

Article

Beyond Borders: Analyzing the Dynamics of Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) Travel in the Context of Global Migration

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Abstract

This study analyzes the characteristics of Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) travel in Korea, distinguishing it from leisure travel based on data from the 2022 international visitor survey by Korean government. The paper identifies significant behavioral and demographic differences between VFR and leisure travelers, revealing that VFR travelers tend to spend more, stay longer, and are more likely to revisit. They are also more likely to be dispersed across various regions rather than concentrated in major cities, thus contributing to the local economy and reducing tourism congestion. Despite facing challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, VFR travel has shown resilience and continues to be a substantial part of international tourism due to its year-round stability and economic impact. This research fills a gap in the literature by focusing on Asia, particularly Korea, and provides valuable insights for destination marketing organizations to develop tailored marketing strategies that leverage the social networks and unique preferences of VFR travelers.

Keywords

Migration, VFR travel, International tourism, Destination Marketing, Comparative analysis

Introduction

Migration between countries has been increasing, and immigrants who have settled in new regions have attracted the attention of friends and relatives living in their home countries toward their destinations (Griffin & Dimanche, 2017). They are motivated to invite acquaintances from their hometowns to introduce them to their new homes and show them their lives. Migration due to interethnic marriage, work, study, retirement, poverty, and political difficulties affects travel's flow, distribution, and frequency (Moon et al., 2019; Seaton, 1997; Williams & Hall,

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2000), thus intertwining migration closely with tourism and creating new travel demands distinct from leisure, recreation, and holidays (Dwyer et al., 2014). Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) after migration has become a crucial component of international tourism (Backer et al., 2020), accounting for over a quarter of all international travelers and nearly half of all visits to low-income or lower middle-income, disease-endemic countries (Zentveld & Yousuf, 2022). There is a steady demand for VFR without a peak or off-season, and, spatially, VFR travelers are distributed rather than concentrated in metropolitan cities or popular tourist destinations. The economic effect is relatively significant due to extended stays and significant spending (Kashiwagi et al., 2023; Shani & Uriely, 2012).

The COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread travel restrictions, profoundly impacting VFR travel, which is a crucial segment of international tourism (Yasin et al., 2022). Despite these challenges, VFR travel showed resilience, with studies indicating that people remained focused on reconnecting with loved ones, which is essential for personal and place identity (Sarkady et al., 2021; Zentveld et al., 2022). While VFR travel faced numerous obstacles during the pandemic, its contribution to international people movement remained substantial, driven by the inherent human need for familial connections (Chan et al., 2022; Damián & Ramírez, 2020). However, VFR has not been sufficiently studied, because tourism transactions do not occur through travel distribution networks (Backer, 2010). Most existing research has been conducted in Western contexts such as Australia and the Americas, leaving the Asian market relatively understudied (Griffin, 2013; Yousuf & Backer, 2015). Consequently, there is a pressing need for more active development of research on VFR in non-Western countries (Kashiwagi et al., 2020).

Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) have traditionally focused on promoting destinations to leisure and business travelers. However, the unique characteristics of behaviors and attitudes of VFR travelers necessitate a tailored approach. Effective marketing strategies should consider the motivations and preferences of VFR travelers, such as their desire for authentic, localized experiences and their tendency to travel during off-peak times (Backer & Lynch, 2011). Marketing efforts can also leverage the social networks of migrants to attract more VFR travelers. Word-of-mouth recommendations and personal invitations from friends and relatives living abroad can be powerful tools in promoting a destination. Additionally, DMOs can develop special packages and offers that appeal to VFR travelers, such as discounts on group activities or cultural experiences that highlight the local heritage and community life (Griffin, 2013).

Despite its significance, VFR travel research faces several challenges. One major issue is the lack of a standardized definition and measurement framework. VFR travel often overlaps with other forms of travel, making it difficult to isolate and study as a distinct segment. The academic significance of VFR travel lies in its multifaceted impact on tourism, community well-being, and economic development, necessitating a deeper understanding and more strategic approach to harness its full potential (AlSaleh & Moufakkir, 2019; Katsoni, 2016). Additionally, data collection methods for VFR travel are not always comprehensive or consistent, leading to gaps in understanding and analysis (Yousuf & Backer, 2015). Therefore, research based on extensive empirical data on VFR travel must be conducted and shared.

