

BATTLES AND BATTLEFIELDS IN FRANCE (and BELGIUM) IN WORLD WARS I & II

BASIC ITINERARY & PROGRAMME FOR GROUPS

Day 1

Assuming your group arrives at Roissy CDG airport early in the morning : you will be met by coach and Cpederf. (Hotel access programmed early afternoon unless you prefer to pay a supplement for morning access). After a long flight, the essential thing is to keep awake until the evening, in order to adjust to European time as quickly as possible!

After leaving the airport, a programme of general sightseeing with a coach and walking tour around Paris, which, as well as seeing the sights, will evoke also the Occupation and Liberation of Paris in World War II. Among other places, the tour will take in the *Arc de Triomphe*, the memorial of France's Unknown Soldier and setting for the national 11 November ceremonies, and the *Champs Elysees*, setting of all Paris's victory celebrations. The coach will leave you at the funicular to go to Montmartre for lunch in the *Place du Tertre*, followed by a guided walk round this famous part of Paris.

Mid-late afternoon back down by coach to the hotel to settle in, after which a short walk to the *Eiffel Tower* (pre-booking required for access to the tower!) and the Champ de Mars followed by a cruise along the river Seine on a *Bateau Mouche*.

Free evening.

Day 2

10h00 : Guided visit of the *Musée de l'Armée* (important collections concerning the first world war). After the visit, time to visit the Invalides and Napoleon's monumental tomb. The Rodin museum is close by if the group would like to visit.

Free for lunch in the Montparnasse area (there is a huge choice of restaurants, brasseries and cafes on the Boulevard Montparnasse).

After lunch, taken for a guided visit of the *Memorial Leclerc et de la Libération de Paris* and the *Jean Moulin Museum*. (General Leclerc led the liberating tanks into Paris on 25 August 1944, while Jean Moulin is perhaps the most famous name in the French Resistance). The guided visit will explain not only the role of both these emblematic figures, but present the greater context of France in World War II.

After the visit, three options : the coach will take those who so wish –
Either to the *Memorial de la Shoah* and the newly inaugurated "Mur des Justes" (the Wall of the Just);

Or : down into the Latin Quarter to wander and explore; Or : back to the hotel.

Evening Welcome dinner in a restaurant close to the hotel.

Day 3

All day excursion on the theme of the *First World War*.

8h30 : Leave Paris by coach to **Compiègne**

10h30 : Guided visit of “*La Clairière de l’Armistice*”, and the railway coach reminding us where Foch signed the Armistice to take effect from 11am on the 11th November 1914. (The coach is a replica, the original was pinched by the Germans and taken back to Berlin in 1942, where it was presumably destroyed by allied bombing...)

Lunch in Compiègne

13h30 By motorway through the *Forest of Argonne* with guide. This is not far from Verdun and when crossing this impressive forest, once the scene of such terrible battles, now grown again after being minced out 90 years ago, but you can stop in the middle of the forest and still see the forms of the trenches everywhere. At sudden turnings in the road, you can read nightmarish notices such as “a whole battalion was wiped out here”

Arrive in **Verdun**

Day 4

9h00 Meet guide (same guide as for the Argonne Forest. **All-day discovery of Verdun** : the Battle of Verdun was the longest in the Great War and destroyed more human lives than any other battles in that war.

During the day you visit the Fort of Douaumont, at the time the strongest fort in the world, the Ossuary of Douaumont – an unforgettable experience – the Memorial of Fleury, the Bayonet Trench...and in particular the *Butte de Vauquois*, taken and retaken many times, where each side built deeper and deeper tunnels : in the end twelve miles of tunnels honeycombed the knoll. It was at Vauquois that minefield warfare really came into its own.

Day 5

8h30 Departure for an all-day excursion devoted to “the most formidable fortification system ever built with the exception of the Great Wall of China – **the Maginot Line**. The Line, built between 1929 and 1942 stretched along the German border from Belgium to Switzerland, and comprised 108 fortresses. How could this impregnable fortification fall, and so quickly? It was built after the 1st World War by the clear-sighted French military High Command who thought that enemies were always gentlemen and therefore stopped the construction of the Maginot line where the Belgian frontier started because as a neutral country Belgium would never be attacked...Hitler was delighted! He had a simple solution!! The famous Ardennes Breakthrough.

During the day you will visit two of the *Maginot Line forts*, both of which were involved in action against German Panzer divisions : first one of the most colossal forts, the *Fort de Fermont* (together with its Maginot Line Museum), which still gives an extremely clear impression of the “life” inside the fort in 1940, then one of the smaller and more “modern” of the forts, *Villy-la-Ferté* (built several years later than Fermont and where the visitor will readily appreciate the technical improvements made in the construction after Fermont).

