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DESTINATIONS

Face to Face With Your Past

More people are finding their family roots through genealogy trips. Here's how to get started.

BY ANNE TERGESEN

In recent years, a growing number of Americans have turned to the Internet to trace their roots. Now they want to do it IRL.

In real life, that is. Inspired by what they've seen online—and by popular television shows such as NBC's "Who Do You Think You Are?"—many are taking trips abroad to unearth records, visit ancestral homes and meet relatives.

"It's all about walking in your ancestors' footsteps," says Megan Smolenyak, author of "Who Do You Think You Are? The Essential Guide to Tracing Your Family History," a companion to the series. "It's really catching on."

According to those in the field, a growing number of travel companies and genealogical experts are offering "ancestral" or "heritage" trips. Former emigration hot spots, including Ireland and Nova Scotia, have recently begun promoting genealogical records on government-sponsored tourism websites. And hotels and resorts, including the **Lodge at Doonbeg** in County Clare, Ireland, and the Sheraton Grand Hotel & Spa in Edinburgh, Scotland, have



Tracing Your Tree

Before booking a genealogy trip overseas, try to do as much ancestral research as possible. These resources can help you get started.

ancestry.com

A repository of more than six billion historical records. Cost: \$19.95 a month for U.S. records and \$29.95 a month for records world-wide.

familysearch.org

Provides access to about 10% of the microfilm records held by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Family History Library, Salt Lake City

This vast repository makes the Mormon Church's full genealogical records available to more than 600,000 in-person visitors annually.

New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston

americanancestors.org
Houses more than 20 million documents, artifacts and photographs. An online genealogist answers research-related questions free of charge.

Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, Ind.

genealogycenter.org
The collection includes genealogical records from around the world.

Source: WSJ reporting

Brian Althar

hired genealogists.

"Genealogy is almost trendy," says Elaine Bostwick, tour coordinator at **Ancestral Attic** of Carp Lake, Mich., which arranged for 42 genealogical tours last year, almost double the number five years ago.

Picking an Approach

These vacations vary from customized tours of ancestral haunts to research-intensive trips to archives. Which approach suits you will depend on the amount of time you wish to spend sifting through records.

Those who want help may benefit from hiring one of a small but growing number of companies or genealogists who build customized itineraries for families.

Marlene Rokicki, 73 years old, has been to Germany twice with **European Focus Inc.** of Sarasota, Fla. In 2006, she and her husband, Robert, 76, visited the church in Aholming where her father was baptized, the Munich apartment where he grew up and the church in Rossbach where her grandparents were married.

In Rossbach, European Focus "arranged for the church organist to play a few hymns for us. It was very moving," says Ms. Rokicki, who also visited sites including the Dornbach farm where her great-grandfather was born.

Along the way, Ms. Rokicki discovered a great-aunt she hadn't known existed.

James Derheim, president of European Focus, says he typically books trips at least six months in advance to allow time to research a family's heritage. Like many others in the field, Mr. Derheim—who specializes in Germany and surrounding countries—visits local archives and speaks with village historians. He arranges for clients to gain access to genealogical records, hunts for modern-day relatives, and delves into property records to locate ancestral farms and

houses. His prices, which include a tour guide, lodging, food and ground transportation but not airfare, start at \$4,500 per person for a 10-day trip.

Doing It Yourself

Some companies also cater to larger groups. Ancestral Attic, which specializes in Eastern Europe, threw a family reunion for 200 in Augustow, Poland, last year. **Scottish Ancestral Trail**, based in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, has arranged tours for individuals who share a clan name.

For those who want to do their own research, various genealogical associations lead trips to national and other repositories, where census, birth, marriage and death records are often stored. The New England Historic Genealogical Society sponsors trips to London, Belfast and Dublin. The Irish Ancestral Research Association, known as Tiara, and David Rencher, who periodically teaches an Irish genealogy course at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., each lead trips to Ireland. (Prices range from \$1,594 per person, based on double-occupancy, with Tiara to \$4,575 per person, based on double-occupancy, with the New England Society, both nonprofits.)

"I am there to help guide you. I am not going to do the research for you," says Mr. Rencher, who says clients often stay longer to travel.

To search for a genealogical guide familiar with your country of origin, see the "tours and cruises" link in the "travel and research" section at cyndislist.com. (Some of the genealogists listed in the directory of the Association of Professional Genealogists may also provide travel services.) Check references and make sure the person you hire provides copies of documents. After all, you want to be sure you really are walking in your great-grandfather's footsteps.