To address these issues, this paper utilizes Korea's official secondary data (Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism, 2023) on foreign people who visited Korea in 2022. Based on these reliable data, the personal characteristics of VFR travelers (age, number of visits, nationality, etc.) are compared with those of leisure, entertainment, and recreation travelers visiting Korea. In particular, the differences in behavior between these groups in terms of length of stay, amount spent, length of visit, accommodation, and areas visited are explored. Additionally, the attitudinal differences between VFR and leisure travelers are examined, focusing on satisfaction, intention to

revisit, and intention to recommend the destination. This approach could contribute academically by empirically verifying the purpose presented as a characteristic of VFR and providing practical implications for attracting the VFR market.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background of VFR Travel

The VFR (visiting friends and relatives) travel segment has been a recognized but underappreciated component of the tourism industry for decades. Initially studied within the context of migration patterns, the VFR segment has gained prominence as an area requiring focused academic and practical investigation. The theoretical underpinning of VFR travel lies in its dual relationship with migration and tourism, highlighting the interconnectedness of human mobility and social networks (Williams & Hall, 2000). Historically, VFR travel was not extensively studied because it did not fit neatly into the traditional categories of tourism, such as leisure or business travel. The VFR segment often overlaps with other forms of travel, making it challenging to classify and quantify distinctly. However, with increasing globalization and migration flows, the importance of VFR travel has become more apparent, warranting a deeper exploration of its unique characteristics and contributions to the tourism economy (Backer, 2010). VFR markets have been more prominent in countries with high immigrant populations such as Australia, Canada, and the United States (Griffin, 2013; Jackson, 1990). VFR research targeting these countries has been ongoing since the 1990s, but the concept and definition of these markets remain a matter of debate (Munoz et al., 2017).

VFR Travel in the Context of Global Migration

Migration patterns significantly influence VFR travel. The decision to migrate can be motivated by various factors including economic opportunities, educational pursuits, family reunification, and political or environmental pressures. Once migrants establish themselves in a new country, they often serve as anchors for subsequent waves of VFR travel. These travelers, typically friends and relatives from the migrant's home country, visit to reconnect and experience the host country through a personal, localized lens (Dwyer et al., 2014).

Studies have shown that countries with high levels of immigration also experience high levels of VFR travel. For instance, Australia, Canada, and the United States, which have significant immigrant populations, have robust VFR travel markets. In these contexts, VFR travel serves not only as a means of maintaining familial and social bonds but also as an essential economic driver, contributing to the tourism industry through expenditures on accommodations, dining, and local attractions (Backer, 2015; Jackson, 1990).

The economic implications of VFR travel are substantial but often overlooked. VFR travelers typically have more extended stays and higher expenditures compared to other types of tourists. They usually spend on commercial tourism facilities such as hotels, restaurants, and sightseeing attractions, contrary to the assumption that they primarily stay with friends and relatives, thus contributing to the tourism sector's revenue (Backer, 2010). They contribute to the local economy through spending on accommodations (even when staying with friends or relatives, as they often engage in dining out, entertainment, and shopping), transportation, and tourism activities. Additionally, VFR travel can help mitigate the effects of seasonality in tourism, providing a more stable revenue stream for destinations (Kashiwagi et al., 2023; Taufatofua & Craig-Smith, 2010).

Regarding the attitudes of VFR travelers, Yousuf and Backer (2015) compared the hosting behaviors of migrant and non-migrant hosts in Australia. They found that migrant hosts often engaged in various tourism activities with their visitors, thereby promoting the lifestyle and culture of their new country. Compared to other tourists, VFR visitors explore the neighborhood more leisurely and visit ordinary local attractions that are difficult for other tourists. Consequently, VFR travel may result in higher satisfaction rates because it has the potential to create new tourist attractions in non-tourist areas while avoiding the homogeneity and superficiality that can result from existing tourism development (Griffin & Dimanche, 2017). Shani and Uriely (2012) found that VFR travelers' spending patterns are diverse, including significant expenditures on local attractions and activities that are often overlooked in traditional tourism analyses. This underscores the importance of targeted marketing and infrastructure development to cater to the specific needs of VFR travelers.

The Role of Host in VFR Travel

VFR travel is distinct from other forms of tourism due to the pre-existing relationships between hosts and visitors, which influence travel decisions, activities, and experiences (Dutt & Ninov, 2017). The role and meaning of a host in VFR travel are multifaceted and significantly influence the travel experience. Hosts are pivotal in shaping their guests' trip characteristics, decisions, and activities, often acting as informal tour guides and cultural intermediaries (Lin et al., 2022; Zentveld & Yousuf, 2022). Constraints such as individual, family, and community factors, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, also influence VFR travel decisions, highlighting the resilience of this travel segment (Oktadiana & Agarwal, 2022).