Later afternoon drive to **Reims** (1 night) : time to visit the World Heritage cathedral before going for a wine-tasting in the champagne capital of the world!

Day 6

After breakfast, drive to **Peronne** to visit the *Historial de la Grande Guerre*, “an international museum of comparative history”. Life on the front, behind the lines, and the involvement of the civilian populations. Linking the past to the present, the *Historial* testifies to the impact the war had on the 20th century.

Time for lunch in Peronne before continuing the short distance to **Villers-Bretonneux**, where Australian troops put an end to the German offensive in April 1918. Visit the Australian Memorial and the Victoria School Museum.

Late afternoon into the city of **Amiens**. Amiens had been nearly destroyed (60%) both during the battle of Picardie in 1918 and during the battle of the Somme in 1940. Its magnificent World Heritage cathedral miraculously survived.

People will have time to visit it but it won't be compulsory to avoid a surfeit of World Heritage gothic cathedrals. Nevertheless it is more than worth the visit.

Evening (if right season) the cathedral is illuminated by laser techniques to show the great variety and vividness of colours of the façade when it was built.

Hotel in Amiens

Day 7

Whole day devoted to exploring this part of the **Somme** which was the setting of so many horrors and which Siegfried Sassoon immortalised in his famous evocation of a "sunlit picture of hell": Albert, Beaumont-Hamel and the "Danger Tree", Thiepval, Pozières, Courcellette, Delville, Colincamps. It is a terribly heart-rending day as you go from cemeteries to monuments, Canadian, New- Zealand, Australian, British, South African, French, German, and realise that a hundred thousand of them fell on these fields.

Return to Amiens for the evening

Day 8 : *free day for everyone* (obligatory for the coach-driver!)

Day 9

After breakfast, drive to see two other famous and moving landmarks : **Vimy**, the Memorial to the 75000 Canadian soldiers who gave their lives fighting in France, and to the hill of **Notre dame de Lorette**, (near the village of Albain St Nazaire), a rather bleak and unfriendly site which serves to intensify the feelings of horror when faced with the statistics : the tombs of 20.000 identified French soldiers, and the ossuary preserving the remains of another 20.000 non-identified soldiers.

Then into the small city of **Arras**, with its beautiful central square, for lunch.

In the afternoon, after settling into hotel, a guided visit of Arras which was so close to hostilities during the first World War, and especially famous for its underground tunnels and galleries (the origins of which go back to the 10th century), and which have often been used in times of crisis – none more so than the Great War, the English having set up an underground hospital here, while New Zealanders in particular will be interested to see the Maori drawings in the tunnels, dating back to the same war.

(***New Zealand groups*** may in fact prefer to substitute (or add) a day in order to visit the town of Le Quesnoy, which the NZ forces liberated in November 1918, and which has retained very close ties with New Zealand, making NZ visitors always feel extremely welcome.)

Day 10

After breakfast, drive straight to **Ypres** (in Belgium) for an all-day exploration of all that is associated with what is known as **Flanders Fields** ("In Flanders Fields the poppies blow between

the crosses row on row....”). You will have the same guide all day. The visit of the superb Flanders Field Museum will be followed by an exploration of the battlefields, the Passchendale disaster, Sanctuary Wood (“the hell where youth and laughter go”), Tyne Cot Cemetery, the Yorkshire Trench....and the day will end by attending the *Last Post Ceremony* at the Menin Gate, performed every night since 1929 (except during WW2). (The names of 6176 Australians are inscribed here : they died in the fields of Flanders and were never found.)

Return to the hotel in Arras after the ceremony. (Given the density of activities on this day, both lunch and dinner will be arranged in Ypres. (For groups not wishing to remain for the Last Post, an earlier return to Arras for dinner can be programmed instead).

Day 11

A relaxed departure around 10am, drive to the historic city of **Rouen** for lunch close to the cathedral and famous clock. Plenty of time to explore the centre of Rouen after lunch. mid-afternoon, a drive of approx 1½ hours gets you to **Caen**, the centre of operations for the last part of the tour! Settle in hotel and time to wander before dinner.

Day 12

The *Normandy Landing* (Part 1) : drive from Caen first to *Pegasus Bridge* before continuing along the coast route – *Sword Beach, Juno Beach, Gold Beach*, to **Arromanches**.

Arromanches, that part of Gold Beach which had to be taken by the landing forces as it had been chosen as the future site of the main *Mulberry* – an objective the British troops achieved on the first day of the landing. Without the Mulberry harbour, the allies would never have been able to land their armies, equipment and weapons.

After lunch, watch a short 360° film presented on the Landing and compiled from filmed records made by journalists on the spot at the time : one is immersed in the terrible feelings of disorientation and fear that must have been experienced by those young men trying to set foot on the coast of France. Visit the small town where the techniques used by the landing forces will be explained.

