

## Where can I find my roots?

An estimated 50 million people worldwide can claim Scottish ancestry. If they visit the country as ancestral tourists, what might they be looking for? Gillian Harrower describes some of the work involved in finding out.

Interest in researching family roots has grown dramatically over recent months, largely due to the high profile media coverage given to the subject. The recent BBC series *Who do you think you are?*, for example, generated a fourfold increase in enquiries to [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk), the website of the General Register Office of Scotland.

In Autumn 2005, VisitScotland conducted an online survey with the database of [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk), the official online source of parish register, civil registration and census records for Scotland. The aim was to gain a better understanding of the characteristics and attitudes of consumers who have an interest in investigating their Scottish ancestors when on a holiday or short break in Scotland. There seem to be four main motivators:

- Accessing more information – getting the facts about their ancestors
- Seeing what their ancestors saw – a typical comment was ‘I wanted to find the sea they fished in and experience the weather. I wanted to hear the language they used and the songs they sang’
- Wanting to connect with other people – both relatives and local people
- Making a strong emotional connection to Scotland for themselves.

However, researching ancestors is only part of the reason for a trip to Scotland – two thirds of previous visitors spent less than 25% of their time on this, with other activities including visiting castles and museums and exploring Scottish scenery. Since 81% of previous visitors intend to take another ancestral holiday or short break in Scotland, we need to give compelling reasons for visitors to return. A good basis for this is to provide authentic experiences based on the ‘seeing what they saw’ and ‘connecting with people’ motivators .

Public sector bodies including VisitScotland, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands & Islands Enterprise have recognised the potential of this market, and are working together with the industry, through an industry-led Steering Group, to help businesses capitalise on this market potential. My work with businesses through the Ancestral Tourism Initiative (ATI) covers a range of product development issues. In particular I advise and support businesses to provide new consumer focused products, and to improve the level of visitor experience on the ground by enhancing the quality of existing ancestral tourism products.

A one-day training course, suitable for all frontline tourism businesses where staff come into contact with ancestral tourists, helps businesses appreciate visitors’ needs. Developed by training provider Tourist Board Training Ltd, the course is linked to

VisitScotland's new 'Ancestral Welcome' scheme, a code of practice that recognises businesses committed to ensuring their services and facilities meet the needs of ancestral tourists. To date over 100 businesses have been through the course, and 16 have been accredited to the Ancestral Welcome scheme.

Based on a review of the first phase of the ATI, the initiative has re-focused its efforts in the last year to work with local and sectoral groups, so we can encourage more buy-in from businesses, and explore ways in which businesses with a common interest can work together.

The Initiative also recently held two workshops for businesses actively involved in the ancestral sector, aimed at sharing best practice and encouraging networking amongst the ancestral tourism community. We believe that one of the most important roles we have is to share what works, and more importantly what doesn't, with businesses in the ancestral tourism community, so that they are equipped with the information they need to develop their own businesses and effectively meet the needs of ancestral tourists.

The greatest impact that the ATI has undoubtedly had has been in raising awareness of the opportunities, based on research, and encouraging individual businesses to make small changes in the way they operate – for example establishing links to local genealogists, museums, or relevant attractions – and making sure they have useful information for their visitors which they can provide before, during and after the visit.

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For more information on the Ancestral Tourism Initiative go to:  
[www.scotexchange.net/ancestraltourism](http://www.scotexchange.net/ancestraltourism)

Advertising people who ignore research are as dangerous as generals who ignore decodes of enemy signals.

*David Ogilvy, advertising executive*