The social relations within diasporas, such as the Chinese community in Hungary, highlight how long-term residents leverage their local knowledge and social networks (*guanxi*) to enhance the VFR experience (Song-Agócs & Michalkó, 2022). International students in educational hubs like Hong Kong and Thailand also play a unique role as hosts, integrating their sociocultural backgrounds with local urban infrastructure to provide visitors a rich, immersive experience (Chan et al., 2022; Petry et al., 2022). The hosting experience is not homogeneous; it varies based on the relationship type (friends vs. relatives), cultural background, and the host's familiarity with the destination (Griffin & Glover, 2023; Tham et al., 2024). Hosts often experience stress due to the desire to provide a good experience, especially in East Asian contexts where cultural expectations are high (Backer et al., 2020). However, hosting also offers personal benefits such as strengthened social ties, improved quality of life, and enhanced place attachment (Liu, 2019; Munoz, 2020). The interaction between hosts and guests can create a virtuous circle, where hosts' destination knowledge and motivation positively impact visitors' experiences, thereby reinforcing the host's role as a destination ambassador (Kim & Choi, 2023). Additionally, hosts contribute to local tourism by encouraging visits to less crowded, culturally significant areas, which is particularly relevant in the post-COVID-19 context. Hosts play a crucial role in shaping the VFR experience, affecting visitors' perceptions of the destination and their overall travel satisfaction (Miah et al., 2020; Munoz et al., 2017). The role of a host in VFR travel is dynamic and integral, encompassing emotional, social, and practical dimensions that significantly enrich the travel experience for both hosts and guests.

The Motivation of VFR Travel

People who travel for Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) are motivated by a complex interplay of factors that extend beyond merely reconnecting with loved ones. The motivations behind VFR

travel often include maintaining social ties, cultural connections, and personal obligations, which differ from the leisure and exploration motives typical of other tourism forms (Huang et al., 2017; Zátori et al., 2019; Zentveld et al., 2022). The tourist experience itself is also a significant motivator, with activities and the length of stay enhancing the overall satisfaction of the trip (Griffin, 2013). Additionally, the destination's attractiveness plays a crucial role, as VFR travelers are often influenced by the appeal of the location itself, which can extend their stay and increase their economic impact on the local economy (Backer, 2010). VFR travel is often intertwined with other purposes, such as attending events or participating in leisure activities, which further diversifies the motivations behind these trips (Backer, 2008; Wu & Pearce, 2017). The emotional need to maintain personal and place identity, as well as the sense of belonging and emotional security, are also critical motivators, particularly for diasporic migrants (Kelly, 2022). Lastly, the travel career pattern framework suggests that core motives like novelty-seeking, escaping/relaxing, and relationship building are universally important, regardless of the traveler's life stage or experience (Scott & Turco, 2007). Thus, VFR travel is driven by a multifaceted set of motivations that encompass emotional, social, and experiential dimensions.

VF and VR Travel among VFR Travel

VFR was classified as VF visiting friends and VR visiting relatives. Seaton and Tagg (1995) concluded that VR comprised approximately four times as many travelers to Northern Ireland as VF. In a study that interviewed VFR traveler hosts in New Zealand, Lockyer and Ryan (2007) derived estimates of 46% VR and 54% VF, respectively. In a street survey of Melbourne with 292 residents who hosted VFR travelers, Backer and Lynch (2011) concluded that VR accounted for approximately two-thirds of the VFR segment and VF accounted for approximately one-third.

Studies have shown that VR and VF are difficult to distinguish. Using UK data, Hay (1996) found that 54% were VR and 37% were VF, with the remaining 9% of VFR travelers falling into both categories. In a study on Northern Ireland by Seaton and Tie (2015), VR was 52%, VF was 30%, and the group comprising both VR and VF was 18%.

Travelers visiting friends (VF) and travelers visiting relatives (VR) also differ in their personal characteristics: VFs are significantly more likely to be students, whereas VRs are more likely to be from higher socioeconomic groups. Additionally, while VF is motivated by excitement and fun, VR is highly motivated by promoting family relationships and enjoying family outings with relatives, including young children (Lockyer & Ryan, 2007). Therefore, VFs were younger than VRs, and differences in attitudes and activities performed by VFs and VRs were identified (Backer et al., 2017).

Comparing VFR with leisure, recreation, and holiday travel in terms of length of stay for VFR travel, Hay (1996) analyzed data from the UK and concluded that VRs stayed longer (3.7 nights vs. 2.1 nights) and traveled farther (201 miles vs. 160 miles) than VFs. Similar results were also obtained in the United States (Lehto et al., 2001), and Germany (Yuan et al., 1995). However, this study did not provide the same results (Boyne et al., 2002), so additional consideration of the characteristics and context of each region is necessary.

Regarding tourism activities and expenditures of VFRs, many recent studies have found that VFRs engage in various activities and provide significant economic contributions to the tourism industry and destinations (Backer, 2015; Shani & Uriely, 2012). Seaton and Tagg (1995) reported that VFs are more likely to spend money on entertainment and drinks than VRs, whereas VRs are more likely to spend money on transportation, shopping, souvenirs, and gifts. Regarding activities, VFs also showed a higher interest in some outdoor activities (viewing scenery, visiting pubs, etc.), whereas VRs were more likely to engage in time-consuming activities, such as golf,

fishing, festivals, and events. Regarding accommodation type, VRs are more likely than VFs to stay in the host's home (Backer, 2010; Seaton & Tie, 2015). However, VRs can also stay in commercial accommodations to enjoy more freedom in activities (Backer, 2008). Research on revisit intention has reported that VR tourists visit hosts more frequently and repeatedly and stay longer than VF tourists (Seaton & Tie, 2015).

