

Why Genealogy Trips Are the New and Improved Family Vacation

By [Melissa Klurman](#) October 16, 2019



Helen Kelly's official title is Genealogy Butler at the historic [Shelbourne Hotel](#) in Dublin. But just a few minutes after meeting her, it's apparent that her true identity is DNA detective. Her job description: to delve into records, interview sources, and eventually deliver a package of family tree surprises to her hotel guests that reads like a bestseller.

How's that for a family-vacation souvenir?

With three decades of genealogy experience, the last dozen exclusively at the Shelbourne, Kelly is just the kind of heritage sleuth who has helped make genealogy-based travel take off. These trips, which are planned with the intent of learning more about your personal lineage, are popular among solo travelers, sure. But thanks to a combination of mystery, discovery, and epic story telling, genealogy trips may be the most fun for families traveling together. Here's a little more what they're all about.

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The Experience

Genealogy trips will be unique for every family—that's the fun! But for one family who visited Dublin from the United States, Kelly used her almost spylike ability to discover just where their ancestors had emigrated from. How exactly?

She combed through the Griffiths Land Evaluation from the 1800s, searching out records like needles in a vast paper haystack in the National Library of Ireland archives until she found a clue. That clue then delivered her to one of the 60,000 townlands in rural Ireland, little "Russian dolls" of land that take great patience to unstack, but deliver incredible rewards. It was a "message from history" for the family who suddenly had the string to connect the dots straight to the emerald ancestral land where they came from.

And stories like these are playing out for families around the world who are interested in finding out where they came from, says Steph Koyfman, a language and cultural expert with [Babel](#), "Heritage tourism — the act of traveling to the land of your ancestry in order to reconnect with your roots — has increased in popularity (in part) from people wanting to feel a sense of belonging and identity in our increasingly globalized world." She also notes that technology has made it much easier both to dig deeper into our ancestry and to have our own DNA tested.

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Why They're Great for Families

There's a sense of adventure on a genealogy trip that you can't find anywhere else. After you've discovered where your family roots grow from, the next step is to visit your ancestral

ground. It's kind of like discovering a secret treasure cache, and only you have the keys to unlock it.

Plus, it's a great excuse to unplug and start talking face to face, enthuses Kelly. Although, she uses digital tools to plot out her missives, "it's more and more precious to have a conversation and physical contact with history," which is why her private consultations are just the start of a genealogy vacation. "Coming together to verbally share in your history" is one of the most important parts of the journey.

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Planning the Best Genealogy Trip for Your Family

It may seem that there are as many ways to get out and touch your history as there are hidden branches on your family tree. You can hire an expert to assist you, book a trip through a travel specialist, or even DIY your own adventure. Here are a few top choices and tips for planning:

Irish Eyes Are Smiling

In addition to the ancestry sleuthing skills on offer at the Shelbourne Hotel, [Aer Lingus](#) offers a *Discover Your Roots* package that includes a consultation at the Family

History Museum in Dublin, a tour of the EPIC Emigration experience (whose motto, We All Come From Somewhere, is especially apropos), and then a rental car and bed and breakfast accommodations so you can immerse yourself in the discovery of your family's roots.

Italian Roots

[Mario Fortini](#) of Travel Leaders Group specializes in bespoke travel for Americans traveling to Italy to discover their roots. In the past two years, he has helped more than 200 Americans on trips related to their Italian ancestry. Often, he says, families with Italian surnames know they have Italian ancestry, but may not have learned the language or have never met their relatives in Italy, so in addition to trip planning, he'll also help find the area their family is from and connect them with a local guide who can translate when they meet their relatives.

Asian Heritage

[Remote Lands](#) focuses on trips to Asia, and creates custom genealogy trips for families who have adopted children from Korea, China, or Vietnam. Itineraries are crafted to help round out families' understanding of their adopted child's heritage while creating a memorable family experience.

Global Journeys

[EF Go Ahead Tours Heritage Tours](#) are one-of-a-kind genealogy tours created in collaboration with Ancestry®. Every detail is taken care on group trips that include hotels, food, and guided tours plus AncestryDNA® kit, pre-trip family history review, and on-site genealogist make up the experience. Family-friendly trips are offered to Germany, Italy, Ireland, and Scotland.

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DIY Your Own Genealogy Trip

"There's no magic button," says Kelly, to finding your heritage, but her advice for family roots discovery and planning genealogy trips is simple and applies to anyone who wants to take their kids to see where they come from:

First, do your homework, talk to family members and find the person who is your ancestor expert, "there's usually one in every family," says Kelly. Then follow up with evidence, because while family folklore is important, hard facts are needed to find your way.

Finally, once you've established your blueprint for discovery, you have to get out and see where you're from for yourself. Getting to touch the place you're from, and "finding physical proof of your roots is what makes it more real."

Here's a few ways to get started with genealogy trips:

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Be a Digital Detective When Sara D joined the popular family tree site Ancestry.com, she discovered family roots that ran all the way back to the 17th century New England. When the mom of twin teenage boys in New Jersey, started her search on "the information wasn't very robust at first." But the site did reconnect her with a cousin she hadn't seen for almost 30 years who was also researching their family tree. That led her to a book written by a relative in 1868. From there "I started linking documents in Ancestry.com and just kept going; it's like unraveling a sweater, once you get started, you can't stop!"

She uncovered 339 ancestors and family ties to the Revolutionary and Civil Wars and a ninth great grandfather that arrived in Boston aboard the *Hector* in 1637. She and her family then went in person to on a discovery trip to New England. "The boys loved being able to touch their history, and we're all planning a trip to go back and search for even more."

There are a number of free genealogy websites, too; [Lifewire](#) has a good roundup of options on their site.

Hit the Library You don't have to head across foreign seas to connect with your DNA. In Salt Lake City, the Church of the Latter Day Saints has the largest genealogical library in the world; and they maintain 4,000 branch Family History Centers worldwide. (You can also access them online at familysearch.org). The collection includes original US federal and state census records, passenger lists for US ports, and 87,000 families histories.

In Washington, DC, the Library of Congress holds more than 50,000 genealogies, and you can find family histories at other libraries around the country, too. [Family Tree Magazine](#) has a list of some of the top libraries for genealogy research around the country.