

VFR tourism and intersecting global mobilities: Experiences of international PhD students in new Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the VFR tourism behaviour of international PhD students in New Zealand. Both quantitative (419 online survey responses) and qualitative (six focus groups) methods were used. The results showed considerable participation of international PhD students in VFR tourism during their studies, although at relatively low travel frequency (1–3 times per year). Students undertook a wide range of activities when travelling to visit their friends and relatives, and often stayed with the visited friends or relatives. The findings also indicate a number of travel behavioural differences and similarities between the VF and VR categories. The study recognises potential growth of non-traditional forms of VFR tourism such as VFR tourism in a third place, and VFR in transit. A conceptual framework was proposed to help describe spatial flows of VFR tourism. Overall, this paper adds to the understanding of the VFR tourism phenomenon in the global mobile context.

1. Introduction

Going to another country to pursue education has become a growing, global trend. In New Zealand, export education was not popular until the 1980s, when the government started introducing legislation to empower tertiary institutions to recruit more full-fee-paying international students (Marriott, Plessi, & Pu, 2010). Economic evaluation reports show that international education is the fourth largest export sector for New Zealand, valued at \$5.1 billion, and supports 48,500 jobs across the country (Education New Zealand ENZ, 2018).

The importance of international students as a tourism market has been noted in the literature (Gardiner, King, & Wilkins, 2013; Glover, 2011; Varasteh, Marzuki, & Rasoolimanesh, 2015). Not only does international education contribute to the local economy, but it also benefits local communities via increased cultural understanding, connections and networks. For these reasons, it is crucial that a greater understanding of students' tourism experiences in the host country is attained.

Most studies to date have examined international university students as a whole; travel behavioural nuances of sub-groups are not well understood. This paper narrows the knowledge gap in the latter area by looking at one specific aspect of travel, Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) tourism, and one specific sub-group of students, international PhD students. It also takes a novel approach by disassembling the component parts of VFR, namely VF (visiting friends) and VR (visiting

relatives) to examine any differences and similarities in these forms of experience. Within each form, the experiences of 'visiting' (being a guest) and 'being visited' (being a host) are also explored separately.

In recent years, the New Zealand government and tertiary education system have actively encouraged international students around the world to undertake PhD studies in New Zealand by providing competitive advantages such as charging domestic (instead of international) tuition fees, unlimited work entitlement, and visa categories for family members (Education New Zealand ENZ, 2016). The resulting growth in numbers of international postgraduate students makes New Zealand an ideal study context for this topic area.

There are several studies based in New Zealand that have examined the leisure behaviour of international students, although a majority have focused on the Chinese student market. For instance, Ryan and Zhang (2007) examined the holiday behaviour of Chinese students in New Zealand and confirmed that they travel significantly while studying in the country for various reasons, ranging from relaxation, adventure, and exploration to looking for career opportunities. International students are an important market to the country's export education. Studies examining tourism behaviour and experiences of international PhD students in New Zealand should, therefore, not only be beneficial to the tourism industry but also to the export education sector. This line of reasoning supports the practical merits of the current study.

The relationship between VFR tourism and international education

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is an example of interacting global mobilities. Examining how these different mobilities intersect and affect each other adds to the understanding of global mobilities. Literature on travel behaviour, including VFR tourism, of international students, is reviewed in the next section. Then, the methods used in the study are described. The fourth section presents relevant results, followed by a discussion of how these results broaden current theoretical understandings of the VFR tourism phenomenon. The paper concludes with key findings, their implications and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature review

The travel behaviour of international students is distinctive; typically, they stay longer than international tourists, but have shorter residency in the country of study than permanent residents. They often undertake short trips (mostly within their host country), travel with friends and/or with other international students, partners or family and are often highly budget conscious (Gardiner et al., 2013; Glover, 2011). Differences in travel behaviour exist among international students in terms of travel preferences (accommodation type, style of eating, travel companion, purpose of travel, and time of travel) and activities; and such differences may be influenced by several demographic factors, including nationality, age, gender, marital status, level of education, source of finance, length of residency and current university (Varasteh et al., 2015).

VFR tourism is still an under researched area (Backer & King, 2015). There is still no single universal definition of VFR tourism, and that hinders a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. VFR tourism is usually accepted as a form of travel whereby the purpose of the trip or the type of accommodation, or both, involves visiting friends and relatives (Backer, 2007, p.369). More recently, Munoz, Griffin, and Humbracht (2017) defined VFR mobility as a form of mobility that is influenced by a host and involves a face-to-face interaction between the host and the visitor within the destination (Munoz et al., 2017). Such definitions emphasise the host–guest interaction and the hospitality received from the host by the guest.

Kashiwagi, Nagai, and Furutani (2020) suggested that the boundaries around purpose of trip and type of accommodation in current definitions of VFR tourism might have omitted some VFR experiences. Their study examined the “hidden VFRs” group whose VFR tourism behaviour appeared to be influenced by hosts in ways of receiving visit invitations or trip related information. The authors also suggested that such influence of VFR hosts should be considered as a definitional factor. However, their study focused on VFR trips of Japanese to other Japanese friends (or relatives) in Western countries. The cultural difference between the participants’ and of the visited places might have influenced the likelihood and significance of information needs that were reported by the participants. Nevertheless, recent studies recognise the important role of hosts in defining VFR tourism, and emphasise the need to expand the current definitions to capture the VFR phenomenon more comprehensively.

The current study adopts the definition by Backer (2007, p.369) that defines VFR travel 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. This study also considers the spatial and time-bound features of a VFR trip that requires a distance of over 15 km one-way and at least an overnight stay as proposed by Boyne, Carswell, and Hall (2002). These spatial and time-bound features help make it clearer for one to identify a VFR trip. Incorporating these features also enables comparison of the findings with previous studies that adopt the same definition of VFR tourism.

International students’ contribution to VFR tourism manifests in several ways. They can be potential VFR travellers (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003; Ryan & Zhang, 2007), or act as a pull factor that motivates friend and family visits by being both the reason for visits and providing the role of hosts (Liu & Ryan, 2011; Taylor, Shanka, & Pope, 2004).

Recommendations from international students may also influence their families’ and friends’ choices of activities and attractions to visit (Lockyer & Ryan, 2007). Additionally, there is a high possibility of them making return visits for various reasons, including leisure, VFR and business (Shanka & Taylor, 2003). Hence, the influence of international students in generating VFR visits can be considered a significant contributing factor to the tourism industry.

The university environment, as both an academic and sociocultural context, may help with the development of relationships that then serve as a foundation for generating VFR tourism. While acknowledging the importance of university students in generating VFR traffic, Bischoff and Koenig-Lewis (2007) overlooked the diversity of characteristics within this population by considering them as a homogenous market. Most studies have examined university students at undergraduate levels. The VFR tourism behaviour of those at the postgraduate levels remains under studied. The current paper focuses on international PhD students to reduce this gap in understanding VFR travel behaviour across different groups.

Typically, VFR tourism has been understood as involving one party visiting another at his/her place of residence and usually generating a host-guest relationship. Increasing mobilities have led to an increase in people travelling to locations that are not the place of residence of either party to meet each other (Janta, Cohen, & Williams, 2015). This specific instance, labelled *VFR tourism in a third place* (VFR3rd) by Tran, Moore, and Shone (2018), has not been well studied.

VFR3rd highlights both a gap in understanding the phenomenon of VFR tourism and a new direction in VFR tourism development. As a form of VFR travel, it may appeal to international students for several benefits, including opportunities to visit a new place, to escape from the immediate study environment and reconnect with loved ones, and to dispense with the hosting responsibilities and pressure that would exist in more typical VFR experiences (Tran et al., 2018). The topic of VFR3rd, therefore, deserves more investigation. Through the examination of VFR tourism of international PhD students in New Zealand, this study also provides relevant findings on this type of VFR tourism.

3. Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach; i.e., it included both quantitative (an online structured survey) and qualitative (focus groups) techniques. Research participants were international PhD students enrolled at universities in New Zealand. Data collection was from February to June 2017. The initial channel used to recruit respondents for the online survey was via email. Later, recruiting messages were sent to representatives of the universities, as well as distributed on postgraduate newsletters, Facebook postings, and via other contact details available publicly on the university websites. Copies of these recruiting messages are presented in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. Appendix 3 provides details of the questionnaire used for the online survey.

The focus groups were conducted subsequent to the online survey, and the focus group participants were recruited via the online survey. Each focus group discussion lasted approximately 60 min. The research participants covered a range of nationalities, age, length of stay in New Zealand, areas of study, and stages in their PhD studies. At each focus group discussion, participants were also provided with a form to collect demographic information and any thoughts that they may not have wished to discuss with the group. A list of interview questions for focus groups and the form to collect participants’ notes are provided in Appendix 4 and Appendix 5, respectively.

At the end, a total of 449 responses were received. During the data entry process, any responses that had substantially low level of completion or did not fit the studied group (i.e., responses from students who were not international PhD students) were discarded. This resulted in 419 completed questionnaires that were usable for analysis.

Moreover, six focus groups were conducted. The number of participants in each focus group varied between 2 and 6 students, and there were 18 participants in total from six focus groups. The main analytical techniques used included descriptive and inferential statistics for the closed-ended questions. Thematic coding and content analysis were used for the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and the data from the focus groups. Pseudonyms were used for the research participants, and where applicable, quotations were provided to illustrate the findings.

4. Research participants' characteristics

4.1. Online survey

The group of 419 questionnaire respondents exhibited a wide range of backgrounds. Most were in the age groups of 30–39 years old and 20–29 years old (50.4% and 40.1% of the sample, respectively). The majority of the respondents came from Asia (64.7%). The two most common family statuses were “single without children” (43.2%) and “married with children” (23.6%).