Methodology

Research Question

This study aimed to analyze the characteristics of VFR based on data from foreign visitors to Korea. Accordingly, the following three research questions were posed:

1. Are there differences in the personal characteristics (age, number of visits, and nationality) of the VFR group who visited Korea compared with those of the leisure, entertainment, and recreation group?
2. Are there any differences in the behavior of the VFR group who visited Korea (length of stay, amount spent, time of visit, accommodation, and visit area) compared to the leisure, entertainment, and recreation group?
3. Are there differences in the attitudes (satisfaction, intention to revisit, and intention to recommend) of the VFR group that visited Korea compared with those of the leisure, entertainment, and recreation group?

Data Collection

Secondary data collected from the 2022 International Visitor Survey (Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism, 2023) was used to understand the characteristics of VFR travel. The Korean government surveyed 16,000 foreigners who visit Korea annually at airports and ports across the country in the survey of foreign tourists. The survey targets people over 15 years of age, and the proportions by gender and age is based on the previous year's visit to Korea. Among this data, 7,306 pieces of data from the group that visited Korea for leisure/entertainment/relaxation purposes and 2,517 pieces of data from the group that visited Korea for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives were extracted and used for comparative analysis.

Research Analysis

To compare the personal characteristics and behaviors of the two groups, individual characteristics (age, number of visits, nationality) and behaviors (accommodation, period of stay, amount spent per person, region to visit) were converted into nominal or dummy variables, and a chi-square test was performed. A t-test was conducted to identify differences between the two groups in post-trip attitudes such as satisfaction, intention to revisit, and intention to recommend. The Chi-square test and t-test are fundamental statistical methodologies used in tourism research to analyze different types of data and draw meaningful conclusions. The Chi-square test is particularly useful for categorical data, which is common in tourism studies. It compares observed frequencies with theoretical frequencies to test hypotheses, serving as a goodness of fit test or a test of independence between two variables in contingency tables (Ramokolo, 2020). The t-test is employed to compare the means of two groups to determine if they are statistically different

from each other, which is essential in experimental designs that study causality, a method widely adopted in fields like psychology and education and increasingly in tourism research (Fong et al., 2020). All analyses were performed using SPSS version 27.0.

Results

Respondents

Table 1 shows the respondents' profile. The survey sample comprised 3,232 men (32.9%) and 6,591 women (67.1%). The largest age group was those in their 20s, with 4,187 people (42.6%), followed by 2,371 people in their 30s (24.1%), 1,296 people in their 40s (13.2%), 1,006 people in their 50s (10.2%), and 493 people in their teens (4.9%). It was in order. The Leisure/Entertainment/Relaxation purpose group (hereafter referred to as the LER group) comprised 7,306 people (74.4%), and the VFR group comprised 2,517 people (25.6%). Regarding the number of visits, the majority were once (4,796 people, 48.8%), followed by four or more visits (2,350 people, 23.9%), two visits (1,720 people, 17.5%), and three visits (957 people, 9.7%). By nationality, Singapore accounts for 16.8%, USA 14.9%, Japan 11.8%, France 7.3%, Taiwan 5.0%, Thailand 4.6%, Germany 4.1%, China 3.3%, Australia 3.0%, Indonesia 2.7%, UK 2.5%, Malaysia 2.4%, followed by the Middle East at 2.2%.

Comparative Analysis of Individual Characteristics and Behavior

Table 2 outlined the results of chi-square test on individual characteristics between two groups. Significant differences were found between the two groups based on age (Figure 1). The LER group had a high proportion of teenagers (77.8%) and those in their 20s (80.2%), whereas the VFR group had a very high proportion of people in their 50s (35.3%) and 60s (53.5%). The VFR group visiting Korea had a relatively older age group than the LER group. This implies that the

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (2022)

	Variable	n	%		Variable	n	%
gender	male	3232	32.9	Nationality	Singapore	1650	16.8
	female	6591	67.1		USA	1463	14.9
age	10~20	483	4.9		Japan	1155	11.8
	21~30	4187	42.6		France	718	7.3
	30~40	2371	24.1		Taiwan	489	5.0
	40~50	1296	13.2		Thailand	449	4.6
	50~60	1006	10.2		Germany	403	4.1
	61 or older	480	4.9		China	324	3.3
					Australia	290	3.0
Purpose to visit	LER	7306	74.4		Indonesia	261	2.7
	VFR	2517	25.6		UK	246	2.5
number of visits	First	4796	48.8		Malaysia	232	2.4
	Second	1720	17.5	Middle East	219	2.2	
	Third	957	9.7	Other item	1924	19.6	
	Over four times	2350	23.9				

Table 2. Chi-square test results on characteristics of visitors to Korea (2022)

