

Handout for Planning a Successful Visit to your Ancestral Home

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A successful visit to your ancestral homeland requires you to do some homework well in advance of your journey. Below are some key steps you should take in research and planning before you travel and some advice while you are at your destination. Most of these guidelines can be applied to a visit to any town or city in any country. And many can be applied to virtual visits as well.

Good luck and have fun doing your genealogy research. It is very rewarding to visit where your ancestors lived and worked; and walk the very streets they did.

Save travels. Jeff

Pre-Trip Planning & Research

Trip Objectives (during your visit)

- Learn more about your destination—town, county, region, state
- Confirm information you already have
- Collect new information and records
- Experience the city and surroundings, not just the archives

General Planning

- Determine number of days to visit based on people and sites you want to visit
- Timing before your trip
 - 6 to 12 months—determine advanced planning & general itinerary
 - 3 months—detail daily activities, places (including days/hours open)
 - 3 weeks—confirm all flights, train, rental car, hotel and site reservations

Research

- Create an updated family tree
- Develop a list of questions you want to answer
- Create a list of must-see and optional-see places to visit
- Gather detailed maps, addresses, contact information
- Use AI as a research partner where possible

Items to Bring on Trip

- Documents (including your detailed family tree)
- Maps
- Copies to leave behind

Hire a Professional Genealogist (if your budget allows)

- Locate one that knows the language and customs
- One that preferably lives close to your destination (this reduces travel costs)
- Develop a scope of the contracted work: hours, pre-trip research, on-site research with you, and post visit follow-up
- Standard fees in 2025 were ~100 Euro/hour, with a minimum number of hours (these will certainly vary depending upon your situation)
- Use an international payment service (I recommend Wise.com—fast, low fees, best exchange rate)
- Develop communications with the genealogist well before your trip to enable some advance research to be done and ensure your objectives and priorities are met

Use AI

- To help plan and organize your research visit—places to visit, sources of information, etc.
- Be specific and ask follow-up questions

The Actual Visit

- Book a hotel conveniently located within walking distance of your target sites
- Set or reset your visit priorities once you arrive—based on weather forecast, open days/hours, etc. as these always change (allow time for last-minute changes)
- Take notes as you go and summarize the day's activities/findings each evening
- When looking at documents, take a photo of the cover, title page with dates in addition to the relevant pages of the document
- In addition to the archives and churches, seek out bookstores, antique shops, and photography shops for vintage photos and books

Post-trip Follow-up

- Document what you discovered
- Update your family trees
- Communicate with those people who helped you with a note of thanks, a copy of an interesting finding, and some additional questions you may have