



Tourist Market of Visiting Friends and Relatives

I Dewa Gde Satrya

University of Ciputra, Indonesia

Correspondent: dewa.gde@ciputra.ac.id

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ABSTRACT: Visiting friends and relatives who live in different cities or countries is a trigger for travel. This research aims to describe the travel experiences of informants from Bali when visiting friends and relatives in East Java. Many activities and tourist destinations that can be visited when visiting friends and relatives in different cities. However, due to limited time, energy and costs, priority is needed in determining the itinerary when visiting friends and relatives so as to optimize the benefits obtained. The formulation of the problem in this research is how the travel experiences of informants from Bali when visiting friends and relatives in East Java? The novelty in this research lies in the qualitative way of determining the itinerary of visiting friends and relatives in order to get optimal benefits. This research was conducted with a qualitative approach. Primary data was obtained through interviews and observations of sources from family travelers from Bali who visited friends and relatives in East Java. Secondary data obtained from relevant previous research. Visiting friends and relatives itinerary based on the main goal or priority of the friends and relatives you want to visit. Apart from the city of Surabaya, family travelers from Bali also want to travel to the city of Batu. However, because the top priority is visiting Surabaya, traveling to Batu is done in half a day, and choosing priority tourist destinations.

Keywords: Batu, Family Travelers, Itinerary, Surabaya, Visiting Friends and Relatives



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INTRODUCTION

Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) is something enjoyable, for both those who visit and those who are visited. Meetings between fellow human beings who have not met for a long time and are separated by that distance, become an effective encouragement to travel. To meet this need, elements of tourism starting from departure, arrival to return, help the smoothness and benefit of visiting friends and relatives. It is precisely in this context that this research was conducted. Family relations who have not seen each other for a long time, drive the tourist trip. Family travelers as guests, family and friends visited in East Java as hosts.

The two cities in East Java visited in this VFR series are Surabaya City and Batu City. Surabaya City because in this city there are relatives of the informant's parents. Apart from that, the informant also studied education in this city. The development of the tourism sector is expected to increase regional income through increasing the number of tourist visits to Surabaya. Tourism development is an activity that is interrelated with development in the industrial, trade, transportation, socio-economic, and environmental sectors. The city of Surabaya, which so far is better known as a business city, has various tourist attractions, both historical tourism, nature tourism, shopping tourism, cultural tourism, and culinary tourism which also play a role in the development of Surabaya tourism. The city of Surabaya is increasingly developing its tourism sector. The 3 main things in this tourist destination are getting quality in Surabaya, namely: something to see (something interesting to see), something to buy (something interesting to buy), something to do (an activity that can be done at a destination).

Meanwhile, Batu City has an attraction because of past experiences and perceptions of informants about Batu City as a pleasant destination, has fresh air and is located in a mountainous area. Batu City, which in 2001 separated from Malang Regency, continues to improve its tourism sector. The large natural tourism potential in the city of Batu is supported by the distance between one destination to another tourist destination that is easy to reach, clear and accessible road signs, available local food restaurants with attractive traditional menus and packaging, friendly local people, supporting infrastructure, clean streets.

Plans and series of trips from Bali to East Java were communicated a month before the trip. Even though the main purpose is to visit family and friends, in this series of trips it is also a holiday and refreshing activity. There is no strict and binding schedule, a series of trips are arranged and discussed together between the guest and the host so that the main purpose of the trip is achieved, while on vacation.

[Backer \(2012\)](#) stated, VFR travel is a type of tourism where people visit their friends and family in different places. [Dwyer et al. \(2014\)](#) stated, VFR tourism is when people visit different countries to see their family and friends. It is a big part of the world market and has to do with how people have moved around in history. This study found that when people move to a new country, they are more likely to have family and friends come visit them. [Capistrano \(2012\)](#) stated, the world is changing and more people are moving to different countries. This is important because these people can help promote visiting friends and relatives (VFR) travel. [Barnett et al. \(2010\)](#) want to change the definition of VFR travelers to include people who are visiting their friends or family. This would apply to people who may have a higher risk of getting sick because they are traveling from one place to another. It doesn't matter what their race, ethnicity, or legal status is.