Variable	LER Group		VFR Group		t	p-value	
n	7,306	74.4%	2,517	25.6%			
age	10~20	376	77.8%	107	22.2%	323.762 ***	.000
	21~30	3,357	80.2%	830	19.8%		
	30~40	1,743	73.5%	628	26.5%		
	40~50	956	73.8%	340	26.2%		
	50~60	651	64.7%	355	35.3%		
	61 or older	223	46.5%	257	53.5%		
number of visits	First	3,725	77.7%	1,071	22.3%	104.526 ***	.000
	Second	1,308	76.0%	412	24.0%		
	Third	708	74.0%	249	26.0%		
	Over four times	1,565	66.6%	785	33.4%		
Nationality	Japan	936	81.0%	219	19.0%	1386.06 ***	.000
	Singapore	1,573	95.3%	77	4.7%		
	USA	715	48.9%	748	51.1%		
	France	514	71.6%	204	28.4%		
	Taiwan	442	90.4%	47	9.6%		
	Thailand	399	88.9%	50	11.1%		
	Germany	261	64.8%	142	35.2%		
	China	156	48.1%	168	51.9%		
	Australia	202	69.7%	88	30.3%		
	Indonesia	243	93.1%	25	6.9%		
	UK	141	57.3%	204	42.7%		
	Malaysia	217	93.5%	88	6.5%		
Middle East	161	73.5%	58	26.5%			

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

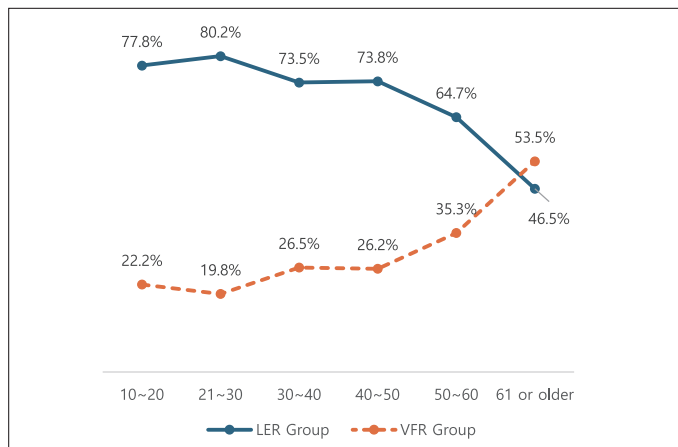


Figure 1. Differences between the two groups according to age of visitors to Korea (2022)

VFR group visiting Korea consists mainly of VRs visiting relatives rather than VFs visiting friends.

Significant differences were observed in the number of visits (Figure 2). The LER group had a high proportion of trips once (77.7%) and twice (76.0%), whereas the VFR group had a high proportion of trips of four or more trips (33.4%). Because the VFR group has a higher revisit rate, it is assumed that they are more likely to overcome external factors such as exchange rates, epidemics, and political conflicts compared to the LER group.

Depending on the country, there was a significant difference in the proportion of the LER and VFR groups (Figure 3). Relatively close countries, such as Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, had a high proportion of the LER group. By contrast, distant countries such as the U.S. and France have a high proportion of the VFR group. Although China is a nearby country, the proportion of VFR was high, which is interpreted to be due to the Chinese

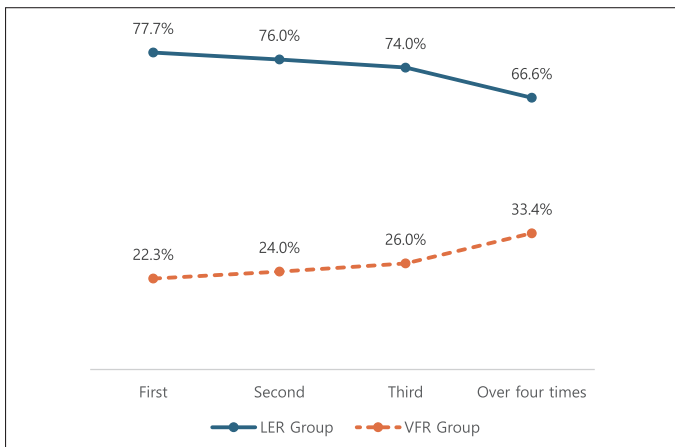


Figure 2. Differences between the two groups according to number of visits of visitors to Korea (2022)

