



Tourists taking in the sights of Hong Kong from the peak (left) and the Roman Agora archaeological site in Athens (above).

PHOTOS: AFP, REUTERS

Is travel in your blood?

Wanderlust could be affected by genetics, but culture, opportunity also play a part

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If you feel a compelling need to always go on a holiday, science may have the answer.

Scot, the low-cost arm of the Singapore Airlines Group, has partnered behavioural geneticist Professor Richard Ebstein to study the link between genetics and travelling.

It is conducting this industry-first experiment to see if travel is an innate human need and not just something people may want to do.

Travel may literally be in your blood if you carry the 7-repeat or 2-repeat of the dopamine D4 receptor gene, DRD4. Dopamine, a chemical messenger, tells the brain when behaviour is rewarding and reinforces learned behaviour based on how rewarding an activity is.

Prof Ebstein, from the Department of Psychology at the National University of Singapore (NUS), told *The New Paper*: "Carrying a copy of the 7-repeat or 2-repeat is enough to nudge an individual in the direction of being novelty-seeking and more inclined towards travelling and adventure."

Could the presence of one gene variant really determine your personality?

EFFECTS

Prof Ebstein said: "Having the travel gene is neither necessary nor sufficient to be a traveller. The effect of a gene variant is small and many genes contribute to a personality trait. That being said, the overall effects of genes on your personality is considerable."

Wanderlust is a product of nature as well as nurture, he added.

"Historically, people migrated or travelled to seek better economic conditions, or to flee from war and persecution. Some groups, like the Roma in Europe, have a culture of ceaseless travelling.

"So it's not all in our genes, since culture and opportunity play important roles in driving us to travel."

Travelling has many benefits, regardless of what motivates individuals to leave their home country.

"I believe experiencing other cultures makes for a better and more tolerant world," said Prof Ebstein.

Mr Lee Lik Hsin, Scot's chief executive officer, told *TNP*: "Our goal is to use science to show that travel is an intrinsic need, rather than just a luxury. By gaining deeper insights into the preferences and habits of our customers, we can continue towards making travel attainable for everyone."

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