

Thesis Abstract

No. 1

Registration Number:	☐ "KOU" ☐ "OTSU" No. *Office use only	Name:	KASHIWAGI, Sho
Title of Thesis: Reconceptualising and Marketing Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) Travel: The Case of Japanese VFR Travellers and Hosts in Australia			
Summary of Thesis: This study examined and indicated reconceptualisation and marketing of visiting friends and relatives (VFR) travel using Japanese outbound VFR market in Australia as well as other four English-speaking countries (Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US). The first chapter offered backgrounds, aims and significance of the current study. VFR travel is one of the largest travel markets in the world. According to UNWTO, out of 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals worldwide in 2018, the share of VFR travel was 27.0%, which equates to approximately 380 million VFR travellers. This figure is second only to leisure travel. Regarding Japanese outbound travel, there were approximately one million VFR travellers in 2018. Discussions about the classification, concept and definition of VFR travel have been ongoing since the early 1990s. This illustrates the difficulty and complexity of understanding, conceptualising and defining VFR travel. Such difficulty and complexity are primarily caused by interactions between various stakeholders. VFR travel involves not only travellers, destinations and the tourism industry but also international students, educational institutions and migrants at the destination. In Australia, the increase of the Japanese VFR market can be expected because of the vast number of Japanese students and migrants. Based on these backgrounds, this study aimed at expanding the concept of VFR travel by investigating additional definitional factors of VFR travel and by developing an extended VFR definition and model. The other aim of this study was to explore attributes of VFR hosts and VFR travellers from an Asian perspective using the Japanese outbound VFR market. Specifically, the research objectives were (1) to identify the hosting behaviours and experiences of VFR hosts, (2) to examine the travel behaviours of VFR travellers and non-VFR travellers, (3) to extract hidden VFR travellers from the category of non-VFR travellers and (4) to embody Japanese VFR travel for marketing purposes. The second chapter of this thesis was the literature review, which addressed current understanding of VFR travel by reviewing previous, relevant studies. Several studies have used both the purpose for travel and the type of accommodation to define VFR travel, emphasising the importance of both factors in their definitions. That said, even when both the purpose for travel and the type of accommodation are used to define VFR travel, travellers who have a plan and factual purpose to visit friends or relatives can still be categorised as non-VFR travellers if they stay in commercial accommodation and regard themselves as leisure travellers. It was necessary to consider an additional definitional factor to appropriately categorise VFR travel and to develop an appropriate definitional model of VFR travel. Chapter three presented a fuller discussion of the methods used in this study. This study applied an exploratory sequential design and procedures of a mixed methods approach. An exploratory sequential design began by conducting a qualitative study on VFR hosts, after which a quantitative study is performed on VFR travellers. Chapter four qualitatively explored the hosting behaviours and experiences of VFR hosts using the			

case of Japanese hosts in Australia. This study interviewed 71 VFR hosts and the participants were recruited using a snowball sampling method. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were then conducted with the participants to explore their hosting behaviours and experiences. All the recorded data were analysed using the thematic analysis method. The current study used Australia as a case study because the VFR market is important to inbound tourism in the country and also because of the recent increase in Japanese VFR travel to Australia from 37,090 in 2013 to 51,774 in 2018 and 2013. This phase explored that student hosts and migrant hosts played important roles in the visits of their friends and relatives (e.g. the purpose of travel, a trigger of travel and a destination choice factor). Issues or struggles were also identified in this phase, such as the difficulty involved in caring for VFR travellers, choosing a variety of things for them to do during their stay and language issues.

Chapter five quantitatively examined the travel behaviours and characteristics of 500 Japanese VFR travellers who had planned and met their friends or relatives in five English-speaking countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US). Questions in an online survey were focused on their travel behaviours, such as total travel length, travel expenditures and travel information source. The data were analysed using a Mann-Whitney *U* test and a Kruskal-Wallis *H* test. The investigation of these elements focused on the comparison of various pairs and groups, including between VFR travellers and non-VFR travellers, between VFs and VRs and between first-timers and repeaters. As a key finding of this phase, the comparison between 164 VFR travellers and 336 non-VFR travellers identified that the two groups had some similar travel behaviours. It identified that 86 samples were hidden VFR travellers in the non-VFR group categorised by the existing two definitional factors: travel purpose and accommodation type. The influence of VFR hosts, including invitations and information from the hosts, illuminated HVFRs and was regarded as an additional VFR definitional factor. It indicated a VFR definitional triangle comprising the four VFR types and the three definitional factors.

In Chapter six, the embodiment of Japanese VFR travel was identified based on the discussion of VFR hosts and VFR travellers. Japanese VFR travels frequently coincided with a series of flows concerning the life transitions of VFR hosts at the destination, including studying, working, getting married, giving birth and afterwards. This chapter investigated that marketing VFR travel should be collaboratively conducted by various stakeholders, including destination marketing organisations, governmental bodies, educational institutions, travel agents, accommodations, airlines, and VFR hosts. Specifically, this chapter proposed several marketing strategies, such as an offer by accommodations companies and airlines to set VFR rates and services, an introduction of the discounted passport renewal fee for repeat VFR travellers and promotional approaches to Japanese VFR hosts, instead of VFR travellers.

Base on the increase of direct flights between Japan and Australia or the share of VFR market (14%) out of the total Japanese market in the UK, the potential to increase Japanese VFR market in Australia was also proposed.

This study empirically contributed to the reconceptualisation and marketing of VFR travel. It thereby expanded knowledge about VFR travel from the qualitative perspective of VFR hosts and from the quantitative perspective of VFR travellers.

Keyword: VFR, Definitional model, Definitional factor, Marketing, Japan