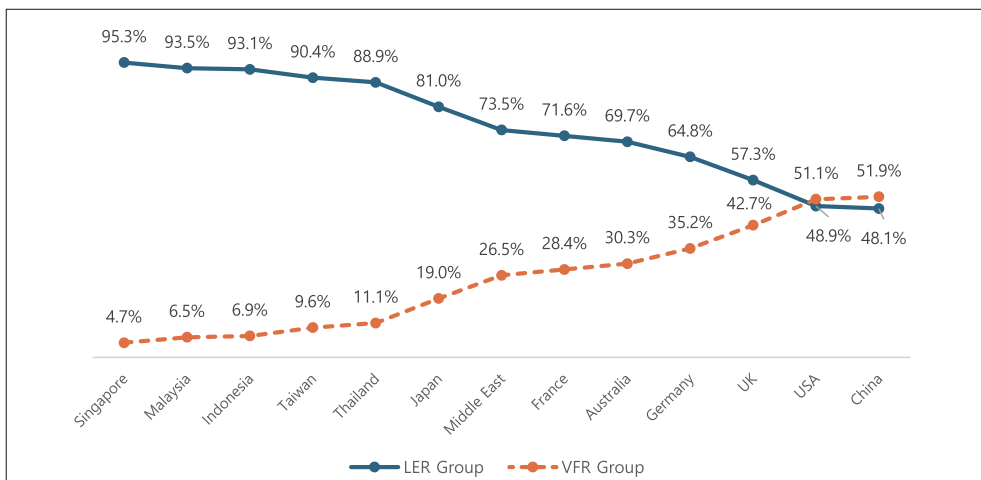


Figure 3. Differences between the two groups according to nationality of visitors to Korea (2022)

Table 3. Chi-square test results for behavioral variables after visiting Korea (2022)

	Variable	LER Group		VFR Group		t	p-value
	n	7,306	74.4%	2,517	25.6%		
Accommodation	Hotel Stayed	6,031	82.6%	1,269	17.4%	1012.574***	.000
	Hotel Not Stayed	1,275	50.5%	1,248	49.5%		
	Family or friend's house Stayed	234	13.8%	1,461	86.2%	3943.549***	.000
	Family or friend's house Not Stayed	7,072	87.0%	1,056	13.0%		
Period of stay	1~3 days	578	89.9%	65	10.1%	1148.796***	0.000
	4~7 days	2,772	86.8%	420	13.2%		
	8~10 days	1,339	78.5%	367	21.5%		
	11~30 days	2,313	67.4%	1,118	32.6%		
	31~60 days	175	39.6%	267	60.4%		
	61~90 days	79	45.4%	95	54.6%		
	91 days~	50	21.3%	185	78.7%		
Amount spent per person	~less than 1,000\$	1,177	81.2%	272	18.8%	129.641***	.000
	\$1,000~less than \$2,000	2,223	78.6%	606	21.4%		
	\$2,000~less than \$3,000	1,918	73.4%	696	26.6%		
	\$3,000~less than \$5,000	1,388	68.1%	650	31.9%		
	\$5,000~less than \$10,000	470	67.4%	227	32.6%		
	Exceeded maximum amount	130	66.3%	66	33.7%		
region to visit	Seoul Visited	6,978	77.8%	1,936	22.2%	646.992***	.000
	Seoul Not Visited	328	36.1%	581	63.9%		
	Gyeonggi Visited	439	43.4%	572	56.6%	566.608***	.000
	Gyeonggi Not Visited	6,867	77.9%	1,945	22.1%		
	Inchon Visited	453	64.3%	251	35.7%	40.030***	.000
	Inchon Not Visited	6,853	75.2%	2,266	24.9%		
	Gangwon Visited	616	70.8%	254	29.2%	6.390***	.011
	Gangwon Not Visited	6,690	74.7%	2,263	25.9%		
	Chungchung Visited	174	41.4%	246	58.6%	249.924***	.000
	Chungchung Not Visited	7,132	75.9%	2,271	24.2%		
	Gyeongsang Visited	2,171	74.4%	747	25.6%	0	.982
	Gyeongsang Not Visited	5,135	74.4%	1,770	25.6%		
	Jeolla Visited	445	68.1%	208	31.9%	14.442***	.000
	Jeolla Not Visited	6,861	74.8%	2,309	25.2%		
Jeju Visited	1,398	81.7%	313	18.3%	58.202***	.000	
Jeju Not Visited	5,908	72.8%	2,204	27.2%			

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

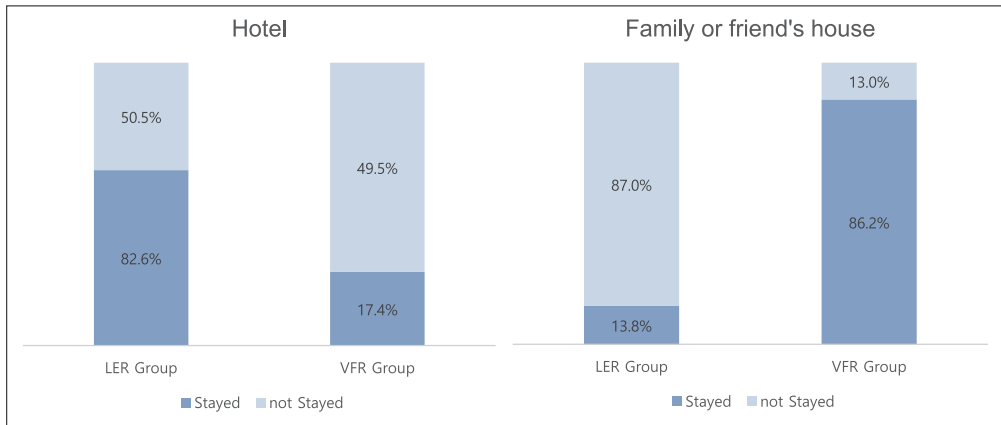


Figure 4. Differences between the two groups according to accommodation of visitors to Korea (2022)

