

Entering the European market for diaspora tourism

Last updated:
02 March 2020

Governments in developing countries are increasingly aware of the economic potential of diaspora populations and are keen to welcome them as tourists. The genealogy, roots or ancestry tourism segment is gaining traction, while analysts highlight DNA tourism as a major travel trend. Local tour operators in destination countries can create and seize the opportunities available to develop initiatives supporting the segment, particularly by facilitating diaspora tourists planning their visits and by offering the right travel experiences.

Contents of this page

1. [What requirements must travel products for the diaspora segment comply with to be allowed in the European market?](#)
2. [Through what channels can you make travel products for the diaspora segment available on the European market?](#)
3. [What is the competition like in the diaspora market?](#)
4. [What are the prices for diaspora travel products on the European market?](#)

1. What requirements must travel products for the diaspora segment comply with to be allowed in the European market?

What are the mandatory and additional requirements that buyers have?

The requirements that European tour operators have for travel products for the diaspora segment in developing countries involve:

- The European Package Travel Directive
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Liability insurance and insolvency protection

As a first step, read the CBI study on [the requirements for tourism services in the European market](#) to familiarise yourself with comprehensive details of legal, non-legal and common requirements.

What are the requirements for niche markets?

Make it attractive and easy for diaspora tourists to visit

Diaspora tourists from Europe may find it daunting to make travel arrangements to long-haul destinations, especially those who may have never done it before. Many destination countries, for instance, impose rules and regulations on international travellers. It is important that you know what the visa requirements and the entry costs are for international tourists, for which you should provide support and appropriate information and links on your website. Most countries are keen to welcome diaspora tourists and many offer visa waiver schemes targeting this cohort, such as:

- In India, the [Overseas Citizenship of India Scheme \(OCI\)](#) enables non-Indian citizens who fit certain background criteria to live and work in India indefinitely.

- Vietnam grants [visa exemption certificates](#) to foreign spouses and children of Vietnamese citizens.
- The Philippines' [Balikbayan programme](#) allows former Filipino citizens and their foreign spouses and children travelling with such former Filipino citizens to enter the Philippines without a visa and to stay for up to one year for tourism purposes.
- As part of its Year of Return campaign, Ghana reduced visa fees by 50% and exempted citizens from some countries of visa requirements. This is in addition to the country's Right of Abode law, which allows former Ghanaian citizens and any person of African descent to gain permanent residency in the country. Both initiatives clearly target people of Ghanaian and more generally African descent to go to Ghana.
- Former Ethiopian citizens and their children can apply for an [Ethiopian Origin ID Card](#), commonly called the Yellow Card, which [exempts them from the need to obtain an entry visa or residence permit to live in Ethiopia](#).

Research the Market

It is essential that you conduct thorough research of the diaspora market in your destination. You should familiarise yourself with the reasons that diaspora tourists are visiting. Ensure you are clear about the issues as follows:

- Measure the travelling pattern of people from abroad visiting family and friends, and those travelling to your destination on a personal quest to find out more about their ancestry.
- Identify what annual or regular events are appealing to diaspora tourists, such as a religious, cultural and sporting events.
- Research what conferences and events are held in your destination that promote and share research about your country or region's diaspora.
- Network with other business that work with the diaspora community, such as accommodation providers, attractions and service providers, including guides, transportation, restaurants and shops.

Tips:

- For insights on the trends and opportunities of the diaspora market, read the CBI study on [the European market potential for diaspora tourism](#).
- To learn more about developing a diaspora tourism strategy for your destination, read [this report](#) outlining the strategy and efforts of The Gathering Ireland 2013, which promoted itself as 'the largest ever tourism initiative in Ireland'. The initiative was specifically aimed at mobilising the Irish diaspora to return to the country in 2013 to take part in a range of specially organised local events.
- Download and read [this comprehensive research document](#) of the Migration Policy Institute, which offers a detailed analysis of diaspora tourism. Despite being produced in 2010, it still offer valuable information.

Develop Local, Cultural and Heritage Experiences

Conflicts, economic conditions and other reasons have led to significant diasporas from various countries. Operators in these countries can find opportunities, for instance, promoting festivals targeting migrants returning home for a visit, but also people with backgrounds going back one, two, three, even four generations. Ghana's [Year of Return](#) in 2019, for example, was a major marketing campaign marking 400 years since the first enslaved Africans arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, in the US. The commemoration continues into 2020, involving a range of events and festivals aimed at the African-American and African diaspora communities.