Late afternoon drive into the small city of **Bayeux**, to see the celebrated *Bayeux Tapestry* – a delightful contrast.

Return to Caen for the evening.

Day 13

The *Normandy Landing* (Part 2). Along the coast from Arromanches to the Pointe du Hoc. First to the *Batterie de Longue-sur-Mer*, one of the few sites left very much intact as it was at the time of the Landing. All along the coast we see the defences the Germans had established, known as the “Atlantic Wall”, and readily appreciate that without the fantastic deception thanks to which the secret had been kept, the Landing would never have succeeded for the Germans had created a fortress right along the coasts of Europe they held.

Along to *Omaha Beach* where, overlooking the beach itself, you will discover the gigantic and beautiful cemetery and memorial at Colleville-sur-mer. An extraordinarily moving experience...You will also realise why the Landing at Omaha Beach was nearly a failure, each pillbox having to be taken out by direct assault, while along at the terrifyingly celebrated *Pointe du Hoc*, evidence of the ferocious allied bombing of German defences in preparation for the landing is still vivid.

Mid-afternoon, return to Caen, for the final visit of the tour : the Caen *Peace Memorial*. Established in Caen, the city which was at the very heart of the Normandy Battle in 1944, the Memorial is both a place of remembrance, and a place of meditation, “to help the visitor reflect on war in general, the need to safeguard peace, and the rights and dignity of all human beings”.

Farewell Dinner in the evening.

Day 14 Return to Paris.

Groups can choose either to return to Paris by coach, direct to the airport if required, or call in to *Giverny* to visit the celebrated garden of impressionist painter Claude Monet, or even return to Paris by direct fast train.

Extra night(s) can be arranged in Paris upon request.

GO TO THE NEXT PAGE FOR AN INDICATION OF COSTING FOR THIS PROGRAMME

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FOR IDEAS ON SHORTER TOURS, PLEASE REFER TO THE BATTLEFIELDS TOURS IN OUR TAILOR-MADE PROGRAMMES SECTION ON THE WEBSITE

IF THIS 14 DAY TOUR IS TOO LONG, JUST SAY WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TAKEN OUT AND WE CAN REVISE THE ITINERARY (AND THE PRICE) ACCORDINGLY!

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THERE ARE MANY TOURIST POSSIBILITIES WITH WHICH GROUPS MAY LIKE TO PUNCTUATE THE ITINERARY – for example :

- Exploring the **Champagne region** from Reims, including the Montagne de Reims and Epernay
- Before reaching Caen, highly interesting and attractive places to visit include : **Honfleur, St Malo, the Mont St Michel**
- The **Loire Valley**, with easy access with your coach from Caen, could appeal as an end-on couple of days taking in, for example : drive to Angers.. Visit the Plantagenet capital. Then via Saumur visit the national tank museum, Cadre Noir, oand/or mushroom caves) and on to Chinon, another Plantagenet fortress, famous also for the part played by Joan of Arc....
- Some groups may be interested in including an extension of the their tour from Verdun (still on the same main theme of the two Worlds Wars) to take in **Alsace** : the Maginot line in Alsace with visit of the *Four à Chaux* followed by a guided visit to Saverne which allowed the liberation of Strasbourg by Leclerc 23rd November 1944. Then by motorway to the south of Alsace for “Le Vieil Armand” a small mountain that in just the year 1915 was conquered and reconquered 4 times . Drive along the *Route des crêtes* to the beautiful town of Colmar. An enjoyable last day on the “route des vins”.

INCLUDED IN THE COSTING OF THE BASIC PROGRAMME
(Land content only)

Bed and breakfast 13 nights
14 main meals (one per day usually dinner), including festive Welcome Lunch and Farewell Dinner
Coach with the group throughout tour (airport to airport)
Specialist guides : Paris, Montmartre, Invalides, Memorial Leclerc and Jean Moulin, Peronne Historial, Verdun, Maginot Line, Somme, Ypres, Normandy Landing
All entry fees for sites, monuments and museums on the programme
Your own Tour Leader Free of charge

The following costs are based on twin sharing/double rooms.

Single supplements available on request

In Two Star hotels :

For a group of 15 paying : 1950 euros per person
For a group of 20 paying : 1760 euros per person
For a group of 25 paying : 1650 euros per person

In Three Star hotels :

For a group of 15 paying : 2120 euros per person
For a group of 20 paying : 1950 euros per person
For a group of 25 paying : 1820 euros per person

***Just contact us for a statement of costs for your own programme,
taking in all changes and additions to this basic programme***

Travel to France is your own responsibility

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