights**

Trip Purpose	Accommodation		
	FR	Paid	Total
VFR	20,865,000 (65.2)	1,129,200 (3.5)	21,994,200 (68.7)
Pleasure	5,854,100 (18.3)	4,152,300 (13.0)	10,006,400 (31.3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,719,100</b> <b>(83.5)</b>	<b>5,281,500</b> <b>(16.5)</b>	<b>32,000,600</b> <b>(100.0)</b>

Percentage of total shown in parentheses. Data is weighted to entire Canadian population.

The measurement of person-nights is useful for destination marketers and is illustrated in Table 4. It illustrates the value of each segment more explicitly than counting visitors alone. Almost two thirds (65.2%) of the person nights spent in the four cities by Canadian urban leisure visitors combined were by VFR visitors staying with friends and relatives. In total, more than 4 in 5 (83.5%) person nights spent by all Canadian urban leisure visitors were spent in the homes

of friends or relatives. The contribution VFR visitors make to the commercial accommodations sector is an important step in demonstrating the value to a key stakeholder group. VFR visitors spent 1.13 million nights in paid accommodation; this is 21.4% of all person nights spent by leisure visitors in paid accommodation, a substantial proportion.

## Activities

The volume of visitors who participated in each activity is depicted in Table 5. When results are compared using trip purpose and Backer's (2007) definition we can see the proportion for VFR increases substantially: from between 45-50% to around 70% for most activities. Around 40% of all Canadian urban leisure visitors who participated in the five categories were VFR visitors staying with friends and relatives. Pleasure visitors who stayed in paid accommodation were the second most populous group accounting for approximately 30% of Canadian urban leisure visitors who participated in most of these activities

**Table 5**  
**Participation in Activities**

	Play or Concert	%	Museum or Art Gallery	%	Spectator Sport	%	Historic Site	%	Festival	%
VFR+FR	503,003	45.7	391,902	39.8	296,572	41.6	310,305	41.7	216,448	42.9
VFR+Paid	25,332	2.3	43,326	4.4	32,272	4.5	46,067	6.2	8,151	1.6
VFR+Both	23,095	2.1	10,841	1.1	3,530	0.5	14,447	1.9	7,753	1.5
PL+FR	208,694	18.9	207,150	21.0	105,820	14.8	95,575	12.8	88,591	17.6
PL+Paid	327,184	29.7	292,326	29.7	264,319	37.1	242,395	32.5	142,054	28.2
PL+Both	14,277	1.3	39,354	4.0	10,855	1.5	36,123	4.8	41,336	8.2
<i>By Purpose</i>										
VFR	551,430	50.1	446,069	45.3	332,374	46.6	370,819	49.8	232,352	46.1
Pleasure	550,155	49.9	538,831	54.7	380,993	53.4	374,093	50.2	271,980	53.9
<i>Backer (2007)</i>										
Total VFR	774,401	70.3	692,574	70.3	449,049	62.9	502,517	67.5	362,279	71.8
Non-VFR	327,184	29.7	292,326	29.7	264,319	37.1	242,395	32.5	142,054	28.2
Total	1,101,585	100.0	984,900	100.0	713,368	100.0	744,912	100.0	504,332	100.0

Data is weighted to entire Canadian population.

Chi square testing shows the propensity for each sub-segment to participate in each activity (Table 6). It is evident that VFR visitors who stayed with friends and relatives are the least active segment. Pleasure visitors who stayed in paid accommodation or in both types of accommodation are the most active segments, with double figure participation in most activities. A distinction can be seen between pleasure and VFR visitors who stay with friends and relatives with pleasure visitors far more active than VFR, suggesting that there is a perceptual difference between the two trip purposes. Pleasure visitors who stay with friends and relatives have fairly high levels of participation for most activities, in particular attending a play or concert (15.4%) and visiting a museum or art gallery (12.3%).