Diaspora tourists in general have some similarities with fully independent travellers (FITs). FITs typically make all their travel arrangements themselves, also deciding where to go and what to do on their own. When diaspora tourists travel to a destination where they have some cultural or historical link, they also often look for things they can do on their own, or along with family and friends. FITs and diaspora tourists are also more likely to travel to less visited places, which opens up opportunities for local operators to create suitable activities and

experiences in off-the-beaten-track locations. Diaspora tourists are also keen to interact with locals, with whom they often share common cultural expressions, language, identity and affinity with the destination.

Tourism products for diaspora tourists should have a clear focus on aspects of culture and heritage, education and learning, family and ancestry, which can also be aligned with other factors your destination promotes, such as [sun and beach tourism](#) and [nature and ecotourism](#).

Tips:

- Identify the most popular regions and areas sought by diaspora tourists, so you can develop related initiatives. These may include festivals, places of worship, natural and historic sites, among others.
- Position yourself or your business as a specialist in the history of your destination. Make sure your guides are fully trained and knowledgeable about the history and culture of your destination.
- Involve local communities in diaspora tourism development, such as by offering homestays, guided local tours of villages, and hands-on activities such as cooking and farming.
- Read the [CBI report about entering the European market for FIT tourism](#) to find out more about the characteristics of the FIT market.

Offer Value for Money

More affordable travel and internet penetration have made it easier for diaspora communities to keep and strengthen ties with places they have cultural, historical and business links. For first-generation international migrants, this means staying in touch with relatives and friends. But for them, and for all other members of a diaspora, it means increasingly intensive communication, trade and cultural exchanges, and consequently more tourism as well, and in both directions.

Because their reason for traveling is not always leisure, particularly in the VFR segment, diaspora tourists often travel to a country where they have cultural or heritage ties outside the high season periods. This provides opportunities for destination countries to mitigate the problems caused by seasonality, making it important for you to set the right price for your services.

Tip:

- Read the CBI study on [doing business with European tourism buyers](#) for tips on marketing and pricing.

2. Through what channels can you make travel products for the diaspora segment available on the European market?

How is the end market segmented?

The diaspora tourism market can be broken down into two main groups. VFR tourists account for the largest share, while genealogy, roots and ancestry tourists form a much smaller, niche group. This latter segment is growing, however, particularly in Europe and North America. [According to analysts](#), DNA tourism is a growing trend.

Both groups share common travel motivations linked to culture, language, history, religion and other factors, but they often have complex relationships with their destinations. Many members of a diaspora desire to retain strong links with one or more places they may have such cultural or historical ties. Among first-generation migrants, for example, travelling for the sake of keeping close ties with family, friends, and their culture is very

common. By contrast, second, third and fourth-generation members of a diaspora naturally have less strong ties with destination countries, so they fit into the genealogy, roots and ancestry segment.

Chart 1: Diaspora segmentation

Source: Diaspora Marketing, Nirmalya Kumar and Jan-Benedict E.M. Steenkamp

Through what channels do travel products for the diaspora segment reach the end market?

Word of mouth is a key sales channel, considering that VFR accounts for most diaspora tourism, so families and friends both at origins and destinations are often involved in the decision-making and booking processes. VFR tourists often stay with friends or relatives, so accommodation is often not required or done locally. Direct bookings with airlines and other transporters are common. Therefore, your local market provides an important route to market for reaching diaspora tourists.

The genealogy, roots and ancestry segment is much smaller than VFR, therefore much more limited. This type of diaspora tourism uses specialist tour operators along with general tour operators and travel agents. These operators provide customised trips and specialised support, which may include, for example, helping to gain access to public archives, libraries or local genealogy experts.

Chart 2: Route to market for diaspora tourism

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

Some examples of operators targeting diaspora tourists include:

- [Polin Travel](#), which focuses on Jewish guiding and genealogy services, including guided tours to locations in Eastern and Central Europe, and offering specific support to those seeking ancestors in Nazi-occupied Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Germany and Lithuania.
- [Family Tree Tours](#) offers group, private and independent heritage and genealogy trips focusing on family roots. Their [Irish Research Tour](#) includes research in archives, lectures and tours to historic and cultural sites.
- [Africa With Us](#) offers a series of packages named [Diaspora Treks](#) targeting black women who wish to visit destinations from where their ancestors may have originated or been taken to, including Jamaica, Brazil, Ghana and Georgia (USA).
- Spector Travel of Boston offers [roots and culture tours](#) focusing on former slave trade routes in West Africa.
- [My China Roots](#) provides genealogy research services and operates heritage trips to China.
- [Go Ahead Tours](#) offers DNA tours to various European countries, developed in collaboration with [Ancestry.com](#), an online resource for family history exploration. Each trip includes an AncestryDNA kit and a pre-trip family review, and all trips are accompanied by a genealogist from [AncestryProGenealogists](#).

