

## **Disaggregating the Visiting Friends and Relatives Market. An Analysis of Australian VFR Arrivals to Dunedin.**

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### **Abstract**

Previous research on Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) travellers has predominantly focused on the economic value of this travel sector to a destination, but has substantially ignored the specific behavioural attributes of VFR travellers which can inform strategic market development campaigns. In New Zealand little is known about the specific behavioural attributes of international VFR travellers to the country, and it has not been possible to develop targeted marketing campaigns with any certainty that they will be effective in stimulating travel volumes or in developing the VFR travel sector into a higher yielding visitor market.

The purpose of this research project was to improve the state of knowledge about the Australian-Dunedin VFR market and, specifically, to identify behavioural trends which could be harnessed for the purpose of designing an effective and strategic marketing campaign to further develop this market. Dunedin was chosen as a case study destination as a reasonably sized Australian VFR market regularly use Dunedin's direct air-link to various Australian destinations. A questionnaire to Australian travellers departing Dunedin for an Australian destination was administered during 13 June 2002 and 14 July 2003. The survey attracted a response rate of 96%, with a total of 730 survey responses (45% of total responses) collected from persons who indicated that their trip purpose was solely VFR, or that VFR was a conjoint trip purpose.

The survey responses were analysed to provide a 'baseline' profile of Australian VFR travellers to Dunedin as an aggregate market sector. A profile of the Australian VFR visitor to Dunedin was developed from an analysis of the aggregate data set. In addition, this research project performed a typological analysis developed by Seaton (1996), Morrison (2000) and Moscardo (2002) on the dataset. The typological analysis of the data set identified many statistically significant differences in the consumption behaviours of the various typological sub-categories. There were also two unexpected findings when the typological analysis was applied to the data set. Firstly, there were few statistically significant differences between the demographic attributes of each typological category. This finding confirms that traditional market segmentation attributes such as demographic features mask the complexities underlying consumption behaviours. It is suggested that an aggregated analysis of the sector on demographic criteria is not a useful predictor of consumption behaviours, and that a typological analysis of consumption patterns should be preferred for the purpose of designing effective marketing campaigns. Secondly, it was discovered that there were statistically significant differences between visitors who classified themselves as 'Leisure' VFR travellers (travellers who identify their travel purpose as VFR and also as 'holiday') and those who classify themselves as 'Pure' VFR travellers (travellers who identify their trip purpose as VFR only).

This research project is the first to develop an aggregated profile of the Australian VFR visitor to Dunedin. It is also the first study to apply a typological analysis to a VFR visitor market in New Zealand. In discovering statistically significant behavioural differences between those VFR travellers

that classify themselves as 'Leisure' VFR travellers and those who classify themselves as 'Pure' VFR travellers, new conclusions can be drawn about New Zealand's Australian VFR visitor market. Therefore, the findings of this research make a significant contribution at both a regional and national level.