

# Who do you think you are?

## Business specialists identify opportunities in ancestral tourism

**W**ITH THE RECENT INTEREST in programmes such as the BBC's 'Who do you think you are?' and the continuous enthusiasm from people in North America in tracing their ancestry, it is no surprise that Scottish businesses are seeing the potential in ancestral tourism.

Borders Journeys, a small tourism business based in the Scottish Borders, has been promoting the stunning, but often neglected, Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway regions as travel destinations since 2012. In addition to sightseeing, owner/director Ian Walker has been inviting ancestral enthusiasts to connect with their Scottish roots and to explore their ancestry across the Borders and Dumfriesshire's towns and countryside. With an excellent knowledge of Scotland, Ian specialises in tailor-made tours which share the beauty, history and culture of his homeland with visitors from home and abroad.

However, with a passion for all things Scottish, Ian was struggling to decide whether to concentrate on the specialism of ancestral tourism or to broaden his focus to encompass Scottish tourism in general.

Dr Claire Seaman, Director of the Scottish Forum for Family Business Research at QMU, said: "Ian felt he needed a clearer strategic vision for his company. He particularly wanted to establish if there was a large enough market to merit him spending the majority of his time focusing on ancestral tourism."

She continued: "As specialists in tourism, QMU was delighted to get involved in this project. Small businesses can often reap the benefits of having a fresh eye on their work. With a strong track record in hospitality, tourism and family business, we were able to conduct research and look at government policy which would help Ian determine a clear future direction for the development of Borders Journeys."

Dr Seaman said: "Tourism can transform local economies, and research has shown that there is a growing interest in ancestral tourism at home and abroad. A recent VisitScotland publication predicted that ancestral tourism could bring around £2.4 billion to Scotland over five years."

"Aside from the USA and other international markets which generate visitors who seek bespoke personal tours focusing on family ancestry in Scotland, there is also a growing home market, possibly fuelled by programmes such as 'Who do you think you are?' and a growing older population."

Dr Seaman and Professor Joe Goldblatt, from QMU's Division

of Business, conducted research into the ancestral tourism market in Scotland, estimating the market size, and looking at the characteristics of ancestral tourism within Scotland and with the Scottish diaspora.

Professor Goldblatt explained: "A recent scoping study for VisitScotland highlights that the current value of ancestral tourism is around £101 million and that the likelihood of ancestral tourists becoming returning tourists in Scotland is high across all countries."

VisitScotland also estimates that there are approximately 28-40 million people of Scottish ancestry who live permanently outwith of Scotland. In addition to these ancestral Scots, a 2009 study conducted by the American Scottish Foundation (ASF) identified tens of millions more individuals who have an affinity with Scottish culture.

Professor Goldblatt continued: "With the increased priority being placed on ancestral tourism by the Scottish Government and opportunities presented by large scale events such as the Commonwealth Games and Scotland's Homecoming, and links with the clan associations, there is significant scope for the development of ancestral tourism."

Dr Seaman concluded: "Our report suggested that, to avoid over-reliance on Ian as the main business expert within the business, the company could grow parallel strands of business, one of which could allow additional expertise to be brought into the company as appropriate."

"However, importantly, our research, and the marketing opportunities we identified with diasporan Scots, confirmed that the future is indeed bright for Borders Journeys and that there is a substantial market to merit its further development in ancestral tourism."

The three month long research project was supported by Interface through a £5,000 innovation voucher from the Scottish Funding Council. Interface provides a central point of access to the expertise available in Scotland's higher education and research institutions and helps match businesses with the right academic expertise.

Ian Walker from Borders Journeys, said: "The advice and support provided by the QMU academic team has been invaluable. Building on the project's findings, Borders Journeys has built new relationships and contacts worldwide in the ancestral history and tourism market. This year we have seen a significant increase in clients contacting us regarding ancestral research and tours."

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