



# Hosting friends and family as a sojourner in a tourism destination<sup>☆</sup>

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- This study explores the characteristics in the hosting experiences of foreign sojourners in Macao.
- In-depth interviews with 20 sojourners reveal that different strategies in hosting visitors are used.
- The hosting experiences of sojourners are related to their own utilization of local tourism space.
- In hosting friends and family, the identity of sojourners blends the meaning of “home” and “away”.
- It suggests the role of the sojourners as specialized destination information providers and important agents in VFR tourism.

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the characteristics in the hosting experiences of foreign sojourners in Macao. In-depth interviews with 20 sojourners reveal that different strategies in hosting visitors, including the way sojourners prepare for hosting, attract guests with selective destination information, and design itineraries, are used. Such strategies are related to the way they use the local tourism space, shaped by their personal interest, previous leisure pattern, and their unhurried exploration of the destination. The findings are discussed with regard to literature on both visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and sojourners in tourism. The study draws attention to understanding sojourners as important agents in tourism and the importance of their hosting experience in destination management.

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## 1. Introduction

There has been acknowledgment that the traditional dichotomised notions of “home” and “away” are becoming blurred. Considering multi-locality, which implies the existence of “home away from home,” diverse forms of mobility and its impact on tourism are increasingly considered important. For example, migrants are unique in that their tourism pattern involves the movement of both “away and towards a home” (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, p. 2181). In addition, an increase of global labour, diasporas, and residential mobility causes the blurring boundaries of the hosts and the guest as well as the home and away, which lead to new nomadism, where travelling becomes as ongoing lifestyle (Uriely,

2010).

The demographic group of interest in this study is sojourners, who are characterized as individuals having a long-term destination experience, usually for a period of six months to five years, and experiencing a process of cultural adjustment through the between-society contact with the host region (Brown, 2009). The study subjects include expatriate workers, their family, and international, interregional, and exchange students, who do not intend to permanently reside in the destination region nor are legally permanent residents of Macao. Those who stay legally as tourists, even for an extended period of time, or those who indicate intention to settle down in Macao are excluded from the study subjects. The current study was motivated by the recent increase in academic attention to this group, which acknowledges not only the lessons learned from their transformative power but also the importance of this group as a mediator of different cultures and thus the contributors in reducing international conflict and improving world relations (Brown, 2009). The focus of most studies on this group has been on international students and their own

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tourist behavior during the sojourn (Brown, 2009; Glover, 2011). Although the sojourners' role as hosts in VFR tourism and their economic and social impact on the destination have been recently recognized, studies mostly were done quantitatively, answering the 'how much' question (Liu & Ryan, 2011). Furthermore, while the hosting patterns have been documented among the local residents (Shani & Uriely, 2012), very few studies have answered the 'how' question by focusing on sojourner's hosting pattern. This study responds to a call for further understanding of the hosting experience among mobilized actors (e.g. Shani & Uriely) using a constructionist approach by transcending the post-positivist view (Griffin, 2014, 2017). Considering the ever-growing number of sojourners and their uniqueness in travelling the host region as well as the linkage of their own pattern of local travelling and that of hosting others (Liu & Ryan, 2011), understanding the hosting pattern of this group is expected to provide meaningful implications for tourism planning and development involving diversified actors and for leveraging the impact of this special market segment.

The study area is Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China because 1) the percentage of sojourner population in the region is significant and 2) their impact on VFR tourism is expected in this tourist destination, considering previous studies conducted in other tourist destinations (Young, Corsun, & Baloglu, 2007). As Macao, as "the Las Vegas of the East," has been well-known as a casino destination, the members of the society have been relatively overshadowed by the tourists. In fact, Macao is one of the most exemplary regions to witness the dynamics of the global labor force. With its entire regional population around 600,000 and the total number of labor force around 400,000, the number of non-resident workers exceeded 150,000 in 2014 (Macao Daily Times, 2014) and reached over 180,000 in June 2016 (Macao Daily Times, 2016). About a quarter of the entire non-resident workers are in the hospitality sector, followed by construction and domestic work. Considering the dynamics with the number of non-residents, it is expected that a remarkable proportion of the population experience new settlement and temporary sojourn in this destination. Knowledge accumulation of the local leisure space among the sojourners would lead to a possession of unique resources for hosting experience as well as tourism information sharing. As it is believed that hosts' experience, knowledge, and attitude of the destination would influence their hosting pattern and then guests' experiences (Shani & Uriely, 2012), and that the sojourners' role as hosts deserve more attention in VFR tourism (Liu & Ryan, 2011), this study is a pioneering endeavour to bridge this literature gap by exploring the hosting experience of sojourners. The present study focuses on those who temporarily live in the tourism destination of Macao as sojourners and explores how their own utilization pattern of the tourism space are linked to their hosting experience. The results of the study are expected to provide implications for developing diversified tourism resources and utilizing this demographic group in tourism to enhance destination experiences. Specific research questions are presented as follows:

