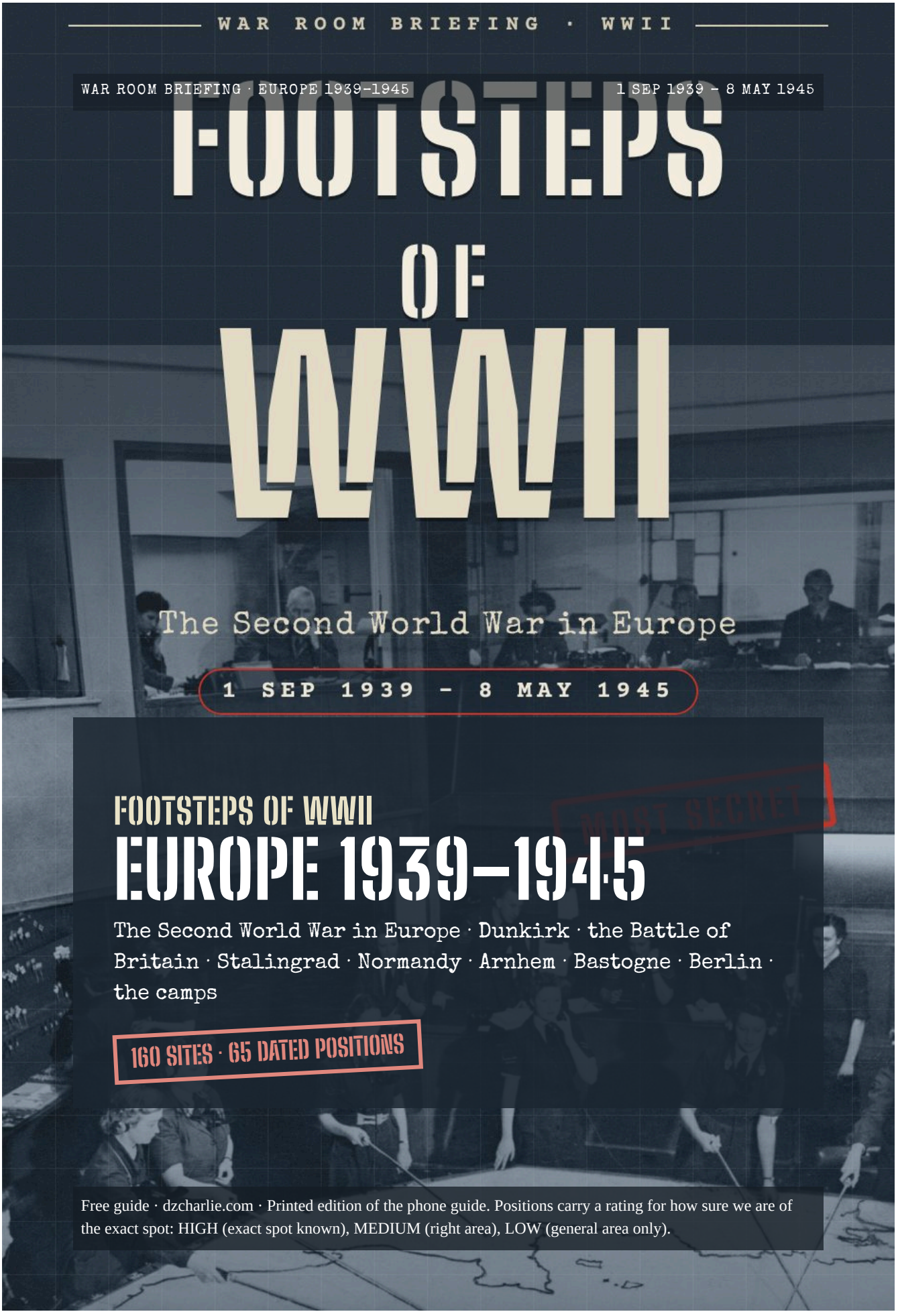

WAR ROOM BRIEFING · WWII
WAR ROOM BRIEFING · EUROPE 1939–1945
1 SEP 1939 – 8 MAY 1945
FOOTSTEPS OF WWII
The Second World War in Europe
1 SEP 1939 – 8 MAY 1945
FOOTSTEPS OF WWII
EUROPE 1939–1945
MOST SECRET
The Second World War in Europe · Dunkirk · the Battle of Britain · Stalingrad · Normandy · Arnhem · Bastogne · Berlin · the camps
160 SITES · 65 DATED POSITIONS
Free guide · dzcharlie.com · Printed edition of the phone guide. Positions carry a rating for how sure we are of the exact spot: HIGH (exact spot known), MEDIUM (right area), LOW (general area only).

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THE STORY IN BRIEF

This guide covers the Second World War in Europe from the first shots at Westerplatte on 1 September 1939 to the German surrender signed at Reims on 7 May and in Berlin on 8 May 1945. It is not one battlefield but a whole continent: 160 places in 15 areas, from Liverpool to Volgograd and from Narvik to Malta, chosen so that together they tell the story of how the war began, turned and ended — and what it did to the people caught in it. Two sets of positions are kept apart on purpose:

TIMELINE — 65 historical positions in date order: what happened, where and when, and who was there. **TOUR** — driving stops in road order, in ready-made routes from one to fifty-two days, or only the area you choose, or your own list. Every stop opens directly in Google Maps.

Poland.. On 1 September 1939 Germany invaded Poland, and two days later Britain and France declared war. The Polish army fought hard, but it was outnumbered, attacked from three sides and, from 17 September, stabbed in the back by the Soviet Union under the secret terms of the Nazi–Soviet Pact. Warsaw surrendered on 28 September and the last Polish forces on 6 October. The country was divided between two dictatorships. The Germans set out to destroy the Polish elite and to crowd Poland's Jews into ghettos; in the east, the Soviets deported hundreds of thousands and in 1940 shot some 22,000 Polish prisoners at Katyn and other sites.

The fall of France.. After a winter of 'Phoney War', Germany seized Denmark and Norway in April 1940. On 10 May it attacked the Netherlands, Belgium and France. The British and French moved their best armies into Belgium, but the main German blow came through the Ardennes: on 13 May the panzers crossed the Meuse at Sedan and in a week reached the Channel, trapping the northern armies. Some 338,000 men were evacuated from Dunkirk, but France was beaten. It signed an armistice at Compiègne on 22 June, and the Vichy regime under Pétain collaborated with the occupier.

Britain alone.. Churchill refused to negotiate. In the summer of 1940 the Luftwaffe tried to win control of the air over southern England as a prelude to invasion and failed against the RAF's radar-directed fighters; on 17 September Hitler postponed the invasion. The Blitz on British cities went on until May 1941. In the Atlantic the U-boats attacked the convoys that kept Britain alive, while Italy's entry into the war opened fronts in North Africa and the Mediterranean. Germany rescued its ally by conquering Yugoslavia and Greece in April 1941 and Crete in May, and sent Rommel to Libya.

Barbarossa.. On 22 June 1941 Germany and its allies invaded the Soviet Union with more than three million men. The Red Army lost millions killed and captured in vast encirclements, and by the autumn the Germans were outside Leningrad and Moscow. Behind them the Einsatzgruppen shot Jewish communities by the tens of thousands, as at Babi Yar in September. But the Soviet state did not collapse. Its factories were moved east, its reserves were thrown in, and on 5 December Zhukov counter-attacked before Moscow. Two days later Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, and on 11 December Hitler declared war on the United States.

The Holocaust.. At Wannsee in January 1942 senior officials coordinated the deportation and murder of all Europe's Jews. Death camps were built in occupied Poland — Chełmno, Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka, then Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek — and trains came to them from France, the Netherlands, Greece, Italy, Hungary and everywhere German power reached. In 1942 alone some 2.7 million Jews were killed. By 1945 about six million had

been murdered, along with Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, disabled people and others. In the Warsaw ghetto in 1943, and at Treblinka and Sobibór, Jews rose against their killers.

The turning points.. In 1942 Germany struck again in the East, towards the Caucasus oilfields and the Volga. At Stalingrad the Sixth Army was drawn into a street battle, and in November the Red Army encircled it; Paulus surrendered at the start of February 1943. In North Africa the British won at El Alamein in November 1942 and Anglo-American forces landed in Morocco and Algeria; the Axis armies in Tunisia surrendered in May 1943. That same month the escorts beat the U-boats in the Atlantic. In July Germany's last great offensive in the East, at Kursk, failed within a week.

The squeeze.. From mid-1943 Germany was on the defensive everywhere. The Allies landed in Sicily in July and in Italy in September; Mussolini fell and Italy changed sides, but the Germans held most of the peninsula and fought the Allies to a standstill at Monte Cassino until May 1944. The British and American bomber offensive burned Hamburg in July 1943 and in early 1944 destroyed the Luftwaffe's fighter force. In the East the Red Army advanced across Ukraine and in January 1944 ended the siege of Leningrad. Across occupied Europe resistance grew, and so did German reprisals.

Summer 1944.. On 6 June 1944 the Western Allies landed in Normandy. For ten weeks they fought a bitter battle in the hedgerows and around Caen, until the Americans broke out in late July and two German armies were nearly trapped in the Falaise pocket. Paris was freed on 25 August. In the East, Operation Bagration destroyed Army Group Centre in Belarus from 22 June, and the Red Army reached the Vistula. On 20 July Stauffenberg's bomb failed to kill Hitler. On 1 August the Polish Home Army rose in Warsaw; the Soviets halted across the river, and after 63 days the Rising was crushed.

Autumn and winter.. The Allied pursuit ran out of fuel at the German frontier. Market Garden, the airborne gamble to cross the Rhine at Arnhem in September, failed. Through the autumn the Americans fought slow, costly battles at Aachen and in the Hürtgen Forest. In the Balkans, Romania and Bulgaria changed sides and the Germans left Greece. On 16 December Hitler threw his last reserves into the Ardennes. The Battle of the Bulge took the Americans by surprise, but Bastogne held, and by January the German army had lost the strength it could no longer replace.

The fall of Germany.. In January 1945 the Red Army swept from the Vistula to the Oder, freeing Auschwitz on 27 January. In the west the Allies cleared the Rhineland, crossed the Rhine at Remagen on 7 March and in strength on 23–24 March, and encircled the Ruhr. As they advanced, they found the camps — Buchenwald, Belsen, Dachau — and the world saw what had been done. On 16 April the Soviets attacked towards Berlin; on 25 April Americans and Soviets met on the Elbe. Hitler killed himself on 30 April. Germany surrendered unconditionally at Reims on 7 May and at Karlshorst late on 8 May.

THE ACCURACY RULE

A GPS coordinate can locate a museum, cemetery, bridge or memorial precisely; it cannot turn a battle across a whole city or a forest into an exact point. When the records only place a unit "somewhere in the woods", this guide says so rather than invent a spot, and where historians disagree — over numbers, times or motives — the text tells you. Each position carries a coloured label:

HIGH exact spot known — a landmark, museum, cemetery, memorial, bridge or building, or a position fixed by the records MEDIUM well supported, but the exact spot is uncertain LOW general area only — the pin is the centre of a search area

HIGH exact spot known — a landmark, museum, memorial or town MEDIUM well supported, but the exact spot is uncertain LOW general area only — the pin is the centre of a search area

WHY THE WHOLE ROUTE

No one place explains the Second World War in Europe. Westerplatte and Sedan show how fast Germany won in 1939–40; Uxbridge, Bletchley and the Western Approaches bunker show how Britain held on. The cemeteries of Normandy and the memorials of Stalingrad and Prokhorovka show where the war was decided and at what cost. The camps — Treblinka, Auschwitz, Dachau, Belsen — and villages such as Lidice and Oradour show what the war was for in Nazi eyes, and what victory stopped. Seen together, from Gdańsk to Karlshorst, the places add up to one war: a war of armies, industry and codes, and of genocide.

1 — THE SOUTH COAST AND FIGHTER COMMAND



The D-Day Story → Battle of Britain Bunker · 2 stops

Begin with the two ends of 1940 to 1944 in southern England: the D-Day Story at Portsmouth, where the invasion sailed from, and the underground operations room at Uxbridge, from which Fighter Command's No. 11 Group fought the Battle of Britain.

A The D-Day Story, Portsmouth

HIGH Museum · United Kingdom · ≈120 min

Portsmouth and the Solent were the heart of the D-Day build-up: troops, ships and landing craft packed the south coast in spring 1944, and Eisenhower's forward headquarters was at Southwick House just north of the city. This museum on Southsea seafront opened in 1984 as the D-Day Museum and reopened in 2018 as The D-Day Story. Its centrepiece is the Overlord Embroidery, commissioned by Lord Dulverton: 34 panels, 83 metres long, made by twenty members of the Royal School of Needlework over seven years. Outside is LCT 7074, the last surviving landing craft tank of its kind from D-Day.

What you can see: Galleries follow D-Day from planning to the Normandy battle through personal stories, with a reconstructed Southwick House operations room. The Overlord Embroidery runs round its own gallery. Board LCT 7074 to see the open tank deck.

Plan: Open daily 10:00–17:00 (17:30 April–September); last entry 16:00, 15:30 for LCT 7074. Closed 24–26 December. Paid entry, ticket includes LCT 7074; buy online or on the day.

GPS 50.77980, -1.08933

Read more: The D-Day Story (Wikipedia) · The D-Day Story (official)

Battle of Britain Bunker, Uxbridge

HIGH Headquarters · United Kingdom · ≈90 min · ★ must see

This bunker, about 60 feet underground at RAF Uxbridge, housed the Operations Room of No. 11 Group, Fighter Command, which defended London and the south-east and saw more fighting than any other group in 1940. Air Vice-Marshal Keith Park commanded from here, sending squadrons up against raids plotted on the large table map. On 15 September 1940, with Churchill watching from the gallery, every 11 Group squadron was committed at once. Churchill first spoke the words 'never was so much owed by so many to so few' as he left Uxbridge on 16 August, four days before he used them in the House of Commons. The bunker was part of the Dowding system, the first integrated air defence network.

What you can see: Down 76 steps you reach the Operations Room, laid out as it was on 15 September 1940: the plotting table with raid markers, the tote board showing squadron states, and the glazed controllers' gallery above. A modern visitor centre at ground level holds the museum.

Plan: Open daily 10:00–16:30. The bunker itself is seen only on a guided tour of about an hour; booking ahead is advised. Tour plus visitor centre about £14 adult, under-16s free. 76 steps, no lift. Check the website before you go.

GPS 51.54125, -0.46528

Read more: Battle of Britain Bunker (Wikipedia) · Battle of Britain Bunker (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is London. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

2 — LONDON: THE BLITZ AND THE WAR ROOMS



Churchill War Rooms → St Paul's Cathedral and the Blitz → Imperial War Museum London · 3 stops

Spend the day on London at war: the bunker beneath Whitehall from which Churchill directed the war, St Paul's as the symbol of the city surviving the Blitz, and the Imperial War Museum's account of the whole conflict.

A Churchill War Rooms, London

HIGH Headquarters · United Kingdom · ≈120 min · ★ must see

The Cabinet War Rooms, in a basement beneath government offices off Whitehall, became operational on 27 August 1939, days before Germany invaded Poland. The War Cabinet met here 115 times, the last time on 28 March 1945, and Churchill made four wartime broadcasts from the site, the first on 11 September 1940. The Map Room, staffed day and night, tracked the war on every front. From 1943 a secure SIGSALY telephone link let Churchill speak to President Roosevelt from a room disguised as a private lavatory. The lights were switched off the day after Japan surrendered, and the rooms were preserved. They opened to the public in 1984.

What you can see: Low corridors lead past the Cabinet Room, the Map Room with its original maps, coloured pins and telephones, the Transatlantic Telephone Room and Churchill's bedroom. The Churchill Museum, opened in 2005, covers his whole life.

Plan: Open daily 09:30–18:00 (last entry 17:00), closed 24–26 December. Adult about £34; booking online is strongly advised as it often sells out. Check the website before you go.

GPS 51.50208, -0.12903

Read more: Churchill War Rooms (Wikipedia) · Churchill War Rooms (IWM)

B St Paul's Cathedral and the Blitz, London

HIGH Memorial · United Kingdom · ≈120 min

St Paul's became the symbol of London's survival in the Blitz. On 12 September 1940 a delayed-action bomb buried itself near the cathedral; a Royal Engineers team under Temporary Lieutenant Robert Davies dug it out and removed it, and Davies and Sapper George Wylie received the George Cross. A bomb destroyed the high altar on 10 October 1940, and another holed the north transept on 17 April 1941. On the night of 29 December 1940, the 'Second Great Fire of London', Churchill reportedly ordered that the cathedral be saved, and Herbert Mason's photograph of the dome rising through the smoke became one of the war's best-known images.

What you can see: Behind the high altar is the American Memorial Chapel, dedicated in 1958, with a Roll of Honour of over 28,000 Americans who died while based in or travelling to Britain. From the Stone Gallery you see the City rebuilt where the bombed streets stood.

Plan: Sightseeing Monday–Saturday, usually 08:30–16:30 (last entry 16:00). Adult about £27, booking online advised. Services are free. Times change for services and events; check the calendar before you go.

GPS 51.51389, -0.09833

Read more: St Paul's Cathedral (Wikipedia) · St Paul's Cathedral (official) · St Paul's Survives (Wikipedia)

C Imperial War Museum London

HIGH Museum · United Kingdom · ≈180 min

Britain's national museum of modern war has occupied the former Bethlem Royal Hospital on Lambeth Road since 1936. It is the best single place in Britain to see the Second World War as a whole: the Blitz, the war at sea and in the air, the home front and the campaigns from 1939 to 1945. In October 2021 it opened new Second World War and Holocaust galleries, which follow the war in Europe and the persecution and murder of Europe's Jews side by side. Outside stand two 15-inch naval guns, one from HMS Ramillies and the other mounted on HMS Resolution and HMS Roberts, which fired in support of D-Day.

What you can see: Head for the Second World War Galleries and the Holocaust Galleries on the upper floors; the central atrium holds aircraft, rockets and vehicles, including a V-2 and a Spitfire. The two huge 15-inch guns frame the entrance.

Plan: Open daily 10:00–18:00, closed 24–26 December. Free; no booking needed for general entry. Some special exhibitions are ticketed. Check the website before you go.

