

Anzac Day on the Western Front 2018



On Anzac Day 1918 Australian soldiers captured the French town of Villers-Bretonneux, an action that was called 'one of the finest feats of the war'. This is your chance to commemorate the 100th anniversary of this outstanding attack, alongside thousands of fellow Australians at the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. Along with Anzac Day 2015 at Gallipoli, this service will be the most significant of the centenary commemorations. Our 9-night tour visits all the key Australian battlefield sites, as well as Paris, Champagne, Reims and Bruges. The highlight is the moving Anzac Day Dawn Service at Villers-Bretonneux.

DAY 1 - 18 APRIL 2018 **PARIS**

Welcome to our Western Front tour! After checking in to our Paris hotel, we will come together for a welcome drink. This is an excellent opportunity to get to know our fellow passengers, Tour Manager and War Historian. After drinks, we'll enjoy a welcome dinner in the hotel. (D)

DAY 2 – 19 APRIL 2018 **PARIS**

Today will be spent exploring the sights and sounds of Paris, the 'City of Light'. In the morning, a local guide will escort us on a Panoramic Tour of the city's iconic sights. The Eiffel Tower, Champs Elysées, the Arc de Triomphe, the Louvre and Notre Dame will all be seen. After enjoying lunch, we will have free time to further explore Paris. (B, L)

DAY 3 – 20 APRIL 2018 **PARIS TO YPRES**

Our tour in the footsteps of the Anzacs begins today. After breakfast we depart Paris for Ypres, scene of some of the most horrific fighting of the First World War and our home for the next four nights. On the way we will stop at Epernay, the birthplace of Champagne, and enjoy a guided tour of one of the town's famous champagne houses. After a tasting of their bubbly we will depart for Reims, the historic city in the heart of the Champagne district. We will have free time for lunch and to explore the historic old town - don't miss the magnificent cathedral, where the Kings of France were once crowned. After leaving Reims we will visit the inspiring Australian 2nd Division Memorial and see the remains of trenches captured by Australian troops on the 1918 battlefield of Mont St Quentin. On arrival in Ypres we will enjoy dinner in our hotel. (B, D)

DAY 4 – 21 APRIL 2018 **YPRES**

Between 1914 and 1918 the town of Ypres was the centre of four great battles, and was completely destroyed by shellfire. Today the rebuilt town is one of the iconic places on the Western Front. This morning, join your Historian for a walking tour around the town, visiting key sights from the war such as the magnificent Cloth Hall, St George's Chapel, St Martin's Cathedral, the Menin Gate and Ramparts Cemetery. We will then enjoy a free afternoon, the perfect opportunity to explore the charming streets and squares of Ypres. This evening we will return to the Menin Gate, where the names of 54,000 missing British and Commonwealth soldiers are recorded, for the moving Last Post ceremony. The Ypres fire brigade has performed this bugle ceremony every day and in all weather since the memorial opened in 1927. The only interruption was during the four years of German occupation during the Second World War - the ceremony recommenced on the day the town was liberated. Two of our passengers will be invited to lay a wreath on behalf of the group. (B)

DAY 5 – 22 APRIL 2018**THE YPRES SALIENT**

The Ypres Salient was a bulge in the front line that curved around Ypres for most of the war. More than a million men were killed or wounded trying to gain control of this small patch of ground. Today we will explore the Australian battlefields in the Salient, places where the Anzacs made history in 1917. Our first stop will be the Passchendaele Museum which features a recreated British dugout. We will then visit the 5th Australian Division Memorial at Polygon Wood and see the graves of Private Hunter and Sergeant Calder, the two Australian soldiers who featured in Mat McLachlan's and Michael Molkentin's documentary 'Lost in Flanders'. Lunch is included at Cafe de Dreve, where the owner, Johan Vandewalle, will tell us about his discovery of the bodies of Private Hunter and Sergeant Calder in a Belgian field. We then get a taste of the devastation caused by four years of continuous artillery fire at the cratered landscape of Hill 60, before visiting Tyne Cot, the world's largest Commonwealth war cemetery. Tyne Cot sits in the heart of one of the most horrific battlefields of the war - Passchendaele. Our final stop today is at the German Cemetery at Langemarck, where we will learn about the men on the other side of the line. As we drive back to our hotel we will see the magnificent Canadian memorial at Langemarck, marking the spot where poison gas was first used in the war. (B, L)