[Yousuf & Backer \(2015\)](#) stated, research on VFR travel began in 1990, with only one review of the literature. This review focused solely on journal articles published from 1990 to 2010 and found that only 39 VFR articles had been published in tourism journals. [Kashiwagi et al. \(2023\)](#) stated, tourism marketers and operators need to focus on enhancing the reputation and perception of a destination among both VFR and the hosts of VFR. VFR hosts play a crucial role in promoting the destination and should be encouraged to warmly welcome VFR and showcase the destination positively. Failure to do so may result in a decline in the VFR market.

[Kashiwagi et al. \(2020\)](#) looked at people who travel to VFR but whose main reason for traveling and where they stay is not because of their friends or family. The study found that these types of

travelers are influenced by their friends and family when it comes to their travel plans. [Tran et al \(2020\)](#) found that international PhD students participate in VFR tourism during their studies. When they do travel, they engage in a variety of activities and often stay with the friends or relatives they are visiting. [Tran et al. \(2018\)](#) proposed framework, by incorporating interactions between tourism and international education, invites its extension to understand how other global mobilities might interact with tourism.

[Griffin & Nunkoo \(2016\)](#) stated, To better attract regional and international visitors who are looking for unique experiences beyond staying with friends or relatives, destinations should understand the context of international tourism flows within a region. [Chan et al. \(2022\)](#) stated, by understanding how people visit their friends and family when they travel, places can find new and creative ways to attract visitors. The experience of hosting friends and family is influenced by things like the culture of the people involved and the environment of the city or town. [Griffin & Dimanche \(2017\)](#) stated, the immigrant population in cities is continuously increasing and they play a role in boosting tourism by engaging in VFR travel and establishing new tourist spots. Based on the background above, then the formulation of the problem in this research is how the travel experiences of informants from Bali when visiting friends and relatives in East Java?

METHOD

This research was conducted with a qualitative approach. Primary data was obtained through interviews and observations of sources from family travelers from Bali who visited friends and relatives in East Java. Secondary data obtained from relevant previous research. The informants are family travelers from Bali consisting of a mother (informant 1), first daughter (informant 2) and second daughter (informant 3). In addition, informant 4 is the host as the family visited. Primary data is based on researchers' notes when participating in family travelers visiting friends and relatives in East Java.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In Indonesia, VFR also occurs during the Lebaran homecoming. Domestic tourists' tourism activities are entering the high season during the Eid holiday. VFR is carried out while returning home during the Eid holiday. Entering the Idul Fitri holiday period, the community welcomed it with enthusiasm. Apart from being celebrated with hospitality and VFR, it is also colored with sightseeing trips. The movement of domestic tourists at each homecoming momentum is also related to domestic tourist trips, which therefore contribute significantly to regional economic growth. However, [Müri & Sägesser \(2003\)](#) stated, VFR is a different kind of traveling, so we have to think about it by itself and not compare it to other types of travel.

VFR family travelers activities from Bali are carried out not during holidays or long weekends. Cost considerations and other considerations have informed the decision to choose the time and destination of VFR. This was conveyed by informant 1,

“The three of us determine the VFR time based on the work load that can be left for a while and whether there is a similarity in leave time.”

As a host in Surabaya and a visiting family, visiting a family from Bali is very enjoyable. This was conveyed by informant 4. [Shani & Uriely \(2012\)](#) found that hosting for home sharing has both positive and negative effects on the quality of life for local residents. Hosts may face challenges such as loss of privacy, increased expenses, physical labor, and mental stress from juggling work and hosting responsibilities, and feeling exploited by guests. However, hosting also brings benefits such as the satisfaction of spending time with loved ones, pride in their altruistic nature or hometown, the opportunity to socialize with guests, and the ability to expect reciprocity when visiting guests in the future. [Dutt & Ninov \(2017\)](#) stated, people who had relatives visiting them, stayed with them, were younger and more educated than them, and came specifically to visit them, learned more from their visitors. [Backer \(2019\)](#) found that while VFR most of the time it actually makes it better for both the visitors and the hosts.