GPS 51.49583, -0.10866

Read more: Imperial War Museum (Wikipedia) · IWM London (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is London. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

3 — THE FEW AND THE CODEBREAKERS



Bentley Priory Museum → Bletchley Park · 2 stops

Two places that helped Britain survive: Bentley Priory, Dowding's headquarters and the heart of the air defence system in 1940, and Bletchley Park, where the codebreakers read German Enigma and Lorenz traffic.

Ⓐ Bentley Priory Museum, Stanmore

HIGH Headquarters · United Kingdom · ≈90 min

This country house was the headquarters of RAF Fighter Command throughout the Second World War. From here Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding commanded the fighter force in the Battle of Britain and ran the defence system he had built: radar stations and Observer Corps reports fed into a filter room here, then out to group and sector operations rooms, which sent fighters to meet the raids. Dowding was removed from command in November 1940 but was made Baron Dowding of Bentley Priory in 1943. The RAF stayed until 2008. The museum opened in 2013 and tells the story of 'The One' (Dowding), 'The Few' (the aircrew) and 'The Many' who supported them.

What you can see: The Italianate mansion's ground-floor rooms hold the museum, including Dowding's restored office looking over the gardens. Galleries on the aircrew and ground staff, a Battle of Britain timeline and a heritage trail in the grounds complete the visit.

Plan: Open Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and bank holiday Mondays; 10:00–16:00 from October to February. Closed mid-December to mid-January. Adult about £9.50; no booking needed. Phone lines unreliable, use the website.

GPS 51.62669, -0.33417

Read more: Bentley Priory (Wikipedia) · Bentley Priory Museum (official)

Bletchley Park

HIGH Codebreaking · United Kingdom · ≈240 min · ★ must see

The Government Code and Cypher School moved to this Victorian mansion on 15 August 1939. Here codebreakers including Alan Turing and Gordon Welchman built on Polish work against the German Enigma machine; their electromechanical bombes found daily settings, Hut 6 broke Army and Air Force Enigma and Hut 8 Naval Enigma. The intelligence, codenamed Ultra, was graded above Most Secret. Later the Colossus computers attacked the German high command's Lorenz cipher. By January 1945 nearly 9,000 people worked for Bletchley and its outstations, about three-quarters of them women. Nobody spoke of it publicly until the 1970s.

What you can see: Restored huts, including Huts 6 and 8, and Block B with a working rebuilt bombe and Enigma machines. Visit the mansion, the lake and the wooden huts. The National Museum of Computing in Block H, with a rebuilt Colossus, has a separate ticket.

Plan: Open daily 09:30–17:00 to 31 Oct, then 09:30–16:00 in winter; closed 24–26 December. Adult about £28.75, valid as an annual pass; 10% off when booked online in advance. Allow at least four hours.

GPS 51.99806, -0.74111

Read more: Bletchley Park (Wikipedia) · Bletchley Park (official) · The National Museum of Computing

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Milton Keynes. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

4 — COVENTRY AND THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC



Coventry Cathedral ruins → Western Approaches HQ · 2 stops

A day on two kinds of war against Britain: the bombed shell of Coventry Cathedral, destroyed in the raid of November 1940, and the Liverpool bunker from which the Battle of the Atlantic against the U-boats was run.

A Coventry Cathedral ruins

HIGH Ruins · United Kingdom · ≈90 min

On the night of 14–15 November 1940 the Luftwaffe attacked Coventry, a centre of aircraft and engineering factories, in one of the heaviest raids of the Blitz. The medieval cathedral of St Michael burned; only the tower, spire, outer walls and one tomb survived. Provost Richard Howard had 'Father Forgive' inscribed behind the ruined altar, stonemason Jock Forbes bound two charred roof beams into a cross, and a cross was made from three medieval nails. Rather than rebuild, the city kept the ruins and Basil Spence built a new cathedral beside them, consecrated on 25 May 1962. The cathedral became a worldwide centre for reconciliation, linked with Dresden among others.

What you can see: Walk through the roofless shell to the altar with the Charred Cross (a 1964 replica; the original is inside) and the 'Father Forgive' words. Look for Josefina de Vasconcellos's 'Reconciliation' statue, then climb the 87-metre spire tower if open, and enter the new cathedral through its glass screen.

Plan: Cathedral and ruins usually open Monday–Saturday 10:00–16:00, Sunday 12:00–15:30, subject to services. Entry is free with donations welcome; the tower climb is charged. Check the website before you go.

`GPS 52.40856, -1.50710`

Read more: Coventry Cathedral (Wikipedia) · Coventry Blitz (Wikipedia) · Coventry Cathedral (official)

Western Approaches HQ, Liverpool

HIGH Headquarters · United Kingdom · ≈90 min

Western Approaches Command, responsible for protecting convoys in the Atlantic, moved from Plymouth to a reinforced basement under Derby House in Liverpool on 7 February 1941. RAF Coastal Command's No. 15 Group moved in alongside, so ships and aircraft were directed from one room. Admiral Sir Percy Noble commanded from February 1941, followed by Admiral Sir Max Horton from November 1942, who led the escort groups through the decisive convoy battles of spring 1943. In the same building the Western Approaches Tactical Unit under Captain Gilbert Roberts, staffed largely by Wrens, wargamed U-boat tactics on the floor and devised countermeasures for escort captains.

What you can see: The main operations room with its two-storey wall map of the Atlantic and convoy plots, the commander's office overlooking it, the teleprinter and cipher rooms, and the reconstructed tactical unit with its floor gaming board.

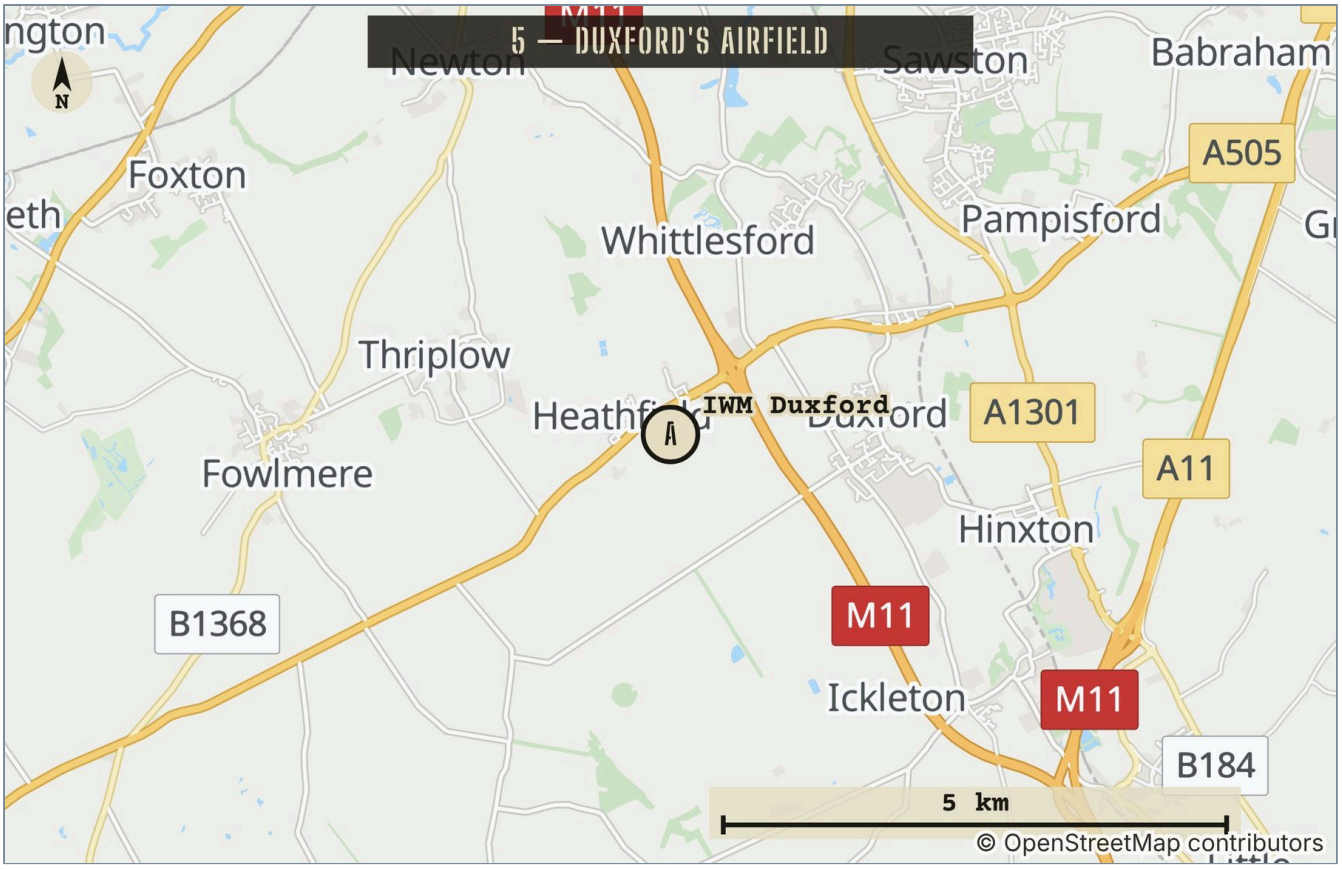
Plan: Open daily 10:00–18:00, last entry 17:00. Adult about £16.50; tickets online or on the day, no time slots. Cashless. Check the website before you go.

GPS 53.40755, -2.99281

Read more: Western Approaches Museum (Wikipedia) · Western Approaches Command (Wikipedia) · Western Approaches (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Coventry. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

5 — DUXFORD'S AIRFIELD



IWM Duxford · 1 stop

A full day at Duxford, a fighter station in the Battle of Britain and later home to American fighter groups, where hangars of aircraft trace the air war from the Spitfire to the bombers over Germany.

IWM Duxford

HIGH Airfield · United Kingdom · ≈240 min · ★ must see

Duxford became a fighter station in 1925, and in August 1938 its No. 19 Squadron was the first RAF unit to fly the Spitfire. In the Battle of Britain it was a sector station of No. 12 Group, guarding East Anglia and the Midlands and sending squadrons south to help 11 Group over London. From March 1943 the US Eighth Air Force's 78th Fighter Group flew from here, first with P-47 Thunderbolts and from December 1944 with P-51 Mustangs, escorting bombers and attacking ground targets until the war ended. The last RAF flight left in 1961, and the Imperial War Museum took over the site, which keeps many original wartime buildings.

What you can see: Original hangars, the control tower and the restored Operations Block, pilots' briefing room and crew rooms show a working 1940 fighter station. Spitfire N3200 is on display, and Norman Foster's American Air Museum holds a B-17 and other US aircraft.

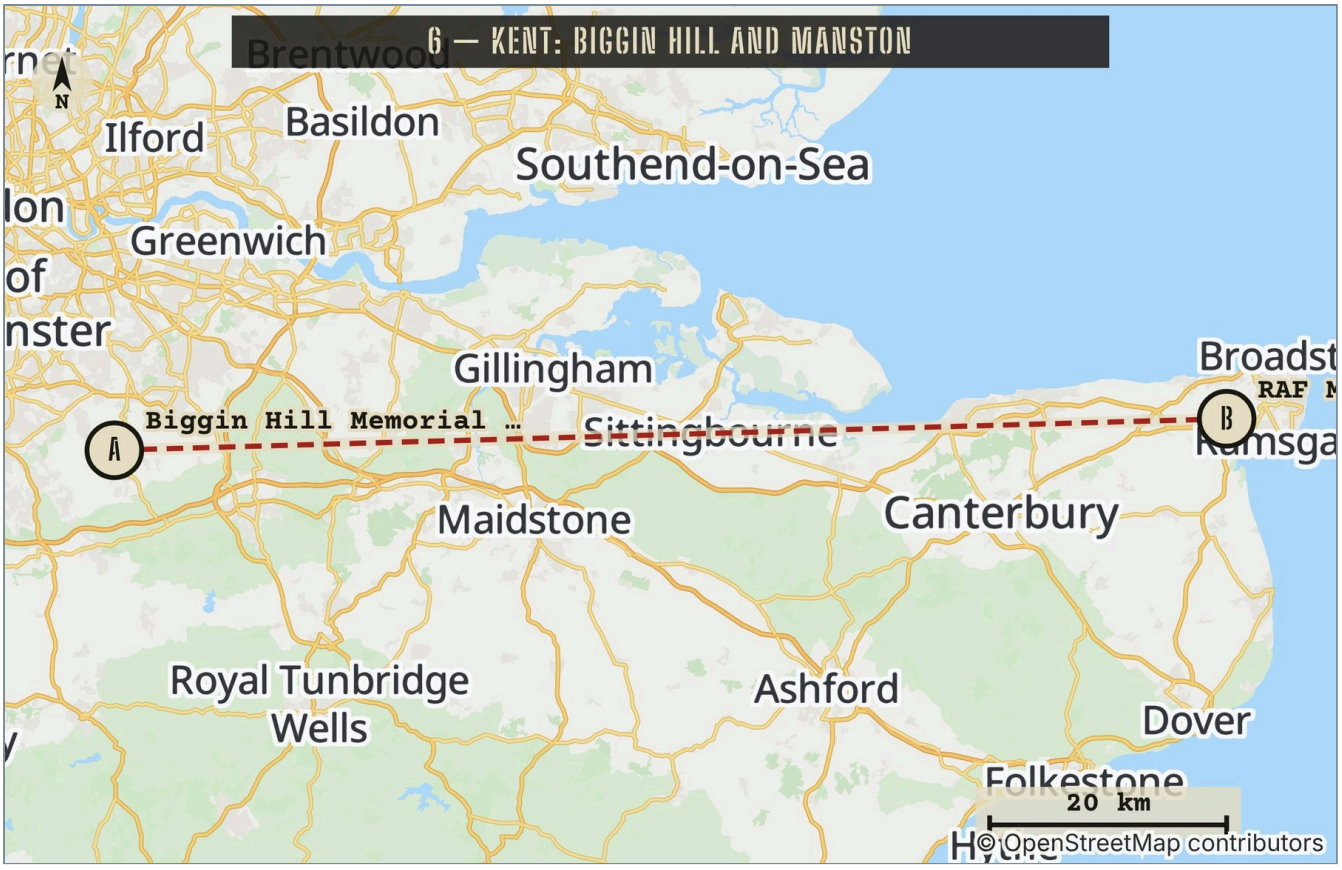
Plan: Open daily; from 25 October the site closes at 16:00. Adult from about £26.80, booking online advised. Flying days and air shows are extra events. Check the website before you go.

GPS 52.09306, 0.12944

Read more: IWM Duxford (Wikipedia) · IWM Duxford (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Cambridge. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

6 — KENT: BIGGIN HILL AND MANSTON



Biggin Hill Memorial Museum → RAF Manston Spitfire & Hurricane Memorial Museum · 2 stops

Into Kent, the front line of the Battle of Britain: Biggin Hill, the most famous fighter station of 1940 and heavily bombed, and Manston, the exposed coastal airfield closest to the enemy.

A Biggin Hill Memorial Museum

HIGH Museum · United Kingdom · ≈90 min

Biggin Hill was the best known of the 11 Group sector stations guarding the southern approaches to London, and in 1940 the Luftwaffe tried hard to knock it out. Between August 1940 and January 1941 it was attacked twelve times; the worst raid, at the end of August, hit the WAAF quarters and killed 39 people on the ground. After the war a public appeal backed by Churchill paid for St George's RAF Chapel of Remembrance, built on the site of a hangar destroyed in 1940; Lord Dowding laid the foundation stone in July 1951. The museum beside the chapel opened in 2019 and tells the station's story through the people who served there.

What you can see: The brick chapel's twelve stained-glass windows by Hugh Easton each show a young airman with a squadron badge, and a tablet records airmen lost flying from Biggin Hill. Gate-guardian Spitfire and Hurricane replicas stand outside; the museum is next door.

Plan: Tuesday–Sunday, 10:00–16:00 from November to March (17:00 in summer), closed Mondays. Adult about £8.50, pay at the door. Allow about 90 minutes. Check the website before you go.

GPS 51.32704, 0.02343

Read more: RAF Biggin Hill (Wikipedia) · Biggin Hill Memorial Museum (official) · Memorial Chapel listing (Historic England data)

RAF Manston Spitfire & Hurricane Memorial Museum

HIGH Museum · United Kingdom · ≈60 min

Manston, on the tip of Kent, was the RAF fighter airfield closest to France and so one of the first targets in the Luftwaffe's August 1940 offensive against Fighter Command. At the height of the battle it was bombed almost daily and left littered with unexploded bombs, and many staff moved out to the nearby woods. Later it became a refuge for damaged bombers, fitted with the FIDO fog-clearance system, and in May 1943 No. 617 Squadron's Lancasters flew from here to drop inert test versions of Barnes Wallis's bouncing bomb off Reculver. The small free museum on the old airfield houses Spitfire XVI TB752 and Hurricane IIc LF751.

What you can see: Two aircraft fill the purpose-built hall: Spitfire TB752, which flew in combat in 1945, and Hurricane LF751. Around them are displays on Manston's war and wartime Ramsgate. The café overlooks the former airfield. The separate RAF Manston History Museum is close by.

