

A Trip to Your Roots

Genealogy is trending—and providing a tantalizing reason to travel.

BY LEEANNE JONES

Connection. That's the drive behind heritage tourism. Also called diaspora, homeland, or roots travel, genealogy trips combine the search for a personal relationship to the past with a traditional vacation.

"There's a desire to see firsthand where our ancestors walked and farmed and ate and lived and raised their kids," says Dallen Timothy, a professor at Arizona State University and editor of the *Journal of Heritage Tourism*. "People are turning to their own familial past as a way to find grounding in a tumultuous world."

Genealogy travel is hot. Technology has made documents such as birth certificates and immigration papers easily accessible. DNA testing kits can determine people's ethnic heritage and link them with living relatives. It's estimated that \$4.3 billion will be spent on those products and services globally in 2018.

"Genealogy is a legitimate craze right now," says A.J. Jacobs, author of *It's All Relative* (see Q&A on page 64). "It's everywhere you turn—genealogy TV shows, genealogy DNA services, genealogy cruises." In his quest to help build the world's family tree, Jacobs discovered just how connected we all are. "It makes you feel like you're part of something larger," he says. "Much larger. Like 7 billion people."

It's especially popular in the United States—with its

amalgamation of people from around the globe, separated from their roots—and among baby boomers, who have both time (the cohort is edging into retirement) and money. As a group, they're the most affluent generation, and many can afford travel to their ancestral homelands.

A genealogical trip can be as simple as going to a place that's significant for your family, such as seeking out authentic Ashkenazi dishes in New York City or visiting the new National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. Others dig into research for more personal quests.

Arlys Veen, a genealogy hobbyist from Chino, California, visited Leerbroek, Holland, where her grandmother was born, and asked every person she met about her family name. That eventually got her an invitation to spend time at a local farmhouse with people who were likely her distant cousins. "We couldn't prove we were related at the time," she says. "But I'm working on it." ●

LEEANNE JONES also writes for *Diablo* magazine.

IF YOU'RE GOING . . .

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VIETNAM, a popular travel destination in southeast Asia, draws many visitors to Ha Long Bay (left), which is dotted with green-topped limestone isles and ornate cruise ships called junks. After the Vietnam War ended in 1975, tens of thousands of South Vietnamese refugees relocated to the United States. Now, Vietnamese Americans make up slightly more than 0.3 percent of the total U.S. population.

POLAND'S former capital, Kraków, is home to the largest medieval town square in Europe. Once used for regal ceremonies and commercial trade, the historic site outside the Kraków Cloth Hall (right) is lined with cafés and hosts lively celebrations. Before WWII, some 3.3 million Jews lived in Poland. Roughly 11 percent survived the Holocaust, with many fleeing to North America. Poland's Jewish population numbers fewer than 4,000 today.



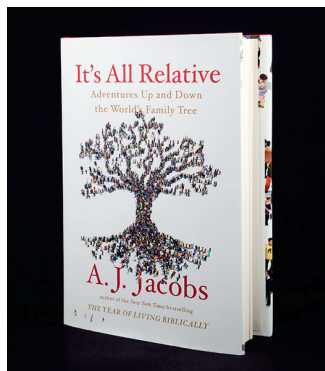
IRELAND'S Cliffs of Moher rise up to 700 feet above the Atlantic Ocean. The highest point is marked by O'Brien's Tower (left), built in 1835, from which visitors can see as far as the mountains of Kerry, 100 miles to the south. More than one in 10 Americans claim Irish ancestry, and genealogists treasure Ireland's many parish records from the 1700s and 1800s.

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Your distant cousin A.J.

Best-selling author A.J. Jacobs traveled the country digging into his roots—and yours.

BY CHIP ROWE



Jacobs lives in Manhattan with his wife and three sons.

A strange email sparked author A.J. Jacobs's interest in ancestry. In *It's All Relative: Adventures Up and Down the World's Family Tree*, he hilariously documents trips to genealogical archives and historical sites, relates surprising things he learned about his family tree, and explains how everyone on the planet is connected.

How did you get interested in the global family tree? I received an email from this guy who said his wife was my eighth cousin. I thought it was a scam, but it turned out he was part of an effort to build a tree that will connect the entire world. It's like Facebook times a billion.

Did you travel a lot when you were researching the book? I did. One of the most memorable trips was to a famous center of genealogy, the Family History Library operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City. After consulting the public files, I was not allowed to go to the mountain [a vault where the church stores billions of vital records] but did sing with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. They didn't tell me to sing quietly, but I thought I should.

Any other favorite spots? Ellis Island [the historic immigration station in New York Bay] was also an amazing place to visit. It's hard to imagine the sound and languages and the terror of waiting for the doctor to inspect you. There were 170 diseases that could get you barred from entry, including, I believe, acne.

Tribalism seems to be "in" right now. Do you see your book as a counterweight? I hope so. We need a common enemy, which is why a Martian invasion might be great for mankind. I have three boys, and I see how they wrestle. So it's not all harmonious, but science has shown we treat family better than strangers.

CHIP ROWE, a professional genealogist and journalist, makes an appearance in Jacobs's book for his work with Find A Grave, a collaborative website that catalogs photos of gravestones for genealogical purposes.

Finding family

Try these tips for a successful genealogy research getaway.

For a deep dive into your roots, plan a trip to conduct genealogical research in a relevant library, archive, church, or town. Among the most popular destinations in the United States are the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and the Genealogy Center at the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Ind. These are treasure troves of documents, but they can be intimidating if you don't plan ahead. Here's how to make the most of your efforts.

Do some legwork in advance. Know what you want to find on your quest. Build on your known family history with online resources such as Ancestry, MyHeritage, FamilySearch, and WikiTree.

Enlist a guide. It's helpful to have someone familiar with the places you want to visit. The Association of Professional Genealogists (apgen.org) lists people who can provide guidance, usually for a modest fee.

Arrive at archives and libraries early. Be friendly, appreciative, and patient with clerks and librarians. They can save you hours of additional work.

Bring a digital camera, extra batteries, and flash drives. Some libraries allow you to photograph records, which is faster than using a copy machine.

Have fun. Keep in mind that it's a trip, not a school assignment. Even if you don't uncover Great-Great-Grandma Josephine's maiden name, you can enjoy the journey. —C.R.

A boy revels at the interactive screens at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City.