The respondents' length of stay in New Zealand ranged from 1 to 156 months, with an average of 24.77 months (SD = 20). A plurality of respondents were in the PhD proposal development stage (27.4%). Those who were in the initial stages (i.e., PhD proposal development, preparation for fieldwork, and research fieldwork) made up 57.7% (n = 242) of the respondents. Most respondents were studying *Science* (31.5%, n = 132) or *Business and Commerce* (19.6%, n = 82). Responses also indicated that 46.1% (n = 193) of the respondents had had previous overseas study experience, either in New Zealand or other countries. Approximately 16% (n = 67) of the respondents also indicated that they had visited New Zealand prior to their current educational experience. Having prior visits to New Zealand might mean a higher level of familiarity with the country's environment and culture. This could, in turn, affect students' ability to make friends and their interest in travelling in the country.

The extent of the respondents' social connections in New Zealand before, and after, their arrival is presented in [Table 1](#).

The proportion of respondents who had friend and family connections in New Zealand increased following their arrival for their PhD study, from 34.3% to 87% of the respondents. The numbers of those who did not, and still do not, have any connections in New Zealand decreased significantly from 65.7% (n = 274) to 13% (n = 54). The increase in established connections after coming to New Zealand reflects the likelihood of social networking activities undertaken during students' PhD studies.

4.2. Focus groups

Participants of the six focus groups were also diverse in relation to nationality, gender, length of stay, and field of study. There was at least one representative for most continents including North and Central America, South America, Asia, and Africa. Their fields of study were also varied, ranging from Education, Health, and Management to other

Table 1
Survey respondent contacts in New Zealand before and after commencing PhD study.

| Relationship | Before PhD study commenced | | After PhD study commenced | |
|--------------|----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Friends | 111 | 26.5 | 309 | 73.7 |
| Relatives | 17 | 4.0 | 9 | 2.2 |
| Both | 15 | 3.6 | 45 | 10.7 |
| None | 274 | 65.4 | 54 | 12.9 |
| Missing | 2 | 0.5 | 2 | 0.5 |
| Total | 419 | 100.0 | 419 | 100.0 |

Social Sciences. While there were many online survey respondents who studied in the field of Sciences, none of the focus group participants were studying in this field. The focus group participants' length of stay in New Zealand varied from 10 to 60 months. Despite the small number of participants, diversity in the focus groups meant that the collected data reflected different perspectives and backgrounds. Such diversity may also have had an impact on their VFR travel behaviour, and consequently, their VFR travel experiences.

5. Results

5.1. Participation in VFR tourism

A high level of involvement in VFR tourism was found from the survey respondents, with 73.3% (n = 307) of them having had some VFR experiences since their arrival in New Zealand; and only 26.7% (n = 112) of them had not had any VFR tourism experience. These two subsets of the quantitative data (one consisting of those who *had* had some VFR tourism experience, and the other of those who *had not*) were extracted and used for further analysis to inform the findings and discussions in this paper.

The involvement in VFR tourism of the 307 respondents who reported having had VFR experiences during their PhD studies is described in [Table 2](#).

Travelling to visit friends was usually domestic (51%, n = 128), whereas travelling to visit relatives was mostly international (78.7%, n = 159). A smaller number of respondents had undertaken both domestic and international travel for VFR purposes, generally to visit friends (29.5%, n = 74) rather than relatives (7.4%, n = 15). In terms of receiving visits, visits by friends were more common and normally from within New Zealand (45.2%, n = 99) while most visits by relatives originated overseas (75.7%, n = 106). Overall, VF tourism seemed to be more popular than VR tourism.

5.2. VFR travel frequency and timing over the years of study

Four levels of episodic travel frequency were identified in the questionnaire for the respondents to choose from: never; 1–3 times; 3–5 times; and, more than 5 times. These categories were converted to four levels: never, low, moderate, and high, respectively, for the purposes of chi-square analysis. VFR travel frequency was examined across three periods: within the first year; within the second year; and from the third year onward. The results are presented in [Tables 3 and 4](#). The figures provided in the tables are the count of responses (rather than respondents). Depending on the respondents' length of stay, some respondents might account for more than one response. Within each time period and each category (VF or VR), chi-square tests were conducted to check the difference in number of responses received for each frequency category. The ‘moderate’ and ‘high’ categories were combined, due to the low number of responses received for these categories.

Examining the VF category for the first year, the result of this analysis indicates that the pattern of frequencies was non-random, $\chi^2(2, N = 471) = 50.84, p < .001$. Similar results were found for the second year [$\chi^2(2, N = 318) = 18.15, p < .001$], and from the third

Table 2
Participation in VFR tourism after the commencement of PhD study.

| From | Visiting | | Being visited by | |
|----------------------------|------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|
| | Friends | Relatives | Friends | Relatives |
| | | | | |
| Outside NZ | 49 (19.5%) | 159 (78.7%) | 61 (27.9%) | 106 (75.7%) |
| Both within and outside NZ | 74 (29.5%) | 15 (7.4%) | 59 (26.9%) | 12 (8.6%) |
| Total | 251 (100%) | 202 (100%) | 219 (100%) | 140 (100%) |

Table 3
VF travel frequency.

| | VF | | | | | |
|--|---------------|--------|---------------|--------------------|--------|---------------|
| | Domestic only | | | International only | | |
| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 onward | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 onward |
| Never | 88 | 65 | 62 | 142 | 82 | 78 |
| Low (1–3 times per year) | 144 | 69 | 42 | 77 | 72 | 39 |
| Moderate (3–5 times per year) and high (over 5 times per year) | 45 | 26 | 18 | 5 | 4 | 5 |

Table 4
VR travel frequency.

| | VR | | | | | |
|--|---------------|--------|---------------|--------------------|--------|---------------|
| | Domestic only | | | International only | | |
| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 onward | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 onward |
| Never | 142 | 92 | 77 | 100 | 53 | 59 |
| Low (1–3 times per year) | 38 | 29 | 17 | 108 | 100 | 55 |
| Moderate (3–5 times per year) and high (over 5 times per year) | 9 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 2 |

year onward [$\chi^2(2, N = 244) = 9.29, p < .001$]. An inspection of the table of frequencies for these variables shows that, within each period, the VF travel frequencies of the students exhibits a distinguishable pattern of responses across the frequency categories; namely, a high proportion of students did not travel to visit their friends, particularly when this involved international travel. Among those who did travel to visit their friends, ‘low’ frequency was more frequently reported than a ‘moderate and high’ frequency. In addition, domestic VF travel was more common than international VF travel across all three periods.

Non-random patterns were also found for the VR category in all three periods: $\chi^2(2, N = 401) = 41.59, p < .001$ for the first year, $\chi^2(2, N = 282) = 49.27, p < .001$ for the second year, and $\chi^2(2, N = 215) = 22.52, p < .001$ for the third year onward. Similar to the VF responses, a high proportion of students indicated that they did not travel to visit their relatives during their PhD studies. Among those who did, the ‘low’ frequency category was noticeably more popular than the ‘moderate’ and ‘high’ frequency categories. The number of responses received for international VR travel was also substantially higher than for domestic VR travel in the ‘low’ frequency category.

In addition to travel frequency, the focus groups provided data concerning the occasions and timing for when VFR travel of international PhD students might have been undertaken. Some frequently

Table 5a
Undertaken activities by types of VF travel.

| Activity | Domestic | | | Total | International | | | Total |
|--|--------------|-----------------|------|-------|---------------|-----------------|------|-------|
| | With friends | Without friends | Both | | With friends | Without friends | Both | |
| Natural attractions (e.g., Visiting the beach, mountain, eco-parks, etc) | 156 | 19 | 22 | 197 | 98 | 16 | 21 | 135 |
| Shopping, theme-parks & other social entertainments | 124 | 25 | 18 | 167 | 105 | 19 | 14 | 138 |
| Participating in local events & festivals | 124 | 22 | 17 | 163 | 99 | 16 | 15 | 130 |
| History & Culture (e.g., Visiting museums, monuments, etc) | 89 | 43 | 16 | 148 | 72 | 22 | 14 | 108 |
| Sports & adventurous activities (e.g., hiking, bungee jumping, jetskiing, etc) | 99 | 30 | 17 | 146 | 84 | 17 | 10 | 111 |
| Other | 3 | | 1 | 4 | 11 | | 1 | 12 |

mentioned occasions were birthdays, weddings, and local festivals and events. These occasions provide both a reason for, and a benefit of, VFR trips; that of helping to maintain relationships. Those students who were in the study country with family also indicated that they had limited free time to travel to visit friends because of their family responsibilities. Their timing might be dependent on school holidays and whether these holidays were aligned with university breaks. This finding is consistent with an argument made by [Backer and Lynch \(2017\)](#) who suggested that family life cycle could influence VFR travel behaviour.

Data collection (associated with the students’ studies) and conference attendance were also mentioned by a few participants as an opportunity to visit their friends and relatives.

If I fly home, mainly for data collection. ... Sometimes, I go for conferences. For example, last year, I went to Australia and Japan for a conference, but I also have friends there, so I visited them and also sightseeing. (Yu, female, Vietnamese).

Fieldtrips are a common component of PhD studies, and conference attendance is often expected of PhD students as part of their academic development. Being able to combine VFR tourism with studying could be an appealing and convenient option, especially with the advantage of cost-saving. Such a combination is even more likely when the fieldwork takes place in students’ home countries where their family and friends reside. These situations, however, apply less to international PhD students who do not conduct fieldwork, though they may still attend conferences in places where friends and relatives live or are visiting.

5.3. Activities undertaken during VFR trips

The types of activities students undertook when travelling to visit friends and relatives were examined according to domestic versus international VFR travel, and whether they undertook the activities with, or without their friends and relatives (See [Tables 5a and 5b](#)).

