



Research note

What pulls ancestral tourists 'home'? An analysis of ancestral tourist motivations



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Three key ancestral motivations are identified: ancestral, heritage, and mass.
- Four ancestral tourist clusters identified using motivations.
- Personal ancestry is confirmed as the main reason of travel for ancestral tourists.
- However, without other elements there is a strong risk of under providing.

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ABSTRACT

Ancestry has received limited attention within the tourism literature but is shown to play a crucial role in heritage tourism, especially for countries with extended diasporas such as Ireland, Italy India, China, and Scotland. The purpose of this study is to explore ancestral tourist motivations, and attain a broader understanding of this market. A survey of 282 ancestral tourists allowed the identification of three key factors: ancestral tourist motivation; heritage tourist motivations; and mass tourist motivation. These themes enabled a detailed analysis of clusters, identifying four ancestral segments: full heritage immersion; the ancestral enthusiast; general interest; and heritage focused. Given the lack of funding and resources currently available to ancestral tourism providers, the identification of these factors goes some way to highlighting productive areas of focus for promotional efforts and resources.

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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of research into one's personal and collective ancestry has been considered within the literature since the late 1970s (Smith, 1979). However, the recent proliferation of television shows and websites facilitating ancestral research has enhanced the popularity of this pastime. The result is an enhanced interest within diasporic markets in travelling to locations from which their forebears emigrated to explore family histories alongside a sense of collective belonging. Thus, people seek to revisit history in the form of their own personal narrative (Meethan, 2004), which can result in the need to keep links with (Iorio & Corsale, 2012), or explore, a 'homeland' which can be perceived quite differently from reality (Sim & Leith, 2012). We define ancestral tourism as "any visit which might be partly or wholly motivated by a need to connect or

reconnect with an individual's ancestral past" (Reference withheld). Previously, this activity has been referred to in general terms (e.g. roots, diaspora, homesick, or legacy tourism; see Basu, 2004; 2005; Iorio & Corsale, 2012; Marschall, 2015), or the need to establish factual evidence (e.g. genealogical or family history tourism; see Santos & Yan, 2010; Savolainen, 1995; Yakel, 2004). We will use the term 'ancestral tourism' as it is sufficiently capacious to accommodate each of these forms of reference, and is the phrase most commonly used within the country explored within the context of this study (VisitScotland, 2017a, b).

It has previously been suggested that the exploration of one's ancestry is not only a growing area, but one of special interest, in which the travel motivation of ancestral tourists differs from that of other heritage tourists (Porja, Butler, & Airey, 2003; reference withheld). However, many heritage sites do not take this fully into account often for reasons of limited necessary resources. By failing to address these specific motivations sites may not benefit fully from this important emerging market segment. It is proposed that the provision of facilities and services to anticipate and

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accommodate ancestral tourists' desire for personal meaning-making and a fuller understanding of their motivations by heritage sites, may have positive implications for both the marketing and success of many destinations (Timothy, 1997; reference withheld).

Recent studies suggest a spectrum of motivations that can underpin ancestral visits (Li & McKercher, 2016; Marschall, 2015). However, empirical quantitative data which considers the added value ancestral tourism can provide to a destination is scant. Timothy (1997) proposed that local tourism business and communities could benefit from further research into personal heritage, and ancestral tourism. For example, where destinations have a focus on key attractions relative to the ancestral context (e.g. cemeteries, genealogical centres, historic churches, buildings, and memorials), the use of these sites both assist in the contribution to the ancestral tourist experience, and enhance the identity of the destination for residents. Thus, it is essential to understand and anticipate specific attributes that drive ancestral tourists to particular destinations at national, regional and local levels, respond to them and thereby enhance their overall experience. As such, the purpose of this study is to explore these dimensions of ancestral tourist motivations.

1.1. Heritage tourist motivations

Dann's (1977) push-pull framework has been used to examine travel behaviours across a variety of pull and push contexts, for example, national parks (Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003), or the motivations of visitors from the United Arab Emirates (Prayag & Hosany, 2014). Push factors have been identified to consist of psychological forces, for example, desire for escape, adventure, self-exploration, or social interaction (Chen & Chen, 2015). Contrastingly, pull factors consist of features of a destination that attract visitors, for example, nature, and sports facilities (Chen & Chen, 2015; Dann, 1977; Klenosky, 2002).

