

The European market potential for diaspora tourism

Last updated:
08 January 2020

Diaspora tourists feel a stronger connection to their holiday destinations than other tourists. That is why they are more likely to visit local shops, eat at local restaurants and stay at local accommodations. The money that they spend usually goes straight to the local community. Ultimately, they will be the best ambassadors of your destination to their friends and family back home.

Contents of this page

1. [Description of the target group](#)
2. [What makes Europe an interesting market for diaspora tourism?](#)
3. [Which European countries offer most opportunities for diaspora tourism?](#)
4. [What trends offer opportunities in the European diaspora tourism market?](#)

1. Description of the target group

Diaspora tourists are people who travel on holidays to destinations where they have an ancestral connection, such as where they were born, raised or where their ancestors live or lived. Diaspora tourists often have family, friends or relatives living in the destination country, or they have ancestors who came from there. Diaspora tourism also includes [Friends and Family Tourism \(VFR\)](#) as well as roots tourism, also called [DNA tourism or ancestral tourism](#). Because diaspora tourists have some sort of connection with the destination country, they feel more like locals than regular tourists. Most diaspora tourists plan their own holidays, so diaspora tourism is very much related to [free independent traveller \(FIT\) tourism](#).

Diaspora tourism by nature creates or already has strong connections to local economies and diaspora tourists actively try to contribute to them. Most diaspora tourists won't make exclusive trips to big touristic attractions and instead more often make visits to authentic, small, local places. This includes visiting local shops, eating at locally owned restaurants and sleeping at small and less popular accommodations. The diaspora tourist on average spends less on their trip than regular tourists, but because they often book directly instead of using a tour operator, their money is more likely to directly contribute to the local community.

Diaspora tourists visit [places regular tourists don't often visit](#). This includes visiting family and friends in off-grid locations, participating in cultural or sport events, or visit regional tourism sites. This means that diaspora tourists can potentially put new places on the map for other tourists and help to geographically spread tourism destinations throughout a country. In addition, by travelling around with local family and friends, diaspora tourists also help to stimulate domestic tourism within the destination country.

While most tourism is seasonal, diaspora tourism doesn't necessarily need to be. Although diaspora tourists also tend to travel on calendar holidays, they also try to travel when flying costs, for example, are low. This applies best to tourists who are visiting friends and relatives, as well as to those travelling for special events, such as births, weddings, anniversaries and burials. Because diaspora tourism is less seasonal, it provides more regular and sustainable form of revenue.

Diaspora tourists likely have some knowledge of their destination and surrounding regions, which means they will be less sensitive to political instability, violence and other factors when planning their travels. It also means that diaspora tourists often visit places regular tourists don't.

Tips:

- Focus on diaspora tourists if your location is more remote, farther away from big tourist attractions.
- Always be honest with the tourist about the state of safety in a particular area.
- Offer deals throughout the year for tourists instead of seasonally, since diaspora tourists travel at all times of the year. This will also lead to more stable and less seasonal revenue.
- Inform tourists about local events which gives them another way of connecting with the area. Diaspora tourists are more attached to the area their friends and family live, or where their roots are.
- Ask diaspora tourists for feedback. Because of their special relationship with the destination, diaspora tourists are often more willing to contribute.

Visiting family friends and relatives (VFR) tourism

The VFR group often keeps a strong connection with the culture, community and habits at their travel destination. At least some of these tourists speak or understand the local language. These connections make VFR tourists feel much more like a local than regular tourists would. These tourists also blend more easily into the local society and know more about local rules and habits than your regular tourist, so they are less likely to harm the customs of an area. Yet, they still are tourists and they do want to see the popular attractions and sights other tourists do. In most destination countries, VFR is the largest type of diaspora tourism.

Tips:

- Attract VFR tourists within your own community; VFR tourists tend to enjoy trips with their families.
- Understand the reasons for the diaspora in the first place. People who have established themselves in Europe for economic or cultural reasons, and those whose families have been in Europe for more than one generation will obviously be more likely to visit as tourists than those who left for reasons related to politics, war, persecution, etc. For more information about the background of immigration into Europe, read [chapter 3 of the World Migration Report 2018](#).