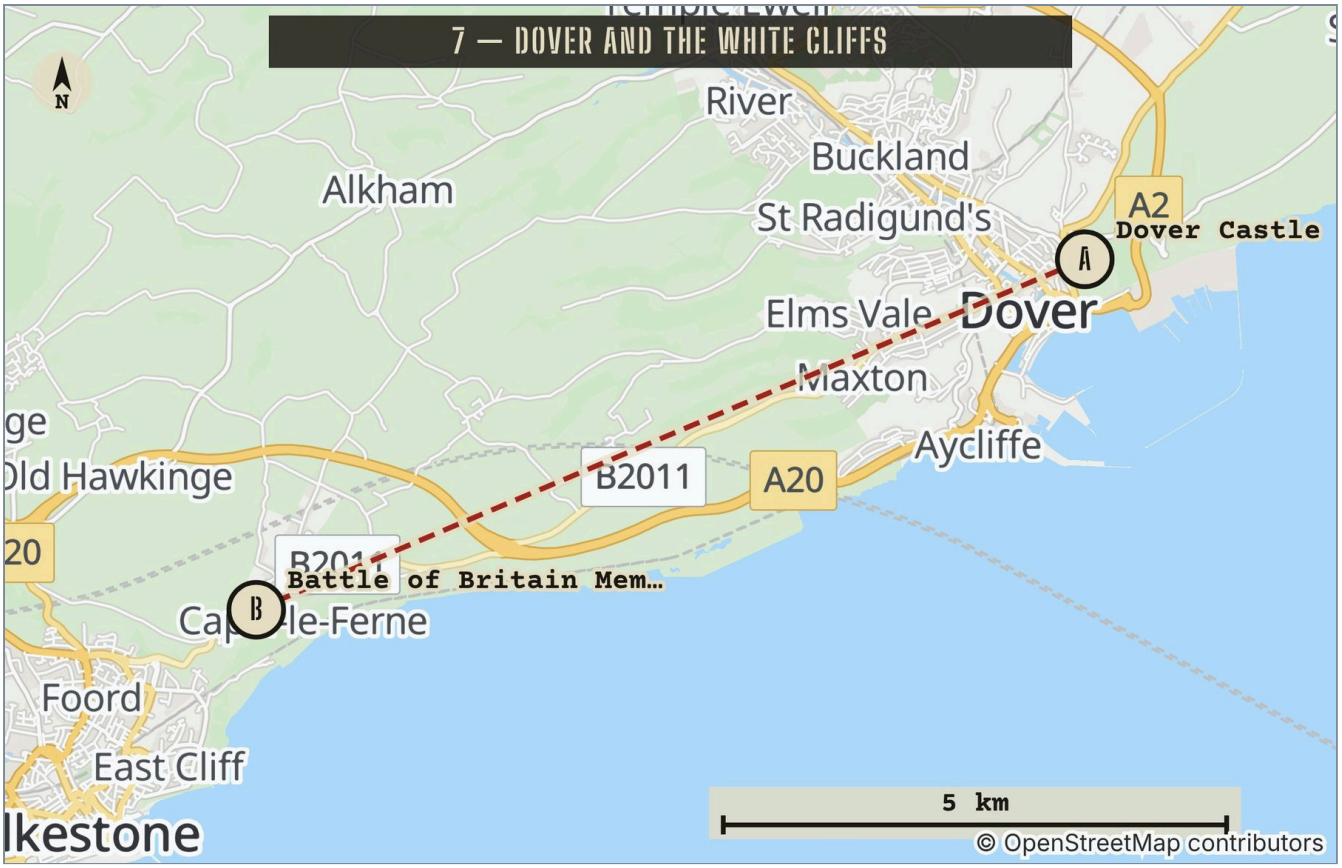
Plan: Admission free; donations welcome. Opening hours vary by season (recently 10:00–17:00 in summer); check the website before you go. Flight simulator costs extra.

GPS 51.35025, 1.34982

Read more: RAF Manston (Wikipedia) · Spitfire & Hurricane Memorial Museum (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Dover. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

7 — DOVER AND THE WHITE CLIFFS



Dover Castle Secret Wartime Tunnels → Battle of Britain Memorial · 2 stops

Finish in Britain at Dover, where the Dunkirk evacuation was directed from tunnels in the cliffs, and the national Battle of Britain memorial at Capel-le-Ferne, before the evening ferry across to Dunkirk.

A Dover Castle Secret Wartime Tunnels

MEDIUM Headquarters · United Kingdom · ≈180 min · ★ must see

Tunnels cut into the chalk below Dover Castle during the Napoleonic Wars were turned in 1939 into an air-raid shelter, then a naval command centre and an underground hospital. From here Vice-Admiral Bertram Ramsay planned and directed Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force and French troops from Dunkirk between 26 May and 4 June 1940. Working with a scratch fleet of warships, ferries and small civilian boats, his staff brought about 338,000 men back to England, far more than the 45,000 first hoped for. The operation is said to take its name from the room that had housed an electrical generator. The tunnels later served through the war as a headquarters guarding the Channel.

What you can see: Guided routes take you through the tunnel complex: the Operation Dynamo galleries with projections telling the evacuation story, the operations rooms, and the reconstructed underground hospital. The medieval castle and Great Tower stand above, with views across the Channel to France on clear days.

Plan: Castle open daily 10:00–17:00 (last entry 16:00); winter hours may be shorter. Book online to save money. The Operation Dynamo section of the tunnels is currently closed for maintenance; the Underground Hospital is open. Check the website before you go.

`GPS 51.12970, 1.32140`

Read more: Dover Castle (Wikipedia) · Dover Castle (English Heritage) · Operation Dynamo (Wikipedia)

Battle of Britain Memorial, Capel-le-Ferne

HIGH Memorial · United Kingdom · ≈60 min

On the cliffs between Folkestone and Dover, under the air battles of 1940, stands the national memorial to the aircrew of the Battle of Britain. It was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother on 9 July 1993. Its centre is Harry Gray's carved figure of a seated pilot looking out to sea; his flying jacket hides rank and nationality, so he stands for every Allied airman of 'The Few'. The Christopher Foxley-Norris Memorial Wall lists almost 3,000 aircrew who flew in the battle. The visitor centre, The Wing, shaped like a Spitfire's wing, was opened by Queen Elizabeth II on 26 March 2015.

What you can see: From the air the memorial is a three-bladed propeller cut into the clifftop. Look for the seated pilot, the long wall of names, Churchill's words on the Beaverbrook Wall, and replica Hurricane and Spitfire. The Wing has the 'Scramble Experience' and a clifftop café.

Plan: Grounds open on foot every day. Café, shop and Scramble Experience 10:00–17:00 to 31 October, 10:00–16:00 in winter, closed Mondays November–February. Scramble Experience about £6 adult. Car park £2–£6, card only.

GPS 51.09888, 1.20518

Read more: Battle of Britain Memorial, Capel-le-Ferne (Wikipedia) · Battle of Britain Memorial Trust (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Dover. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

8 — DUNKIRK: OPERATION DYNAMO



Dunkirk 1940 Museum → East Mole → Malo-les-Bains evacuation beach → Dunkirk Memorial and Town Cemetery → Fort des Dunes → Zuydcoote and Bray-Dunes beach wrecks · 6 stops

Spend the day on Operation Dynamo, May to June 1940: the museum in the command bastion, the mole and beaches from which over 338,000 Allied troops were lifted, the fort on the perimeter and the wrecks still on the sands.

A Dunkirk 1940 Museum (Bastion 32)

HIGH Museum · France · ≈90 min · ★ must see

Bastion 32 is a casemate in the old fortifications by the harbour, a short walk from the East Mole and the evacuation beaches. During the Battle of Dunkirk it served as the headquarters of the French and Allied forces defending the town while Operation Dynamo ran from 26 May to 4 June 1940. From here the defence of the perimeter was coordinated as 338,226 men were taken off to England, 239,555 of them from the harbour and 98,671 from the beaches. The museum inside tells the story of the battle and the evacuation, with weapons, uniforms, models, photographs and maps of the operations.

What you can see: A long, low brick casemate set into the bastion wall on Rue des Chantiers de France. Inside, vaulted rooms hold uniforms, weapons, models of the ships and beaches, and maps of the shrinking pocket. Outside, a memorial to the French Navy of 1939–40 stands nearby.

Plan: Tourist office listing: open daily 10:00–18:00 from 7 Feb to 31 Dec 2026; adult €8, child/student €5. No booking needed for individuals. The 2026 remembrance guide gives early Feb to mid-Nov plus Christmas holidays, so check the website before you go.

GPS 51.04611, 2.38127

Read more: Dunkirk evacuation (Wikipedia) · Dunkirk 1940 Museum (official) · Dunkirk 1940 Museum (Dunkirk Tourism)

B East Mole (Jetée de l'Est), Dunkirk

HIGH Naval base · France · ≈45 min

The East Mole was a long breakwater sheltering the harbour entrance, never designed for ships to berth against. With the port's quays wrecked by bombing, Captain William Tennant began using it as a jetty, and it became the key to Operation Dynamo: almost 200,000 troops boarded ships from its narrow walkway. Destroyers, ferries and paddle steamers came alongside under bombing and shellfire. On 29 May the paddle steamer HMS Crested Eagle sailed from here with about 600 men aboard and was set on fire by bombs less than a mile out.

What you can see: A narrow jetty about 1.5 km long running out to sea from the end of Rue Militaire, with a German blockhouse at its foot. The far end is closed. From the walkway you get a panoramic view along the Dynamo beaches towards Belgium.

Plan: Free, open access; the outer end is closed to the public. About a 10-minute walk from the Dunkirk 1940 Museum. Exposed to wind and spray, so take care in rough weather.

GPS 51.05041, 2.36870

Read more: Dunkirk evacuation (Wikipedia) · Remembrance guide 2026 (Dunkirk Tourism, PDF) · Official website

C Malo-les-Bains evacuation beach, Dunkirk

MEDIUM Landing beach · France · ≈45 min · ★ must see

The beaches running east from Malo-les-Bains towards Bray-Dunes and De Panne were where tens of thousands of British and French soldiers waited, often for days, under air attack. Small boats ferried men out to larger ships lying offshore, a slow process that led Captain William Tennant, the senior naval officer ashore, to send most troops to the harbour moles instead. In all 98,671 men were lifted from the beaches. At the western end of the promenade, the Digue des Alliés, the Allied memorial inaugurated in 1962 marks the annual commemoration of the battle and of Operation Dynamo.

What you can see: A wide, flat sandy beach backed by the promenade and rebuilt seaside villas. At its western end stands a block-like memorial, inscribed in French only, to the soldiers, sailors and airmen of the French and Allied armies, with British poppy wreaths on its anchor. From here you can walk to the root of the East Mole.

Plan: Free, open access at all times. The memorial is at the western end of the Digue des Alliés, close to the Dunkirk 1940 Museum. Best combined with the museum and the East Mole on foot.

GPS 51.04839, 2.38101

Read more: Dunkirk evacuation (Wikipedia) · Remembrance guide (Dunkirk Tourism) · Official website

D Dunkirk Memorial and Town Cemetery (CWGC)

HIGH Cemetery · France · ≈30 min

The Dunkirk Memorial commemorates more than 4,500 men of the British Expeditionary Force who died in the 1939–40 campaign, or later in captivity after being taken prisoner then, and have no known grave. Designed by Philip Hepworth, it was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother on 29 June 1957. It forms the entrance to the British war graves section of Dunkirk Town Cemetery, on the road towards Veurne (Furnes) in Belgium, where men of both world wars are buried.

What you can see: A colonnaded entrance with the names of the missing on its panels and an engraved glass panel by John Hutton showing the evacuation. Through it lie the Second World War plots (I and II) and First World War plots IV and V; the other First World War plots are reached via the civil cemetery entrance.

Plan: Free, open daily. Wheelchair accessible, with a disabled parking space in front of the memorial and a slope from the pavement. Address: route de Furnes, Dunkirk.

GPS 51.03060, 2.38967

Read more: Dunkirk Memorial (CWGC) · Dunkirk Town Cemetery (CWGC)

Fort des Dunes, Leffrinckoucke

HIGH Fortification · France · ≈90 min

Built in 1878–80 in the dunes east of Dunkirk, the fort was the headquarters of the French 12th Motorised Infantry Division, part of the rearguard holding the perimeter while the British and French embarked. On the evening of 2 June 1940 dive-bombers struck it and General Janssen, the division's commander, was mortally wounded in a courtyard with several officers. Further bombing on 3 June killed more men inside the fort. The French held long enough for the evacuation to run to 4 June. In September 1944 the Germans used the fort to shoot captured members of the Resistance against the north moat.

What you can see: A sunken 19th-century fort with brick casemates, moats and courtyards, now a museum (the Musérial) on the 1940 battle and the evacuation. Plaques by the entrance remember the soldiers killed in 1940 and the executed resistance fighters. The national military cemetery lies next to the fort.

Plan: Open 3 Mar–1 Nov 2026, Tuesday to Sunday 10:00–18:00, closed Mondays. Adult about €7–8, child €3.50. Audio-guides and guided tours available. Bus C1 or C2 to 'Leffrinckoucke Fort des Dunes'. Check the website before you go.

GPS 51.05283, 2.44482

Read more: Fort des Dunes (TracesOfWar) · Fort des Dunes (Wikipedia FR) · Fort des Dunes (official)

Zuydcoote and Bray-Dunes beach wrecks

HIGH Landing beach · France · ≈60 min

On 29 May 1940 the Thames paddle steamer HMS Crested Eagle, serving as an anti-aircraft ship, left the East Mole with about 600 men, including survivors of the bombed Grenade and Fenella. Bombs set her stern on fire less than a mile out and her captain, Lieutenant Commander Bernard Booth, ran her ashore opposite the Zuydcoote sanatorium; about 200 survivors were picked up. A few hundred metres away lies the Devonia, bombed on 30 May and beached to serve as a jetty. Further east at Bray-Dunes, soldiers drove lorries into the sea at low tide to build improvised piers.

What you can see: At low tide, the blackened ribs and paddle-wheel frames of the Crested Eagle rise from the sand, with a plaque placed in 2015; the Devonia lies a few hundred metres east. On the Bray-Dunes seafront a monument honours the French 12th Motorised Infantry Division.

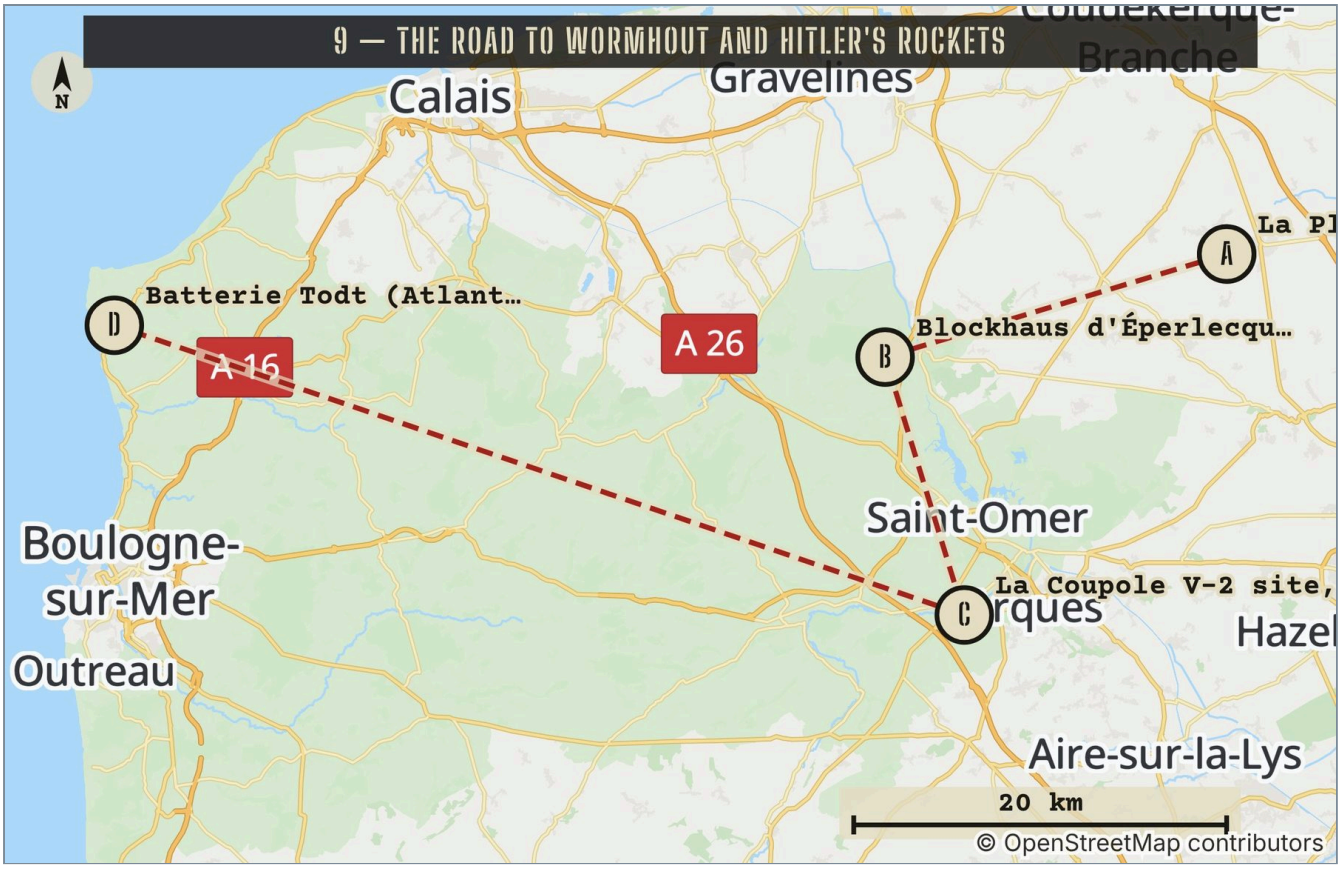
Plan: Free. Wrecks visible only around low tide, best at spring tides: check tide tables (maree.info) first. Park on Rue de Wattrelos, Zuydcoote; the Crested Eagle is about 500 m from the beach access. Do not get cut off by the rising tide.

GPS 51.07582, 2.49121

Read more: HMS Crested Eagle (Wikipedia) · Wreck of HMS Crested Eagle (TracesOfWar) · Official website

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Dunkirk (ferry from Dover). The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

9 — THE ROAD TO WORMHOUT AND HITLER'S ROCKETS



La Plaine au Bois massacre memorial → Blockhaus d'Éperlecques → La Coupole V-2 site → Batterie Todt · 4 stops

South from Dunkirk to the Wormhout massacre site, a reminder of the fighting retreat of 1940, then to the giant concrete sites built for the V-weapons at Éperlecques and La Coupole and the Atlantic Wall guns near Cap Gris-Nez.

A La Plaine au Bois massacre memorial, Esquelbecq (Wormhout)

MEDIUM Memorial · France · ≈45 min

On 28 May 1940 British units held Wormhout to cover the retreat to Dunkirk: the 2nd Royal Warwickshire Regiment, the 4th Cheshire Regiment and 210 Battery of the 53rd (Worcestershire Yeomanry) Anti-Tank Regiment. After they were overrun by the SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, about 95 prisoners were herded into a cowshed at La Plaine au Bois and killed with grenades and gunfire. A handful survived, among them Privates Bert Evans and Arthur Johnson and Gunner Brian Fahey. Post-war testimony blamed Wilhelm Mohnke, who denied it and was never tried; he died in 2001.

