

How To Plan A Successful Genealogy Trip

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Thanks to the rise of at-home DNA testing and sites like [Ancestry.com](#), there's a growing interest in genealogy travel — people looking to learn more about their heritage by traveling the world, meeting up with distant relatives and visiting historically significant sites in their ancestral countries.

But genealogy travel is unique — and even someone experienced in leisure travel may find trouble planning a trip of this sort. To further complicate matters, there are actually several types of genealogy travel. From research-based trips to full-on heritage tours with pre-planned itineraries, there's a whole host of ways you can use travel to learn more about your familial history and lineage.

Are you interested in genealogy travel? Want to save on expenses and plan the best trip possible? This guide will show you how.

What type of genealogy trip should you take?

Before you can start your planning, you'll need to determine what you want from the trip first. What are you looking to learn or experience during your travels? What are you hoping to take away from it all?

There are several ways you can go about genealogy travel. You can:

- **Conduct research while traveling:** Are you looking to do a deep-dive and really dig into your family tree? If so, a library, county courthouse, or even the National Archives may be your best bet.
- **Visit distant relatives:** If you did a DNA test like AncestryDNA, you may be able to connect with distant relatives and even visit them on your travels.
- **Visit your ancestor's home countries/cities/homes:** You can also just experience the culture of your relatives and ancestors. Was a great-great-great-great grandfather a king? Visit his old castle (or its ruins). Did your grandmother grow up in Galway, Ireland? Spend a few days there and see the sites she may have frequented as a child.
- **Take a heritage tour or professionally-planned genealogy vacation:** If you have a good handle on your lineage, you might be able to let a pro take the wheel. Some companies that offer personalized heritage tours include European Focus, Ancestral

Journeys of Scotland, Go Ahead Tours, Travel Italian Style, and Irish Family Tree Vacations.

Of course, you don't have to pick just one of these goals. If you're able to take a lengthier vacation, you might be able to combine a few of these trips into one, visiting relatives, doing research and experiencing an ancestor's culture all in one fell swoop.

What to do before you embark on your heritage journey

Since most genealogy trips involve an international trip or, at the very least, travel to somewhere you're unfamiliar with, it's very important you're adequately prepared. That means pre-planning your excursions, studying up on the region and language, and packing the right maps (and maybe even printing out detailed directions just in case your phone doesn't have a data connection).

Here are a few other tips that can make your genealogy trip successful:

- **Research each location you're going to:** Dig into each country, city, and site you plan to visit. What are the locals' favorite spots? What hours are things open? Are there any community events or festivals you need to be aware of? You should also note any cultural requirements you'll need to adhere to (clothing, manners, language, etc.)
- **Make detailed itineraries:** Where will you go each day? What are the addresses for each place you're visiting? Who do you need to check in with or contact when you arrive? How long will you stay at each location? Put all the information you'll need in one handy place.
- **Get some help:** There are lots of travel agencies that specialize in heritage travel. While you might not want a full-on, pro-planned vacation, consulting an expert may give you ideas you never thought of. It can also lighten your load a bit in the planning stages. You could also consider speaking with a professional genealogist to point you in the right direction history-wise.
- **Be pointed with your packing:** Clothes and toiletries are a must, but on a genealogy trip, you'll also need research materials (maybe even a laptop), foreign cash, maps, and a good camera. Don't forget a [no-foreign transaction fee credit card](#), and be sure to leave room in your bags for mementos you'll bring back home, too.

There's a chance your phone may not work while traveling, so don't put all your plans, tickets, and itineraries only on a device. Make sure to print out the important stuff and store it in a folder in your backpack or purse as well.



Remember to pack all the essentials.

How to pay for your genealogy travel using points and miles

Genealogy travel can be expensive, especially since it's usually international. Once the flight costs, lodging, food, and experiences are all factored in, you can easily see expenses creep well into the thousands.

Fortunately, you don't have to drain your bank account in order to make a trip like this happen. Here are just a few ways you can make genealogy travel just a little bit more affordable:

- **Use a travel credit card:** [Travel credit cards](#) can help you two-fold. First, many offer travel perks and can help reduce the costs of your hotels, transport, and other related charges. On top of this, you'll also earn points on all your purchases. Some of the most [popular travel cards](#) include the [Capital One® Venture® Rewards Credit Card](#), the [Chase Sapphire Preferred® Card](#), and [The Platinum Card® from American Express](#). Cards like the Amex Platinum provides hotel elite status and airline lounge access which can make your trip a bit more comfortable, while the [Chase Sapphire Preferred](#) and many other cards offer [rental car insurance](#) which cuts down on ancillary costs.
- **Cash in on points and miles:** If you have a frequent flier account or just have points racked from a rewards-earning credit card, then you might be able to put those toward your trip, too. With [transferrable points earning cards](#), you can even [combine your travel miles with your card rewards balance](#) (for instance, you can top up your United Airlines

mileage balance by transferring [Chase Ultimate Rewards points](#) into it). Or you can book through the [Chase travel portal](#) and skip the process of transferring points into airline miles altogether. If you don't already have a rewards-earning card, it's not too late to sign up. Most offer hefty [sign-up bonuses](#) that could help cover the cost of your trip.

If you're worried about the costs of your genealogy travel, you might consider staying in hostels or [Airbnbs](#), cutting down on the tours and landmarks that charge admission, and making your own food while abroad. These can all cut down on travel expenses significantly.

Once you're there, savor the moment

With genealogy travel, there are no guarantees. Remember: you're going there to learn. There's a chance you might not like what you discover, your information was incorrect or inaccurate, or the trip may just fall short of expectations. Try to prepare yourself for any outcome just in case.

Along the way, try to take in the local culture as much as possible. These trips are once-in-a-lifetime opportunities, and no matter what you learn, you'll likely want to reflect on these memories later on. Take lots of pictures, keep a notepad on hand to jot down your thoughts, and bring along a loved one to experience it all alongside you.

Bottom line

Taking a genealogy trip can be a great way to experience the world and learn a little more about your lineage in the process. With the right planning approach and some creativity in the credit card department, it can even be quite affordable, too.

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