government's strict ban on overseas travel owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Next, the accommodation type was analyzed among the travel behavior characteristics between the two groups (Table 3). Since the questionnaire related to accommodation had multiple responses, rather than cross-analyzing hotels and family or friend's houses at once, the differences between the group that stayed in each accommodation facility and the group that did not were converted into dummy variables to analyze the differences. As confirmed in the literature review, there was a significant difference: the LER group stayed more in hotels, while the VFR group stayed at family friends' houses (Figure 4).

Meanwhile, regarding frequency, only 58% of the VFR group stayed at a family friend's house, and 50.4% stayed at a hotel, suggesting that they contributed economically to the tourism industry. These figures support Backer (2008) that VFR travelers may choose to stay in commercial accommodation to enjoy greater freedom of movement.

There was also a significant difference in length of stay (Figure 5), with most of the LER group having a high proportion of stays of less than ten days (78.5-89.9%), while the VFR group had a very high proportion of stays of 11 days or more (32.6-78.7%). These results support previous studies such as Kashiwagi et al. (2023) and Taufatofua and Craig-Smith (2010) regarding the length of stay of VFR travelers. The economic impact of the VFR group is proving to be more significant than that of the LER group.

The extended stay of the VFR group was also reflected in to amount spent per person (Figure 6). While the LER group accounted for a high proportion of those traveling under \$2,000 (78.6-81.2%), the VFR group accounted for a high proportion of those traveling over \$2,000 (26.6-32.6%). These results support previous studies such as Kashiwagi et al. (2023) and Shani and Urieli (2012) regarding the amount spent of VFR travelers.

To identify the regions visited in Korea, respondents who responded that they visited each region were converted into dummy variables, with 1 indicating that they visited and 0 indicating that they did not visit. No significant differences were found in the Gyeongsang region, including Busan and Daegu. However, significant differences were found in all other provincial cities. In Seoul and Jeju, the ratio of the LER group was higher than the average, and in Incheon, Gangwon, Chungcheong, and Jeolla-do, the ratio of the VFR group was higher than the average. In particular, the dependence on VFR was very high in the Chungcheong and Jeolla regions, at 58.6% and 31.9%, respectively. Even in 2019, before COVID-19, the proportion of foreign

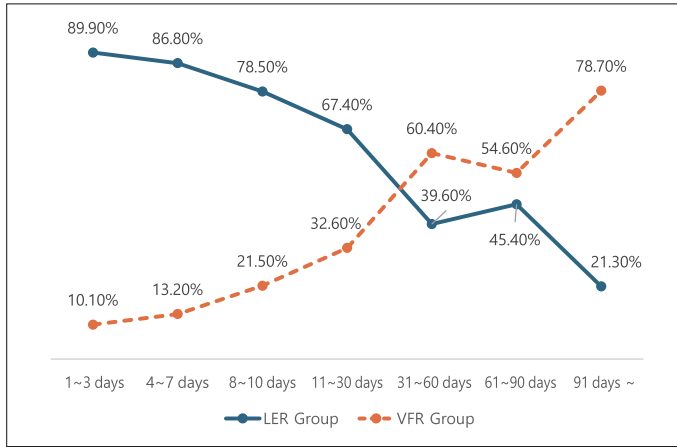


Figure 5. Differences between the two groups according to period of stay of visitors to Korea (2022)

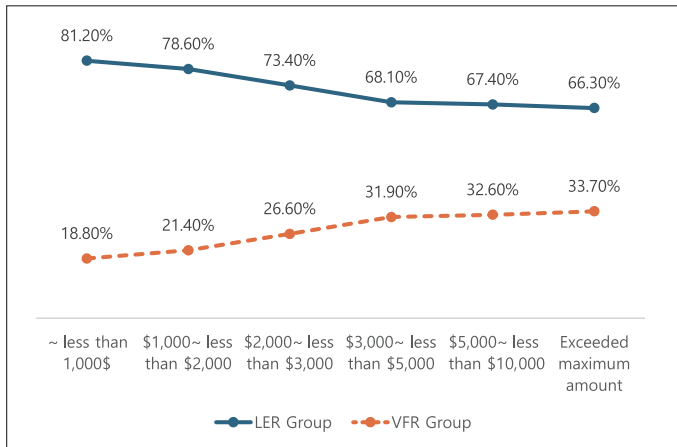


Figure 6. Differences between the two groups according to amount spent per person of visitors to Korea (2022)

tourists entering Korea who visited Seoul was very high at 76.4%, and the phenomenon of not spreading to regional areas has been pointed out as a chronic imbalance problem in Korea. Therefore, the VFR group apparently contributed to resolving this imbalance phenomenon. The results showing that VFR travelers are not concentrated only in the capital city but are dispersed across regions are consistent with previous studies (Griffin & Dimanche, 2017; Shani & Uriely, 2012).

