



Immigrants, their Visitors, and their Tourism Activity

What is the issue?

Residents bring people to our destinations, affect what activities they do, and often join in leisure activities they would not otherwise participate in. However, residents are rarely engaged as hosts as visiting friends and relatives (VFR) travel is both undervalued and misunderstood. There are, however, significant potential benefits for residents, tourists, and communities who embrace and encourage VFR.

What did the researcher do?

The common definition of VFR was challenged. Typically visitors are categorised as either Pleasure or VFR depending on their answer to the question "Why are you visiting?" However, many people who say "vacation" are categorized as 'pleasure' but are actually staying with friends or relatives, diminishing the perceived value and occurrence of personal relationships between residents and visitors. A more inclusionary understanding of VFR that includes the use of accommodation was applied to existing data on international visitors to Toronto to show how many visitors actually know someone in the city. In addition, qualitative interview with immigrants about their hosting experiences shed light on how they attract and direct visitors around their communities. Further, hosting was seen to encourage tourism related behaviour among residents developing attachment to the new community.

Why is this research Useful?

This research helps demonstrate the substantial volume of international visitors who actually know someone in the destination, giving quantitative justification for engaging residents as influencers of tourism behavior. In addition, the qualitative results give an emotional explanation of how hosting by immigrants is an important and powerful experience, helping practitioners understand how having friends and family come to visit is an important and distinct experience with service and marketing implications.

What were the outcomes?

Key findings indicated:

- Of all international leisure visitors to Toronto, 7 in 10 knew someone in the city.
- Between 2000 and 2010 the proportion of international leisure visitors who were VFR rose from 50% to 70%.
- 28% of person nights spent in hotels by international visitors are by VFR visitors
- Between 65% and 74% of international leisure visitors who go to zoos, aquariums, festivals, cultural performances and sports events are visiting a friend or relative, accompanied by an unknown number of resident hosts.
- Newcomers are ambassadors, promoting their new communities to their home networks, giving reasons for many people to visits, and take pride in sharing and their new place of residence and fosters a sense of pride and settlement.

About the Researcher

Tom Griffin is an Assistant Professor at the Ted Rogers School of Management and his work focuses on destination marketing and visiting friends and relatives travel.

Citation

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