Many specialist online travel agents (OTAs) offer short trips, tours and experiences focusing on culture and heritage. OTAs are the fastest growing sales channels for tours, activities and experiences. Travellers interested in learning more about their origins, culture and heritage often look for tours guided by a local who is knowledgeable about the specific culture and history of the place they are visiting. OTAs that focus on this kind of local appeal include [Tours by Locals](#), [Like a Local Guide](#) and [Viator](#). To learn more about OTAs, read [this useful guide](#) of resources for operators to list their tours, compiled by Tourism Tiger.

Tips:

- Ensure that you promote your culture and heritage trips and products also in your domestic market, which provides an additional route for you to reach your target audience.
- If you can offer practical support to visitors who are looking to discover more about their roots, such as facilitating access to public records, including birth, death, marriage, residence, baptism and other

information, make sure to include that on your website. Include useful links, for example, the [National Archives of India](#).

- Familiarise yourself with the FIT market, which is closely aligned to the VFR market. Read the [CBI report on entering the European market for FIT tourism](#).
- Sell your trip on the OTA that fits best with your business. For more advice on working with OTAs, read the CBI's [tips for organising your tourism services export to Europe](#).

What is the most interesting channel for you?

To attract VFR tourists, reach out to the domestic market, making sure that you have a visible presence, so locals are aware of the services you can provide to their visiting families and friends.

OTAs are the best way of promoting your trips to members of diasporas interested in learning more about culture and heritage at travel destinations. See the tip above for more advice on working with OTAs.

3. What is the competition like in the diaspora market?

What countries are you competing with?

According to the UN, a third of all international migrants in the world live in Europe: 78 million people. Of those, 37 million come from countries outside of Europe, but that's just the current migrants. Diaspora communities in European countries also include people whose parents, grandparents and so on immigrated decades or centuries ago. Nevertheless, the European countries with the largest number of international migrants are Germany and the United Kingdom. The developing countries with some of the largest diaspora populations in Europe are listed as follows:

- China
- India
- Morocco
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Turkey

China

There are 10.7 million Chinese citizens living outside China adding to the already large Chinese diaspora. The past decade has seen an increase of Chinese immigration to Europe. An estimated 2.2 million Chinese live predominantly in the UK, Italy and France. There are many well-known Chinatowns in major UK cities, such as London, Birmingham, and Liverpool, which is the city with the oldest Chinese community in Europe.

India

India has the largest number of citizens living abroad with 17.5 million. Of those, 2.2 million live in Europe and 1.5 million in the UK alone. In 2017, approximately 6 million visitors to India were people of Indian descent. India has been proactively targeting the Indian diaspora in recent years to help boost tourism to the country. The [Non Resident Indians Online](#) website, which provides information to Indian citizens living abroad and to persons of Indian descent, estimates these two cohorts to add up to 30 million, but the entire Indian diaspora, including previous generations is likely larger.

Morocco

Most of the 6 million Moroccan citizens living outside of Morocco (known as MREs, from French *marocain résident à l'étranger*) live in Europe. More than 1 million of them live in France, another 840,000 in Spain and a further 800,000 in Belgium and the Netherlands. The number of Moroccan citizens reportedly living in Italy is also growing. The Moroccan government has long been aware of the potential of the diaspora community and

has been trying to mobilize it for the benefit of Morocco, running major public campaigns and developing governmental organisations to engage with them. However, there is some [criticism of the country's relationship with its diaspora](#), reinforcing the need to recognise the value of the diaspora for the financial benefits and the skills it can offer, being careful not to take these benefits for granted.

Nigeria

Estimates of the number of Nigerian people living abroad range from 5 to 15 million. The largest population of Nigerians abroad live in the US (400,000) and in several European countries, including the UK (estimated at more than 200,000), Italy and Spain. In London, the area of Peckham in Southwark is home to a vibrant Nigerian community nicknamed Little Lagos. The Nigerian diaspora is formed of well-educated and highly entrepreneurial individuals who send high remittances to Nigeria. The [Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation Europe \(NIDO\)](#) is the European arm of the global Nigerian diaspora network, which aims to bring Nigerians living in Europe together and assist in personal development. NIDO has hosted major events, including the Nigeria Diaspora Global Development Conference in 2018 and in 2019.