What you can see: A replica of the barn stands in the fields, reached by a path lined with 80 beech trees. Nearby are a stele inaugurated on 28 May 2010 to the Allied and civilian dead of Wormhout, Ledringhem and Esquelbecq, and an orientation table explaining the fighting. A separate memorial stands on the D17.

Plan: Free, open access. Address: Rue des Dunkirk Veterans, Esquelbecq. A €2 trail leaflet covering Esquelbecq, Ledringhem and Wormhout is sold by Terre de Flandre Tourisme; group guided tours in English on request.

GPS 50.87782, 2.44229

Read more: Wormhoudt massacre (Wikipedia) · Plaine au Bois site (Terre de Flandre Tourisme) · Memorial Wormhoudt Massacre (TracesOfWar)

B Blockhaus d'Éperlecques

HIGH Bunker · France · ≈120 min

Under the cover name Kraftwerk Nord West, the Organisation Todt began this bunker in the forest near Watten in March 1943 as a launch facility for V-2 rockets, planned for over 100 missiles and up to 36 launches a day. It was built largely by prisoners of war and conscripted workers held in nearby camps. On 27 August 1943, 187 US B-17s bombed it while the freshly poured concrete was still setting. Part was later finished as a liquid oxygen plant. Tallboy raids in June and July 1944, including on 6 July, caused severe damage, and construction stopped that month.

What you can see: A colossal concrete block in the woods, its roof and walls scarred by bomb craters and the twisted reinforcing of the August 1943 raid. A woodland trail leads past V-weapons and a V-2 replica to the bunker, which you walk into and around.

Plan: March–October: March weekends only 14:00–17:00; April–June and September 11:00–17:30; July–August 10:00–18:30; October 13:00–17:00. Adult €11.50, child €6.50. No booking for individuals. Allow 1h45.

`GPS 50.82861, 2.18361`

Read more: Blockhaus d'Éperlecques (Wikipedia) · Le Blockhaus d'Éperlecques (official)

C La Coupole V-2 site, Helfaut

HIGH Bunker · France · ≈180 min

From October 1943 the Organisation Todt, using forced labour, built a vast bunker in a chalk quarry near Saint-Omer to assemble, fuel and launch V-2 rockets against London and southern England. Its heart was a chamber under a concrete dome. Allied bombing under Operation Crossbow followed; in June and July 1944 RAF Tallboy bombs wrecked the outer works and blocked the launch tunnels. On 4 August an Operation Aphrodite drone aimed at the site overshot. The complex never entered service: work stopped, the Germans abandoned it and the Allies captured it in September 1944.

What you can see: The huge concrete dome sits on the edge of the quarry. Inside, tunnels and galleries lead to the history centre on the V-weapons, the occupation of northern France and the forced labour that built the site, plus a 3D planetarium on the space race.

Plan: Open daily 9:00–18:00 (10:00–19:00 from 5 July to 31 August). History Centre adult €13, child €9.50; combined ticket with planetarium €20.50. Tickets can be bought online. Check the website before you go.

`GPS 50.70526, 2.24362`

Read more: La Coupole (Wikipedia) · La Coupole (official)

D Batterie Todt (Atlantic Wall Museum), Audinghen

HIGH Fortification · France · ≈90 min

Work on the battery at Haringzelles, near Cap Gris-Nez, began on 22 July 1940. First called Siegfried, it was renamed after Fritz Todt, head of the Organisation Todt, who died in 1942. Four 380 mm naval guns in concrete casemates could reach the English coast, and the battery shelled shipping and the Dover area; the Cap Gris-Nez guns caused 3,059 alerts and 216 civilian deaths in England. On 29 September 1944, after heavy bombing, the North Nova Scotia Highlanders of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division took it during Operation Undergo.

What you can see: Casemate 1, a massive concrete gun house, holds the private Atlantic Wall Museum with uniforms, weapons and posters. Outside stands a 280 mm K5 railway gun, one of two survivors, brought here from Fort Nieulay at Calais in 1992. The other casemates lie in the surrounding fields.

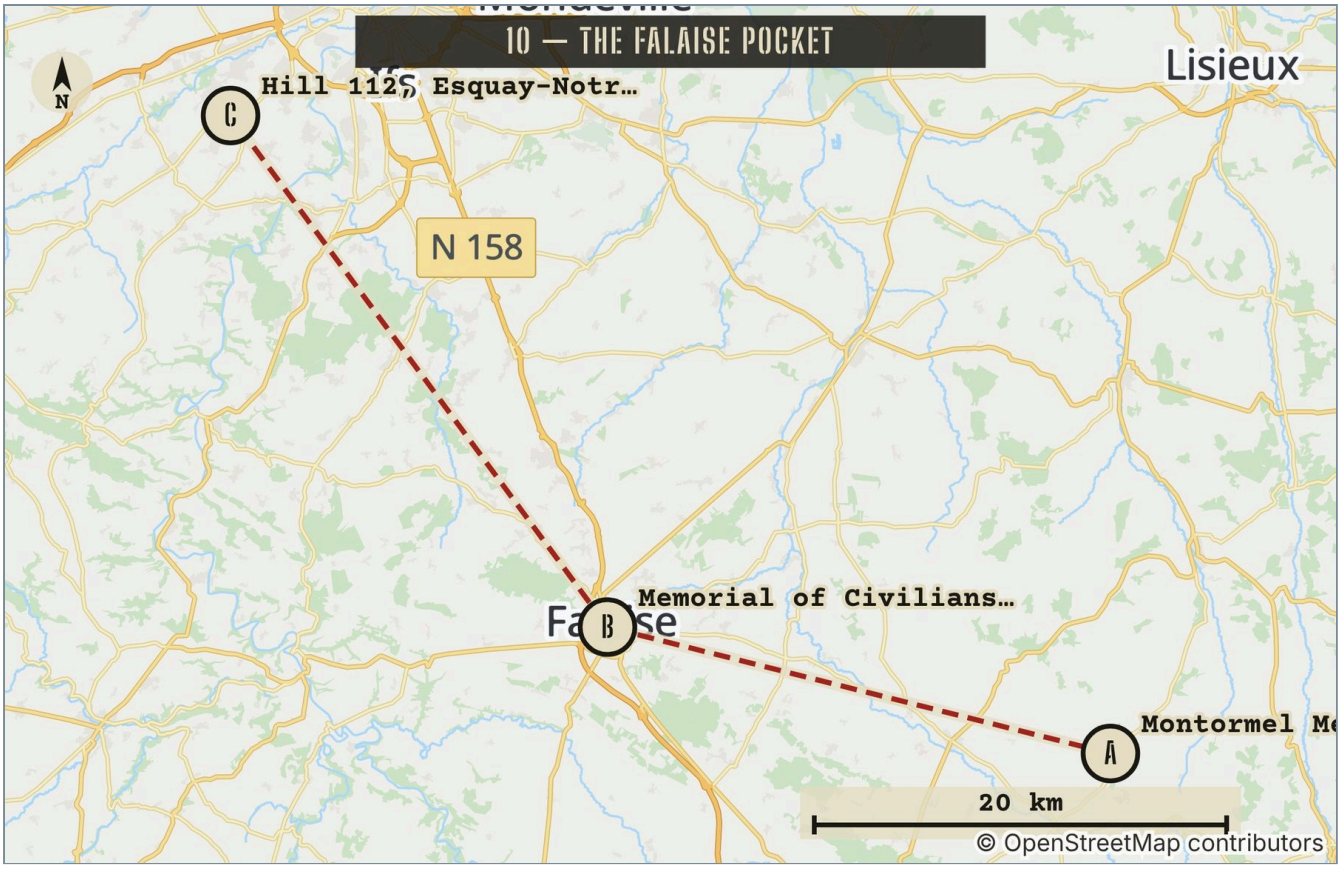
Plan: February–mid-November: Feb, Mar, Nov 14:00–17:30; Apr–Jun and Sep–Oct 10:00–18:00, closed Mondays; Jul–Aug 10:00–18:30; also open 26–31 Dec. Adult €9, child €6. Check the website before you go.

`GPS 50.84386, 1.60004`

Read more: Todt Battery (Wikipedia) · Musée du Mur de l'Atlantique (TracesOfWar) · Musée du Mur de l'Atlantique (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Boulogne-sur-Mer. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

10 — THE FALAISE POCKET



Montormel Memorial → Memorial of Civilians in Wartime → Hill 112 · 3 stops

A long drive south-west into Normandy, to the end of the campaign: the Falaise Pocket, where the German armies in Normandy were trapped and destroyed in August 1944, and Hill 112, scene of the bitter fighting west of Caen.

A Montormel Memorial, Falaise Pocket

HIGH Memorial · France · ≈60 min

By mid-August 1944 two German armies were almost surrounded in the Falaise Pocket. On the afternoon of 19 August tanks and infantry of the 1st Polish Armoured Division under General Stanisław Maczek took position on Hill 262, which they called 'Maczuga' (the mace), astride the last escape routes in the Dives valley. Cut off and short of supplies, about 2,000 Poles held off German units trying to break out from inside the pocket and break in from outside until Canadian troops reached them on 21 August, when the gap was closed. The memorial, built into the hillside in 1994, overlooks the valley.

What you can see: A Polish monument of 1965 and a Sherman tank stand on the hilltop. The museum, built into the slope, has a large window over the Dives valley, where the guide traces the escape routes; the visit includes an animated map and film.

Plan: May–Sep daily 09:30–18:00; April daily 10:00–17:00; October–March Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday 10:00–17:00. Adult from about €6. Check the website before you go.

GPS 48.83733, 0.14218

Read more: Falaise Pocket (Wikipedia) · Mémorial de Montormel (official) · Montormel-Coudehard (Chemins de mémoire)

B Memorial of Civilians in Wartime, Falaise

HIGH Museum · France · ≈90 min

Falaise gave its name to the pocket in which the German armies were trapped in August 1944, and the town itself was largely destroyed by bombing and fighting before Canadian troops took it in mid-August. The Mémorial de Falaise stands on the site of a house destroyed in the 1944 bombing, in a building from the town's reconstruction, close to William the Conqueror's castle. Unlike most Normandy museums it tells the war from the point of view of civilians: occupation, shortages, bombing, evacuation and liberation, combining reconstructions made with the Caen Memorial and the memories of people who lived through it.

What you can see: Reconstructed scenes of civilian life under occupation and bombing, with film and personal testimony. Afterwards walk up to the castle; the rebuilt town centre around it shows how much of Falaise had to be rebuilt.

Plan: Adult from about €8.50. Opening pattern varies by season and the site may close in winter; check the website before you go.

`GPS 48.89421, -0.20234`

Read more: Falaise Memorial (Normandie Tourisme) · Mémorial de Falaise (official)

C Hill 112, Esquay-Notre-Dame

HIGH Battlefield · France · ≈45 min

This low, broad hill south-west of Caen, between the Odon and Orne, gives a view over much of the battlefield. Tanks of the 11th Armoured Division first reached it at the end of Operation Epsom in late June but were withdrawn. On 10–11 July, in Operation Jupiter, the 43rd (Wessex) Division under Major-General Ivor Thomas attacked again against the 10th SS Panzer Division, with Tiger tanks of the 102nd SS Heavy Tank Battalion and later the 9th SS Panzer Division. The summit changed hands repeatedly and remained contested for weeks. Jupiter failed tactically, but it wore down two SS panzer divisions.

What you can see: A quiet plateau of fields. At the crossroads stand a Churchill tank, the 43rd (Wessex) Division memorial, an infantryman statue and a memorial wall; a short walk leads to the Bois Calloué memorial wood. The true summit is south of the monuments, near the orchard.

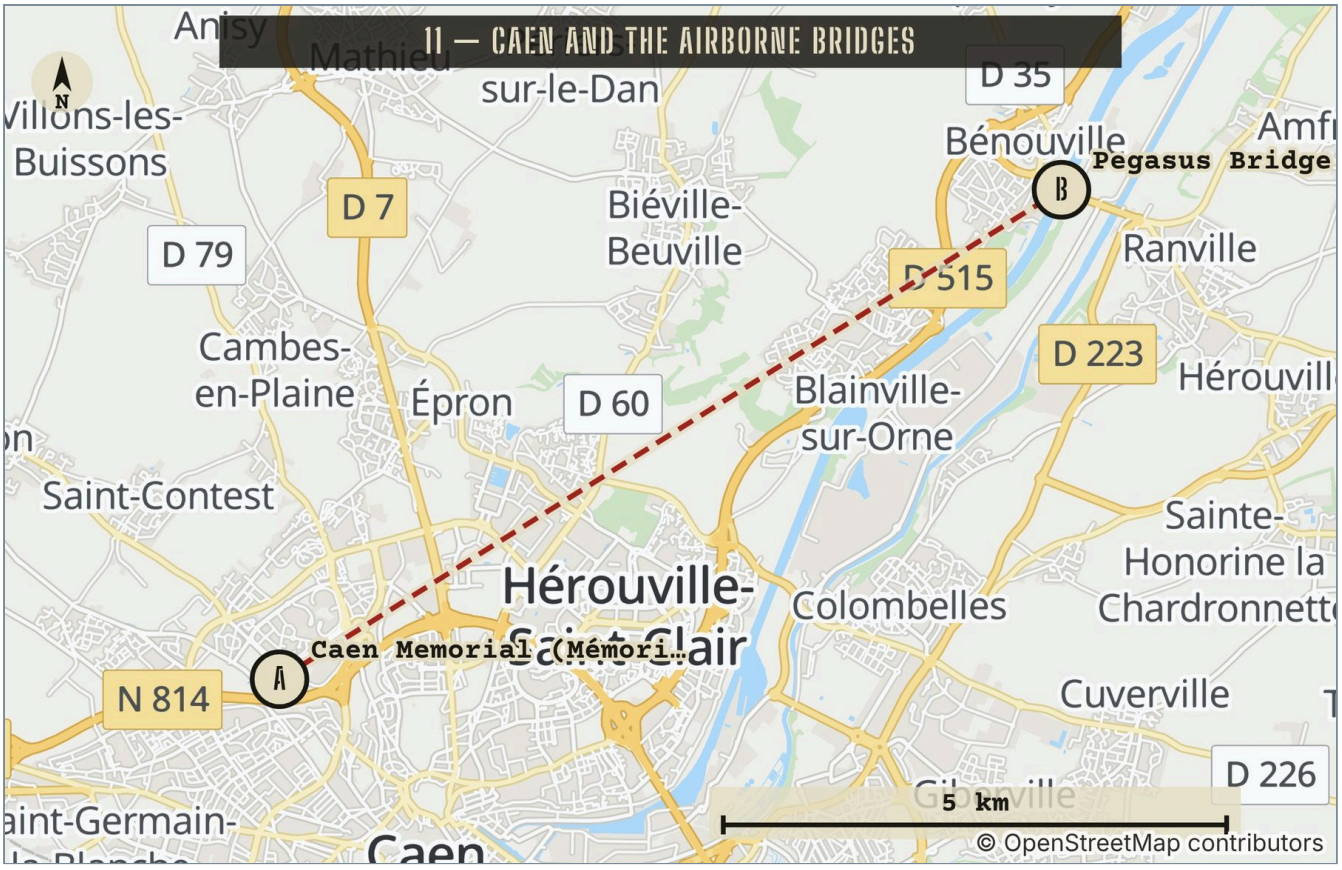
Plan: Open-air site, free and accessible at all times, with no facilities. Roadside parking beside the memorials on the D8 (address given as Vieux).

`GPS 49.12374, -0.46058`

Read more: Operation Jupiter (Wikipedia) · Hill 112 (TracesOfWar)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Caen. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

11 — CAEN AND THE AIRBORNE BRIDGES



Caen Memorial → Pegasus Bridge and Memorial Pegasus · 2 stops

Caen was the British objective on D-Day and took two months to win; the Memorial sets out the whole war, and Pegasus Bridge marks where British glider troops opened the invasion just after midnight on 6 June.

A Caen Memorial (Mémorial de Caen)

HIGH Museum · France · ≈240 min · ★ must see

Caen was a D-Day objective for the British, but it took until July to clear the city. Montgomery's offensives around it, including Epsom, Charnwood and Goodwood, drew in most of the German armour in Normandy. Bombing and shelling destroyed much of the city and killed many civilians. The Mémorial, opened by President Mitterrand on 6 June 1988, stands in the northern suburbs over a former German bunker. It is a large museum of the twentieth century, covering the road to war, the Second World War, the landings and Battle of Normandy, and the Cold War, with an emphasis on peace and reconciliation.

What you can see: A large modern building with several permanent exhibitions and films; allow at least half a day. Outside are memorial gardens to the Americans, British and Canadians. Below, part of the German underground bunker can be visited.

Plan: Open daily (Jan–Mar 09:00–18:00, Apr–Sep 09:00–19:00, Oct–Dec 09:30–18:00, closed Wednesdays in Nov–Dec except holidays); closed three weeks in January, 25 Dec and 1 Jan. Adult about €20.80. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.19744, -0.38414

Read more: Mémorial de Caen (Wikipedia) · Mémorial de Caen (official)

Pegasus Bridge and Memorial Pegasus

HIGH Bridge · France · ≈90 min · ★ must see

Just after midnight on 6 June 1944, about sixteen minutes past twelve, three Horsa gliders carrying D Company, 2nd Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, with Royal Engineers, landed beside the bridge over the Caen Canal at Bénouville. Two more came down near the Orne river bridge. Led by Major John Howard, the men took both bridges within about ten minutes. Holding them kept the only crossings open between the beaches and the 6th Airborne Division's landing zones east of the Orne. Paratroopers of the 7th Parachute Battalion reinforced them before dawn, and Lord Lovat's commandos arrived from Sword Beach around midday. The canal bridge was named Pegasus Bridge after the airborne emblem.

What you can see: The 1994 replacement bridge carries the road; the original 1934 bridge stands in the grounds of Memorial Pegasus at Ranville, on the east bank, with a full-size replica Horsa glider. Markers show where the gliders landed. The Café Gondrée, beside the bridge, still trades.

