

ANCESTRAL SCOTLAND RESEARCH

Executive Summary

In Autumn 2005, VisitScotland conducted an online survey with the database of 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 with an interest in investigating their Scottish ancestors when on a holiday or short break in Scotland. The results, which are discussed below, are based on over 4,000 responses. This represents a robust sample size.



MAIN FINDINGS

- One of the key findings was that ancestral tourists are **mainly older consumers**; over half of respondents were over 55 years old. Over a third are retired or semi-retired and the majority have no children living in their household.
- A wide array of **sources** is used for investigation into Scottish family history. The overwhelming majority of respondents mentioned websites as a source of information (in particular Ancestry.com, Genuki, Genes reunited, Rootsweb, FreeCen, Familysearch, Virtual Mitchell Library, Ellis Island, and various census websites). Other sources mentioned were talking to relatives and other ancestral researchers, family history centres / clan centres, family history magazines, and books.
- **How much research** ancestral tourists do **before taking a trip to Scotland** appears to vary according to personal preference and ambition. Respondents who had visited Scotland previously were split into two groups: Half had done no research at all or just started, whilst the other half had been researching for a while or done extensive research before taking a trip to Scotland. Attitudes of respondents who have not (yet) visited Scotland showed that although Scotland is not seen as the last resort, they tend to prefer to do some research before their trip.
- In general, it should be remembered that ancestral visitors always need a certain amount of information to kick off their research before visiting Scotland. This can be very basic (i.e. area where their ancestors lived) but if not present it will be a barrier to their decision to take a trip.
- Researching their ancestors tended to be **only part of the reason for most respondents to take a trip in / to Scotland** and was as such only one of many activities they took part in. Indeed, two-thirds of previous visitors spent less than a quarter of their time researching their ancestors while on holiday or short break in Scotland.
- Ancestral travel appears to be driven by **four main motivations**:
 - **Access more information.** The desire to find out as much factual information as possible about their ancestors. This can include inscriptions on gravestones, census records, photographs of places, local sources like newspapers etc. Some respondents had hit a brick wall and hoped to find further clues on their trip, whilst others wanted to verify information from internet sources, find out something new and surprising about their family history or try to solve family mysteries.

- **“See what they have seen”**. The desire to get a feel for the places where their ancestors lived. Some respondents found it hard to visualise how they lived, and wanted to soak up the atmosphere.
 - **Connect with other people**. Connecting with others is very important for ancestral tourists and can occur on different levels. Some want to share the experience with family members, discover long-lost relatives, or speak with locals in the hope to find out more about their ancestors or their way of life.
 - **Connect with self**. The desire to connect with their Scottish identity and national pride. This is a very personal motivation. Some respondents mentioned a feeling of “coming home” and the desire to know where they came from.
- Looking at the **characteristics of an “ancestral” holiday or short break in Scotland**, a few general trends appear:
 - As befits their lifestage, ancestral tourists tend to travel in partner pairs.
 - Most ancestral tourists tend to stay in hotels or B&B / Guest houses, followed by friends and relatives.
 - They tend to spend an average of 10 nights in Scotland and visit during the Summer months (almost two-thirds come between June-September).
 - Popular places to visit in terms of their research are places connected to their ancestors (like houses, places of work) and graveyards.
 - Other popular activities include visiting attractions such as castles and museums and / or exploring the Scottish scenery.
 - The majority visit both areas of Scotland which are connected to their ancestors and other areas. The top four areas visited by ancestral tourists are Edinburgh & Lothians, Glasgow & Clyde Valley, Perthshire / Angus and Dundee / Fife and South of Scotland.
 - In terms of **motivators** for visiting Scotland for a future “ancestral” holiday / short break, great travel deals came out as having the strongest pull for both prospective and previous visitors. Special ancestral packages also have some pull, but are of more interest to prospective visitors. Information on Scottish events has more of a pull than information on cultural events – except for the Scottish. **Barriers** which were identified in the research included personal reasons (health, lack of funds) and lack of time. However, respondents know that visiting Scotland would offer them a unique insight into their ancestor’s lives which they can’t gain through researching other sources, i.e. the internet.
 - Because of their strong emotional connection with Scotland, ancestral tourists tend not to “tick Scotland off the list” of places they want to visit – instead they want to return time after time to follow up more leads or just to soak up the atmosphere. Therefore it is not surprising that 81% of previous visitors intend to take another “ancestral” holiday or short break in Scotland; this proportion is lower for non-visitors (56%), because some (28%) are still undecided.

