

No Easy Button: Using Immersion Genealogy to Understand Your Ancestors

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Overview

Family history is so much more than just names, dates, and places, or boxes, lines, and charts. For 21st century genealogists, it is easy to limit our research to the documents or other facts we find online, or to what others tell us to be true. Learn how to take your research a step further to understand your ancestors' lives through "immersion genealogy"—the process of discovering where they lived, worked, and worshipped, and experiencing those customs and traditions they passed down through the generations. Key resources, methodology, and tips for reaching out to relatives and repositories, and how to make the most out of a trip to your ancestor's hometown (whether in North America or across the pond) will be discussed.

Creating Your Own Immersion Genealogy Experience

If you are thinking about or are in the process of planning a trip to your ancestral homeland, here some suggestions for how you can include "immersion genealogy" in your itinerary.

- **Home** – If possible, go inside the ancestral home, learn about daily life. How did your ancestors cook? Where did they sleep? How did they deal with personal matters (bathroom, bathing, etc.)?
- **Work** – Where did you ancestors work? In the fields (farmers, shepherds, etc.)? In a mine, factory, or other industry? Did they own a shop, tavern, or pub? Did they work with their hands (tailor, boot maker, or craftsman)? If possible, book a tour of a workplace or talk to a town historian.
- **Worship** – Did your ancestors attend church or synagogue? How far away was their place of worship? What was their religion? What rituals did they observe? Ask to meet with the priest and go inside the church. Attend a service.
- **Food** – What foods did they eat? Did they grow/produce their own food? Were there special meals for holidays or other occasions? If visiting family, try to enjoy a meal with them, or go to a local eatery.

- **Dress** – What type of clothing did your ancestors wear for work, church, special events? Did they make their own clothing? Is there a nearby museum you can visit? Or ask those who live there if they still make or have traditional costumes.
- **Community** – Who lived near your ancestors? What was life in their community like? Were there community celebrations? What did they involve? Make contact with the mayor in advance and try to get an appointment to see important places in the town/village.
- **Entertainment** – Did your ancestors experience music and dance? What did they do for entertainment? Is there still a local pub or meeting place you can visit to talk with the locals?
- **Folklore** – What stories, superstitions, or folklore were a part of your ancestors' lives? Ask for books or pamphlets at town offices or archives.
- **Customs and Traditions** – Were there certain customs or traditions specific to your family or the town or village (for example, what did they do for baptisms, weddings, funerals, military honors, or to say goodbye to people who left for America or other countries)? Talk to families living there or seek out places in the area such as churches or social clubs who may be hosting festivals or other commemorative events.

Tips for Success

- Plan
- Prepare
- Pack Well

Virtual Experiences

If you are unable to travel for whatever reason (time, finances, health/safety concerns, etc.), there are ways to have “immersion genealogy” experiences without leaving home.

- Websites and Blogs
- YouTube
- Facetime/Skype/Zoom
- Google Earth and Google Maps

Articles

- “**Genealogy Tourism**” by Lisa A. Alzo, *Your Genealogy Today*, March/April 2015.
- “**Immersion Genealogy**” by Lisa A. Alzo, *Family Chronicle*, November/December 2014.
- “**Five Ways to Connect with your Living Kin,**” by Lisa A. Alzo, *Internet Genealogy Magazine*, October/November 2010.
- “**Heritage Travel,**” *Internet Genealogy, Tracing Your Ancestors Special Issue*, 2017. <http://www.internet-genealogy.com>

Books

- *Three Slovak Women* by Lisa A. Alzo (KDP Publishing) <http://amzn.to/2fUIY6v>
- *Running Away to Home: Our Family's Journey to Croatia in Search of Who We Are, Where We Came From, and What Really Matters* by Jennifer Wilson (St. Martin's Griffin) <http://amzn.to/2fusRL3>

Online Resources

The Accidental Genealogist Blog by Lisa A. Alzo (Search on “Sojourn in Slovakia”) <https://www.theaccidentalgenealogist.com>

Research Write Connect – Self-Paced Online Genealogy and Writing Courses <https://www.researchwriteconnect.com>

Cyndi’s List Travel & Research <https://www.cyndislist.com/travel>

Facebook (search for groups, for example Heritage Travel) <https://www.facebook.com>

GeneaBloggers <https://geneabloggers.com>

Genealogy on Facebook List (Katherine Willson) <https://socialmediagenealogy.com/genealogy-on-facebook-list>

***Now maintained by Cyndi Ingle of Cyndi’s List, see:** <https://cyndislist.com/facebook>

Nutfield Genealogy Blog (Heather Rojo) <https://nutfieldgenealogy.blogspot.com>

Immersion Genealogy (share your experiences online)

<https://www.immersiongenealogy.com>

The screenshot shows the homepage of Immersion Genealogy. At the top, the logo features a tree with roots and the text "IMMERSION GENEALOGY". To the right, it says "CREATE A MORE COMPLETE FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH EXPERIENCE." Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for Home, Immersion, Blog, Articles, Resources, and Testimonials, along with a search bar. The main content area is a carousel slide. The current slide shows a man and a woman standing in front of a church altar. To the right of the image is a green box with the title "Creating Your Own Immersion Genealogy Experience" and a paragraph of text: "Family history is so much more than just names, dates, and places, or boxes, lines, and charts. For 21st century genealogists, it is easy to limit our research to the documents or other facts we find online, or rely on information others share in their family trees, or via social media. Immersion genealogy gives us the opportunity to take our research a step further to help us to truly understand our ancestors' lives." Below the carousel is a white sidebar with a search bar and a "Home" button. The main content area below the carousel has a green header "What is Immersion Genealogy?" followed by a paragraph: "Immersion Genealogy is the process of discovering where and how our ancestors lived, worked, and worshiped, and experiencing first-hand those customs and traditions they passed down through the generations." To the right of this text is a blue box with the text "FREE: 18 Simple Steps to Becoming a Genealogist" and a "Signup for Lisa's newsletter to receive the free download." Below this is a form with fields for "Email Address*" and "First Name".

For additional or revised content for this presentation, visit: <https://www.lisaalzo.com>

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