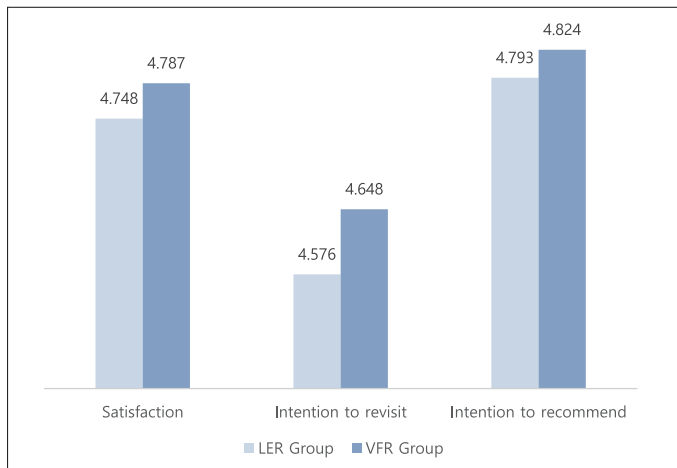
Comparative Analysis of Individual Attitude

A comparative analysis was conducted of the attitudes of foreign visitors to Korea after their visits (Table 4). The two groups were compared using a t-test because the attitude-related questionnaire was designed on a 5-point scale. Satisfaction with visiting Korea was 4.748 points

Table 4. Results of t-test test on attitude variables after visiting Korea (2022)

Variable	LER Group		VFR Group		F	p-value
	average	Standard Deviation	average	Standard Deviation		
Satisfaction	4.748	0.4961	4.787	0.4765	620.545***	.000
Intention to revisit	4.576	0.7949	4.648	0.7554		
Intention to recommend	4.793	0.4707	4.824	0.4489		

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

**Figure 7.** Differences between the two groups according to attitude variables of visitors to Korea (2022)

for the LER group and 4.787 points for the VFR group, which was statistically significant despite a slight difference. Regarding the intention to revisit, the LER group scored 4.576 and the VFR group scored 4.649, which further widened the gap and was statistically significant. Regarding the intention to recommend to people around them, the LER group scored 4.793 and the VFR group scored 4.824, showing a statistically significant advantage over the VFR group (Figure 7). This is also consistent with a study by (Griffin & Dimanche, 2017) that found that VFR travel leads to higher satisfaction and behavior intention.

Conclusions

The results of the present study have several implications. First, based on personal characteristics, the VFR group accounted for a relatively large proportion as age increased, and many participants returned more than four times. By nationality, the proportion of people living in remote areas such as the United States, France, and Australia was high.

Second, based on behavioral characteristics, the VFR group often stayed at family friends' houses rather than at hotels. However, 42% of the VFR group did not stay at a family friend's house and 50.4% stayed at a hotel, clearly showing that they contributed economically. The VFR

group had a more extended stay than the LER group, the amount spent was higher than that of the LER group, and the frequency of local visits was more significant than that of the LER group. Regarding the timing of visits, the VFR group is not concentrated at a specific time. However, it was evenly distributed throughout the year, demonstrating that it played a vital role in resolving seasonal differences.

Third, in terms of attitudinal characteristics, the VFR group had higher satisfaction, intention to revisit, and recommendations than the LER group, as they had more opportunities to immerse themselves in local life with their hosts and had more authentic experiences. Above all, this suggests that, among inbound visitors, the VFR group is a segment that must be managed strategically in the future because it is highly likely to repeat visits.

This study contributes academically to expanding research on VFR, which has been conducted mainly in the Western world, to the Asian region, particularly Korea. Additionally, while many existing VFR-related studies have been limited to the VFR group, this paper distinguishes their characteristics compared to groups traveling for leisure, entertainment, or relaxation. It has been empirically verified that the VFR group is superior to the LER groups in all qualitative aspects of inbound tourism, including length of stay, amount spent, local visits, authenticity, intention to recommend, and intention to revisit. These characteristics can also be utilized for marketing purposes.

This study has several limitations. First, because the survey was conducted in 2022, it is not a time when the country has completely recovered from COVID-19. Therefore, it is possible that the characteristics of the VFR groups visiting from nearby countries, such as Japan, China, and Taiwan, were not adequately reflected. Second, VF and VR, which have heterogeneous features in the VFR, cannot be separately distinguished and classified into one group. In order to overcome these limitations in the use of secondary data, it is necessary to conduct research in the future by securing data that can be classified more strictly.

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Conflict of Interests

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