

# We are Family

**Various travel options allow employees to track their roots and unite with relatives and coworkers**

By Margie Dolgin, CTC, MCC

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**O**ur ancestors came to America and settled in communities where they could regularly visit each other. Today, loved ones are scattered throughout the U.S. and abroad, making family get-togethers more like large events than regular occurrences. In recent years, Americans' interest in rediscovering their family roots has grown. Since Sept. 11, they are yearning for a sense of belonging and expressing a desire to devote more time to nurturing relationships with loved ones. Group travel programs help employee services providers supply employees with the resources and ideas needed to research their roots and plan family reunions. Companies use group travel to promote a unified workforce and create a sense of family in the workplace.

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### **Tracking family roots**

As employees begin their quest to unite with family members, they look to genealogy resources that assist them in tracking their roots. Various websites, software and publications assist employees in their search. Consider sharing popular genealogy information outlets with employees.

The Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation, Inc., New York, NY, also known as the American Family Immigration History Center, is an exciting family research facility. Ellis Island provides visitors with advanced computer and multimedia technology, printed materials and professional assistance for investigating immigration history, family documentation and

genealogical exploration. From 1892 to 1924, more than 22 million immigrants, passengers and crew members traveled through Ellis Island and the Port of New York. The ship companies that transported these passengers kept detailed passenger lists, called "ship manifests." Now, thanks to volunteers from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, who transcribed these manifests into a vast electronic archive, individuals may easily search and locate passengers. Immediately following Sept. 11, the Statue of Liberty closed for safety reasons, but reopened on Aug. 3, 2004 after increasing security measures. As employees express an interest in genealogy, suggest they visit the Statue of Liberty and search the Ellis Island transcripts for their roots at the same time. For more information, visit the American Family Immigration History Center's website at <http://www.ellisland.org>.

A key element of genealogical research is building a family tree. Many software programs and websites assist employees in ancestry searches. One of the most popular genealogy sites is <http://www.ancestry.com>. This site has over one billion records and exclusive databases to assist with in-depth investigations of census records, immigration records, social security death records, newspaper archives, and family trees. Since 70 percent of Americans have ancestry roots in the UK or Ireland, the website also includes these records. Ancestry.com also helps African-Americans research their family history, which at times is challenging, due to a lack of credible documentation. The 1870 Census, journals and Slave Narratives are among the most evocative of genealogical resources for African-Americans. The use of Freedmen's Bureau Records, established in 1865, and Plantation journals are another source of information, which employees can find by visiting the genealogy library, universities, chancery offices, and state historical societies.

Employees researching their roots may purchase software such as *Family Tree Maker*, which provides tools to build, search and share a family tree with family and friends. In addition to providing online services, the professional ancestor researchers at Heirlines Family History & Genealogy will meet with individuals in person or over the telephone to discuss their ancestors. The website offers free consultations on searching, finding and building family trees. Visit <http://www.heirlines.com> for more information.

As employees search their ancestry, suggest that they build a family website for relatives to post and contribute information, photos and more about their growing families. A website enables them to gather current family news to share among relatives. The same software that allows users to create a family tree also teaches employees how to build a family website. *Family Tree Magazine* is another resource for discovering, preserving and celebrating family history.



### Coming home

Families often use group travel to plan unforgettable family reunions that help them celebrate and reflect on their heritage. In today's world, no two families are alike, allowing them to share a unique bond with each other. Families share a sense of belonging and strength and it is our heritage that we will pass on to future generations. Companies can provide employees with the ideas and resources necessary to make their dreams of a family reunion a reality.

A family reunion requires many hours of planning and enough leeway so that everyone may participate. Setting the event date at least six months to a year in advance will allow family members to save the date. Though schedule conflicts may exist for some relatives, they will have enough time to plan in advance for the event. On the family website, post the date of the reunion, an explanation of the trip, travel expenses, and contact information for travel arrangements.

Family members should contribute to the meaning of the family reunion by sharing their backgrounds with relatives. Consider offering employees a service that allows them to transfer video, film, photos, and slides to DVDs. This preserves the family's legacy and employees may present them as gifts for relatives or post them on the family website when preparing for the reunion.

Employees may choose to celebrate an anniversary or birthday with a family reunion. A variety of price ranges exist—from budget to luxury travel arrangements—depending on the vacation package. Suggest that employees work with a travel planner to select a three-, four- or seven-day cruise. They should choose a port of departure that is closest to most of the family members' homes. Then, provide information for relatives who may need air transportation to travel to the cruise departure destination. A travel planner will also help family members determine the number of tables they need for meals on the cruise and seating arrangements so that they will enjoy one another's company.



while eating together. Families can even select staterooms near each other. Depending on each family's budget, relatives may choose an inside or ocean view stateroom or ocean view stateroom with a balcony. A cruise includes meals, entertainment and shipboard activities, such as a pool, spa and sports facilities, which is an economical venue for all family members.

Planning an all-inclusive resort family reunion also serves as a budget conscious group vacation. All-inclusive resorts allow family members to purchase a complete vacation package that includes meals, entertainment, drinks, tips, and sports, such as swimming, sailing, scuba diving, kayaking, and golfing. Depending on the type of all-inclusive resort, the price range of a family reunion runs from moderate to luxury. The amount of amenities affects the cost of most all-inclusive resorts.

When planning a family reunion, it is important to include activities that allow children of all ages to interact. Younger relatives will have a chance to encounter relatives they may not have met before, and the family reunion is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the lives of family members to again be interwoven.

For more information on planning a family reunion, contact the Convention and Visitors Bureau in your area, partner with a travel planner and tap into ESM Association's National Associate (supplier) members to assist you in arranging a destination reunion that relatives will remember for a lifetime.

### Uniting coworkers

Similar to strengthening family ties, travel programs also bring employees and their families together. Examples of group travel for employees include cruises, sightseeing tours and vacation packages that give employees a chance to enjoy each other's company through activities, meals, ports-of-call excursions, and sightseeing stops.

The length of a group trip varies from a short cruise, a vacation package of three to five days or a weeklong tour. In preparing for group travel, travel planners usu-

ally choose a date at least a year in advance so that employees have an opportunity to coordinate vacation time with their spouses and children. Cost is another factor in planning group travel. Employees prefer a vacation that provides relaxation and, at the same time, is cost effective. As mentioned before, cruise prices include meals and entertainment, which often helps employees save money on vacations. Some tour and vacation packages include meals as well.

If employees are unable to travel for an extended period of time, consider offering day trips. Companies can plan day trips or events on a quarterly basis or a few times a year for employees to enjoy destinations they may not have the opportunity to visit on their own. This promotes a sense of loyalty toward the employer for considering them and caring enough to arrange a day trip for them. Some companies use group travel as rewards for a job well done, while other companies provide trips at reduced or subsidized rates so that they fit into employees' budgets.

### Promoting travel

Companies should promote a cruise, tour, vacation package, or day trip through printed flyers, e-mail announcements and the company's intranet site. Employee services providers may also advertise group travel options in the company newsletter, so that employees are aware of the company's travel resources. Promote the trip as an opportunity for employees to reconnect with family, be among friends and interact in an open atmosphere.

### Conclusion

Whether employees are planning a family reunion or the company is planning an employee cruise, group travel has the ability to unite people and foster relationships. With a family reunion, it is the ancestry of their roots that bind them. With employees, it is common interests and a shared work environment that connect them. Either way, travel provides an opportunity for people to be together in stress-free surroundings, enabling them to enjoy each other's company and mingle with people similar to them. **esm**

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