

GENEALOGICAL TOURISM: QUEBECKERS IN SEARCH OF ANCESTORS IN NORMANDY



More and more Quebeckers become part of genealogical tourism in Normandy, in search of their ancestors. Will this newfound interest be enough to revitalize the economy of certain areas of Normandy?

With the advent of the internet, genealogical research has been democratized and has become more accessible. Proof can be found in the recent development of websites dedicated to genealogy (Ancestry, GeneaNet, MyHeritage, etc.).

In Quebec, this type of research has become very popular – as evidenced by the creation of television programs featuring Quebec celebrities in search of their origins. Moreover, the desire of Quebeckers to affirm their own French identity within the context of a mostly Anglophone Canada also plays a part in this newfound interest for genealogical research.

In recent years, the genealogical tourism industry for Quebeckers has been developing in France. While this new form of tourism remains highly personal, its potential for local economic development is not negligible, especially in the rural areas from which many pioneers departed.

Can genealogical tourism respond to the challenges of revitalizing these aging areas which are becoming increasingly unattractive to tourists? Let's take Normandy as an example – an area responsible for a prolific descendance in Quebec and an area in which genealogical tourism is still being under-exploited by local authorities.

Several hundred pioneers, mainly from the Norman provinces of Perche (a territory which was partly integrated into Normandy in 1789), Aunis and Saintonge (which currently corresponds to the former Poitou–Charentes region) left for New France in search of a better life.

Subsequently, more than 800 women called "Filles du Roy" were sent to New France to get married and start a family with the men currently located there. These women usually came from orphanages or hospitals in the cities of Dieppe, La Rochelle, Paris or Rouen and were anywhere between the ages of 15 and 30 years old. The population of New France soon doubled after the arrival of these young women. As a result, it is highly probable that today, a Quebecker of French Canadian origin will have several ancestors from among these 17th and 18th-century pioneers.

Of the ten most commonly used family names in Quebec, four of them are of exclusive Norman

ancestry (Tremblay, Gagnon, Côté and Gagné) and five others contain a partial link to this ancestry (Roy, Gauthier, Morin, Lavoie and Fortin).

The potential for genealogical tourism in Normandy is great given how many Quebeckers are interested in finding out about their genealogy. Therefore, if the public and private stakeholders within the territory were to take advantage of this tourism potential (local elected officials and tourism companies in particular), **it is certain that the rural areas would experience direct local economic benefits (hotels, restaurants, etc.)**. Faced with the difficult challenges posed by the revitalization of rural areas, this new form of tourism might be an answer to the many economic problems of these areas.

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