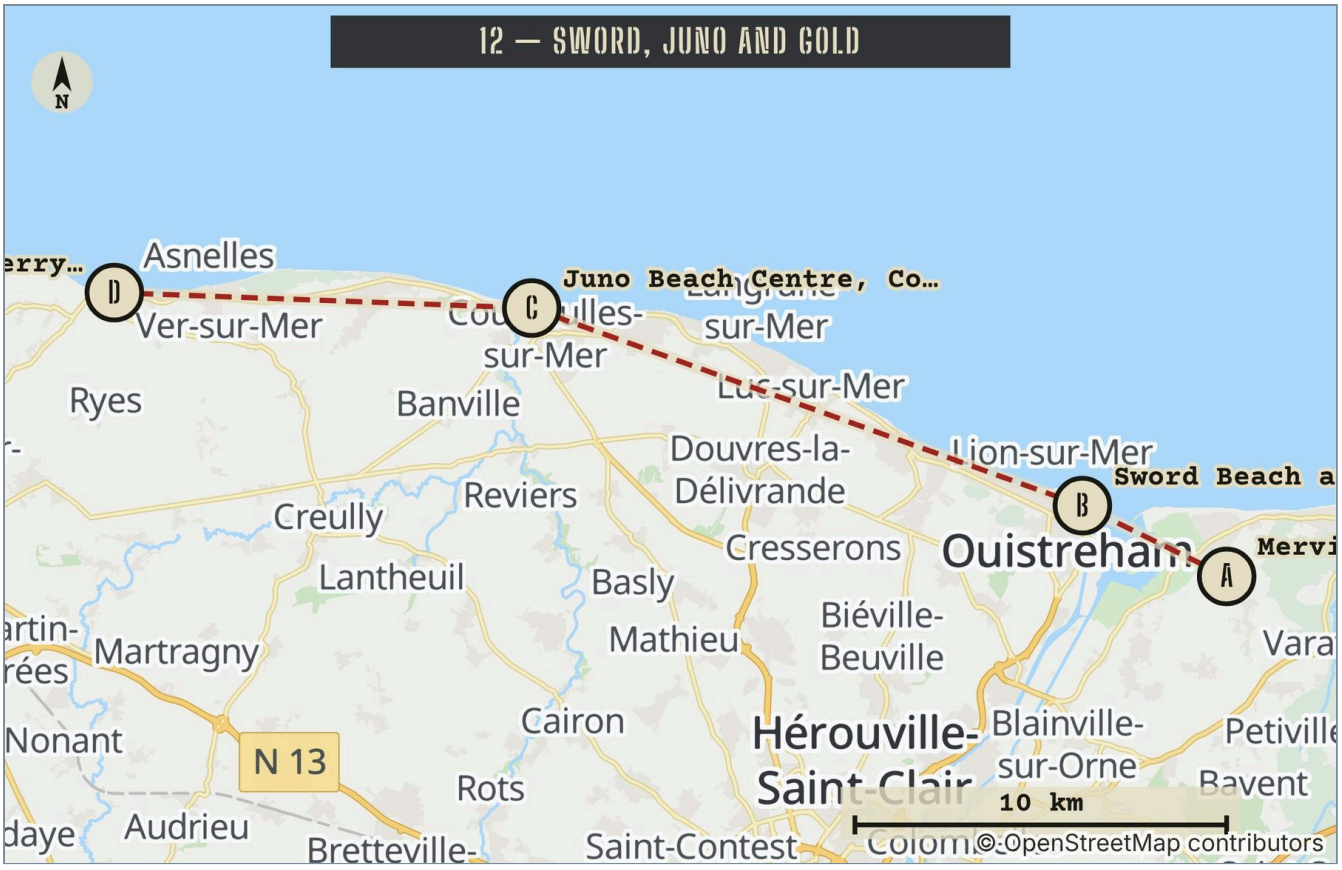
Plan: The bridge and landing-zone markers are always accessible and free. Memorial Pegasus (adult about €10.50) is closed from October 2026 until May 2027 for extension and renovation; it is due to reopen in June 2027. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.24222, -0.27444

Read more: Pegasus Bridge (Wikipedia) · Memorial Pegasus (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Caen. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

12 — SWORD, JUNO AND GOLD



Merville Battery → Sword Beach and the Grand Bunker → Juno Beach Centre → Arromanches · 4 stops

Follow the British and Canadian invasion coast from the Merville Battery and Sword Beach at Ouistreham, past the Canadians at Juno, to Gold Beach and the remains of the Mulberry harbour at Arromanches.

A Merville Battery

HIGH Fortification · France · ≈90 min

The Allies believed this battery of four concrete casemates could fire on Sword Beach and the fleet. The 9th Parachute Battalion, 6th Airborne Division, under Lieutenant Colonel Terence Otway, was ordered to destroy it before dawn on 6 June. The drop was badly scattered and only about 150 of some 600 men reached the rendezvous, without most of their heavy equipment. Otway attacked anyway. The paratroopers broke in after a short, costly fight and put the guns out of action. They proved to be First World War-era 100 mm Czech howitzers, not the heavier guns that had been feared.

What you can see: The four casemates survive in a wooded site with trenches and bunkers. Casemate No. 1 holds the museum, and another recreates the attack with sound and light. A C-47 Dakota, 'SNAFU Special', stands on the site, and a memorial to Otway is near the entrance.

Plan: Seasonal museum, normally closed in winter: open daily 10:00–18:30 until 15 November 2026, then closed until spring. Adult about €9.50. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.27006, -0.19769

Read more: Merville Gun Battery (Wikipedia) · Merville Battery Museum (official)

B Sword Beach and the Grand Bunker, Ouistreham

HIGH Bunker · France · ≈60 min

Sword was the easternmost beach, assaulted on 6 June by the British 3rd Infantry Division and No. 1 Special Service Brigade, including Commandant Philippe Kieffer's French commandos, who fought through Ouistreham. The 17-metre concrete tower behind the seafront was the fire-control post for the coastal batteries guarding the Orne estuary. Commandos bypassed it after being driven back on D-Day. On 9 June Lieutenant Bob Orrell of the Royal Engineers and three men blew in its armoured door, which took about four hours. Two officers and about fifty men surrendered to them.

What you can see: The five-storey tower is restored as it was in June 1944: machine-room, dormitory, radio room and the rangefinder at the top, with views over the estuary. Sword Beach and the Kieffer commando memorial are a short walk away.

Plan: Private museum with an entry fee. Opening hours and prices were not available online when checked; phone +33 2 31 97 28 69. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.28753, -0.25245

Read more: Sword Beach (Wikipedia) · Le Grand Bunker (official)

C Juno Beach Centre, Courseulles-sur-Mer

HIGH Museum · France · ≈120 min · ★ must see

Juno was Canada's beach. On 6 June 1944 about 14,000 Canadian troops of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade landed here between Gold and Sword. Rough seas delayed the assault, so many landing craft hit mined obstacles in the rising tide, and the first waves met strongpoints the bombardment had missed. By evening the Canadians had pushed further inland than any other Allied force that day. The Juno Beach Centre, built on the beach at Courseulles, was opened on 6 June 2003 by veterans led by Garth Webb, and tells the story of Canada's whole war.

What you can see: A low titanium-clad building shaped like a stylised maple leaf stands behind the dunes. Outside, guided tours enter German bunkers of the Courseulles strongpoint. A Sherman DD tank recovered from the sea stands in the town nearby.

Plan: Closed in January and on 25 December; open daily the rest of the year (Nov–Dec 10:00–17:00). Adult €9; museum plus bunker tour €13.50 (bunker tours April–October). An extension, the Concordia Project, was announced in September 2026. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.33639, -0.46167

Read more: Juno Beach Centre (Wikipedia) · Juno Beach Centre (official)

D Arromanches: Mulberry harbour and D-Day Museum

HIGH Museum · France · ≈90 min · ★ must see

With no large port in Allied hands, the planners towed prefabricated harbours across the Channel. At Arromanches, on the western edge of Gold Beach, the British built Mulberry B, later called Port Winston. The first Phoenix caissons were sunk on 8 June 1944 and floating roadways ('Whales') led from pier heads to the shore. A storm from 19 to 22 June wrecked the American Mulberry at Omaha, but Port Winston survived, damaged, and was used for months. Through it passed huge quantities of men, vehicles and stores. The museum on the seafront, opened in 1954, was the first D-Day museum in Normandy.

What you can see: Concrete Phoenix caissons still lie in an arc offshore and on the sand at low tide. The museum, directly facing them, uses working models and film to explain how the harbour was built. The clifftop viewpoint to the east gives the best overall view.

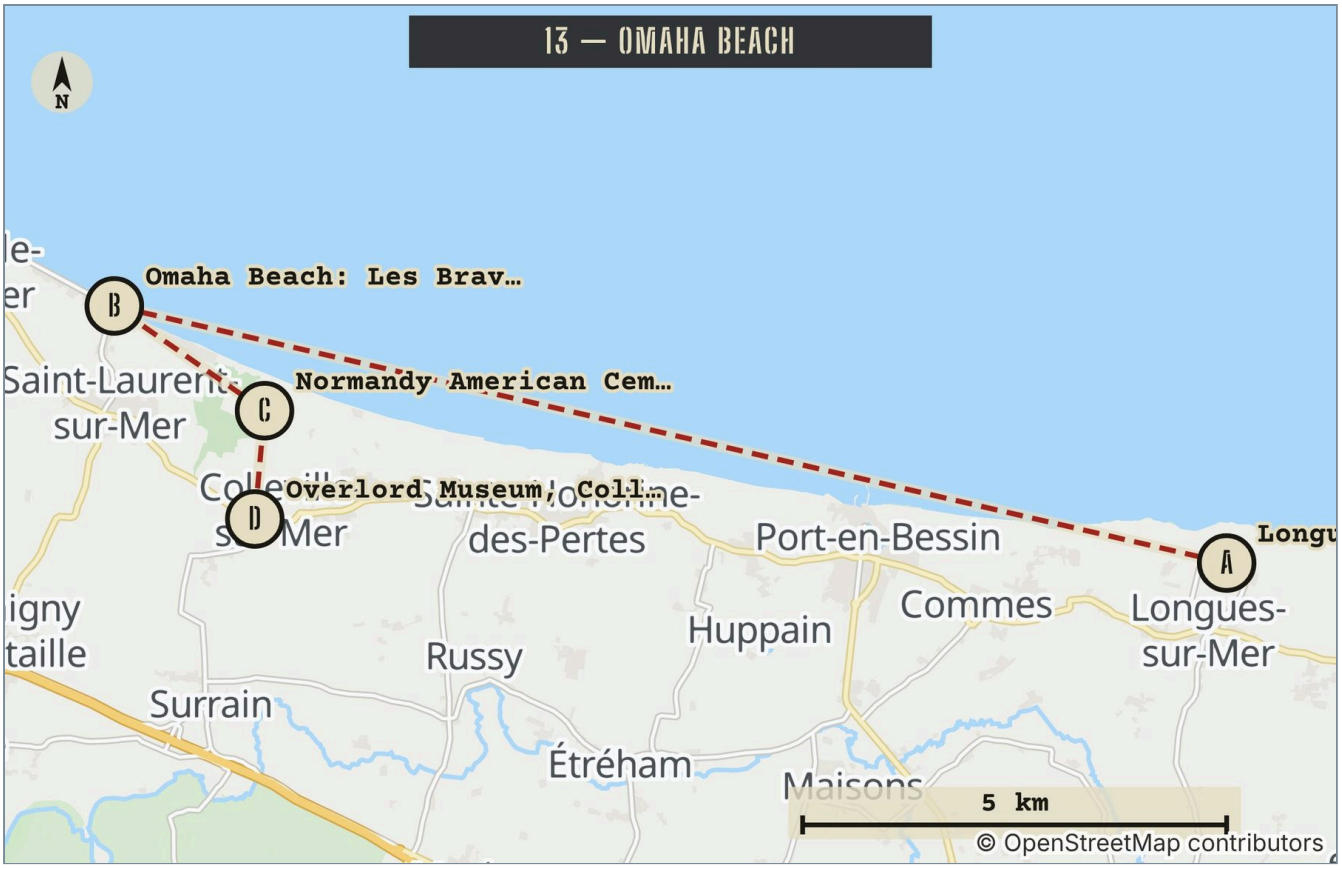
Plan: Museum closed throughout January and on 24, 25 and 31 December; otherwise open daily, hours vary by season (Nov–Feb 10:00–17:00). Adult €12.90. The beach and remains are free. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.34019, -0.62025

Read more: Mulberry harbour (Wikipedia) · D-Day Museum Arromanches (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Bayeux. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

13 — OMAHA BEACH



Longues-sur-Mer battery → Omaha Beach → Normandy American Cemetery → Overlord Museum · 4 stops

A day on the bloodiest of the five beaches: the German guns at Longues-sur-Mer, the shore at Omaha where the American assault nearly failed, the American Cemetery above it and the Overlord Museum.

A Longues-sur-Mer battery

HIGH Fortification · France · ≈45 min

This naval battery, completed in early 1944 between Arromanches and Port-en-Bessin, had four 150 mm Škoda guns in concrete casemates and a fire-control post on the cliff edge. Its range of about 20 km covered both Gold and Omaha. On the morning of 6 June it fired on the fleet and duelled with the cruisers HMS Ajax and HMS Argonaut and the French cruisers Georges Leygues and Montcalm, which knocked out or damaged three casemates. On 7 June the garrison of about 180 men, many of them older soldiers, surrendered to C Company, 2nd Battalion, Devonshire Regiment.

What you can see: Three casemates still hold their guns, the only battery in Normandy to keep them. A fourth gun is wrecked. Walk forward to the two-storey fire-control post on the cliff, which overlooks the sea and featured in the film The Longest Day.

Plan: Open-air site, free and accessible at all times. Guided tours are offered by the Bayeux tourist office in season. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.34308, -0.69450

Read more: Longues-sur-Mer battery (Wikipedia) · Bayeux Bessin tourist office

B Omaha Beach: Les Braves, Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer

MEDIUM Landing beach · France · ≈60 min · ★ must see

Omaha was the bloodiest of the five beaches. On 6 June 1944 the US 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions landed below bluffs held by German strongpoints that the air bombardment had largely missed. Many amphibious tanks sank in the rough sea, landing craft drifted off their sectors, and the first waves were pinned on the sand. For several hours General Bradley considered diverting follow-up forces elsewhere. Small groups of infantry, helped by destroyers firing at close range, worked up the bluffs between the strongpoints, and by nightfall the Americans held a shallow beachhead. The stainless-steel sculpture Les Braves now stands on the sand at Saint-Laurent.

What you can see: Les Braves, three groups of tall steel 'wings', stands on the beach, with a granite memorial behind it. Look up at the bluffs and the draws (valleys) the Americans had to open; remains of German strongpoints survive along the slope, and the American Cemetery is on the plateau to the east.

Plan: Public beach, free and open at all times. Parking along the seafront road (D514/D517) at Saint-Laurent; busy in summer and around 6 June.

GPS 49.37093, -0.87977

Read more: Omaha Beach (Wikipedia) · Les Braves (TracesOfWar) · Official website

C Normandy American Cemetery, Colleville-sur-Mer

HIGH Cemetery · France · ≈90 min · ★ must see

On the plateau above Omaha Beach, the cemetery holds 9,389 American war dead, most killed in the landings and the Normandy campaign. The Walls of the Missing in the Garden of the Missing carry 1,557 names. It covers 172.5 acres and was dedicated on 19 July 1956. Among the graves are Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Jr., who landed with the first wave at Utah, buried beside his brother Quentin, killed in 1918, and two of the Niland brothers, whose story inspired Saving Private Ryan. The visitor centre was opened by the American Battle Monuments Commission in 2007.

What you can see: Rows of white marble Latin crosses and Stars of David on lawns above the beach, a small chapel at the centre, and a colonnade with the bronze statue 'Spirit of American Youth Rising from the Waves'. The visitor centre explains the landings. An orientation table overlooks Omaha Beach.

Plan: Free; open daily, normally 09:00–17:00, closed 25 December and 1 January. ABMC is bringing in compulsory free pre-registration for all visitors (expected from late 2026, reservations from 2027). Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.35959, -0.85476

Read more: Normandy American Cemetery (Wikipedia) · Normandy American Cemetery (ABMC) · Visitor pre-registration (ABMC)

D Overlord Museum, Colleville-sur-Mer

HIGH Museum · France · ≈90 min

This private museum is built around the collection of Michel Leloup (1929–2011), who witnessed the fighting as a boy and later worked in Normandy's post-war reconstruction, gathering vehicles and equipment left on the battlefields. The collection was shown in Falaise from 1987 and moved to this purpose-built site near Omaha Beach in 2013. It covers the campaign from the landings to the liberation of Paris, with a short look at the earlier war, using large vehicle scenes that put German and Allied equipment side by side.

What you can see: More than 35 vehicles, tanks and guns from the armies that fought in Normandy are shown in staged scenes, including Shermans, a Panther and a Panzer IV. Personal belongings of individual soldiers add the human scale.

