

# Academic Weekly Digest

## School of Hospitality & Tourism Management



### *Aspirational Intimacy in Visiting Friends and Relatives*

Visiting friends and relatives' tourism (VFR) has risen in importance due to the implicit economic benefits of a high number of global VFR visits. To date, however, there has been little research on understanding the cultural implications of VFR, and how maintaining relationships at a distance affects the quality of personal relationships. Drawing from Marxist psycho-cultural theory on globalization and intimacy, [Dr Michael Humbracht](#), [Prof Scott Cohen](#) and [Prof Allan Williams](#), explored which relationships migrants prioritize after migrating, the qualities of those relationships and how those qualities shape maintaining relations.

# What holds together relationships after international migration? In short: Hope

Dr Michael Humbracht, Prof Scott Cohen & Prof Allan Williams

VFR tourism is said to be important because of a high number of global VFR visits. These visits are often thought to be driven by stable cultural norms that prioritize family relationships and face-to-face contact. Yet little research has attempted to grasp how different kin or friend relationships, and their qualities, might change because of migration and living at a distance. To grasp changing relations, our study looked at the personal relationships of Italian migrants in London. We conducted international on-site interviews with both migrants in London and their friends and family in Italy, which helped to overcome a tendency of informants from previous studies to provide mostly positive descriptions.

The research found that migration provokes deep social anxieties about the authenticity of relationships and whether they can endure distance. This meant that informants tended not to prioritize relationships according to cultural categories like mom or best friend but by the authenticity of emotional experiences when in contact.



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Hope for relationships  
produced within VFR  
Tourism is crucial in  
managing relationship  
anxieties tied to  
migration, across  
holiday cycles and in  
daily life

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Emotional authenticity in turn gave people a sense of hope about the durability of relationships that could be felt during VFR visits and in routines of daily technology use that crossed multiple platforms. The findings suggest relations are not necessarily held together by formal kin norms but develop through sense of hopefulness that migrants and loved ones learn to sew through their everyday routines and holiday cycles. The study also helps shift VFRs importance away from economic factors and towards the role tourism plays in creating hopeful global social change.

## Further Reading:

Humbracht, M., Scott, C., & Williams, A.M. (2022). Aspirational intimacy in visiting friends and relatives. *Annals of Tourism Research*.

Link: [bit.ly/3kFejdc](https://bit.ly/3kFejdc)