Visiting natural attractions and participating in social entertainment were the most frequently reported types of activities undertaken when visiting friends and relatives. A chi-square test was conducted to compare participation patterns in activity categories between domestic and international travels, in both cases of VF and VR. No significant relationship was found: $\chi^2(5, N = 1459) = 8.205, p = .15$ for VF; and $\chi^2(5, N = 1039) = 9.10, p = .11$ for VR. It can be concluded that the students’ pattern of participating in activities was similar between domestic and international travels, in both VF and VR. Visiting natural attractions and social entertainments were more common than other activities, although not by much. Moreover, in both the VF and VR categories, the respondents reported participating in the listed activities with their friends/relatives rather than without them.

A number of other activities were also mentioned by the online respondents. With domestic VF, they included barbeques at home, eating and singing. With international VR, some other activities were camping, catching up, and spending time together (e.g., having coffee, cooking meals, celebrating holidays). The key similarity of all these

Table 5b
Undertaken activities by types of VR travel.

| Activity | Domestic | | | Total | International | | | Total |
|---|----------------|-------------------|------|-------|----------------|-------------------|------|-------|
| | With relatives | Without relatives | Both | | With relatives | Without relatives | Both | |
| Natural attractions (e.g., Visiting the beach, mountain, eco-parks, etc) | 66 | 17 | 10 | 93 | 102 | 20 | 16 | 138 |
| Shopping, theme-parks & other social entertainments | 52 | 23 | 10 | 85 | 102 | 15 | 17 | 134 |
| History & Culture (e.g., Visiting museums, monuments, etc) | 53 | 23 | 7 | 83 | 75 | 28 | 8 | 111 |
| Participating in local events & festivals | 51 | 22 | 9 | 82 | 92 | 16 | 12 | 120 |
| Sports & adventurous activities (e.g., hiking, bungee jumping, jet skiing, etc) | 45 | 28 | 9 | 82 | 58 | 31 | 8 | 97 |
| Other | 1 | | | 1 | 12 | | 1 | 13 |

activities is that they facilitate social interaction, which seems to be one of the main purposes of VFR tourism for the respondents.

The preference of participating in activities with (rather than without) friends and relatives when travelling to visit them was also reflected in the focus group discussions. It was the amount of excitement resulting from 'togetherness' that tended to increase the enjoyment of the experience, as illustrated in the statement by Alex (female, Malaysian) below:

There are many nice places to visit in New Zealand. However, if I just go to these places with my husband, it might be quite boring. It would be a lot more fun if we arrange trips with friends. If I have friends in certain cities, I would want to go there and then travel with my friends to other places.

Choi and Fu (2018) found that some migrants preferred to visit tourist sites with their "significant ones" to reinforce the special meaning attached to such visits. By undertaking the activities together, the level of interaction between the students and the visited friends (and/or relatives) was also likely to be high. Such high level of interaction may also have an impact on their VFR tourism experiences, as well as other aspects associated with these experiences.

5.4. Types of accommodation

Results on type of accommodation commonly used by the online survey respondents when they travelled to visit friends and relatives are shown in Table 6.

When visiting friends or relatives, the respondents more often stayed at their friends' (or relatives') places than at commercial accommodation (69% versus 28% in the case of visiting friends; 88% versus 11% in the case of visiting relatives). Although not a typical accommodation option, commercial accommodation was more common in the case of visiting friends (28%) than in visiting relatives (11%).

Several other types of accommodation were listed by the respondents, including AirBnB and camping. While AirBnB and camping can be considered commercial accommodation due to the transactional element involved (e.g., room cost, camping ground fee), the respondents thought differently.

Factors that can influence the tendency of choosing to stay with friends (or relatives) at their place were also explored through the focus groups, and are summarised in Table 7.

Table 6
Choice of accommodation when travelling to visit friends and relatives.

| Type of accommodation | Number of responses | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| | VF | VR |
| Commercial accommodation | 59 (28%) | 18 (11%) |
| Place of friends/relatives | 147 (69%) | 149 (88%) |
| Other | 6 (3%) | 2 (1%) |
| Total | 212 (100%) | 169 (100%) |

Table 7
Influencing factors on decision to stay with friends and relatives.

| Motivating factors | Demotivating factors |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bonding with friends and relatives/Reconnecting ● Saving money ● Security ● Comfort ● Good hospitality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Long distance between their place to key attractions or central areas ● Long stays ● Travel companions (travelling with family/kids) ● Less freedom ● Tension |

First, by staying with friends or relatives they were likely to have more social interaction and, consequently, to have more time for bonding and refreshing their relationships.

I guess the most important thing is that I get to spend time with them. If I stay somewhere else, then I might not see them as much. Another really important thing is the cost, free place to stay whereas compared to hotel or even a backpacker place, you still get to save quite a bit of money. The only thing probably discourage me from staying is if their place is far. I have some friends in Auckland and Wellington who live quite far from the city so if I go to an event or something, if I go out at night, I may prefer to stay somewhere closer to the city. (Amy, female, Canada).

As well as nourishing existing relationships, Amy's comment suggested that staying with friends and relatives helped her save money that otherwise would be spent on accommodation costs. The location of the friend's place was an important element, especially when the trips were combined with other leisure purposes. According to Griffin and Nunkoo (2016), VFR visitors are more likely to stay with friends and relatives in urban centers, and in paid accommodation in locations that are less central.

Third, the feeling of comfort motivated the participants to stay with their friends and relatives, as mentioned by Paul below.

The comfort level is different because we are used to being with them so it feels like home. In a commercial place, it is different. (Paul, male, Indian).

Feeling comfortable when staying with friends and relatives was not always the case for some participants in the current study. The level of comfort may depend on the relationship the students have with their friends (or relatives).

If we are close, I feel more comfortable to stay with them, and do not mind too much to disturb them. But if I don't know them well, I'll just ask if they are available to meet and some advice on accommodation around the area. (Yu, female, Vietnamese).

Staying with friends (or relatives) not only enhanced existing relationships but also helped new relationships that were yet to be close become stronger. Once the relationship between the students and their friends (or relatives) were enriched, the students would be more likely to stay with their friends (or relatives) during future visits. Hence, repeat visits with the same friends (or relatives) may lead to a higher likelihood of staying with them. This finding reinforces a claim of Janta

et al. (2015), that visits may strengthen close friendships or lead to a realisation that these are now more akin to casual friendships.

On the other hand, factors that discouraged the participants from staying with friends and relatives were often associated with location and length of stay. Respondents seemed less motivated to stay with friends and relatives if it was for a long period.

If it is for several days, I'll stay with my friends but if it is for one month or longer, I will stay in commercial accommodation. More freedom. (Wendy, female, China).

Wendy's view indicated a desire for a higher level of freedom when staying in commercial accommodation as opposed to her friend's place. Presumably, if the length of the trip was only a few days, she might have stayed with friends and traded off less freedom. Such a trade-off would be less desirable if the trip was longer. Moreover, the participants might have felt that longer stays caused their friends and relatives some discomfort, and, therefore, they did not want to bother them for an extended period of time.

Even with close relationships, some participants found that being in the same space with their friends and relatives for a longer time could be intense.

My mom came to Dunedin first, tried to get use to the jetlag... Then we went up to the North Island, and we were travelling and stayed in hotel and trekking all day and...uh... yeah I liked it. It was pretty fun. It got intense at times though because we had different ideas of what we really like to do on vacation. (Nancy, female, USA).

Differences in travel goals, personality clashes and different living habits may lead to conflicts during VFR trips. VFR tourism is distinguished by the relationship between participants, either friendship or family connection. Such relationships often come with a complexity that is different from other relationships in traditional tourism such as visitors–visitors, or locals–visitors, who do not have a history of knowing each other, enduring obligations towards each other, or the likelihood of seeing each other again in the future.

5.5. VFR tourism in non-traditional places

The concept of VFR3rd is relatively new. The location where the VFR experience takes place is what distinguishes VFR tourism in a third place from other conventional forms of VFR. In the online survey, respondents were asked about their level of engagement in some VF travel patterns where one of the pre-listed patterns was: “*My friends and I travel to a third place (either domestic or international) that is neither mine nor my friends' place to meet each other*”. This pattern represents a form of VFR3rd. While attempts were made to collect relevant data, an issue with high standard deviations limited what could be concluded. It did not shed much light on the phenomenon beyond that some respondents had, indeed, engaged in VFR3rd. The phenomenon was further explored in the focus groups.

VFR3rd is still developing and not yet a common form of VFR tourism, at least for international PhD students participating in this study. However, even those who had not engaged in it expressed a high level of interest.

I haven't but it sounds like a great idea. I haven't even thought of it before! Because you would be looking forward to both the place where you are going to, and the people whom you are going to meet, so what is not to like about it. (Jay, male, Costa Rican).

The study found that patterns of VFR3rd were varied in terms of geographic distance. It could be domestic, international or a combination of both for those involved. For example, one of the students from Christchurch mentioned that she and her friend (from Canada) decided to meet in Queenstown. In this case, it was a domestic trip for her, but an international trip for her friend.

Several advantages and disadvantages of VFR3rd were addressed in

the focus groups. One of the biggest advantages was that both parties got to meet each other while visiting a new place. In some cases, by meeting half-way, VFR3rd also helped at least one of the parties to save time and travel cost.

Saving money, and another one is to save time that you each have to spend. It is like splitting the cost of a flight. Or it is just a place that you both want to visit so it is more of a holiday together as well. (Amy, female, Canada).

To some, VFR3rd was the only option for them to visit their friends and relatives. For instance, Mary, who was Iranian, shared her perspective:

I also want to mention another factor, people's ability. My parents are elderly. It is a long way from Iran to New Zealand so we may decide to meet in a third place so that they don't need to travel long distance. It can also be a matter of obligation. Sometimes people can't be in another country due to political reasons, because they are refugees or because they have other legal problem. So, meeting in a third place can be a good option for people under pressure and people with legal problems.