**Table 6**  
**Participation in Activities**

Segment	n	Activities				
		Play or Concert	Museum or Art Gallery	Spectator Sport	Historic Site	Festival <sup>a</sup>
VFR+FR	3,006 (100.0)	190 (6.3)	169 (5.6)	122 (4.1)	105 (3.5)	74 (2.5)
VFR+Paid	196 (100.0)	19 (9.7)	25 (12.8)	16 (8.2)	19 (9.7)	6 (3.1)
VFR+Both	85 (100.0)	15 (17.6)	10 (11.8)	4 (4.7)	10 (11.8)	5 (5.9)
PL+FR	603 (100.0)	93 (15.4)	74 (12.3)	49 (8.1)	44 (7.3)	38 (6.3)
PL+Paid	756 (100.0)	159 (21.0)	132 (17.5)	139 (18.4)	99 (13.1)	50 (6.6)
PL+Both	87 (100.0)	12 (13.8)	20 (23.0)	10 (11.5)	20 (23.0)	17 (19.5)
Total	4733 (100.0)	488 (10.3)	430 (9.1)	340 (7.2)	297 (6.3)	190 (4.0)
$\chi^2$		168.927	139.557	190.618	149.993	95.909
p		<.000	<.000	<.000	<.000	<.000

Parenttheses show row percentage.

<sup>a</sup>2 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.41.

### Trip Expenditures

A factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) on trip expenditures was conducted (Table 7). Expenditure on accommodations was excluded to allow a fairer comparison between segments on their impact on the tourism sector beyond the accommodation industry (Seaton and Palmer, 1997). The results show differences between those who stayed in paid accommodation (M=506.75, SD=464.745), those who stayed with friends or relatives (M=296.58, SD=397.19) and those who used both (M=717.63, SD=639.00) as significant (F=71.194, p=<.001). Differences among trip purposes were also shown to be significant (F=32.798, p=<.001) between pleasure visitors (M=504.36, SD=518.31) and VFR visitors (M=287.90, SD=380.56). However, there was no interaction effect of significance between accommodation use and trip purpose (F=1.901, p=0.150). In other words, regardless of accommodation used pleasure visitors spent more than VFR visitors, and regardless of trip purpose those who use both forms of accommodation spend more than those in paid accommodation, who in turn spend more than those staying with friends and relatives, even when accommodation costs are excluded.

**Table 7**  
**Factorial ANOVA of Expenditures Excluding Accommodation costs**

Segment	Total Spend Less Accommodation			F-ratio	p
	n	Mean	Std.dev.		
VFR+FR	3,002	269.02	362.33	1.901	0.150
VFR+Paid	194	433.70	457.97		
VFR+Both	83	629.67	556.63		
PL+FR	595	435.59	518.26		
PL+Paid	731	526.13	478.79		
PL+Both	83	805.58	704.35		

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Trip Purpose	5,796,244	1	5,796,244	32.798	< 0.001
Accommodation	25,163,429	2	12,581,714	71.194	< 0.001
Interaction: Purpose x Acc.	671,872	2	335,936	1.901	0.150
Within Groups Error	827,423,482	4,682	176,724		
Total	1,483,201,700	4,688			

## DISCUSSION

Several points of discussion are generated from the results. Primarily it is clear that a large proportion of Canadian urban leisure visitors have personal relationships with residents of the cities they are visiting. In total 86% of all Canadian urban leisure visitors either stayed with a friend or relative, or travelled to visit a friend or relative (or both). Although they have a lower trip spend than the non-VFR segment they still accounted for 70.7% of all dollars spent. The impact is only amplified when the unknown amount of spending associated with their hosts is taken into consideration (Young et al., 2007). It is argued that the role of residents as influencers is an opportunity that could be developed by marketers. Ultimately a destination could decide to engage residents and their guests in ways that will encourage word of mouth promotion, increased participation in activities (including use of paid accommodations) and raise civic pride among residents by tweaking and realigning traditional marketing efforts.