Varying motivations have been identified within the realm of heritage (Apostolakis, 2003; Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2006). Such examples include, but are not limited to, the presence of attractive settings, architectural merit, atmosphere, an enjoyable day out (Shackley, 2001), personal benefit, or knowledge (Chen, 1998). However, others suggest differing motives could be influenced through various locations of data collection or the timing of the collection, resulting in a lack of attention to those who have not yet been to the site (Davies & Prentice, 1995; Poria et al., 2006). Given the broad notion of heritage as something that can be linked to, for example, eco-tourism (Ivanko, 1996), dark tourism (White & Frew, 2013), or adventure tourism (McCain & Ray, 2003), the identification of varying motivations should come as no surprise.

1.2. Ancestral tourist motivations

Although the importance of exploring niche segments in heritage tourism has been considered, the legacy, or personal heritage market has been somewhat overlooked (McCain & Ray, 2003). Individuals interact with heritage places based on their own cultural background (Poria et al., 2006), and these interactions have been shown to go beyond merely educational purposes and invoke emotional experiences, and connections to one's ancestors (McCain & Ray, 2003; Poria et al., 2003). As such, Poria et al. (2003) argue those whom seek a personal element on their heritage journey are likely to act significantly differently to others interested in heritage.

The principal motivation for ancestral tourists is the desire to explore family history, and to better understand their 'home' identity (Bhandari, 2013). However, research has identified a number of other motivations within more general notions of

heritage that may link specifically into the ancestral context, such as historic sites and landscapes which indicate a more general sense of belonging (Marschall, 2015; McCain & Ray, 2003). These push-pull motivations have been discussed broadly using legacy tourism as a basis (McCain & Ray, 2003; Ray & McCain, 2012), from a conceptual notion of self-identity (Higginbotham, 2012), a qualitative exploration (Li & McKercher, 2016; Santos & Yan, 2010), or as one overarching ancestral motivation (Smith, 1979).

1.3. Ancestral tourism in Scotland

Populations have migrated throughout the world since before the emergence of recorded history and for various reasons. Significant examples in the modern era (i.e. from c.17th century onwards) include those from Ireland, Italy, India, China and Scotland. Large levels of Scottish emigration have occurred within phased periods over the last 250 years (Devine, 2011). Much of this emigration resulted in travel to four main English speaking territories, which became the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Cameron, 2002). Difficulties exist in identifying specific figures for emigration over this period, yet it is estimated that between 20 and 90 million people are linked to the Scottish Diaspora within these countries (VisitScotland, 2013). Research has shown evidence of Scotland's heritage and ancestral focus in marketing communications since the mid-1990s (see Pritchard & Morgan, 1996). Ancestral tourism has now received further attention from the Scottish tourism industry given claims that this particular sector attracts 213,000 visitors to Scotland each year, with a further 4.3 million tourists within this market whom could be persuaded to visit during a five year period. Visit Scotland estimates that this increase in visitation could be worth an additional £2.4 billion to the Scottish tourism industry as whole, making it a key strategic focus (VisitScotland, 2013).

2. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore and test a scale of ancestral tourist motivations. Literature was examined to seek existing scales and attributes were identified for inclusion relative to the ancestral context (see McCain & Ray, 2003; Ray & McCain, 2012; Santos & Yan, 2010; Smith, 1979). Given the complexity of ancestral tourism interactions and difficulties seeking ancestral tourists, the initial phase explored perspectives related to the ancestral tourism experience from the supply side. A total of 32 interviews were conducted with museum curators, archivists, and volunteers across 29 sites throughout Scotland providing services useful to ancestral tourists' research (reference withheld). The initial qualitative study ensured elements of importance for ancestral tourism 'suppliers' were included in the study with ancestral tourist motivations identified in the literature (Bhandari, 2013; Marschall, 2015). Furthermore, literature exploring ancestral tourist motivations has commonly used a qualitative approach. As such, findings from the interviews, in combination with attributes from the literature and a review of VisitScotland's website, were used to develop a survey to explore ancestral tourist motivation quantitatively (see Table 1). A total of 14 motivations were identified for exploration.

The survey was tested with five ancestral tourists, before being sent to sites across Scotland for data collection (see Appendix 1). Data was collected from May of 2014 to September of 2015 in two allocated periods – May through September each year. These months were chosen as many of the sites were only open during these months, and they were peak seasons for ancestral tourists (as identified from the initial interviews). Twenty sites across both years were involved in the study and returned surveys. Staff from

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