

Family Research On A Trip To Italy

By Kathy Foggia

The uniqueness of your Italian heritage comes from your immigrant ancestor's home town.... the dialect, customs and foods. Your ancestor brought a part of that little hometown with them to start over in this country. Finding and visiting the family's ancestral town is a step towards a deeper understanding of who you are. Genealogical research provides a gateway to that understanding by taking us to the homes of past generations, our personal piece of Italian history.

Before heading off to Italy for a vacation, with a little extra planning you can find out more about your family history. First you will want to find or verify the town your ancestor came from. Sometimes that information has been passed down as part of a family's oral history. In other families it needs to be proven in genealogical records, like passenger manifests, naturalization records, vital records (birth, marriage and death records) of the immigrant, the spouse or child of the immigrant, military records, obituaries, newspaper articles and other sources.

Ancestral Town

Once you know or find the ancestral town it is helpful to confirm this by looking for a birth record or marriage record either by writing to the commune (town) or looking on one of the online sites with Italian civil records:

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/search> – a free website log in required. This is a link to the catalog where you enter the town name to search for what records they hold. You must be registered to view them.

<http://dl.antenati.san.beniculturali.it/en/gallery> - This is a list of the different State Archives with free records online with a link.

<https://www.ancestry.com> – Go to Search, Card Catalog and enter Italy to see the records held on this monthly fee website.

Goals

What goals would you like to accomplish on your trip? Would you like to see the home your ancestor was born in? Do you want to see if there are living relatives still there? Do you want to find out your great-great-grandfather's name?

Some of these goals you can start working on ahead of your trip. You can look for people with the same family name living in that town by searching the Italian phonebook: https://www.paginebianche.it/index_en.html . You can write to them using Google Translate to see if they are related to you. If you do find an Italian birth record online for your ancestor, it will have a street and sometimes house number listed where your ancestor was born, so you can see the actual home where they lived.

Research Plan

List where the records might be located, with the address and hours that usually will be posted online at the town's website. Civil records in small towns are held at Ufficio dello Stato Civile & Ufficio Anagrafe. Typically, these offices contain birth, marriage and death records. The year these records began varies from town to town. If you plan on visiting a parish church for records, you will need to write, call or email ahead as parish priests are very busy, and your chance of catching them at a good time for research without an appointment are very slim. Take a family tree with you, including birth and death dates if you have them for use at the commune or with possible family members. Also, take a photo of your immigrant ancestor.

Guide or Translator

If you will be spending a few days in your ancestral hometown where little English is spoken and you don't speak Italian, it is well worth the money to hire a translator/guide. The time they save you knowing the local people, the customs, knowing where to go and who to see is invaluable. It can make all the difference in a successful trip. You can find someone by asking others that have traveled to the area, or by asking on a genealogy Facebook group page for recommendations.

Visiting your ancestral hometown can be a rewarding experience. Being prepared with the proper information before you go can make it even more meaningful.