The results also demonstrated that pleasure visitors who stay in paid accommodation are indeed the highest yield, making them an appropriate and sensible target for marketers. They account for 14% of the visits but 29.3% of spend, and have the highest participation rates for almost all activities. Further analysis on this group for individual destinations would be beneficial for marketing efforts. Although the high spending market is desirable it is important to consider the cost of conversion compared to VFR market needs investigation. It is possible that a VFR visitor can be more easily influenced because of their personal relationships than pleasure visitors. Meis et al. (1995) note that it is far more efficient to keep an existing customer than to find a new one. The VFR market naturally has a high rate of repeat visitation and engaging them and their hosts with new things to do, providing them with a new reason to visit could produce results. The researchers point out that even though a frequent visitor to Canada from the U.S. may spend less per trip than a new visitor, the total value of that one frequent visitor is far greater than the one new visitor. They found that someone who has visited Canada

five or more times “spent up to 20 times more over the duration of the travel life cycle than One Trip Visitors” (p. 31). A new visitor costs more to attract and is less likely to return.

It is recommended that the VFR market be viewed as an opportunity rather than a low spending market that cannot be influenced (Backer, 2007; Morrison & O’Leary, 1995; Morrison et al., 2000; Young et al., 2007). There are sub-segments of the VFR market who are likely receptive to marketing initiatives targeted at host and guest groups. Those who state pleasure as their trip purpose but who stay with friends and relatives are the most attractive group for marketers. They are large in number and active in comparison to others. Tsao-Fang et al. (1995) found that VFR visitors from Holland did less than their pleasure counterparts, but their activities were more social and focused on time together, and the results here support that. Further analysis on this group for each individual destination could enlighten marketing efforts.

Those who stayed with both friends or relatives and in paid accommodation had the highest spend and activity rate no matter what trip purpose they reported. They are both small in number and their activity participation was high, but varied. Further analysis into this small but high yield group could provide inspiration for creative marketing campaigns that encourage visitors and hosts as well to take side trips to other destinations within the longer VFR trip (Hu & Morrison, 2002).

## **CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study was limited in part due to the structure of the TSRC survey. In particular there is no way to ascertain whether a VFR trip was to visit friends or relatives. As discussed previously this would provide a further insight and future primary research should incorporate this key variable. VFR as an activity is also not captured. Further, this study is just a snapshot in time and does not provide analysis on temporal trends. In addition it only looks at the Canadian market, future analysis should include international visitation. The international market is typically less familiar with Canada as a destination and perhaps provides even greater opportunities in markets that are relatively unaware of Canada’s urban destinations. International VFR markets have been found to follow the historical patterns of immigration (Jackson, 1990; Seaton & Tagg, 1995) which bodes well for Canada’s cities with high numbers of first and second generation immigrants. Just as VFR visitors are not homogenous hosts are varied too (Young et al., 2007). Further research into the social and cultural impacts of VFR could lead to a discussion on how tourism could be used to encourage residents to engage in their community more. VFR campaigns directed at immigrants for example could aid integration. Local governments and community groups could partner with marketing agencies for this goal.

As already mentioned, an investigation into the return on investment of marketing to the VFR market would be useful. Even though certain visitor groups may spend and do more during their stay it is possible that a VFR visitor offers far greater value in terms of how many resources it requires to convert a new or return visit. The return on investment should include the likelihood of return trips, host expenditures (including vacation time taken to entertain), the effect of word of mouth promotion produced by VFR and the impact that VFR has on seasonality enabling the year round operation of services used by residents and high spending tourists alike.

In summary the results have concurrently added weight to the view that the pleasure visitor who stays in paid accommodation is indeed the highest yield, but have also presented the VFR market and its sub-segments in a different light, perhaps demonstrating that there is indeed potential in engaging this market. A successful VFR campaign means not only convincing outsiders to visit, but encouraging and preparing residents to play host and become destination

ambassadors. In order to engage with the VFR segment marketing should be specifically targeted to visitors and hosts, offering them opportunities to enjoy the destination while providing opportunities to enjoy their relationships (Morrison & O'Leary, 1995). Current perceptions of the VFR market are hampered by the conceptual definition employed by those who use tourism data and need to be reviewed to take advantage of the data available and potential in this untapped market.

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