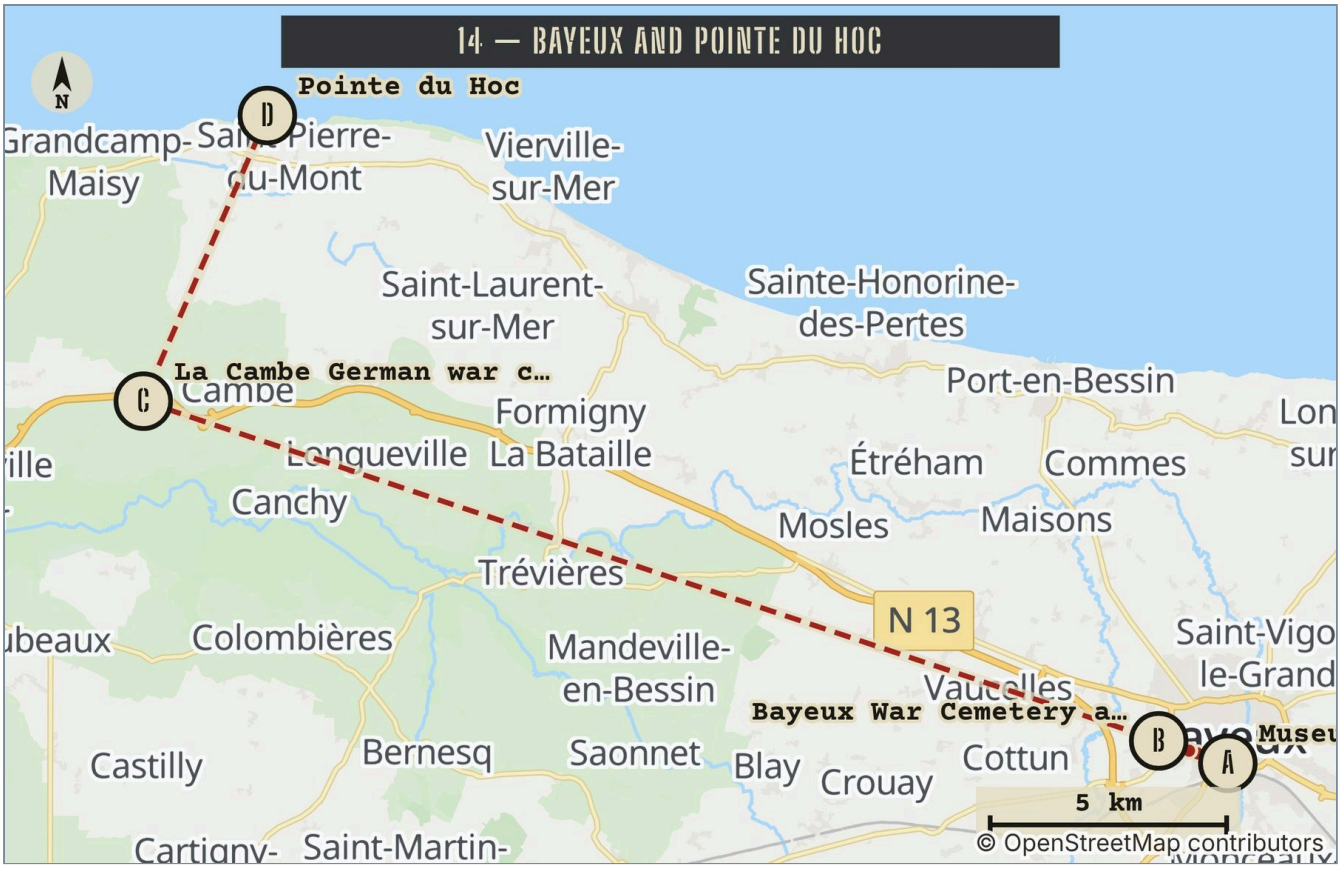
Plan: Open daily mid-February to early January (winter 10:00–17:30, summer to 19:00); closed 4 January to 12 February, 24–25 December and 1 January. Adult €9.90 in 2026, €10.90 in 2027.

GPS 49.34785, -0.85637

Read more: Overlord Museum (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Bayeux. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

14 — BAYEUX AND POINTE DU HOC



Museum of the Battle of Normandy → Bayeux War Cemetery and Memorial → La Cambe German war cemetery → Pointe du Hoc · 4 stops

Begin in Bayeux, the first town liberated, with its museum and the largest British war cemetery in France, then head west past the German cemetery at La Cambe to the cliffs scaled by the US Rangers at Pointe du Hoc.

A Museum of the Battle of Normandy, Bayeux

HIGH Museum · France · ≈90 min

Bayeux was freed by the British 50th (Northumbrian) Division on 7 June 1944, almost undamaged, and was the first sizeable French town liberated. On 14 June General de Gaulle came ashore and spoke here, a step towards establishing his authority over liberated France. The museum, on the ring road named after Fabian Ware, founder of the Imperial War Graves Commission, covers the whole Battle of Normandy from June to August. It explains the campaign as a sequence, from the landings through the battles for Caen and the bocage to the Falaise Pocket.

What you can see: Restored armoured vehicles, including a Sherman and a Churchill Crocodile, stand on the lawn outside. Inside are weapons, uniforms, vehicles, dioramas and an aviation room, with a film shown regularly. Bayeux War Cemetery is across the road.

Plan: Open daily; 1 May–30 Sep 09:30–18:30, otherwise 10:00–12:30 and 14:00–18:00. Closes for about two weeks in January (5–18 January in 2026) and at Christmas and New Year. Adult €8.50. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.27344, -0.71156

Read more: Bayeux museums (official)

B Bayeux War Cemetery and Memorial

HIGH Cemetery · France · ≈45 min

This is the largest Commonwealth Second World War cemetery in France, with 4,648 burials, mostly men killed in the Normandy campaign. More than 500 graves are of other nationalities, most of them German. It was begun in 1944, completed in 1952 and designed by Philip Hepworth for the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission. Across the road the Bayeux Memorial names more than 1,800 Commonwealth servicemen who died in the Battle of Normandy and have no known grave. Its Latin frieze reads, in translation: 'We, once conquered by William, have now set free the Conqueror's native land.'

What you can see: Rows of Portland-stone headstones in lawns, with the Cross of Sacrifice and Stone of Remembrance. Across the road, the colonnaded Bayeux Memorial carries the names of the missing, and its Latin inscription about William the Conqueror runs across the front.

Plan: CWGC cemetery and memorial: free, open at all times, no booking needed. Park on Boulevard Fabian Ware, opposite the Museum of the Battle of Normandy.

GPS 49.27399, -0.71415

Read more: Bayeux War Cemetery (Wikipedia) · Bayeux War Cemetery (CWGC)

C La Cambe German war cemetery

HIGH Cemetery · France · ≈45 min

La Cambe holds 21,222 German servicemen, the largest German war cemetery in Normandy. It began on 10 June 1944 as a battlefield cemetery laid out by the US 607th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company, with American and German dead in neighbouring fields. After the war the American dead were repatriated or moved to Colleville, and Germans were gathered here from about 1,400 field graves across Normandy. The Volksbund, the German war graves commission, maintains it. Among the dead is Tiger commander Michael Wittmann, killed with his crew on 8 August 1944 and found in 1983.

What you can see: Flat stone grave markers, each usually for two men, lie among groups of dark basalt crosses. A grassy mound in the centre, topped by a large cross and figures, covers a mass grave of 207 unknown and 89 identified soldiers. A peace garden of maple trees and a small information centre are by the entrance.

Plan: Free; the cemetery is open at all times. Small information centre by the car park, just off the N13 near the La Cambe exit.

GPS 49.34194, -1.02639

Read more: La Cambe German war cemetery (Wikipedia) · Volksbund (official)

D Pointe du Hoc

HIGH Fortification · France · ≈60 min · ★ must see

German guns on this 35-metre headland between Utah and Omaha were thought to threaten both beaches. On 6 June 1944, 225 men of the 2nd Ranger Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel James Earl Rudder landed late, at about 07:10, and climbed the cliffs with rocket-fired grapnels and ladders under fire. At the top they found the casemates empty: the guns had been moved inland. Patrols found five of the six in an orchard and wrecked them with thermite grenades by about 09:00. The Rangers then held the headland against counter-attacks until relieved on 8 June, by when only about 90 were still fit to fight.

What you can see: The ground is still a moonscape of bomb craters around ruined casemates and the observation bunker at the cliff edge, topped by the granite Ranger Monument. Look over the edge at the cliffs the Rangers climbed.

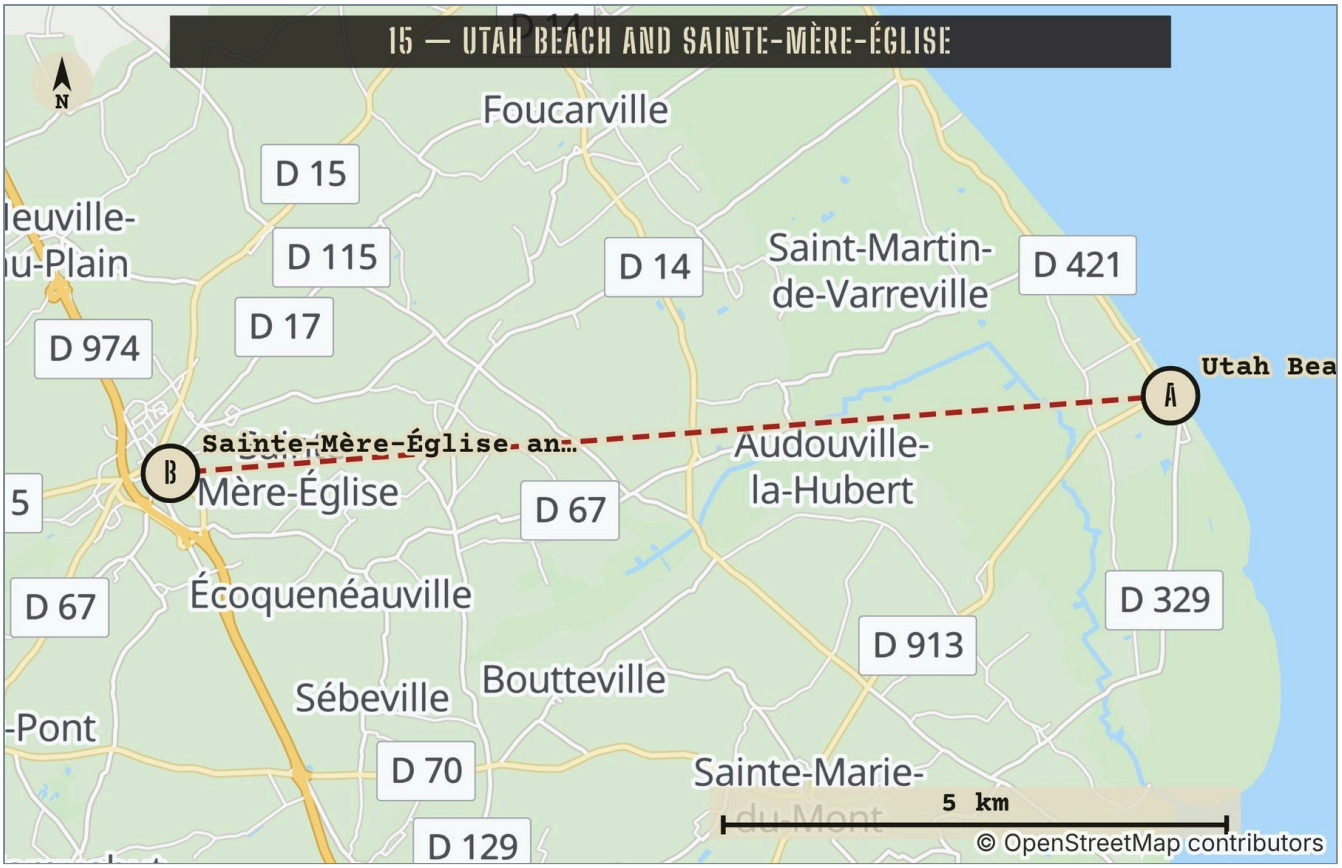
Plan: Free; open daily 09:00–17:00. ABMC works run until mid-2027: the visitor centre and main car park (P1) are closed, and some paths and bunkers are fenced off. Access is by the west path only, with temporary parking signposted. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.39738, -0.98936

Read more: Pointe du Hoc (Wikipedia) · Pointe du Hoc Ranger Monument (ABMC) · Restoration project 2026–27 (ABMC)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Carentan. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

15 — UTAH BEACH AND SAINTE-MÈRE-ÉGLISE



Utah Beach Museum → Sainte-Mère-Église and the Airborne Museum · 2 stops

Finish in Normandy with the American western flank: Utah Beach, where the landing went comparatively smoothly, and Sainte-Mère-Église, the town taken by American paratroopers in the early hours of 6 June.

A Utah Beach Museum, Sainte-Marie-du-Mont

HIGH Museum · France · ≈120 min · ★ must see

Utah was the westernmost beach, added to the plan so that Cherbourg could be taken quickly. On 6 June 1944 the US 4th Infantry Division landed here; currents carried the first waves well south of their planned sector, onto a stretch that turned out to be less heavily defended. Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Jr., with the first wave, decided to bring the follow-up forces in where they had landed. The division got ashore with far lighter losses than at Omaha and linked up with the airborne troops inland. The museum stands on the beach, on the site of a German strongpoint.

What you can see: Displays, models and many vehicles inside and outside, and a hangar housing a B-26 Marauder bomber. Large windows look out on the beach. Outside are monuments, a Sherman tank and the dunes the 4th Division crossed.

Plan: Open daily (Oct–Apr 10:00–18:00, May–Sep 09:30–19:00), except 16 November to 14 December. Adult €10. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.41533, -1.17467

Read more: Utah Beach (Wikipedia) · Utah Beach Museum (official)

Sainte-Mère-Église and the Airborne Museum

HIGH Town · France · ≈120 min · ★ must see

Sainte-Mère-Église sat astride the main road to Cherbourg behind Utah Beach. In the early hours of 6 June 1944 paratroopers of the US 82nd Airborne Division dropped on and around the town; some landed in the square, lit by a burning house, and were shot as they came down. Men of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment took the town before dawn, making it one of the first places in France liberated on D-Day. Paratrooper John Steele was left hanging from the church tower by his parachute. The Airborne Museum, opened in 1964, tells the story of both American airborne divisions.

What you can see: In the square, a dummy paratrooper hangs from the church tower, and inside the church stained-glass windows show paratroopers. The Airborne Museum has a real Waco glider and a C-47 that flew in the 5–6 June drops, plus the walk-through 'Operation Neptune' building.

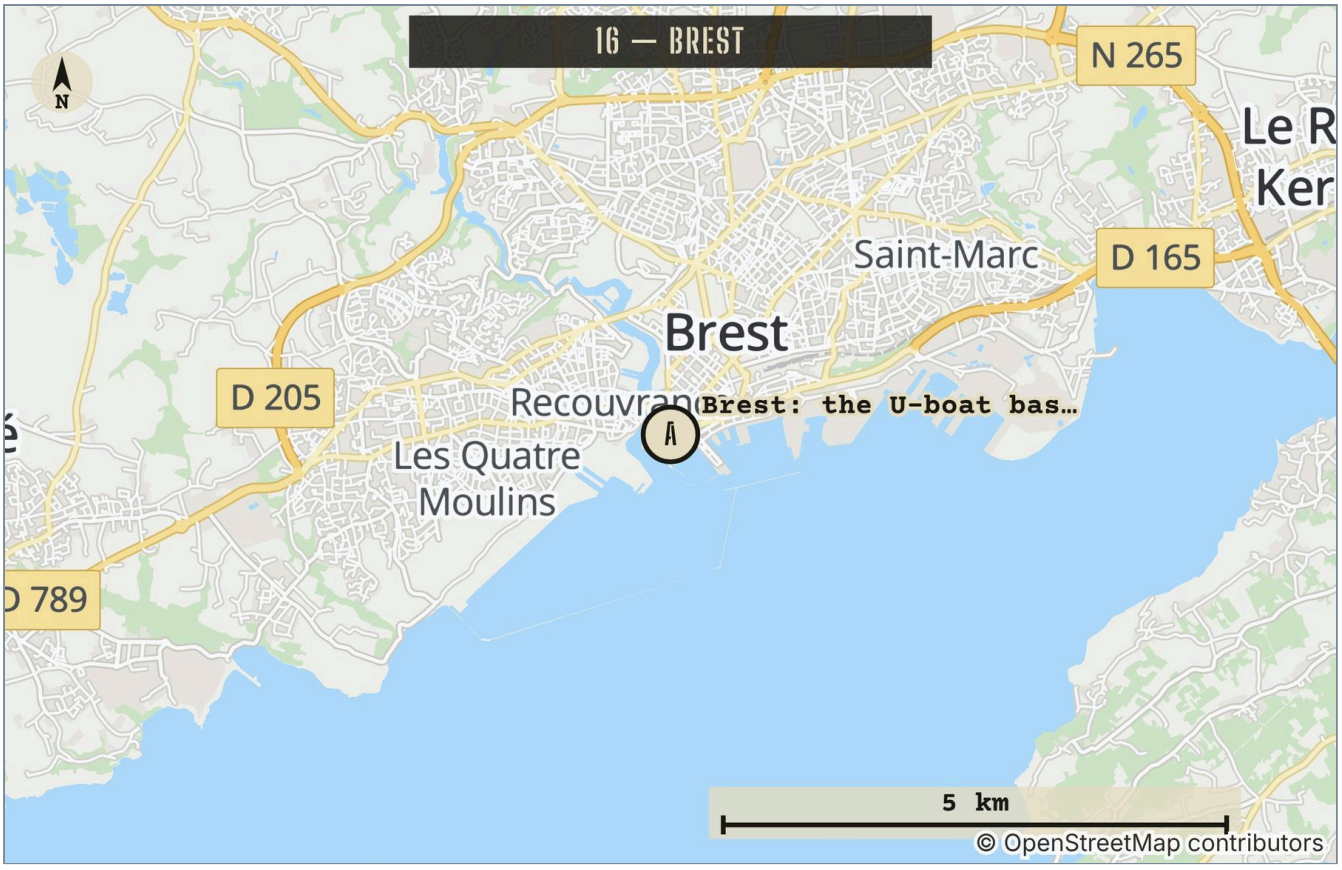
Plan: Airborne Museum open daily (October hours 10:00–18:00). Adult €11.50. The town and church are free. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.40825, -1.31496

Read more: Airborne Museum (Wikipedia) · Airborne Museum (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Sainte-Mère-Église. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

16 — BREST



Brest · 1 stop

A long drive west into Brittany to Brest, the great naval port that became a German U-boat base and was besieged by the Americans in August and September 1944, leaving the city almost entirely destroyed.

A Brest: the U-boat base and the Naval Museum

HIGH Museum · France · ≈120 min

German troops entered Brest on 19 June 1940. From 1941 the Organisation Todt built a U-boat base of 15 basins, its roof thickened to 6.1 m, for the 1st and 9th U-boat Flotillas. It survived 82 raids; Tallboys from 617 Squadron pierced the roof but did little damage inside. After D-Day the city became Festung Brest under General Hermann-Bernhard Ramcke. US VIII Corps besieged it from 7 August to 19 September 1944, taking about 38,000 prisoners; the old city was razed and the port wrecked. On 9 September an explosion in the Sadi-Carnot shelter killed 371 French civilians.

What you can see: The medieval château, still the seat of the Maritime Prefecture, houses the National Naval Museum, with ship models, paintings and the harbour's naval history. Its ramparts look over the military port; the U-boat base lies inside the naval zone and cannot be visited. The Sadi-Carnot shelter, with its memorial, is in the city centre.