The statement above suggests the relationship between politics, legislation and VFR tourism. Political conditions can create boundaries for VFR tourism (e.g., visa requirements, eligible destinations, length of stay). VFR3rd is a potential solution for people to be able to visit each other and maintain their kinship.

Some disadvantages to VFR3rd were also mentioned. First, all parties might feel uncertain going to a place with which they were not familiar. This meant more effort was required in planning the trip.

In the third country, you have no control of the situation, both parties are guests, no one is the host. So, I think it is an emotional side, you are not sure whether you would have a good experience. (Mary, female, Iranian).

Hibbert, Dickinson, and Curtin (2013) argued that visitors might be encouraged to visit a region if they have a friend or relative who is familiar with that place. Such reassurance might not be available with VFR3rd, especially when all participants are new to the meeting destination. Unfamiliarity with the destination can also undermine the feeling of safety and security, which may influence not only travel-related decisions but also the overall travel experience.

The second disadvantage of VFR3rd was related to the number of friends and relatives they could visit.

It is not only the time saving matter for me. Because whenever I go back to my country, it is not only my husband, but also my parents, my in-laws, I will be seeing them all. So, I rather go back home so that I can see everyone. Whereas going to Singapore, I may only see my husband, or whoever can make a trip there but not all of them. (Tania, female, Bangladeshi).

VFR3rd requires all participants to travel and, therefore, only those who can afford to travel (whether in physical, time or financial terms) will see each other. This means that they may not get to see as many friends and relatives as they would if they travelled in their home country. Although this factor is addressed as a disadvantage in this section, some students may perceive it differently. For some, the obligation to visit many friends and relatives during a trip home could be a burden. Therefore, whether being unable to see all family and friends is an advantage or a disadvantage may vary with circumstance.

Another non-traditional form of VFR tourism noted in the focus groups was VFR in transit. Similar to VFR tourism in a third place, VFR in transit may have been around for a while, yet has not been widely acknowledged and studied.

I visited friends along the way to seeing my family, but not necessarily travel to see a friend specifically. So, we [he and his wife] stopped at Seattle. My family is in Boston but on the way, we stopped in Seattle to

see some friends. (Noel, male, USA).

For VFR trips that involved long distances, VFR might also happen in the transit route. Although transiting is often regarded as a necessary inconvenience by tourists (Tang, Weaver, & Lawton, 2017), for some, stopping and staying along transit routes, sometimes, is a choice. For instance, they may choose to stopover to visit a new region on the way, or to have a rest before taking the next long flight, or to visit a friend who happens to live in the transit region.

International visitors, especially long-haul, are more attracted to multi-destination trips, as they seek efficiency and variety to increase the value of their trips (Griffin & Nunkoo, 2016). This could also be the case for some international students who undertake long-haul flights to visit families and friends in their home countries. Even with domestic VFR travel, there is the potential to construct itineraries in such a way as to incorporate 'side' visits to friends or relatives en route to the main destination (which may be for entirely non-VFR purposes). VFR in transit, therefore, has great potential to grow and needs to be robustly conceptualised.

5.6. No involvement in VFR tourism

The results reported in this section were based on the sub-set of data from those online survey respondents who had not had any VFR tourism experience ($n = 112$), and the focus group discussions. Several factors were identified as to why some international PhD students might not engage in VFR tourism.

First, lack of resources (time and money) was one of the common reasons mentioned by the online survey respondents.

"I do not have support for my PhD. I have to work full-time and there is no holiday" (Survey respondent R89).

"Too expensive to visit friends and relatives back home. Same as for them coming here to visit me." (R58).

As Gardiner et al. (2013) observed, international students are highly budget-conscious when travelling. The issue of cost was often associated with travel expenses such as flights and accommodation:

In New Zealand, finding accommodation is very difficult... So, I may consider travelling to visit them [friends/relatives] and stay with them, but if I need to find a place, for example, backpackers or hotel, to visit my friends, I may not go. (Mary, female, Iranian).

The ability to stay with friends (or relatives) is an important pull factor that can influence the students' decision to engage in VFR tourism or not, because it helps them to save on accommodation costs. Flight cost may also affect the time of travel. Some respondents shared that, on occasion, the decision to undertake a VFR trip depended on whether flight tickets were on special or not.

In addition, it was stated in the online survey that a VFR trip should be over 15 km one-way from the traveller's residential home with at least one night's stay (Boyne et al., 2002). The respondents might have had some trips to visit friends and relatives after their arrival in New Zealand but if those trips did not meet the requirements, they would not have been considered VFR trips. Several respondents pointed out that they had undertaken a few trips to visit friends nearby but did not stay overnight.

"All my friends in New Zealand live in my city or in areas around it, and no need to stay overnight when visiting them." (R112).

Another common reason for not engaging in VFR tourism was having no friends or relatives in New Zealand. This reason is probably more relevant to those who had recently arrived or had been in the country for only a short time and had not had many opportunities to form friendships. Moreover, some might spend the initial period focused on settling into the destination and would have had less time and inclination for travelling or hosting.

Some students were also discouraged from travelling to visit friends and relatives who were living in places with 'bad' weather.

I am living in Auckland, I went to Dunedin to visit my friends once and then I thought, I am not gonna go back because it is so cold. (Alex, female, Malaysian).

Perceived bad weather is often associated with being wet, rainy and cold. These may affect travel conditions, and limit options for activities when visiting friends and relatives.

The effort required in planning a VFR trip and a concern over potentially interrupting their friends' and relatives' everyday life were other disadvantages.

I think it is planning ahead, and it is not just me who has to plan but my friends as well. It can be quite time consuming and takes a bit of effort from everyone. (Alex, female, Malaysian).

When it was known that their friends or relatives might be busy, there was both a complication and, possibly, a reluctance to go due to the difficulty of coordinating or synchronising several people's schedules. A concern over potentially interrupting their friends' and relatives' everyday life was also expressed. This is also associated with the time and cost constraints.

6. Discussion

The results of this study outline some distinctive characteristics of international PhD students' VFR tourism behaviour. They suggest that friends featured more frequently in VFR tourism of the respondents than did relatives. This stands in contrast with an observation by Seaton (2017), which suggested that up to 80% of all VFR tourism is related to family. It also implies that the amount of activity in certain categories of VFR tourism (VF, VR, or VFR) may vary in different groups, and for different patterns. In this study, for example, domestic travel was more common when visiting friends, whereas international travel was more prevalent when visiting relatives. The stronger prevalence of visiting friends suggests a greater emphasis on maintaining friendship ties among international PhD students' while they are in their host country.

The VFR travel frequency of the survey respondents was relatively low (1–3 times per year). A high proportion of respondents who never travelled to visit friends and relative during their first year were noted. International PhD students, as a specific group of migrants, might be reluctant to host their friends and relatives during the initial phase (i.e., just after their arrival) because they might want to spend some time to settle in and get familiar with their immediate location in terms of day-to-day logistics, transport, activities, or amenities. This provides an additional explanation for the delay in engaging in VFR tourism at the beginning after the students' arrival in the host country. However, at the start of their study abroad experience, their desire for VFR experiences (seeing friends and relatives) might be higher to help overcome homesickness and social isolation. As such, there might exist, arguably, the potential for conflicted feelings regarding the personal need for, and at the same time, perceived lack of capability to adequately host VFR visitors.

Furthermore, the presence of immediate family during the study experience was likely to have had a range of effects on the propensity to engage in VFR travel. For those who were with family, their time availability might be dependent on their studies, university breaks, and their children's school holidays. Conversely, students who were not in the study location with immediate family may have had fewer obligations and responsibilities and, consequently, more available time to travel. However, having immediate family in New Zealand could entail a higher need for social relationship enrichment. Accordingly, students in this position might have felt more motivated to engage in VFR tourism. This finding indicates a potential three-fold relationship between family status, university and school calendars, and the timing of VFR tourism undertaken by the students.

The demand, frequency and timing of VFR tourism of international students may also be governed by the obligations and expectations attached to their culture. According to [Kashiwagi et al. \(2020\)](#), past VFR studies have focused on the Western market and therefore, VFR tourism behavioural insights caused by cultural diversity might not have been well captured. [Tham and Raciti \(2018\)](#) examined VFR tourism in collective cultures through the lens of Taiwanese hosts. Their study found potential effects of cultures on VFR decision-making in terms of length and frequency of VFR trips, choice of accommodation (i.e., whether or not to stay with friends/relative), spending, and behavioural expectations. Hence, cultural and social contexts should be factored into analyses in studies examining VFR tourism behaviour.

The study also found a potential link between the housing situation in the host country and the students' participation in VFR tourism. The housing situation (i.e., space availability) and the location (i.e., urban versus non-urban) of the host's place can be important factors in both the ability to host at all and the quality of the hosting experience of international PhD students. Moreover, the housing needs of international PhD students who are in the study destination with family members are likely to be different from those who do not have family.

Although not directly investigated in the current study, it should be noted that type of accommodation when travelling to visit friends and relatives could be influenced, once again, by VFR participants' culture. Providing accommodation is a common part of hosting ([Yousuf & Backer, 2017](#), p.436), and culture may play a role in what hosting comprises. For instance, in Polynesian culture, hosting is unconditional and there is almost no limit to the extent of hospitality provided to guests ([Schänzel, Brocx, & Sadaraka, 2014](#)). In such a culture, provision of accommodation to guests is a near-certainty, and not staying with the host (friends or relatives) could be considered impolite.