Pakistan

More than 6.3 million Pakistani citizens live abroad and the number continues to grow rapidly. A large majority reside in the Middle East, but 2.2 million live in Europe. The largest Pakistani community outside Pakistan lives in the UK, numbering an estimated more than 1 million, including Pakistani citizens, dual British-Pakistani citizens and British citizens of Pakistani ancestry. The [British Pakistan Foundation](#) aims to unite and engage with the Pakistani community in the UK by creating networks to support them and their lives in the UK.

Turkey

Germany is home to the largest Turkish diaspora community in the world, estimated to range between 2 and 4 million, representing approximately 5% of the German population. Germany has a long history with the Turkish diaspora that dates back to the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century, while Turkish immigration to Germany increased significantly during the 20th century. Nowadays, Turkish culture is much in evidence throughout Germany, where cultural and economic ties with Turkey and communities of Turkish descent are well established.

Tips:

- To learn more about your country's diaspora, seek help from your national government, which likely has data and information about the diaspora to provide. The website of India's [Ministry of External Affairs](#), for example, provides a broad range of information about the Indian diaspora. The ministry or department of tourism in your country may also be able to provide useful information.

What companies are you competing with?

Diaspora tourism is not commonly offered as a leisure experience, the kind that is normally promoted by mass tourism, because most diaspora tourists travel to visit family and friends. Travel that is motivated by people going to visit family and friends or explore ancestry and heritage is often spontaneous and less planned. In this market, word of mouth plays an important role, and travel planning often involves various family members. Cultural and heritage experiences to areas that are meaningful to visitors are the most likely trips of choice. Therefore, local operators that offer cultural or heritage trips are your most likely competitors. Some examples of such operators include:

- [China Educational Tours](#) offers cultural tours targeting [families and friends](#), including heritage visits. The [China Adoption Return Tour](#) is designed to help parents of adopted children take their children back to China to learn about their heritage.

- [Non Resident Indians Online](#) provides information for the Indian population to plan their trip to India. [Travelite \(India\)](#) offers culture connection tours, while [Hidden Treasures of India](#) offers tours targeting specific festivals.
- Many of Morocco’s operators, such as [Local Morocco Tours](#), offer guided tours and day trips based on activities, such as cooking lessons in Marrakech.
- Nigerian tour operators, such as [Social Prefect Tours](#), have been targeting the Nigerian diaspora through Facebook, while TVP Adventures offers tours on the [Nigerian tourism board website](#). Local guides on OTAs such as [Tours by Locals](#) also target visiting members of the Nigerian diaspora.
- Tour operators in developing countries, such as [Exploria](#) and [Falcon Adventure Club](#) in Pakistan, promote their cultural and heritage products on TripAdvisor and other OTAs.
- Turkish operator [Byzas Tours Turkey](#) offers a wide range of tours, packages and day trips, including customised trips to visitors who have Turkish ancestry.

Tip:

- Explore OTAs like [TripAdvisor Experiences](#) to find out what trips local tour operators in your destination offer.

What products are you competing with?

Trips and experiences aimed at the FIT market are your biggest competitors, along with community-based tourism (CBT) experiences, because they offer diaspora tourists authentic insights into the culture of the destination. The table below shows the main activities competing in the diaspora market.

Table 1: Tourism activities for diaspora market

Type	Common Experiences
Cultural experiences	Sightseeing tours of lesser-known sites; local festivals; historic tours of ancient, modern cities and ruins; architecture and design tours; markets
Community-based tourism experiences (CBT)	Visiting local villages and tribal communities; engaging in regional games and sporting events; homestays; cooking and handicraft classes; home hosting activities
Learning activities	Local history tours; genealogy experiences; trips to archives and libraries; talks by genealogy experts; visits to specific areas; regions and villages

Source: Acorn Tourism Consulting

Tip:

- Consult the CBI’s tourism studies, including [the opportunities for community-based tourism from Europe](#), and [entering the European market for FIT tourism](#).

4. What are the prices for diaspora travel products on the European market?

There is no established pricing structure for diaspora products on the European market. VFR trips are usually constructed in separate parts and comprise various elements that include travel, subsistence, accommodation and trips and experiences. Specialist tours arranged for genealogy, roots and ancestry tourists are usually custom-made for individual needs and the prices depend on what is included. Consequently, prices for genealogy holidays are not widely accessible.

Tip:

- To ensure you understand how to price your trips fairly for diaspora tourists, consult the CBI's study on [doing business with European tourism buyers](#) for tips pricing.

This study was carried out on behalf of CBI by [Acorn Tourism Consulting Limited](#).

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