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Ancestry Vacations: Family Roots and Routes in Europe

By **Carla Hunt** - September 5, 2017

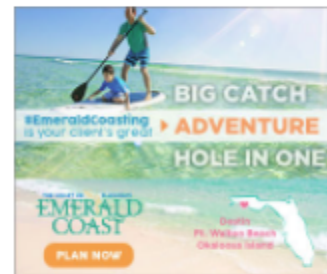
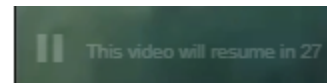
With the popularity of sites such as Ancestry.com and its DNA tests for ethnicity and genealogy, heritage travel or ancestry vacations—exploring the origins of one’s family tree, searching through local archives and with luck even meeting a long-lost relative—has boomed in popularity. Increasingly, tour operators and hotels are catering to heritage-hungry guests with onsite genealogical experts, by arranging itineraries to local villages, and providing onsite guidance in tracing family trees.



There may be no group of Americans who go “home” as often as those of Italian descent, according to Steven Yu, v.p. of marketing for **Zicasso**. “Italy is far and away our leading destination for ancestry travel,” says Wu, who points out that Italians are all about the importance of family. And most Italians know where great, great *nonno* was born, or at least they will know the family came from say Puglia or Sicily. “The pull is strong for Italians to visit the family’s hometown, to learn all about the culture of the region, and on repeat trips, to celebrate special occasions. Elements of trip planning range from memorable meals starring traditional foods to connecting families with local Italian societies and registries.”

For Zicasso, Yu says that England and Scotland tie for second in ancestral travel popularity. For that market, the company has designed a *Scottish Ancestry Tour—Tracing the Family Heritage*, getting acquainted with this land of oral history and legend where your clan name was your lifeblood. From ancient stones to Roman ruins, heritage archives to friendly local pubs, this customized trip seeks to help discover the wonders that shaped a genealogical past. It starts in Edinburgh, and travels to Inverness, Isle of Sky, Kyle of Lochalsh, Talbert, Stornaway, Callanish, Isle of Lewis and Harris. Price guidelines pp per day range from: five-star—\$350 - \$1,000; four-star—\$300 minimum; and three-star—\$280 minimum. Costs include trip planning, transfers and other overland transport, accommodations, guided tours, unique experiences, and 24/7 support during the whole trip.

Heritage Tours, certainly a go-to name in this rising market, finds that the European destinations on their roster—Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey—fill the bill for “parents and kids who want not only to visit their grandparents’ hometown, but want to learn more about the culture of the whole ancestral region, such as Andalusia,” reports Ally Lewing, product manager for Spain and Portugal. “We specialize in custom-designed itineraries, and we know that our Spain—complex, diverse, culturally rich, always gorgeous—will provide a local and intimate experience.” Lewing says that planning starts with the company’s “Idea Lab,” where itineraries are built around specific and personal heritage expectations and sites.



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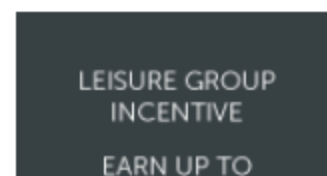
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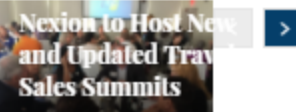
With all the attention on tracing one's roots—from TV shows such as NBC's "Who Do You Think You Are?" and the PBS series "Finding Your Roots," the family travel set is getting more serious about its actual genealogy. **Family Tree Tours** is one of those companies that combines customized tours of ancestral haunts with research-intensive trips to sift through records and archives. Company founder Kathy Wurth reports that "after the death of my grandmother, my father wanted to know more about the family, but he couldn't read old German script. So I learned in order to help him, the genealogy bug hit, and I have been researching and travel planning now for exactly 15 years."

Family Tree Tours specializes in heritage travel to Germany, Switzerland, Ireland and England, providing a unique travel experience for those who are eager to know more about their family history and ancestral origins. Working with European partners who are expert genealogists, its services range from help with research both in the U.S. and on location to making sure that every client actually visits the family hometown. The company offers a selection of escorted *Group Guided Heritage Tours* that focuses on different regions of a country and immerses travelers in the culture. Another brand is a *Private Guided Heritage Tour*, offering a personalized itinerary that can include making all genealogical research contacts and appointments needed to research family history; a company-trained, English-speaking guide who also acts as translator; a driver and minivan or small coach to visit sites of personal interest; and hotel and train reservations as required.

\$2,500



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Even hotels have gotten into the act on ancestry travel. In Edinburgh, the **Balmoral Hotel** not only offers 188 opulent suites and contemporary rooms, but invites its guests to consult with its dedicated Tartan Butler, Andy Fraser, who is obsessive about the history and heritage of Scottish ancestry, and who has traced his own clan as far back as the early 13th century. Fraser has excellent connections with the city's foremost experts and is ideally placed to guide guests through the process of discovering their Scottish roots and their tartans. The Tartan Butler can arrange a visit to the ScotlandsPeople Centre, where they can search records going back 500 years to build a complete picture of their Scottish ancestry. The Tartan Butler can create a bespoke tour that follows in the ancestral footsteps to their own Scottish region, and he can arrange a visit to the most established kilt shop, Kinloch Anderson, and arrange for a fitting.

In arranging travel for families in search of Irish-born relatives, travel agents have a friend in **The Shelbourne Dublin, A Renaissance Hotel** that can plumb their family's lineage with the help of accredited Genealogy Butler Helen Kelly. She has helped countless guests unravel the threads of their Irish family history through her professional consultancy service, housed right onsite. Well ahead of departure, guests with confirmed Shelbourne reservations will fill out a questionnaire to return, outlining what the family knows of its ancestor's history. When clients arrive, Kelly and her colleagues will have done the preliminary research and drawn up a personalized plan on how to navigate state and church records. She will then spend an hour or so with her guests to actually point them in the right direction to find the family's actual hometown—as well as experience first-hand the landscapes, villages and maybe even the pubs of family legend.

Contact Information

Balmoral Hotel: roccoforte.com.com

Family Tree Tours: familytreetours.com

Heritage Tours: heritagetours.com

The Shelbourne Dublin: roccoforte.com

Zicasso: zicasso.com



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