It is acknowledged that there is no one universally accepted definition of VFR tourism; rather there are multiple. One noted limitation of the current definitions of VFR tourism is that they do not adequately clarify the location of where the visit happens, nor do they specify a minimum length of the visit. It is often simply assumed that the location is at the visited person's area of residence. As a result, there are instances where visits to friends and relatives occur but are not categorised as VFR tourism by researchers and marketers. When the element of staying with friends (or relatives) was missing, visiting was not always the primary purpose of trip, and in these cases, the VFR experiences were still considered in some studies ([Bischoff & Koenig-Lewis, 2007](#); [Kashiwagi et al., 2020](#)). Using different definitions of VFR tourism across studies may result in inconsistency and make it difficult to compare findings. These limitations call for more research in conceptualising the VFR phenomenon, with consideration given to the socio-cultural aspect and factors that may influence this aspect such as time, relationship, and sociocultural contexts.

The increasingly complex dynamics of migration patterns has expanded the geographical and behavioural boundaries of VFR tourism, as has the use of new technologies to create 'virtual presence' between people. The recognition of VFR tourism in a third place and VFR in transit are specific examples of such boundary expansion identified in the current study. This also indicates that the current definitions and concepts of VFR tourism have become less useful in a world with incessant and intersecting mobilities at all geographic scales and complex patterns of migration.

A framework is proposed to help conceptualise the spatial flows of the VFR travel ([Fig. 1](#)).

Three locations are outlined in the framework, including: the location where international students reside (Location 1), the location where their friends (or relatives) reside (Location 2), and the third location where neither of the parties reside (Location 3). In this study, it is shown that international students from Location 1 may travel to visit their friends (or relatives) in Location 2, or conversely, their friends (or relatives) from Location 2 may travel to visit them in Location 1. When both parties travel to Location 3 – where none of them reside – to meet each other, that is VFR3rd. The distance between the locations can be either domestic or international, or both.

The framework also recognises the possibility for VFR in transit to happen in any of these flows between the locations. The likelihood of engaging in VFR3rd and VFR in transit may be higher with multi-destination trips. According to [Griffin and Nunkoo \(2016\)](#), existing models of conceptualising VFR tourism are often for single-destination trips, but it is more difficult to apply them in multi-destination trips. By conceptualising the spatial flows of VFR travel, the framework is useful for studies that attempt to define the VFR phenomenon and thus contribute to theoretical understanding of VFR.

The host–guest relationship in non-traditional VFR forms also requires further conceptual refinement. With VFR3rd, for example, since there is no presumed hosting responsibility, the existence of the host–guest relationship and the sociocultural impact resulting from hosting/guesting experiences are unclear. Even if such a relationship exists, it is likely to be distinctive because all participants have a role as visitors at the visited place. When VFR experiences are placed in another region instead of either party's residential area, the context may put all those involved in a vacation mode ([Griffin, 2016](#)). VFR3rd also presents an opportunity for some destinations to position themselves as 'safe, third places' for people to meet. This notion is likely to become increasingly important as international tensions, as well as migration-refugee flows and concerns, increase under the interconnected pressures of climate change, international conflict and globalisation generally.

7. Conclusion and implications

This paper described the VFR tourism behaviour of international PhD students in New Zealand. It confirms a relatively high level of participation in VFR tourism during the course of their study, and outlines some differences in their VFR tourism behavior between the VF and VR categories. Through an improved understanding of the VFR tourism behaviour of international PhD students in New Zealand, the study highlights differences in VFR tourism behaviour that may exist between different forms of international education (e.g., the duration of a qualification, the family structure of students doing different qualifications).

The paper has also argued for the study of some non-traditional forms of VFR tourism, including VFR3rd and VFR in transit. A mix of advantages and disadvantages of VFR3rd was found. It is particularly appealing to those who want to combine visiting friends and relatives with tourism and leisure. Conversely, one might be discouraged from engaging in VFR3rd due to perceived unfamiliarity with the destination and the concomitant effort required to plan such trips. A framework was developed to help conceptualise the spatial aspect of the VFR phenomenon.

The high likelihood of students' participation in VFR tourism suggests an important role of VFR tourism to their overall international education experience. As this study enables a better understanding of VFR tourism behaviour among international PhD students, it provides useful insights for tourism and education providers to enhance students' experience in New Zealand. Some examples of initiatives could be the development and promotion of VFR tour packages, or the introduction of VFR visa schemes.

The study also emphasises the prevalence of friends in international PhD students' VFR tourism, and consequently, matters related to the development and enhancement of friendship (e.g., the nature of the sociocultural environment, social media, telecommunication, virtual technology) may affect their participation and behaviour in VF tourism. Moreover, as international education continues to increase, it is likely that friend and relative networks in the host country will intensify (become more common and more dense) which would suggest that VFR travel of international PhD students would increase, correspondingly, in the future.

The potential growth of VFR tourism in a third place and VFR tourism in transit has expanded the spatial aspect of VFR tourism, as well as the traditional conceptualisation of this phenomenon. They are evidence of how increasing and interactive mobilities have broadened and complicated the relationship between tourism and migration. The complex and diverse processes expressed within international PhD students' VFR tourism behaviour are indicative of the broader

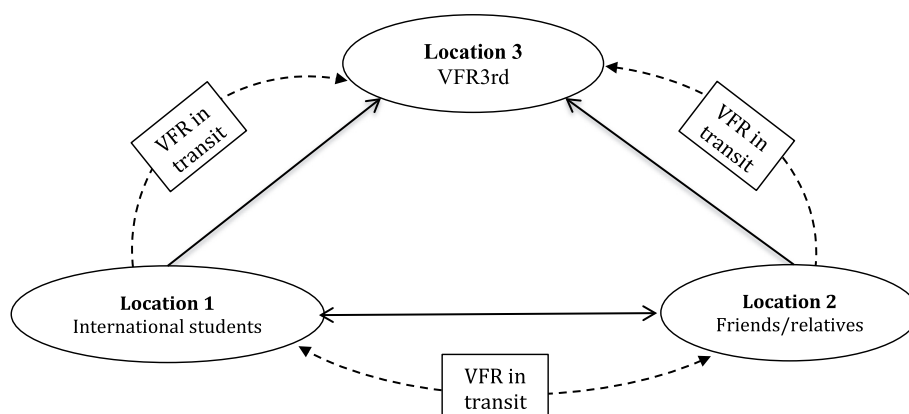


Fig. 1. Spatial flows of VFR travel.

phenomenon created when new and increasing forms of global mobility interact and intersect with each other within the activities of individuals. Not only are such interactions on the increase but, as they interconnect, they inevitably give rise to emergent forms of mobility and experience. This study has provided some insight into the details of one such set of interactions.

8. Limitations and future research

The current paper has a number of potential limitations. It is based on a study in New Zealand and therefore, generalisation of the findings is limited, and should not be transferred to other contexts without considerable caution. The inconsistent quality of responses (some were incomplete with several questions left unanswered) has narrowed the ability to conduct some analyses. Moreover, not many participants had engaged in VFR3rd and, thus, they could not contribute to some of the questions that aimed to explore this phenomenon in depth. Being in the focus group discussion format might also have meant that some participants did not express their opinion as much as others, and possibly not expressing opinions as independently as they would have been without others' presence.

In addition, the selection of responses could have been refined further depending on respondents' length of time in New Zealand and availability of friends and relatives. Those who had been in the country for less than three months without any prior connections might be less likely to engage in VFR tourism, and thus, could have been excluded from the study. However, this could not be assumed especially in cases where students may have already had friends or relatives in the study country who could visit them to provide initial support during the 'settling in' period after arrival. Selection of

research participants for future studies on VFR tourism may consider criteria associated with length of time and availability of friends/relatives in the host country for a more refined sample that could better reflect on their VFR experiences.

Future research could examine the non-traditional forms of VFR tourism in detail to further understand how VFR tourism evolves with increasing global mobility. Longitudinal studies could explore how VFR travel frequency changes over time for the same students, and whether any differences in patterns are associated with categories of VFR tourism (VF, VR, VFR) and destinations (domestic, international). For those interested in the social psychology of VFR tourism, the likely fluid and context-dependent nature of the host and guest roles in these non-traditional VFR forms could prove a very productive avenue of research, both theoretically and empirically. The impact of participation in VFR tourism on educational outcomes of international students is also another fruitful topic. Future studies built upon the results of this study would, in various ways, contribute further to the conceptualisation of the relationship between VFR tourism and international education.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix A. Email Sent to University Representatives (for distribution of the link to access the online survey)

Dear ...,

As one of the current international PhD students in New Zealand, you are invited to participate in a short (8–10 min) survey about your travel experiences in relation to visiting friends and relatives (VFR). This survey is part of a PhD project with the following details:

- Name of the project: International students and VFR tourism – A case study of New Zealand.
- Name of the researcher: My Nguyen Diem Tran, PhD candidate, Lincoln University.
- Objectives: To examine the VFR travel experiences of international PhD students in New Zealand with a focus on the visiting friends (VF) segment and its significance for international students' adaptation in New Zealand; and to investigate the host-guest relationship manifested in their VFR tourism.

The survey is completely anonymous, and your participation is voluntary. Please click on the link below to start the survey:

http://lincoln.nz1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8D1kTTFm4lX0rkN

Students are also encouraged to participate in focus group interviews for this research. Refreshment will be provided during the interviews. If you are interested in taking part or if you have any questions about the project, please contact the researcher via her email address: nguyendiemmy.tran@lincolnuni.ac.nz

Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Kind regards,

Appendix B. Research Advert Published on Newsletters, Forums

Title: “Studying Or Travelling?”

Content:

“Have you ever travelled to visit your friends and relatives while studying abroad? Why or why not?”

My Tran, a researcher from Lincoln University, is conducting a study examining travel experiences of international PhD students in relation to visiting friends and relatives (VFR). The objectives of her research are to understand several aspects of this phenomenon including travel behaviour, socio-cultural adaptation and experiences of being both VFR hosts and VFR guests. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.

All international PhD students currently enrolled at universities in New Zealand are invited to participate in an online survey as part of this study by clicking on the link below:

http://lincoln.nz1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8D1kTTfm4lX0rkN

Your participation is voluntary and completely anonymous. For more information and queries, please contact My Tran via her email address nguyendiemmy.tran@lincolnuni.ac.nz

Your support is highly appreciated.”