DAY 6 – 23 APRIL 2018**BRUGES**

We will spend time today exploring Bruges, one of Europe's most charming medieval cities. Wander the cobbled streets, take a cruise on one of the city's enchanting canals, ride through the picturesque squares in a horse and cart or sample the lace boutiques, chocolate shops and cafes that make Bruges famous. On the drive back to Ypres we will stop at Essex Farm Cemetery, where in 1915 Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae composed 'In Flanders Fields', the most famous poem of the war. (B)

DAY 7 – 24 APRIL 2018**YPRES TO THE SOMME**

Today we leave Ypres and travel south to the battlefields of the Somme. Our first stop is the battlefield of Messines, scene of a huge Allied attack in 1917 that was heralded by the explosion of 19 massive mines. We will then travel to French Flanders, and the very moving 1916 battlefield of Fromelles, where Australia lost 5533 men during its first action on the Western Front. While here we will visit the Australian Memorial Park, VC Corner Cemetery (the only all-Australian cemetery in France), the site of the recently discovered Australian mass grave at Pheasant Wood and the new Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Cemetery, where 250 Australian and British soldiers were laid to rest in 2010. We will also visit the new Fromelles museum, opened in 2014, which tells the story of Australia's disastrous involvement in the battle of Fromelles in 1916. Our final stop of the day is the battlefield of Bullecourt, where Australia lost 10,000 men in two great battles in 1917. We will pay our respects to them at the Slouch Hat memorial in the centre of town and the Australian Memorial Park on the site of the German front line. A packed lunch is included today, and we will enjoy dinner in our hotel on our arrival in the Somme. (B, L, D)

DAY 8 – 25 APRIL 2018**ANZAC DAY**

An Anzac Day we will never forget! We have an early start this morning and a short drive to the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. We will gather here with thousands of other Australians to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the battle of Villers-Bretonneux as we pay our respects to our 45,000 countrymen who were killed during fighting on the Western Front. As the sun rises over the imposing memorial to Australia's 11,000 missing from France, the strains of the Last Post will echo across the countryside, peaceful now, but the scene of a monumental Australian victory on Anzac Day 1918. After this moving ceremony we will enjoy a piece of Australia in the heart of the Somme – breakfast with the townspeople of Hamel. This town was liberated by Australian troops in July 1918, and we will be made very welcome by the local people. Following breakfast we will conduct a memorial service at the Australian Memorial Park near the town. This very special breakfast event is being conducted exclusively for Mat McLachlan Battlefield Tours, and is a wonderful highlight of the tour. Later in the morning we will begin our tour of

the 1916 battlefields of the Somme. Our first stop will be the imposing Lochnagar Mine Crater, which was detonated beneath the German lines on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Even though erosion has reduced the size of the crater it is still enormous - more than 100 metres across and 30 metres deep. We will then visit the village of Pozieres, scene of the most costly battle in Australia's history. 23,000 men were killed or wounded in six weeks' fighting, and we will visit the scenes of their heroic sacrifice at the 1st Division Memorial and the Windmill. We will also have time to walk the battlefield with our historian, gaining a better understanding of the fighting that led to more Australian casualties than any other battle in our history. We will enjoy lunch at a local cafe, then return to our hotel where our evening is free. (B, L)

DAY 9 – 26 APRIL 2018 **THE SOMME TO PARIS**

Our last day in the footsteps of the Anzacs will see us return to the 1916 Somme battlefields, where we will visit the maze of trenches at the Newfoundland Memorial Park. The Newfoundland Regiment was almost wiped out here on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. We will then drive past the Ulster Tower, modelled on Helen's Tower in Northern Ireland, before visiting the spectacular Thiepval Memorial, where the names of more than 72,000 British men missing from the Somme fighting are recorded. We will also see Mouquet Farm, scene of a costly advance by Australian troops in August 1916. We then return to Villers-Bretonneux, where we will visit Adelaide Cemetery, the place where Australia's Unknown Soldier lay for 75 years before being returned to Australia in 1993. We will also visit the remarkable Victoria School, home to a wonderful small Australian museum, and where a sign in the playground entreats that the students 'Do Not Forget Australia'. We will then return to the Australian National Memorial where we commemorated Anzac Day the previous day, to spend some peaceful time exploring the memorial, reading the names of the missing Australian soldiers and taking a last opportunity to pay our respects to the original Anzacs. We then farewell the battlefields and board our coach for the return trip to Paris. This evening we will enjoy a farewell dinner while cruising along the Seine River, a wonderful opportunity to see the landmarks of Paris bathed in light. (B, D)

DAY 10 – 27 APRIL 2018 **PARIS**

Sadly our Western Front Tour ends this morning after breakfast. The journey may be over but the memories will last a lifetime. (B)

To enquire please contact Active Travel on

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