

In Search of Personal Heritage: Genealogy Tourism within New Zealand.

Gerald Sides – *Graduated 2006*

Abstract

Heritage tourism is a specialist form of tourism and its growth has been suggested as being a major contributor to the overall increase of tourism throughout the world. In part this rise has been attributed to tourists seeking those heritage attractions and sites that have some form of personal connection. There is much in the literature that suggests that dissatisfaction and alienation in modern society is a reason why people seek heritage experiences. There is a small body of tourism literature that examines this personal connection to heritage through a need to find and identify with the past through ancestral lifestyles and connections.

Genealogy as an interest or hobby has also experienced a growth in interest in North America and in New Zealand. The same reasons as to why a person undertakes heritage tourism equate with the need to undertake genealogy. While technology has enabled some genealogy to be undertaken without travel, the majority of resources, archives and places with family connections require travel to access them and enable the genealogist to discover their roots or construct their family tree.

In the New Zealand context there is very little data or studies available either in relation to genealogy itself or to genealogy or personal heritage tourism. The purpose of this study is to explore the extent of genealogy in New Zealand and to gain an understanding and insight into the characteristics of the New Zealand genealogist, their motivations for undertaking both genealogy research and genealogy travel. This study also explores to what extent the genealogist travels within New Zealand, what they visit and why.

Preliminary interviews were held with four genealogists to gain an appreciation of what it is to be a genealogist. From these interviews and the existing literature on genealogy a quantitative survey instrument was prepared and distributed randomly to subscribers of the New Zealand Genealogist. The resulting data was analysed using frequency distributions to achieve the goals set. The results indicate a similarity between New Zealand genealogists and their North American counterparts. It also indicates that the sociological motivators mentioned above are not necessarily the most important outcomes from their endeavours. The data also reveals that those genealogists who travel to undertake aspects of their research do so primarily in conjunction with their holiday travels. There is however a reasonably large body of genealogists who indicated they travel purely for genealogy research.

This research indicates that there are opportunities for those individuals and organisations with a connection to the provision of genealogical material and attractions to better cater to and provide for the genealogy tourist. It is also apparent from this study that there are many opportunities for further studies of genealogy and the genealogist in New Zealand as well as the travel characteristics of the genealogist.