

# Walk Where Your Ancestors Walked

Virtual Heritage Travel Using AI & Online Resources

Lisa Lisson, *Are You My Cousin?*

[www.LisaLisson.com](http://www.LisaLisson.com)

You may not be able to travel to your ancestor's homeland, but you *can* walk in their footsteps and experience what they may have experienced from your living room couch.

## What is Heritage Travel?

**Heritage travel** is simply a travel experience where you explore the culture and area where your ancestors lived.

**Virtual heritage travel** is when you explore the culture and area where your ancestors lived *from home*. Exploring cities and towns on your laptop and even interacting with the locals is possible!

## Why Travel Virtually (or In-Person)?

Heritage travel offers you, the traveler, more than just the ability to see the sights where your ancestors lived. It provides you with the ability to connect to previous generations. You can see the sights an ancestor saw, hear the music, and taste the foods an ancestor ate. It allows you to:

- Connect to past generations
- Learn about an ancestor's culture
- Improve your research skills (Think Social History!)
- Save Money

## How To Start Planning Your Virtual Trip

You have no plane tickets to purchase and no time tables to adhere to!

Start by deciding:

- Which ancestral lines or specific ancestors you want to explore.
- Where you want "to go".
- What types of things or "tours" you would like to visit.

## Let Artificial Intelligence Tools (AI) Help You Plan

Large language models like [ChatGPT](#) and [Google Gemini \(formerly Bard\)](#) offer exciting possibilities for virtual heritage travel with their text generation and question-answering abilities. Both free and paid versions exist, and while they continuously learn and improve, you do need to verify your information.

Mastering effective prompts is **key** to unlocking valuable results. Structure your prompts as if you are talking to an actual person. Be specific in what you want to know and provide context as needed. Treat your prompt thread as an ongoing conversation. AI tools continue to learn and adapt their answers to your ongoing queries.

Use the following prompt examples to structure your own prompts.

### Examples of Prompts (Google Gemini):

1. I have traced my ancestors back to New York City in the late 1800's. My ancestors arrived in the 1880's and 1890's and were Eastern European families from Russia (Today, that's Lithuania.). They lived on Broome Street in the lower east side area of New York. Please create a virtual tour of that area for me.

2. For the museums you mentioned, please provide their website links and additional resources they provide for online patrons.

3. I am a foodie and love to try new foods. Since I can't travel, I want to try tastes of my eastern European heritage at home. Please suggest foods and recipes of my ancestors, I can easily make at home.

4. Additionally, are there foods from my husband's eastern European Jewish heritage that I can order to try at home. To be clear, I am not looking for a meal or restaurant delivery, I'm looking for food products that can be ordered. Please provide links to websites.

*Note in #4* - I clarified what I was asking for (food products) - and not asking for (a meal delivery) - which resulted in a better response from Google Gemini..

5. While I eat these traditional foods and explore the virtual museums, I would like to listen to traditional music, too. What do you recommend?

## More Virtual Travel Options (Without Using AI)

For those not wishing to use one of the AI tools for their virtual trip planning, try one of these options!

## Explore Google Maps

[Google maps](https://www.google.com/maps) (<https://www.google.com/maps>) is not just for directions to get from point A to point B. With the Google Maps street view, walk the streets where your ancestors walked. See what they saw, and see how their world has changed. You can even see the buildings where they lived or worked or worshiped.

## Explore Your Ancestor's Culinary Heritage

Food connects people, and food can connect generations. The culinary heritage of a region was influenced not just by taste, but by available ingredients and the local economy. Religious food laws also played a part in the food culture of past generations.

What a society ate and drank opens a window into the culture and lifestyle of its people. In short, food tells the story of the people who lived there.

### **Culinary Heritage Tip:**

Explore vintage cookbooks to learn more about traditional foods and traditions surrounding those dishes. Many can be found online at [Google Books](https://books.google.com/) (<https://books.google.com/>).

## Virtual Museum and Heritage Site Tours

During the covid pandemic, many museums and heritage sites have created virtual tours and educational series so you could “visit” from home.

The variety available online is astounding! Look into what museums are offering in the area where your ancestors lived.

Do you have German ancestors? Irish ancestors? Examples you'll want to explore:

- [German American Heritage Center](https://gahc.org/) (<https://gahc.org/>) - Explore your German ancestors as they settled in the upper Midwest in the late 1880s.
- [The National Museums of Ireland](https://www.virtualvisittours.com/category/national-museums-of-ireland/) (<https://www.virtualvisittours.com/category/national-museums-of-ireland/>) - Learn about the daily life of your Irish ancestors by visiting these 4 museums.
- [The Tenement Museum \(New York\)](https://www.tenement.org/digital-exhibits/) (<https://www.tenement.org/digital-exhibits/>) - Many Americans have immigrant ancestors who came into America through New York. The Tenement Museum offers digital exhibits to learn and experience the life of your immigrant ancestors.

### **Virtual Tour Tip:**

Structure your internet search for virtual tours of cities and museums/attractions to include the location and/or topic of interest. For example: Search “Poland Virtual Museum Tours” to find tours to learn more about your Polish ancestors.

Exploring and experiencing your cultural heritage does not have to be limited by expense or your ability to even travel. Your heritage and the culture of your ancestors can be experienced in their foods, their customs, and by “traveling” the streets they walked. By seeing the streets, by eating the foods, and by exploring their community through museums, connection to your past is possible.

### **Take a Cultural Class Virtually!**

A unique and creative way to explore the culture of your ancestor is to take a virtual class on any number of topics. For example, you could have the opportunity to experience a particular part of your heritage by creating a specific dish in a virtual cooking class or taking a dance class!

Companies and websites such as [Masterclass.com](https://www.masterclass.com/) (<https://www.masterclass.com/>) or [League of Kitchens](https://www.leagueofkitchens.com/) (<https://www.leagueofkitchens.com/>) offer the ability to take a virtual class such as a cooking class or a dancing class from local residents. Youtube is another option for learning how to cook a traditional dish or dance a local dance. Not only do you have the opportunity to learn a new skill or something about your culture and heritage, taking a live stream class offers the opportunity to talk to the host live to ask questions and learn their perspective.

Exploring and experiencing your cultural heritage does not have to be limited by expense or your ability to even travel. Your heritage and the culture of your ancestors can be experienced in their foods, their customs, and by “traveling” the streets they walked. By seeing the streets, by eating the foods, and by exploring their community through museums, connection to your past is possible.