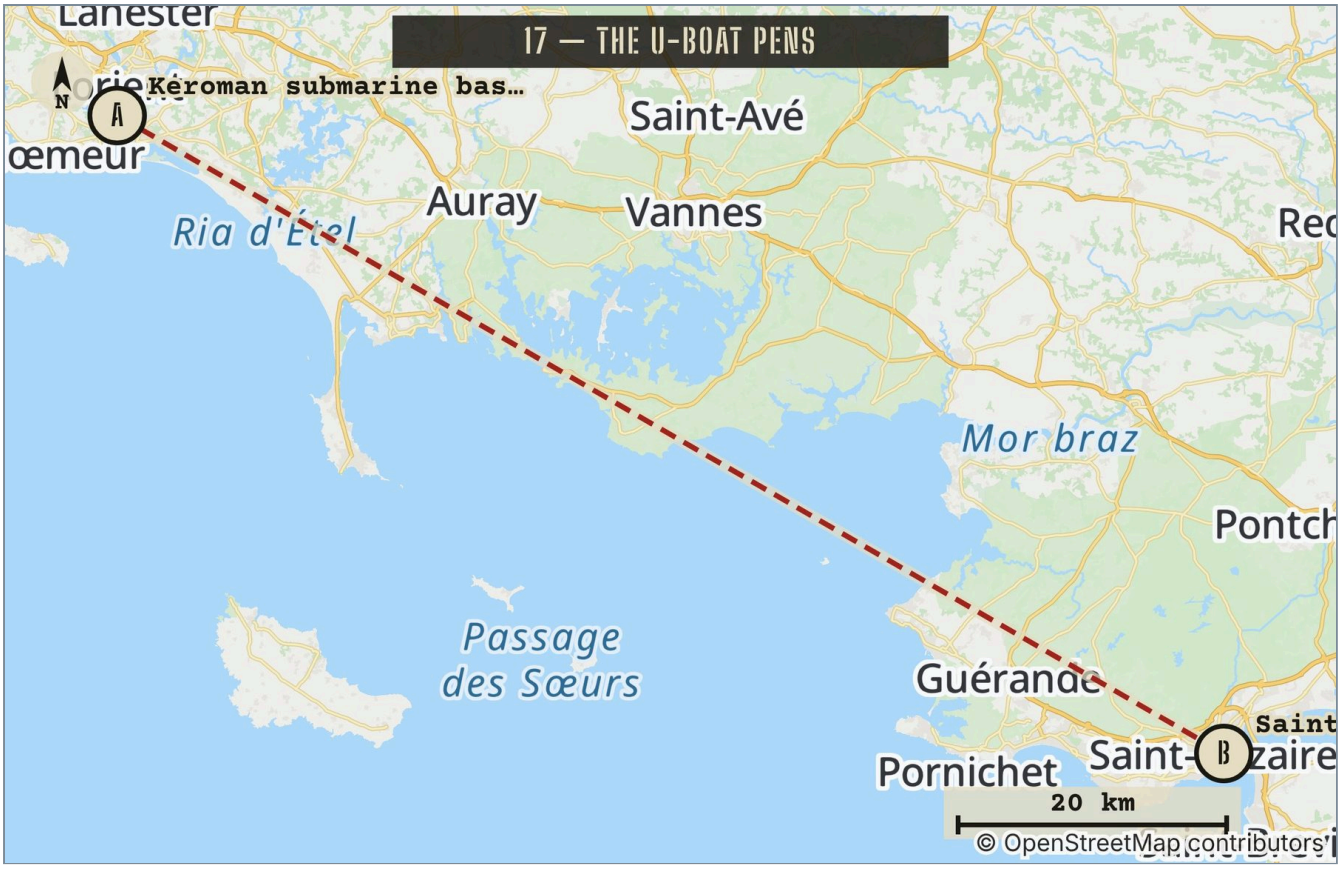
Plan: Naval Museum: 1 Apr–30 Sep daily 10:00–18:30; 1 Oct–31 Mar 13:30–18:30, closed Tuesdays. Adult €12, reduced €10; online booking available. The U-boat base is not open to the public.

GPS 48.38180, -4.49284

Read more: Battle for Brest (Wikipedia) · Château de Brest (Wikipedia) · Abri Sadi-Carnot (Wikipedia FR) · Musée national de la Marine (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Brest. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

17 — THE U-BOAT PENS



Keroman submarine base → Saint-Nazaire · 2 stops

Follow the Breton coast to the U-boat pens that the Allied bombers could not break: Keroman at Lorient, and Saint-Nazaire, whose great dock was put out of action by the commando raid of March 1942.

A Keroman submarine base, Lorient

HIGH Naval base · France · ≈180 min

On 7 July 1940 Fritz-Julius Lemp's U-30 became the first U-boat to refuel at a French base, at Lorient. From November 1940 to March 1942 Admiral Dönitz directed the Atlantic campaign from a villa at Kernevel, facing the harbour. The Kriegsmarine built three huge pen blocks at Keroman from 1941; the largest, K3, could shelter 13 submarines under a roof over seven metres thick. The 2nd and 10th U-boat Flotillas were based here. Raids from January to February 1943 flattened nearly 90% of Lorient but left the base intact. The garrison held out until May 1945.

What you can see: The grey bulk of K1, K2 and K3 dominates the peninsula. Guided tours go inside K3. Nearby you can board the French submarine Flore (S645) and visit a 1942 bunker used to train submariners in escape, now the Musée sous-marin, as well as the Cité de la Voile.

Plan: K3 guided tours from €7 adult (tours also in English). Flore submarine: daily 10:00–18:00 in the autumn school holidays; other dates vary. Musée sous-marin: Sundays 14:00–18:00 all year, daily in summer. Book online at lorientlabase.fr; check the website before you go.

GPS 47.72742, -3.36613

Read more: Keroman Submarine Base (Wikipedia) · Lorient U-boat base (uboat.net) · Flore S645 and museum (official) · K3 guided tour (Lorient tourism)

Saint-Nazaire: U-boat base and Normandie dock

HIGH Naval base · France · ≈180 min

Saint-Nazaire's 14-pen U-boat base, built from February 1941 to mid-1942, served the 6th and 7th Flotillas. Beside it lay the Normandie dry dock, the only Atlantic dock that could take the battleship Tirpitz. In Operation Chariot on 28 March 1942, the explosive-packed destroyer HMS Campbeltown, under Lieutenant Commander Stephen Beattie, rammed the dock gate at 01:34 while commandos of No. 2 Commando under Lieutenant Colonel Charles Newman wrecked installations. Campbeltown blew up around noon, and the dock was out of use until 1948. Of 612 men, 169 were killed and 215 captured; five Victoria Crosses were awarded.

What you can see: The vast concrete base, with a fortified lock of 1943–44 and a roof-top viewing terrace, now holds the Escal'Atlantic liner exhibition and the submarine Espadon. The Normandie dock (Forme Joubert) is close by, and a stele to the Chariot raiders stands in Petit-Maroc facing the Loire.

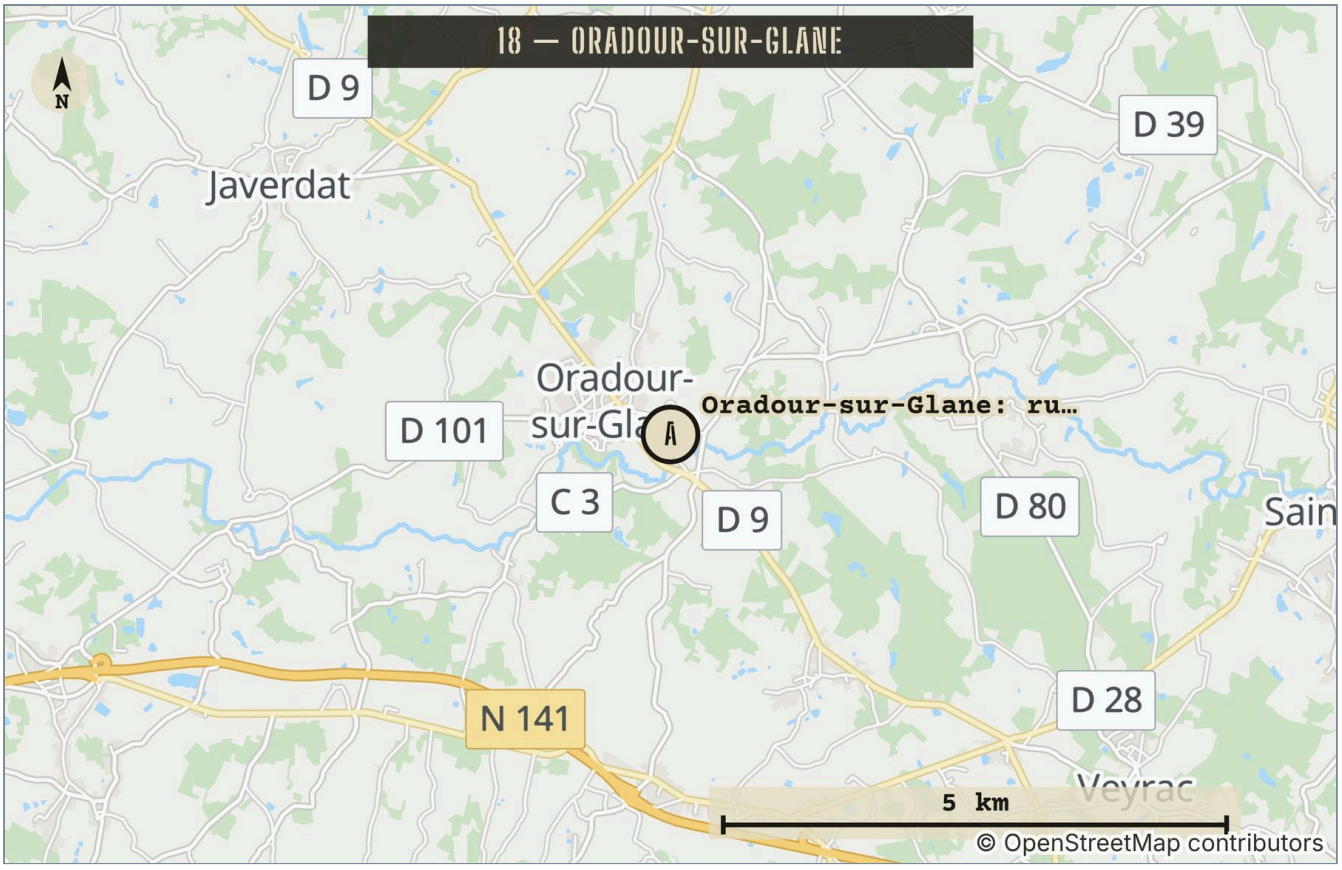
Plan: The base and the Chariot stele are freely accessible. Escal'Atlantic adult €15; submarine Espadon €6; timed slots recommended. A guided tour of the Chariot raid sites costs €6. Hours vary by month; check the website before you go.

GPS 47.27500, -2.20250

Read more: St Nazaire Raid (Wikipedia) · Saint-Nazaire submarine base (Wikipedia) · Saint-Nazaire tourism (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Saint-Nazaire. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

18 — ORADOUR-SUR-GLANE



Oradour-sur-Glane · 1 stop

A long drive south-east to Oradour-sur-Glane, the village where an SS division murdered 643 people in June 1944, left in its ruined state as a memorial to the occupation and the reprisals against the Resistance.

A Oradour-sur-Glane: ruined village and Centre de la mémoire

MEDIUM Ruins · France · ≈180 min · ★ must see

Four days after D-Day, the 1st Battalion of the SS Panzergrenadier Regiment 'Der Führer', part of the 2nd SS Panzer Division Das Reich, surrounded Oradour-sur-Glane. Its commander, Adolf Diekmann, acted after a fellow officer, Helmut Kämpfe, had been seized by the Resistance. The men were shot in barns and sheds, which were set alight; the women and children were locked in the church, which was set on fire. 642 people were killed. Marguerite Rouffanche escaped through a church window. In 1953 a Bordeaux military tribunal convicted 19 of 20 defendants, but an amnesty freed the Alsatian conscripts among them, causing lasting bitterness in the Limousin.

What you can see: The ruined village has been left as it was: burnt-out houses, the church, rusting cars, sewing machines and bicycles, tramlines along the main street, and plaques naming families. The Centre de la mémoire, at the entrance between the old and new villages, displays objects recovered from the ruins.

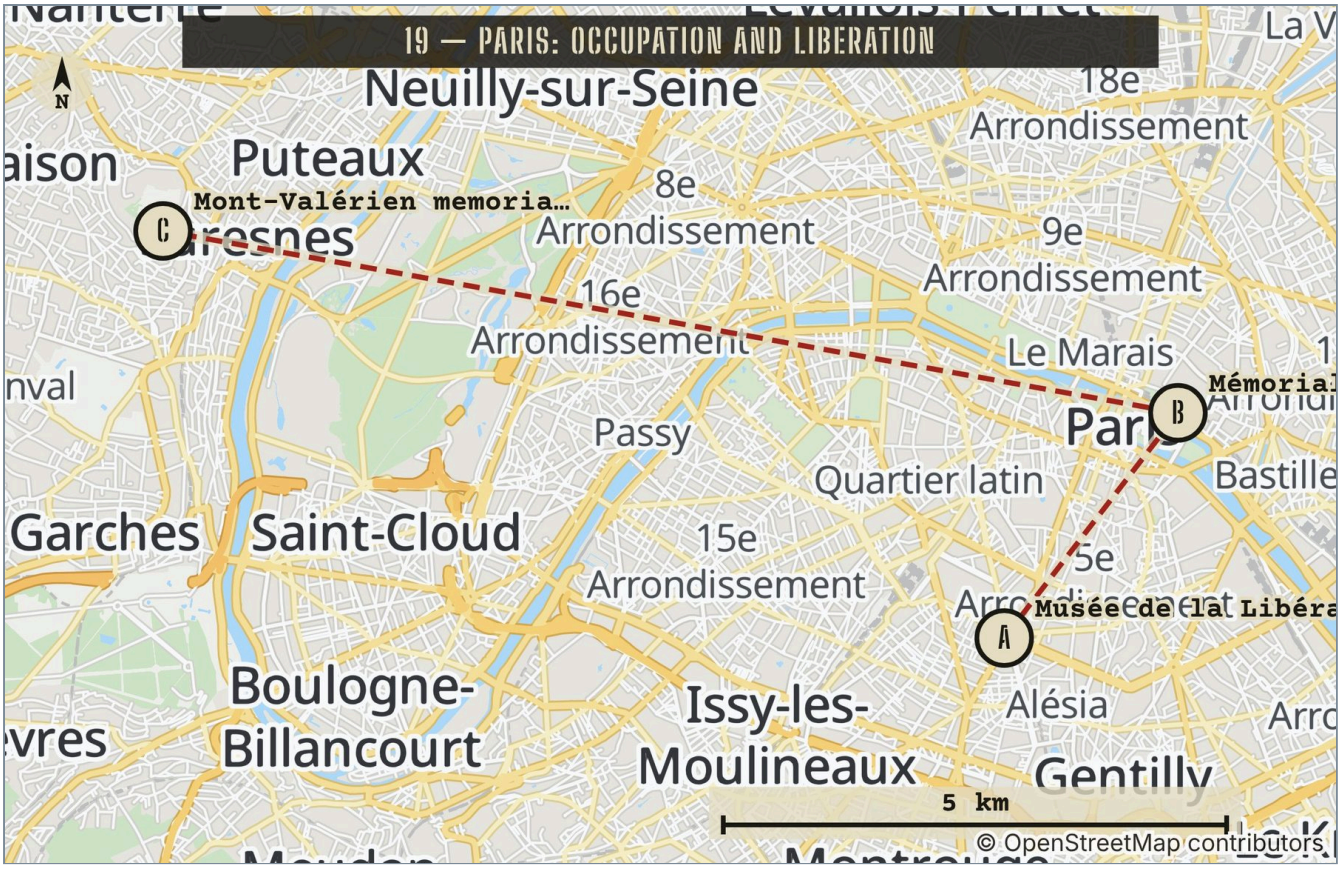
Plan: The ruins are reached through the Centre de la mémoire. Guided visits of the village start from the car-park reception point. Hours and prices for 2026 could not be confirmed; check the website before you go.

GPS 45.92957, 1.04039

Read more: Oradour-sur-Glane massacre (Wikipedia) · Centre de la mémoire (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Limoges. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

19 — PARIS: OCCUPATION AND LIBERATION



Musée de la Libération de Paris – Leclerc – Jean Moulin → Mémorial de la Shoah → Mont-Valérien memorial · 3 stops

After the drive north, a day on Paris under occupation: the museum of the Liberation and Jean Moulin, the memorial to the Jews deported from France, and Mont-Valérien, where more than a thousand hostages and résistants were shot.

A Musée de la Libération de Paris – Leclerc – Jean Moulin

HIGH Museum · France · ≈90 min

The museum opened on 25 August 2019, the 75th anniversary of the Liberation, in the 18th-century Ledoux pavilions on Place Denfert-Rochereau. It brings together collections on General Philippe Leclerc, whose French 2nd Armoured Division entered Paris on 24–25 August 1944, and on Jean Moulin, de Gaulle's envoy who unified the Resistance and died after his arrest in 1943. Beneath the building is the underground command post of Colonel Henri Rol-Tanguy, commander of the Paris-region FFI, from which the uprising of 19–25 August 1944 was directed.

What you can see: Exhibition rooms on occupation, resistance and liberation, with Leclerc and Moulin material, then a descent of about a hundred steps to Rol-Tanguy's command post, a concrete civil-defence shelter with its original telephones and fittings.

Plan: Not verified in October 2026 (official site unreachable). The permanent collection has been free and the museum closed on Mondays; the command-post visit is by timed slot. Check the website before you go.

GPS 48.83411, 2.33180

Read more: Musée de la Libération de Paris (official)

B Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris

HIGH Memorial · France · ≈120 min

Around 76,000 Jews were deported from France between 1942 and 1944, the great majority to Auschwitz, with the help of the Vichy authorities and French police; few returned. The Mémorial de la Shoah in the Marais, formerly the Memorial of the Unknown Jewish Martyr, reopened in its present form on 27 January 2005, inaugurated by President Jacques Chirac. It combines a museum, archive and memorial. The crypt holds ashes from the death camps and the Warsaw Ghetto, buried in 1957 in soil from Israel.