“There is a sense of emotion, gratitude and gratitude for our meeting in such a short time with the family from Bali. We haven’t seen each other in a long time, mainly because of Covid-19. The family stories from our conversation were very deep. There are valuable lessons that we can receive from the sharing conveyed by the family.”

In terms of choosing accommodation for lodging, family travelers choose hotels that are close to where their parents live in Surabaya. Star rating and hotel brand are not a consideration when determining which hotel to stay at. This is explicit based on information from informant 2 in accordance with opinion [Hendel-Paterson & Swanson \(2011\)](#) found people who were traveling to VFR, but their main reason for traveling and where they stayed wasn’t necessarily because of their friends and relatives.

“The main consideration in choosing a hotel was to be close to our parents' younger sibling's house in Surabaya. Indeed, the star rating and brand of the hotel are not a major consideration, but the cleanliness and comfort of the hotel are still important.”

The selection of the city of Batu as a series of VFR family travelers' itinerary from Bali was based on personal desires driven by the knowledge and perceptions of informants, as well as based on suggestions or information from other people. This is explicit based on information from informant 3 and in accordance with opinion [Currie et al. \(2008\)](#) that confirms previous research that shows peer groups have a significant impact on people’s decisions to purchase services, especially when it comes to choosing a tourism destination.

“I have always wanted to travel to Batu, because I often see Batu tourism on social media looking good. Apart from that, my colleagues told me about their experiences traveling to Batu.”

Research related to Batu tourism, among others, [Wahyudi \(2018\)](#), stated, Batu is a popular tourist destination in East Java, but it also faces issues with poverty. The tourism industry has the potential to boost the local economy and alleviate poverty. The tourist village in the Bumiaji District has significant economic value and can help reduce poverty. [Ratuloly et al. \(2023\)](#) found that Batu City government has played a crucial role in developing the tourism potential in the villages. The government has provided support in terms of physical infrastructure, attractions, accessibility, activities, facilities, and socio-economic factors.

Batu City government is currently working on developing a tourism village as part of their strategic plan to improve tourism in the area. The focus is on increasing the number of tourism villages

with proper infrastructure ([Augusty et al., 2023](#)). Brau Hamlet, located in Batu City, is considered an underdeveloped area where the main source of income for its residents is dairy farming. Despite its natural beauty and potential for tourism and agriculture, these resources have not been fully utilized. The current approach is to implement a growth strategy that involves integrating different aspects and gradually developing tourism management ([Zurinani et al., 2019](#)). [Kurnianto et al. \(2016\)](#) stated, to promote tourism, it is important to invest in training human resources, such as butterfly observers and visitor services. It is also recommended to establish a breeding center to help recover butterfly populations and educate visitors. [Hidayatullah et al. \(2017\)](#) stated, based on the results of data analysis in three locations of tourism villages shows that Pokdarwis (*Kelompok Sadar Wisata*) still has not played an effective role in tourism activities. The development of tourism village in Batu City, the participation of the villagers through the formation of the community-based tourism called Pokdarwis.

[Setiawati & Jasmin \(2020\)](#) stated, Batu city is a popular tourist destination in Indonesia that requires a POSE strategy to promote its attractions. The POSE strategy includes paid media (such as local TV, magazines, and billboards), own media (such as the official website and city applications), social media (such as TikTok, YouTube, blog, and Instagram), and a Tourism Ambassador named Kangmas Nimas Batu City. [Aulya et al. \(2016\)](#) stated, the process in realizing the independent community through community empowerment program of tourism with the concept of community based tourism may be optimized for their several contributing factors.