Appendix C. The online structured survey

Thank you for participating in this survey which is part of a PhD project undertaken by My Tran (A PhD candidate at Lincoln University). The main aim of the project is to examine travel experiences of international PhD students in New Zealand with regard to visiting friends and relatives (VFR). In particular, it focuses on their VFR tourism behaviour, the significance of those VFR tourism experiences, and the host-guest relationship manifested in their VFR tourism.

Please make sure that you meet the following criteria to be eligible for this survey:

- + Being currently enrolled in a PhD programme at a New Zealand university.
- + Holding a student visa at the time you started your PhD programme.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the survey at any time up until clicking on the “submit survey” button at the end of the survey.

The survey will be closed on Saturday 30th April 2017.

Should you have any questions about the project, please contact the researcher via her email address: nguyendiemmy.tran@lincolnuni.ac.nz

Demographics

In this first section, I would like to find out a little bit about you.

Q1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

Q2. How old are you?

- Under 20
- 20–24
- 25–29
- 30–34
- 35–39
- 40–44
- 45–49
- 50–54
- 55–59
- 60–64
- 65 and over

Q3. Which of the following best describes your current personal circumstance/family status?

- Single without children
- Single with children
- Married without children
- Married with children
- Life partner without children
- Life partner with children
- Other

Q4. What is your nationality?

Q5. Have you had any previous overseas study experience other than your current PhD education in New Zealand?

- Yes
- No

Q5a. Please provide information regarding your previous overseas study experience(s).

| | Level of study (e.g., High school, undergraduate...) | Country of study | Duration of study |
|-----------------------------|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Overseas study experience 1 | | | |
| Overseas study experience 2 | | | |
| Overseas study experience 3 | | | |

Q6. Please indicate the primary area of your PhD study

- Arts
- Business and Commerce
- Engineering
- Education
- Law and Politics
- Medical and Health Sciences
- Sciences
- Society and Humanities
- Other. Please specify:

Q7. What stage of the PhD process are you currently in?

- 1st stage: PhD proposal development
- 2nd stage: Preparation for fieldwork (E.g.: Ethics application, research instruments, etc)
- 3rd stage: Research fieldwork
- 4th stage: Data analysis
- 5th stage: Thesis write-up and completion

Background in New Zealand

In the following section, I would like to find out a little bit about your background concerning New Zealand.

Q8. How many months in total have you been in New Zealand? *(Including all past and current stays for any purposes such as holiday, business, education, etc... since the age of 13).*

Months (Please insert numbers only).

Q9. In which university are you currently enrolled for your PhD?

- The University of Auckland
- Victoria University of Wellington
- University of Canterbury
- University of Otago
- Lincoln University
- Massey University
- Auckland University of Technology
- University of Waikato

Q10. Have you visited New Zealand as a tourist before coming here for your PhD study?

- Yes
- No

Q10a. Please provide information regarding your previous visit to New Zealand.

| Year of visit (e.g., 1999, 2000...) | Main purpose of visit (e.g., holiday, business) | Travel party (e.g., alone, with friends...) |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1st visit | | |
| 2nd visit | | |
| 3rd visit | | |

Q11. Do you, or did you, have any friends/relatives in New Zealand?

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| Before coming to New Zealand for my PhD study | <input type="radio"/> I had friends here | <input type="radio"/> I had relatives here | <input type="radio"/> I had both friends and relatives here | <input type="radio"/> I did not have friends or relatives here |
| After coming to New Zealand for my PhD study | <input type="radio"/> I have friends living here | <input type="radio"/> I have relatives living here | <input type="radio"/> I have both friends and relatives living here | <input type="radio"/> I do not have friends or relatives living here |

Research project related questions

In the following section, I would like to find out a little bit about your travel experiences in relation to visiting friends and relatives while studying in New Zealand. For this particular survey, a trip to visit friends/relatives should be over 15 km one-way from the traveller's residential home with at least one night's stay.

Q12. Since you began your PhD study in New Zealand, which of the following type of travel and visits have applied to you?

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| I have travelled to visit friends | <input type="radio"/> Within New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> Outside New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> Both within and outside New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> Not applicable (No visits to friends at all) |
| I have travelled to visit relatives | <input type="radio"/> Within New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> Outside New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> Both within and outside New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> Not applicable (No visits to relatives at all) |
| I have been visited by friends | <input type="radio"/> From within New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> From outside New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> Both from within and outside New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> Not applicable (No visits by friends at all) |
| I have been visited by relatives | <input type="radio"/> From within New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> From outside New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> Both from within and outside New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> Not applicable (No visits by relatives at all) |

Q13. If you answered "NOT APPLICABLE" for any travel or visit type of Question 12, please explain why:

- I chose "Not applicable" for one/some parts of Question 12, because:
(e.g., no friends/relatives in New Zealand, no money, no time...)
- I chose "Not applicable" for ALL parts of Question 12, because:
(e.g., no friends/relatives in New Zealand, no money, no time...)
- I did not choose "Not applicable" for any part of Question 12.

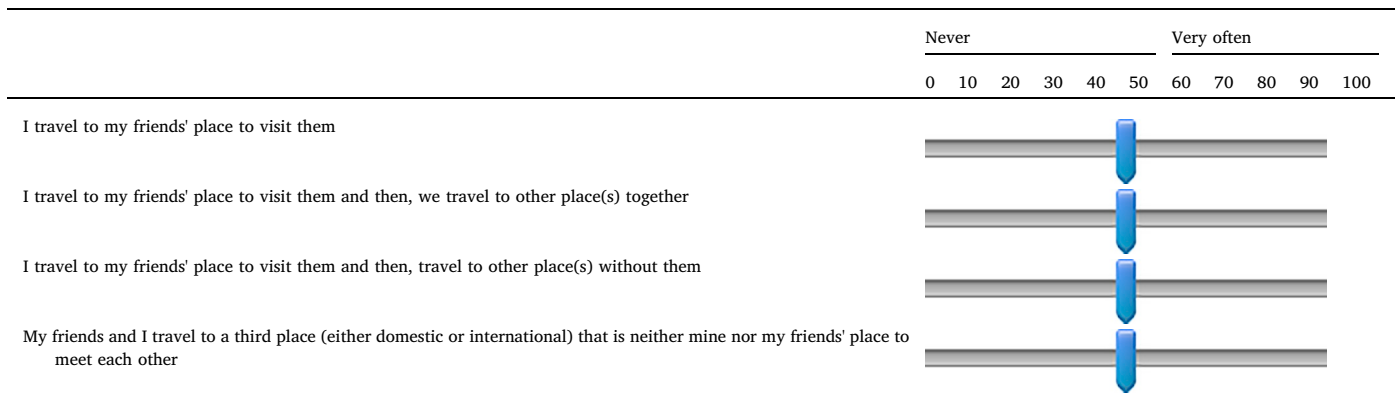
Q14. How many times have you travelled primarily to visit **friends** within/outside New Zealand?

| | Within New Zealand | | | | | Outside New Zealand | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Never | 1-3 times | 3-5 times | > 5 times | Not applicable | Never | 1-3 times | 3-5 times | > 5 times | Not applicable |
| During the 1st year of my PhD study | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| During the 2nd year of my PhD study | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| From the 3rd year of my PhD study onwards | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q15. How many times have you travelled primarily to visit **relatives** within/outside New Zealand since you started your PhD?

| | Within New Zealand | | | | | Outside New Zealand | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Never | 1-3 times | 3-5 times | > 5 times | Not applicable | Never | 1-3 times | 3-5 times | > 5 times | Not applicable |
| During the 1st year of my PhD study | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| During the 2nd year of my PhD study | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| From the 3rd year of my PhD study onwards | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q16. Since you started your PhD study in New Zealand, to what extent have you engaged in the following forms of travel (Please use the slider to indicate your response)?



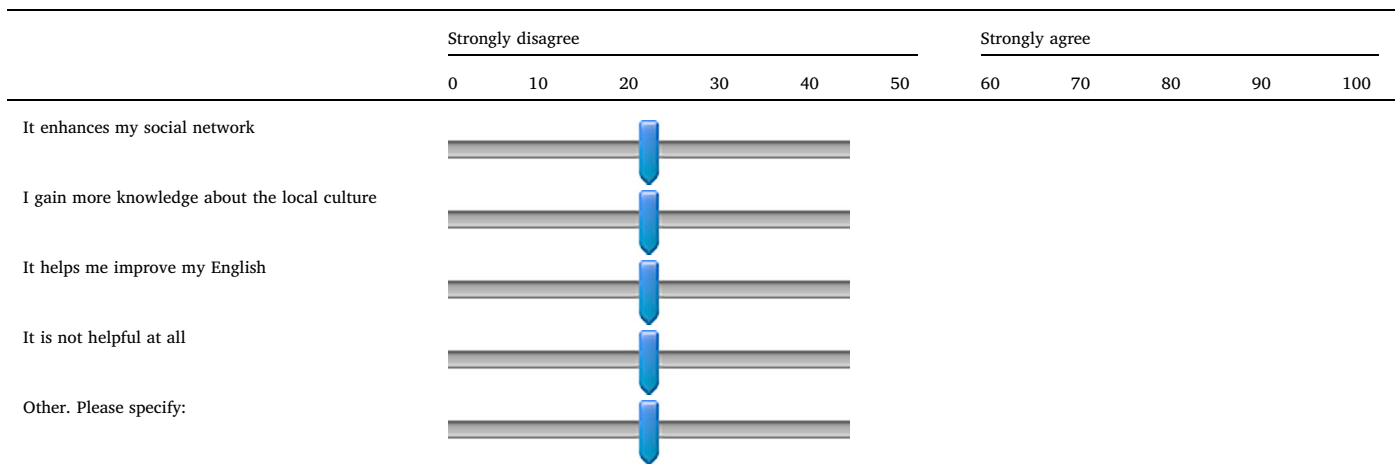
Q17. When you travel primarily to visit your friends/relatives **WITHIN** New Zealand, what types of activity do you **most commonly** do (both with and without them)?