Roots or ancestral tourism

This group is probably not so familiar with local culture, community and habits, but they will feel more at home than regular tourists because they have some ancestral connection. The reason for their travel is to learn and experience their family history and the way of life of their ancestors. They visit places where their ancestors could possibly have lived or travelled through. A part of this may be visiting ancient slave and trade routes. Many roots visitors chose to explore without too many people around, because for many this is a very special journey.

Many African slave routes can be found on [the website of Afro Tourism](#). Some companies also offer tours to explore these roots. This can either be a small local tour [like the one offered by Viator](#), or a [full-package deal trip including several destinations](#).

Tips:

- Offer personalised guidance instead of group tours.
- Develop a tour totally geared to roots tourists, such as [Poland travel](#)'s.
- Treat a diaspora tourist like a local. Root tourists consider their hosts as their own people and the journey as a return trip home, even if their connection to the destination is several generations removed.
- Beware of excessive commercialisation, like prices for taking photographs, which downgrades the tourist's excitement.
- Understand your visitors. A big reason for taking the trip for roots tourists is the emotional journey. They differ from regular tourists because there is an underlying seriousness and emotional engagement to the trip and the location.
- Make sure your guides are well trained and preferably certified. Their knowledge of the history, their credibility and their sensitivity towards the tourists are very important.

2. What makes Europe an interesting market for diaspora tourism?

According to [IZA](#), there are millions of people living in Europe who came as a result of diaspora. In some countries, they make up between 1% and 2.5% of the national population, which makes it a big potential target group for tourism.

In addition to tourism, diaspora tourists also contribute in other ways to their ancestral land.

One way they contribute is literally by sending money. Remittance transfers have been growing worldwide and continue to do so. For example, [remittances to Kenya grew from €671 million in 2017 to €2.4 billion in 2018](#), which is equivalent to 3% of Kenya's 2018 GDP. In Uganda, [2018 remittances added up to €1.114 billion](#), which corresponds to 4.5% of Uganda's 2018 GDP. These are significant amounts.

When diaspora tourists visit the destination where they have a connection, they strengthen those bonds and that may lead to increased remittances.

Another way diaspora tourists may contribute to a destination is with [knowledge and skills](#). Diaspora groups are likely to have higher incomes and acquire more education and work experience in Europe, so they may decide to apply some of it or invest money in local communities and businesses. At the very least, they may become the best ambassadors of your country in Europe.

3. Which European countries offer most opportunities for diaspora tourism?

In number of trips, VFR tourism offers a much larger market than roots tourism. For European tourists, roots tourism is a very small niche. However, since their demands are so specific, it is important to address these visitors specifically. Roots tourism comes mainly from the United States and to a lesser extent from the Caribbean. It offers a small market, but roots tourism is also up and coming in Europe and there is very limited competition yet.

Because visiting friends and relatives tourism is so much larger, we will focus on VFR tourism in this section. In this segment, Germany offers the most opportunities.

In order to seize opportunities in diaspora tourism, you must know where the diaspora from your country went

to. To learn how many people with a background from your country live in each European country, [download our European diaspora table](#), which has been extracted from 2018 Eurostat data.

Tips:

- Before developing a tour, first make a selection of one or two target markets you intend to focus on. Demarcating your market offers you focus in your marketing activities and will also contribute to understanding your clients.
- Read [our study on tourism demand](#) to learn more about outbound European tourism.
- Target associations that represent people from your country or culture in Europe, whether to advertise or to get in contact with networks of people from your country.

Examples of these organisations in Europe include:

- [The Indian Community Association](#), representing Indians living in the United Kingdom;
- [Mae Uku](#) for Moluccas in the Netherlands;
- [Die Türkische Gemeinde in Deutschland](#) (TGD);
- [Campus France](#) offers insights into diaspora groups living in France, like for example [Algerian student communities](#).