Meanwhile, research related to Surabaya tourism, among others, that the conservation of cultural heritage in the Masjid of Sunan Ampel area aligns with the principle of intelligent Urbanism. However, improvements in infrastructure, public spaces, technology, integration of institutions, and community empowerment are still needed ([Budiarto et al., 2016](#)). [Idajati \(2014\)](#) stated, revitalization planning is crucial for Surabaya City, particularly for the Kalimas river area. It aims to improve the living conditions of the local residents and workers, as well as enhance the visitor experiences to boost the local economy. [Bararatin & Agustin \(2015\)](#) stated, the revitalization strategy for the Kembang Jepun area aims to transform it into a heritage tourism site, in addition to its commercial function. This will boost the economic value and image of the area, ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of Surabaya city.

VFR trips are carefully planned by family travelers from Bali. Because these three informants are workers who are bound by the company's working hours. They tried to take a few short days off to go on VFR to East Java. Their journey from Bali to East Java was by plane from Denpasar to Surabaya, and vice versa. The total time they spent on VFR was 4 days 3 nights, with the following itinerary:

- Day 1 Departure from Bali to Surabaya by plane in the afternoon
- Day 2: Travel by train from Surabaya to Malang, and then by car to Batu. The trip to Batu is a half day trip with the aim of visiting two theme parks, typical Batu culinary delights and buying souvenirs. In the afternoon we head to Surabaya to visit family.
- Day 3: Visiting parents' younger siblings in the morning, followed by meeting with college friends in the afternoon and evening. At night culinary tour in Surabaya.
- Day 4: Return from Surabaya to Bali by plane in the afternoon

This VFR itinerary for family travelers from Bali was carried out in a short time. They are not focused on tourist destinations and the food they will eat, because this is not the main goal. However, tourist destinations and special foods are additional benefits that can be obtained when doing VFR. This is in line with [Müri & Sägesser \(2003\)](#) found that people who do VFR do not necessarily spend more money on food and their trips are not longer than other trips.

Informant 2 stated that his experience in Surabaya this time felt different. He sees the city of Surabaya today as different from his previous experience when visiting Surabaya. However, it doesn't take long to feel at home and familiar when you are in Surabaya.

“Surabaya feels comfortable, as the second largest metropolitan city in Indonesia, being in Surabaya still feels comfortable.”

Based on informant 1's confession, informant 2 is not a typical person who is easy and likes to travel. So actually it is not easy to make him feel comfortable and at home when he is in a new place. The researcher's observations while participating in VFR activities, informant 2 seemed to enjoy the trip because he was traveling with his family. Apart from that, the itinerary and destination are your choice. This is in line with [Uriely \(2010\)](#) stated, when people go on trips to VFR in another place, their experience might be different depending on if they are in a foreign place or their homeland. If they are in a foreign place, they might start off feeling a little strange and unfamiliar, but over time, they can start to feel more comfortable and familiar. On the other hand, if they are in their homeland VFR, they might start off feeling familiar, but as time goes on, they might start to feel a little strange and unfamiliar. This could be because things have changed since they last visited and they might feel a bit lost or out of touch with what's happening. Other things like the culture of the people they are visiting and their social status can also affect how comfortable and familiar they feel in the place they are visiting.

CONCLUSION

Visiting friends and relatives itinerary based on the main goal or priority of the friends and relatives you want to visit. In this case, family travelers from Bali have the main motivation to visit their parents' younger siblings who have not been visited in Surabaya for a long time. In this city, family travelers from Bali also complete higher education studies, so there are many friends who also visit. Apart from the city of Surabaya, family travelers from Bali also want to travel to the city of Batu. However, because the top priority is visiting Surabaya, traveling to Batu is done in half a day, and choosing priority tourist destinations. Travel to Batu city by train to get new experiences that don't exist in Bali, visit two theme parks which have become icons of Batu city, eat typical Batu city culinary delights and buy souvenirs.

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