

Lisa A. Alzo shares tips for planning a dream trip to your ancestral homeland

For many genealogists, a trip back to the ancestral homeland is a “must do”. Making my own personal trip to Slovakia, and the four birthplaces of my grandparents, gave me a real sense of adventure and accomplishment. [See “Sojourn in Slovakia” www.theaccidentalgenealogist.com.]

So, why should you consider visiting your ancestral homeland? Some reasons include:

- Walk in your ancestor’s footsteps
- Experience heritage/culture firsthand
- Meet relatives
- Perform research in archives, repositories, churches, etc.

This collective experience is something I have named “Immersion Genealogy” — the process of discovering where and how our ancestors lived, worked, and worshipped, and experiencing firsthand those customs and traditions they passed down through the generations. (See my article in *Family Chronicle* November/December 2014, and visit www.immersiongenealogy.com.)

So, if a heritage trip is in your future, here are a few secrets to make it your most memorable one ever.

The Three P’s of Your Ancestral Journey

It may be a bit daunting to work out the details for a trip to a place you know little or nothing about. But the process can be simplified to: **Plan, Prepare, and Pack.**

1. PLAN. You can never start too early to plan your trip and research objectives (1 year is ideal). Consider the places you want to visit, your length of stay, if you will need a passport or visa, how to maximize your time and what you hope to accomplish.

Next, create a document or spreadsheet on your computer, or use Evernote www.evernote.com to create a virtual notebook to make lists and create an itinerary. Initially, you should schedule everything (e.g., visits with relatives, time for cemetery exploration and researching in the archives, etc.), but be flexible. Realize you may NOT get to do everything, so have a “Dream List” and a secondary plan. Create a contact list (family, professional researcher/tour guide, parish priest, mayor, archives, etc.). Consider basic logistics such as cost, transportation, accommodations, passport/visa requirements, language, local laws/ restrictions, etc. Use online trip planning tools and apps. (Download Lisa’s Travel Tools and Tips list at http://YourGenealogyToday.com/Travel_Tips.pdf.)

2. PREPARE. The more you know about your ancestral homeland, the less stress you will feel once you get there. Google your destination, or check travel books and websites (read the reviews). Enlist help of a local tour guide and/or professional researcher. Invest in good maps (GPS may not work in remote locations). Consult town/archive websites, and contact family and other

individuals in advance of your trip. Consider starting a “Genealogy Fund” savings account. Outline your research goals.

3. PACK. Don’t wait until the last minute to pack. Create a packing list. Consider airline restrictions, and leave room for souvenirs and gifts from relatives! Avoid taking those bulky research binders. Limit the tech “gadgets” and research how to access the Internet. Perform a safety/risk assessment before traveling to a foreign country.

(Get a free Packing Checklist at http://YourGenealogyToday.com/Packing_List.pdf.)

Other Tips

Of course, we all want those “**Who Do You Think You Are?**” moments (just like we see on TV), but try to set realistic expectations. Build time into your schedule to allow for rest and unexpected activities or emergencies. Focus on the positive and embrace serendipity.

Also, don’t forget to share your experiences and photographs through a blog or other social media. (Tip: Consider waiting until you return so as not to advertise to the world that you are not home.)

Finally, have fun and enjoy the moment! ☞☞



Author and lecturer **LISA A. ALZO** is a frequent contributor to *Your Genealogy Today* and *Internet Genealogy*.