4. What trends offer opportunities in the European diaspora tourism market?

Social media if for everyone

The target groups Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1995) and Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2010) will eventually dominate the tourism market. As people from all backgrounds do, members of diasporas also connect more online and via social media nowadays, and some examples of this are [Uniting Eritrean voices in Germany](#) and [Indians in London](#).

Tips:

- Read more about these target groups in our study on [Generation Y](#).
- [Create an event](#) for a specific target group via Facebook, such as this surf festival in Morocco promoted on [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#). You can also use [travel blogs](#) for this purpose.
- Target your customers via a group on social media for a particular community in a specific European country.

More people gain knowledge about their roots via DNA tests

DNA testing technologies are improving and costs are lowering. People now can order a DNA test and receive the results at home instead of going to a specialist lab. This means getting to know about your roots is more accessible than ever and opens up the road for many more diaspora tourists to discover their past.

Tips:

- Develop a product for root tourists where they can experience the local history. This may include, for example, showing historic sites, connecting tourists with people who know local historic customs,

showing older elements of your culture, or offering authentic food from a certain period.

- Collaborate with European companies that offer DNA tests. Examples of such companies are [CRI Genetics](#) in the UK, [My Heritage](#) (in many European countries) and [Ancestry](#) in the UK.
- Target a specific group [via Facebook advertising](#). When you have a company in Kenya for example, you can target a European country where people are interested in Kenya as well as in DNA searches.
- Focus on DNA tourists, if there have been high migration flows from your country to Europe in the past.

People who are part of diasporas also look for unique experiences

A general trend among European travellers is the growing demand for unique experiences. Younger people especially want to plan their own holidays, instead of booking an existing trip. This is also true for people who are part of diasporas. Many roots tourists and VFR tourists will buy their own tours, simply because their demands are so specific that there aren't predefined products for them. Plus, there are not so many tour operators offering roots tourism out there.

Tips:

- Read our study on [free independent traveller \(FIT\) tourism](#) to learn more about how European travellers plan their own trips.
- Consider entering the [dark tourism](#) market as well. Your root travel products may also inadvertently attract people looking for this kind of tourism. Their demands are less personalised than roots tourists' and the products may even attract larger groups.
- When you are attracting organised tour participants, which is still a large market, try to improve their experience, for example, by including welcome ceremonies, visiting communities, re-enactments and initiation ceremonies.

New immigrants may offer opportunities in the future

New immigrants are coming into Europe every day. Their first concern will obviously not be to return for a touristic trip, but many will return some day to reunite with friends and families. According to Eurostat, in 2016 approximately 2 million people from developing countries moved to Europe, especially to Germany (533 thousand), the UK (340 thousand), Spain (327 thousand), France (310 thousand), Poland (236 thousand) and Romania (208 thousand).

Tips:

- Stay informed about [recent migration flows](#) from your country into Europe. This may help you to target new markets in the future.
- Read [our study on trends in the European tourism market](#). This will help you to gain insight in threats and opportunities in the European outbound tourism market. Most trends in the European tourism market will also apply to diaspora tourism.

Cultural events are up and coming

Some countries have international events aimed at attracting people who are members of a diaspora or who have shared cultural backgrounds, such as the [Egyptian-Greek-Cypriot Roots revival Initiative in Egypt](#) and the

[Roots International Festival in Gambia](#). Festivals like these increase the popularity and publicity of an area, often increasing tourism numbers outside of the festivals' days. These types of events often occur outside tourist resorts, which means they can bring tourism to places not overly explored by the tourism industry, which is great for spreading tourism but may be problematic for infrastructure.

Tips:

- Stay informed about your own government's diaspora policy, if it has one, [like the diaspora policy of Kenya](#), which may offer clues to business opportunities.
- Attract visitors for a roots or cultural event, or initiate one such event yourself.
- Pay attention to the presence of tourism infrastructure and facilities. Many times these events are organised in places less visited by tourists, where there is insufficient infrastructure, like not enough hotel rooms.

This study was carried out on behalf of CBI by [Molgo](#) and [ETFI](#).

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).