| | Visit friends | | Visit relatives | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | With them | Without them | With them | Without them |
| History & Culture (e.g., Visiting museums, monuments, etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Natural attractions (e.g., Visiting the beach, mountain, eco-parks, etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sports & adventurous activities (e.g., hiking, bungee jumping, jetskiing, etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Participating in local events & festivals | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Shopping, theme-parks & other social entertainments | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Others. Please specify: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

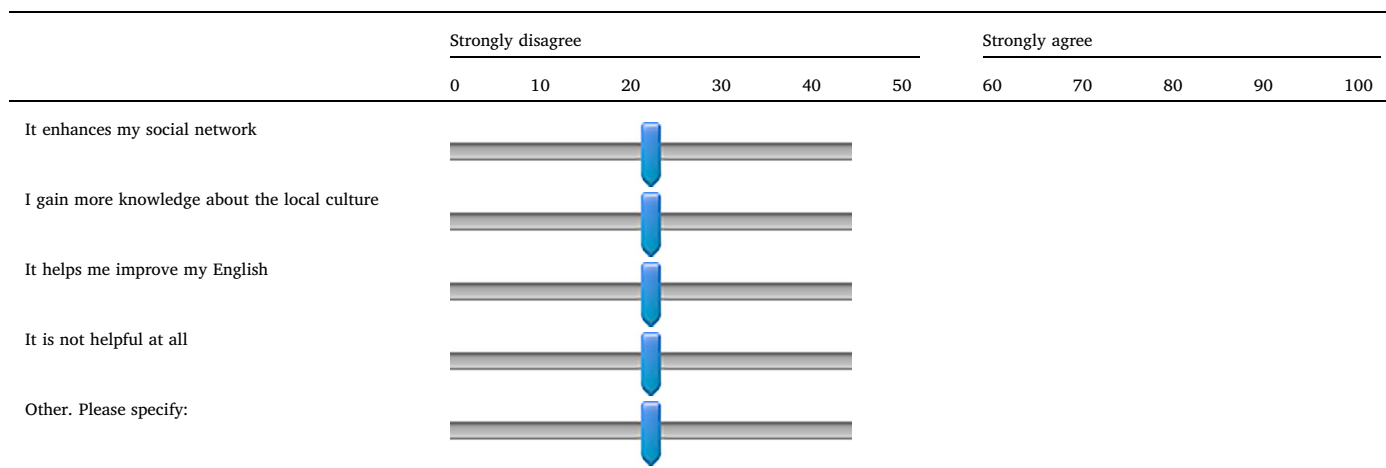
Q18. When you travel primarily to visit your friends/relative **OUTSIDE** New Zealand, what types of activity do you most commonly do (both with and without them)?

| | Visit friends | | Visit relatives | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | With them | Without them | With them | Without them |
| History & Culture (e.g., Visiting museums, monuments, etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Natural attractions (e.g., Visiting the beach, mountain, eco-parks, etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sports & adventurous activities (e.g., hiking, bungee jumping, jetskiing, etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Participating in local events & festivals | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Shopping, theme-parks & other social entertainments | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Others. Please specify: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q19. When you travel within New Zealand to visit your friends who are **local New Zealanders**, in what ways do you think it benefits you? (Please use the slider to indicate your response).



Q20. When you travel within New Zealand to visit your friends who are **NOT local New Zealanders**, in what ways do you think it benefits you? (Please use the slider to indicate your response).



Q21. In general, how would you evaluate your travel experiences in relation to visiting friends and relatives during your PhD study in New Zealand?

| | Very positive | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Very negative | Not applicable |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Travel experience when visiting friends within New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Travel experience when visiting relatives within New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Travel experience when visiting friends outside of New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Travel experience when visiting relatives outside of New Zealand | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

In this last section, I would like to find out a little bit about your experiences in being hosts and guests of friends and relatives while studying in New Zealand.

Q22. What kind of accommodation do you typically use when you travel to visit friends/relatives during your study in New Zealand?

| | I usually stay at | | | Please specify: (For those who choose "Other types of accommodation" only) |
|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|---|
| | Their places | Commercial accommodation (Hotels, Motels, etc.) | Other types of accommodation | |
| When I travel to visit friends , | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When I travel to visit relatives , | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

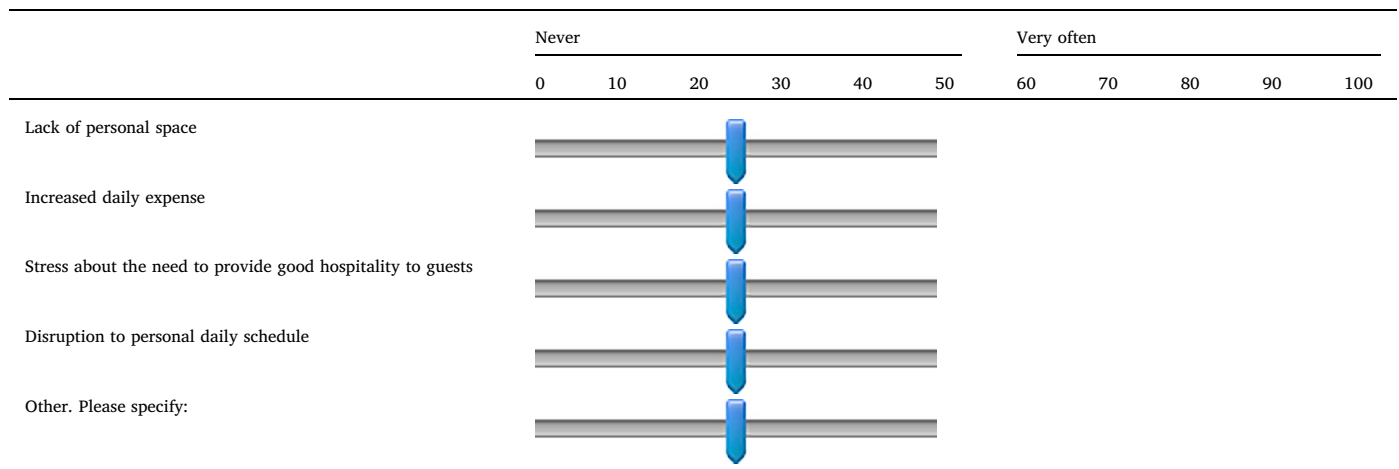
Q23. When your friends/relatives travel to visit you during your study in New Zealand, what kind of accommodation do they **typically** use?

| | They usually stay at | | | Please specify: (For those who choose "Other types of accommodation" only) |
|--|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|---|
| | My place | Commercial accommodation (Hotels, Motels, etc.) | Other types of accommodation | |
| When my friends travel to visit me, | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When my relatives travel to visit me, | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

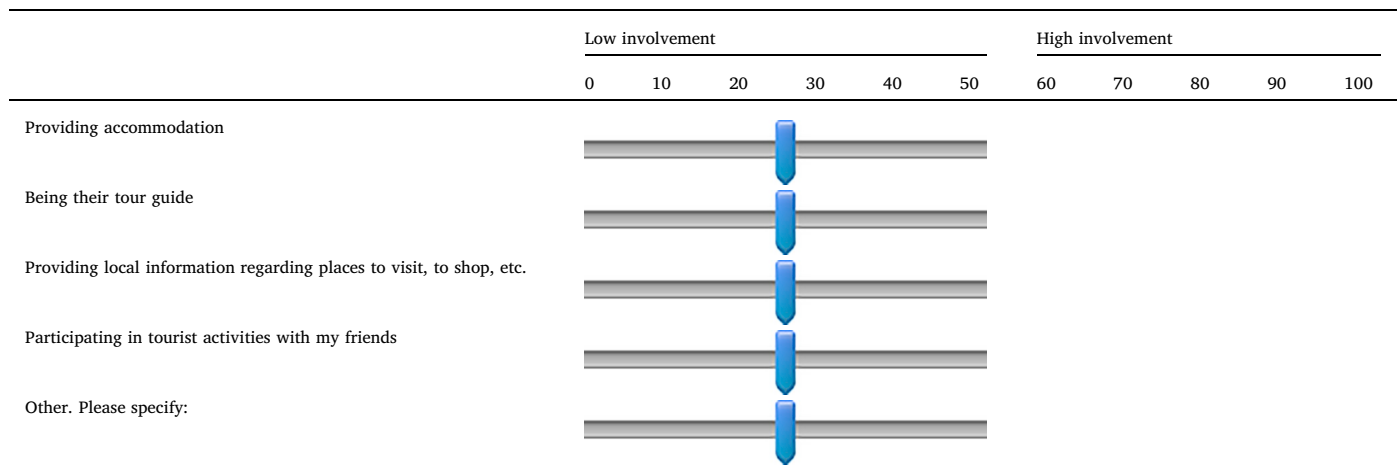
Q24. Have you encountered any problems when hosting friends during your PhD study in New Zealand?

- No problem at all
- Yes, I have
- Not applicable (I haven't hosted friends during my PhD study in New Zealand)

Q24a. How often have you encountered the following problems when **hosting friends** during your PhD study in New Zealand? (Please use the slider to indicate your response).



