

The Malaysian Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) Market Initiated by the Malaysian Students in South Island, New Zealand.

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Abstract

In addition to the traditionally dominating countries within the international education market, the United States and the United Kingdom, new providers of educational products and recipients of student-generated VFR have been emerging over the last decade. Although, historically, the link between international education and the tourism industry has not attracted any significant research attention, recent studies (Cameron and Meade 2002; Kember 2002; Pope, Shanka and Au-Knight 2002; Isa 2002) have identified the potential role of international students regarding the promotion of their host country as a VFR destination. By investigating the contribution of Malaysian international students towards VFR in New Zealand, this study attempts to facilitate a deeper understanding of the economic and social implications of international student-generated VFR.

Asian countries are reported to contribute the largest number of international students studying abroad. In New Zealand, the number of Asian students and, consequently, Asian VFR tourist has increased significantly in recent years, with Malaysian international students accounting for the largest group in New Zealand. Thus, this study investigates Malaysian students, who were studying in New Zealand in 2003, their families, who had already visited New Zealand and families, who intended to visit the host country. Research was carried out in form of questionnaires and interviews regarding the interaction between study, visitation and intention to visit.

Upon analysis of the results, the study finds that there are significant differences among the Malaysian ethnic groups in answering a few questions. Also, closeness to family, relatives and friends appears to be the major reason for the students to host VFR and for their VFR visitors to come and visit them in New Zealand.