1. How do sojourners in Macao utilize the local tourism space?
2. How do sojourners in Macao host friends and family?
3. How do the destination experiences of the hosts affect their hosting pattern of friends and family?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Mobilized actors in global tourism

Globalized societies and the increase in the number and form of migration have enabled the reconsideration of the diversified

mobilized actors, triggered by the notion of the *mobilities turn* (Urry, 2007), and their effect on global tourism. Lifestyle migration, which incorporates "second-home ownership, retirement migration, seasonal migration, international counter urbanization or leisure migration" (Huete & Mantecón, 2011, p. 161) and residential tourism (O'Reilly, 2007) are notable examples.

In particular, expatriates, who represent the globally mobile workforce, have gained attention (Elmhirst, 2012). While the traditional notion of a "community" focuses on the locals who are embedded in the destination region, the rapid increase in mobility requires the reconceptualization of many terms given all types of permanent and temporary migration. One example is expatriates, the term used to describe self-initiated or assigned global labor forces. Among the attempts to define expatriates, a few studies have categorized such labor forces in the tourism sector in particular. Uriely (2001) provided a framework for classifying four types of international workers based on their orientation of work versus tourism. Tourism professional workers travel in order to execute work while migrant tourism workers are those who travel both to make a living and seek pleasure. Non-institutionalized working tourists work mainly to support their travel and working-holiday tourists integrate work, which is recreational in nature, with their tourism experience. According to Uriely (2001), tourism professional workers are the most work-oriented, have economic prestige, and belong to the middle or upper middle classes in their home country. In contrast, migrant tourism workers are usually lower middle working class in local tourism economies. Although they do not intend to settle down in the destination country, they would try to acclimate to the destination country and spend an extended period of time, ranging from a few months to a few years. Adler and Adler's (2004) typology of foreign labourers in the tourism industry can be a useful tool in understanding foreign residents' lifestyles, especially those in tourism destinations. As the first category, trapped labourers mostly include new immigrants from less developed countries, who work for longer hours and struggle with low disposable income, and thus have limited time and money for leisure in the destination country. On the other hand, transient labourers are usually professionals or at the managerial level and thus have less financial burden. They possess high mobility and are actively involved in tourism. Miller and Auyong (1998) proposed tourists, locals, and brokers as three categories of agents in the tourism system. Although this categorization may classify the target group of this study as short-term or seasonal locals or on-site brokers, depending on whether their profession is within the tourism industry, such a distinction may not be made easily in reality. As the spectrum of tourism service is broad, it is hard to distinguish who are paid for tourism and who are not. For example, it is not clear if a local expatriate blogger, who works full time in the non-tourism industry and blogs about local tourism attractions, can be considered as a "local" or as a "broker". Also, the roles of those in the tourism industry in guiding tourists and hosting acquaintances are often intermingled, and a lay expatriate's role in hosting acquaintances cannot be ignored in understanding the tourist experience of visiting friends and relatives (VFR). The recent focus on blurred delineation of tourism and migration as well as working and leisure challenges the traditional classification of the actors in tourism due to their complex roles (Cohen & Cohen, 2015). Therefore, rather than delineating the scope of sojourners based on their identity, it is more meaningful to identify the perceptual and behavioural features of those with global mobilities and their impacts on others in the tourism scene.

Although the global mobility of workforce and students may share commonality with sustained tourism in the form of lifestyle migration, especially the actors' dual identities as the hosts and the guests, the nature and characteristics of the sojourners are different

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