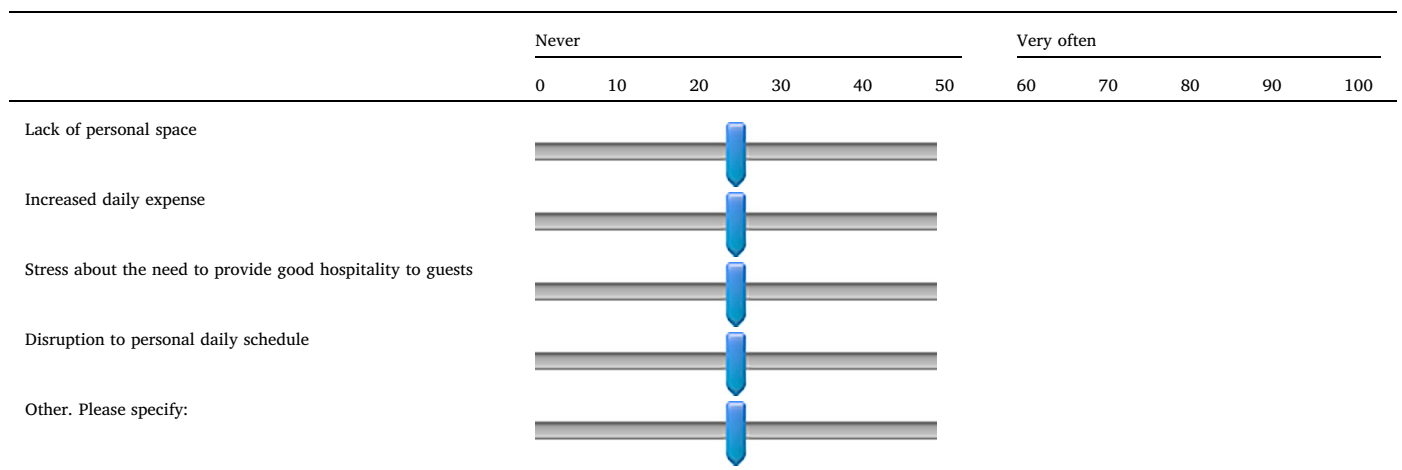
Q24b. If you have hosted **friends** during your PhD study in New Zealand, to what extent did it involve the followings? (Please use the slider to indicate your response).



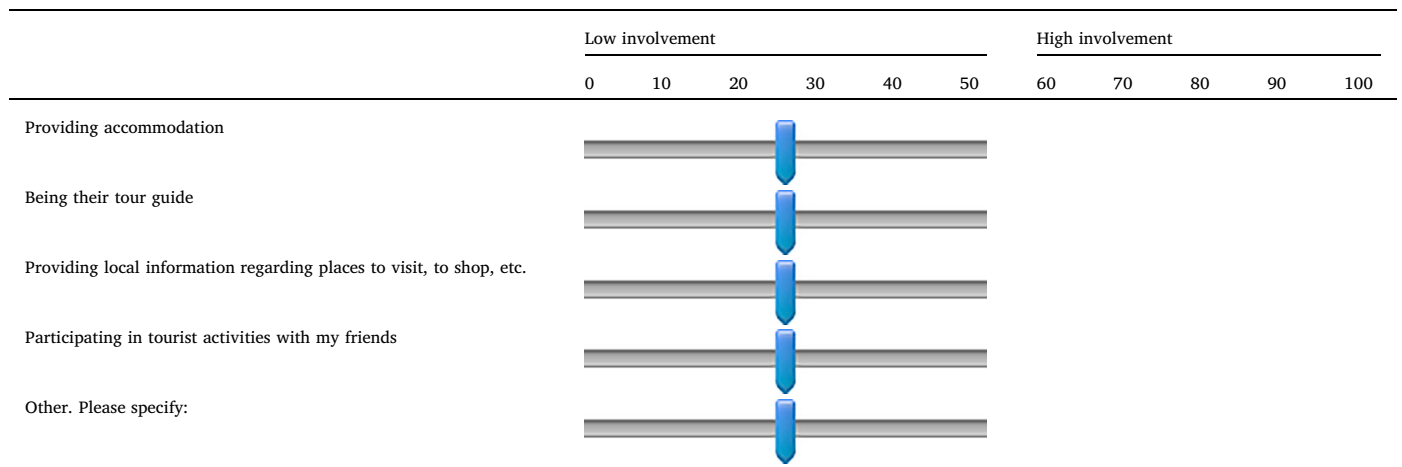
Q25. Have you encountered any problems when **hosting relatives** during your PhD study in New Zealand?

- No problem at all
- Yes, I have
- Not applicable (I haven't hosted relatives during my PhD study in New Zealand)

Q25a. How often have you encountered the following problems when **hosting relatives** during your PhD study in New Zealand? (Please use the slider to indicate your response).



Q25b. If you have hosted **relatives** during your PhD study in New Zealand, to what extent did it involve the followings? (Please use the slider to indicate your response).



Q26. How would you evaluate your experiences of hosting friends/relatives, and/or being hosted by them in New Zealand?

| | Very positive | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Very negative | Not applicable |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| My experience of hosting friends in NZ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My experience of hosting relatives in NZ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My experience of being hosted by friends in NZ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My experience of being hosted by relatives in NZ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q27. In addition to this survey, the project also involves focus groups discussion, with potential elaboration upon data obtained from the survey. The discussion will last about 60 min and refreshments will be provided. Would you be interested in participating in a focus group discussion as part of this research?

- No, thank you.
- Yes, I would.

If you would like to participate in these focus groups please supply your contact details below (e.g., email address, phone number, etc). This will mean that your survey responses will not be completely anonymous but will, however, be treated with confidentiality and any information you provide in the survey will be reported anonymously in the research findings. You can also be assured that your data will be stored separately from these contact details and the researcher will be the only person to see these details. Your information will be entirely confidential to the researcher.

Appendix D. Indicative questions for focus group discussions

D.1. The VFR tourism behaviour of international PhD students in New Zealand

- Why do you travel to visit friends/relatives while studying? In the case of travelling to visit relatives, is it an obligation?
- Could you please say a little bit about the timing – and length – of your VFR trips?
 - When is best, and why?
 - Are there any challenges in sorting out timing with your friends and family? If yes, do you have examples of these difficulties?
 - For those of you who've been in NZ for a while has the timing and frequency of these kinds of trips changed during your period of study here? Why?
 - How might timing affect your experience of these VFR trips?
- Have you ever visited the same friends/relatives more than once? If yes, who did you visit? Why do you visit them often?
- What might discourage you from travelling to visit your friends and relatives while you studied in New Zealand?

Most of us here have involved in VFR tourism in some way, either as guests or hosts. There is an emerging form of VFR where everyone travels to a third place that is neither anyone's home to meet each other.

- When you engage in this form of VFR travel, could you please describe to me how you organise it?
- Is it more likely for domestic or international travel?
- What do you think are some of the reasons why people choose this form of travel to visit each other?
- In your experience, what are the good or bad aspects of this kind of VFR when compared to just having friends and relatives visit you where you live or visiting your friends and relatives where they live?

D.2. Host-guest relationship manifested through the VFR tourism experiences of international PhD students

- Some of us here might have had experiences of hosting friends/relatives, or being hosted by them. Could you please tell me how well it went? Any memorable experiences you can share?
- What usually motivates/demotivates you to stay with friends/relatives when you travel?
- If you know that your friends/relatives are travelling to your residing area, would you offer them accommodation at your place? Why/why not?
- What are the main differences between hosting friends and relatives?
- Very often, when we have guests, we take them out to places and participate in tourist activities that we might otherwise have not. If such situation has happened to you, could you please tell me what it was like? (Prompt: Like a tourist, like I am having a holiday myself, make me realise that I am still a stranger in my town, etc)
- What factors may affect your **hosting** experiences/behaviour of your friends and relatives? Or in other words, when hosting friends or relatives does the experience differ depending on things such as who they are, how long you have known them? If yes, in what ways?" (Prompt: How well/long you have known each other? Relationship? Age difference?)
- What may change how you behave or feel when you are a guest travelling to visit your friends and relatives? (Prompt: How well/long you have known each other? Relationship? Age difference?)

D.3. The significance of the domestic VF tourism of international PhD students

D.3.1. Domestic VF tourism behaviour

So far we have talked about VFR tourism both domestically and internationally. In this section of the interview, I'd like you to think about your experiences in visiting/hosting FRIENDS ONLY and within New Zealand only.

- First, could you please tell me: what are some of the occasions when you travel to visit your friends in New Zealand?
- What factors would you consider before deciding to host your friends?
- Do you think you will come back to New Zealand to visit your friends here after completing your PhD? Why/why not?

D.3.2. Domestic VF tourism and sociocultural adaptation in New Zealand

- In my online survey, respondents were asked in what ways travelling to visit friends in New Zealand while studying benefits them. Besides the given options, there was one interesting comment stating that: "When I travel to visit friends who are not local New Zealanders, it makes me feel like home". Do you agree with this comment? Why/why not? Any other benefits you would like to add?
- Are the experiences different between travelling to visit friends who are local residents and visiting those who are not? If yes, in what ways?
- How does hosting friends in New Zealand have an impact on you? Any differences between hosting friends who are local residents and those who are not? If yes, how?
- Overall, if you think about your experience of living in New Zealand as a PhD student, do you find it hard or easy to adapt? Does travelling to visit friends, or hosting friends help in any way?

Appendix E. Focus group participant's note

Thank you very much for participating in this focus group. The purpose of this sheet is to provide you with a material to write down your thoughts, opinions and any comments you have for the questions asked during the group discussion. In addition, I would also appreciate it if you could provide some information about yourself in the "demographic details" section. This is so that I can record the participant make-up of my focus groups and distinguish one from another.

The sheet will be collected at the end of the interview, and all relevant gathered demographic information will be kept confidential.

I. Demographic details:

Gender of participant:

Nationality of participant:

Area of participant's study:

Length of time in New Zealand:

Previous VFR (visiting friends and relatives) tourism experiences (Please tick where applicable):

| | Friends | Relatives |
|---------------|---------|-----------|
| Domestic | | |
| International | | |

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