What you can see: In the forecourt, the Wall of Names lists about 76,000 deported Jews by year of deportation. Outside, the Wall of the Righteous honours those recognised by Yad Vashem for saving Jews in France. Inside are the crypt, the permanent exhibition and a room of photographs of deported children.

Plan: Not verified in October 2026 (official site unreachable). Entry has been free, with a security check at the door; closed on Saturdays and some Jewish holidays. Check the website before you go.

GPS 48.85485, 2.35620

Read more: Mémorial de la Shoah (Wikipedia) · Mémorial de la Shoah (official)

C Mont-Valérien memorial, Suresnes

HIGH Memorial · France · ≈90 min

Between 1941 and 1944 the German army shot 1,008 men at Fort Mont-Valérien, a 19th-century fort above the Seine west of Paris; most were resistance fighters and hostages. Prisoners waited in a disused chapel and were taken to a clearing about 100 metres away to be shot. Among them were the naval officer Honoré d'Estienne d'Orves on 29 August 1941, the communist deputy Gabriel Péri on 15 December 1941, and Missak Manouchian and members of his FTP-MOI group, the 'Affiche Rouge', on 21 February 1944. De Gaulle consecrated the site as a memorial on 18 June 1945.

What you can see: The Memorial of Fighting France, a long wall with a large Cross of Lorraine, stands below the fort. A path leads up to the chapel, with graffiti left by the condemned, and to the execution clearing, where a monument records the names of those shot.

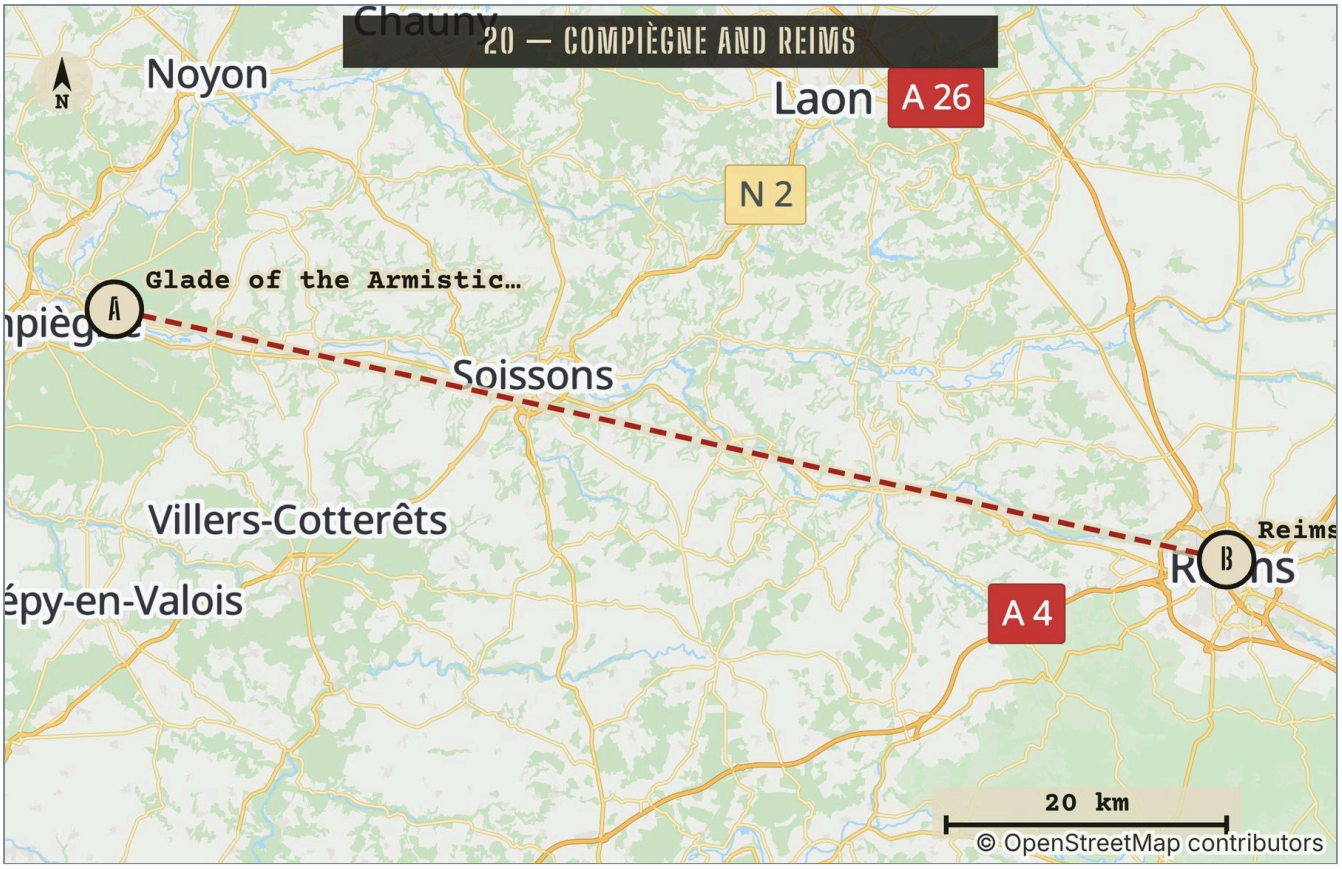
Plan: Not verified in October 2026 (official site unreachable). The memorial is managed by the Ministry of the Armed Forces; visits to the chapel and clearing have been free, partly by guided tour. Check the website before you go.

GPS 48.87160, 2.21383

Read more: Fort Mont-Valérien (Wikipedia) · Mont-Valérien (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Paris. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

20 — COMPIÈGNE AND REIMS



Glade of the Armistice → Reims Surrender Museum · 2 stops

Two surrenders, five years apart: the clearing at Compiègne where Hitler made France sign the armistice of June 1940, and the schoolhouse at Reims where Germany surrendered to Eisenhower in May 1945.

A Glade of the Armistice, Compiègne

HIGH Memorial · France · ≈90 min

On 11 November 1918 Germany signed the armistice ending the First World War in Marshal Foch's railway carriage, CIWL No. 2419D, in this glade in the Forest of Compiègne. In June 1940 Hitler chose the same place and the same carriage for France's surrender, arriving with Göring, Keitel and Ribbentrop; the armistice was signed on 22 June. The Germans took the carriage to Berlin as a trophy and destroyed the Alsace-Lorraine monument, leaving Foch's statue standing. In 1945 SS guards burned the carriage at Crawinkel in Thuringia as American troops approached.

What you can see: A long clearing with the rail tracks marking where the two trains stood, the statue of Foch and the Alsace-Lorraine monument of a German eagle pierced by a sword. The museum holds an identical carriage of the same series, renumbered 2419D in 1950, furnished as in 1918.

Plan: The glade is open; the museum (Mémorial de l'Armistice) charges admission. Hours and prices for 2026 could not be confirmed; check the website before you go.

GPS 49.42722, 2.90639

Read more: Glade of the Armistice (Wikipedia) · Mémorial de l'Armistice (official)

Reims Surrender Museum (Musée de la Reddition)

HIGH Headquarters · France · ≈60 min · ★ must see

In 1945 a technical school in Reims, today the Lycée Franklin-Roosevelt, was Eisenhower's forward headquarters (SHAEF). At 02:41 on 7 May 1945, in the map room, General Alfred Jodl signed the unconditional surrender of all German forces, with Admiral von Friedeburg and Major Wilhelm Oxenius. General Walter Bedell Smith signed for the Allies, Soviet General Ivan Susloparov signed on his own initiative without Moscow's approval, and French General François Sevez signed as a witness. Stalin insisted on a second signing in Berlin, so the official date of capitulation remained 8 May. The museum opened in 1985.

What you can see: The war room is preserved as it was on 7 May 1945, its walls still covered with the operations maps, with the table where the surrender was signed. Other rooms show a film in four languages, uniforms, medals and newspapers of the day.

Plan: Not verified in October 2026 (city museum site unreachable). Address: 12 rue Franklin Roosevelt, Reims. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.26298, 4.02693

Read more: Musée de la Reddition (Wikipedia FR)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Reims. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

21 — SEDAN AND THE MAGINOT LINE



Sedan → Fort de Schoenenbourg · 2 stops

Follow the 1940 campaign east, from Sedan, where German panzers crossed the Meuse and broke the French front, to the Maginot Line fort at Schoenenbourg, which held out but was simply bypassed.

A Sedan: the Meuse crossing, May 1940

LOW Battlefield · France · ≈90 min

Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps reached the Meuse at Sedan on 12 May 1940 after crossing the Ardennes. On 13 May, after hours of Luftwaffe bombing that cut French communications, the 1st Panzer Division crossed near Gaulier and Floing with the Großdeutschland regiment, the 10th Panzer near Wadelincourt and the 2nd Panzer at Donchery. At Wadelincourt Feldwebel Walter Rubarth's small engineer team knocked out seven bunkers. That evening the French 55th Infantry Division collapsed in the 'panic of Bulson'. On 14 May Allied bombers attacked the Meuse bridges and suffered heavy losses, and the panzers broke out towards the Channel.

What you can see: The river Meuse below the town, with the heights of La Marfée rising to the south where the French bunkers stood. Walk or drive the riverbank at Gaulier, Floing and Wadelincourt to see how narrow the river is and how the high ground overlooks it.

Plan: Open battlefield, free. There is no dedicated 1940 visitor centre confirmed for this stop; bunker remains on the heights may be on private land, so view them from public roads.

GPS 49.70250, 4.94250

Read more: Battle of Sedan (1940) (Wikipedia)

Fort de Schoenenbourg (Maginot Line)

MEDIUM Fortification · France · ≈120 min

Schoenenbourg is a gros ouvrage of the Maginot Line, with six combat blocks and two entrances linked by deep tunnels, manned in 1939 by 491 men and 17 officers under Commandant Reynier. In June 1940, with the line outflanked, it held out alone: Stukas attacked on 19, 20 and 21 June, and from 21 June 420 mm siege mortars shelled it for three days. Its walls cracked but it kept firing; over the campaign it fired more than 17,000 shells and took over 3,000 shells and 160 bombs. Undefeated, it surrendered on 1 July 1940 under the armistice.

What you can see: A walk of several kilometres through tunnels 30 metres underground, past barracks, kitchens, the power station and magazines, to the combat blocks and a retractable gun turret. Above ground, the craters of 1940 are still visible.

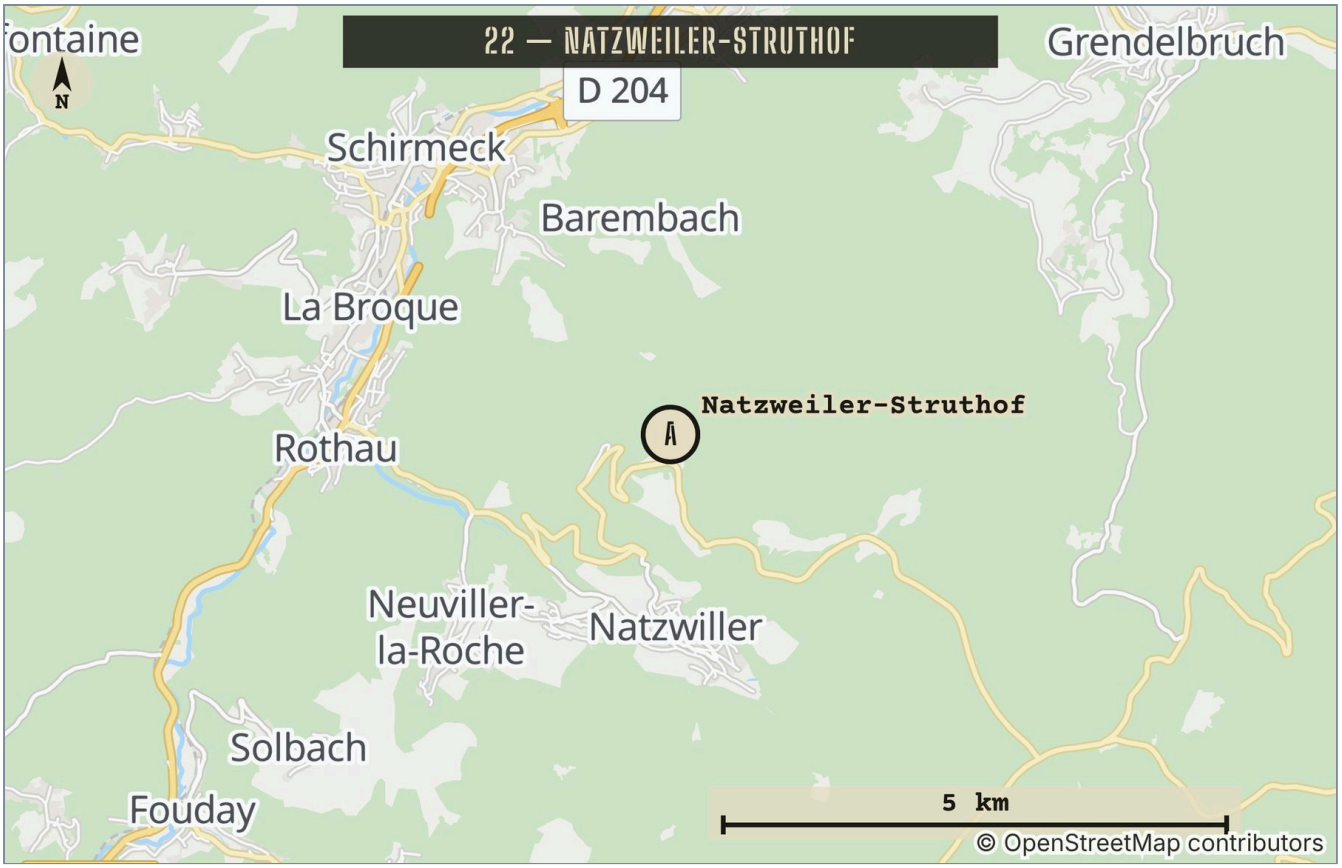
Plan: Self-guided visits start at Block 7, the ammunition entrance. Hours and prices for 2026 could not be confirmed. Underground temperature is low, so bring a warm layer; check the website before you go.

GPS 48.96667, 7.91194

Read more: Ouvrage Schoenenbourg (Wikipedia) · Fort de Schoenenbourg (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Wissembourg. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

22 — NATZWEILER-STRUTHOF



Natzweiler-Struthof · 1 stop

Natzweiler-Struthof in the Vosges mountains was the only concentration camp on French soil, holding Resistance prisoners from across Europe; afterwards the drive continues north into Luxembourg.

A Natzweiler-Struthof

MEDIUM Camp memorial · France · ≈180 min · ★ must see

The SS opened Natzweiler-Struthof on 1 May 1941 at 800 metres in the Vosges, beside a quarry, in Alsace annexed by Germany. About 52,000 prisoners of 32 nationalities passed through it and its subcamps, many of them Nacht und Nebel prisoners from resistance movements. In 1943, 86 Jewish people selected at Auschwitz were gassed here for August Hirt's skeleton collection at Strasbourg university. On 6 July 1944 four British SOE agents, Andrée Borrel, Vera Leigh, Diana Rowden and Sonya Olschanezky, were executed. The camp was evacuated in early September 1944 and found by the French First Army on 23 November.

What you can see: Terraces of the camp descend the hillside inside barbed wire, with the gallows, the crematorium and cell block, and a museum barrack. Above stand the national necropolis and the tall memorial to the deported. The European Centre of Deported Resistance Members is at the entrance; the gas chamber lies about 2 km down the road.

Plan: The official site currently warns that access to the camp may be partly closed after weather damage, while the European Centre and museum barrack stay open. Hours and prices for 2026 were not available; check the website before you go.

GPS 48.45667, 7.25389

Read more: Natzweiler-Struthof (Wikipedia) · Struthof / CERD (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Wissembourg. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

23 — LUXEMBOURG: PATTON AND THE SAUER



Luxembourg American Cemetery → National Museum of Military History · 2 stops

Begin the Battle of the Bulge on its southern flank in Luxembourg: the American cemetery at Hamm where Patton is buried, and the museum at Diekirch on the river Sauer, crossed by his Third Army in January 1945.

A Luxembourg American Cemetery, Hamm

HIGH Cemetery · Luxembourg · ≈60 min

The 609th Quartermaster Company of the US Third Army opened a temporary cemetery here at Hamm on 29 December 1944, while the Battle of the Bulge was still being fought. Dedicated in 1960, the cemetery covers about 20 hectares and holds 5,076 American dead, most of whom died in Luxembourg between September 1944 and February 1945. Among them are 101 unknowns, 22 pairs of brothers, 118 Jewish soldiers under Star of David headstones and an army nurse. General George S. Patton, commander of the Third Army, who died in December 1945, is buried at the head of the graves between the two flagpoles.

What you can see: Pass the white stone chapel with its stained-glass window of five US command insignia and mosaic ceiling. Headstones fan out across the lawn; Patton's grave stands alone at the front between the flagpoles, facing his men.

Plan: Open daily 09:00–17:00, free, with a car park (Visit Luxembourg listing, October 2026). Run by the American Battle Monuments Commission; hours can change, so check before you go.

GPS 49.61167, 6.18556

Read more: Luxembourg American Cemetery and Memorial (Wikipedia) · Luxembourg American Cemetery (Visit Luxembourg)

National Museum of Military History, Diekirch

HIGH Museum · Luxembourg · ≈120 min

Diekirch, on the Sauer in north-eastern Luxembourg, lay on the southern flank of the Bulge. On the night of 18 January 1945 units of the US 5th Infantry Division crossed the river here as the Americans went over to the offensive. The museum grew out of the Diekirch Historical Museum, opened in 1984 in part of the former brewery, and now fills about 3,200 m² over four floors. Its life-size dioramas, centred on the night crossing of the Sauer, are surrounded by weapons, uniforms, photographs and more than 50 vehicles and guns from both sides. A second section covers the Luxembourg Army from 1815 to its UN missions.

What you can see: Start with the large diorama of the night-time Sauer crossing, then work through four floors of dioramas, vehicles and personal belongings from both sides. Look for the working Enigma cipher machine. The museum is in the old brewery buildings about 200 m from the town centre.

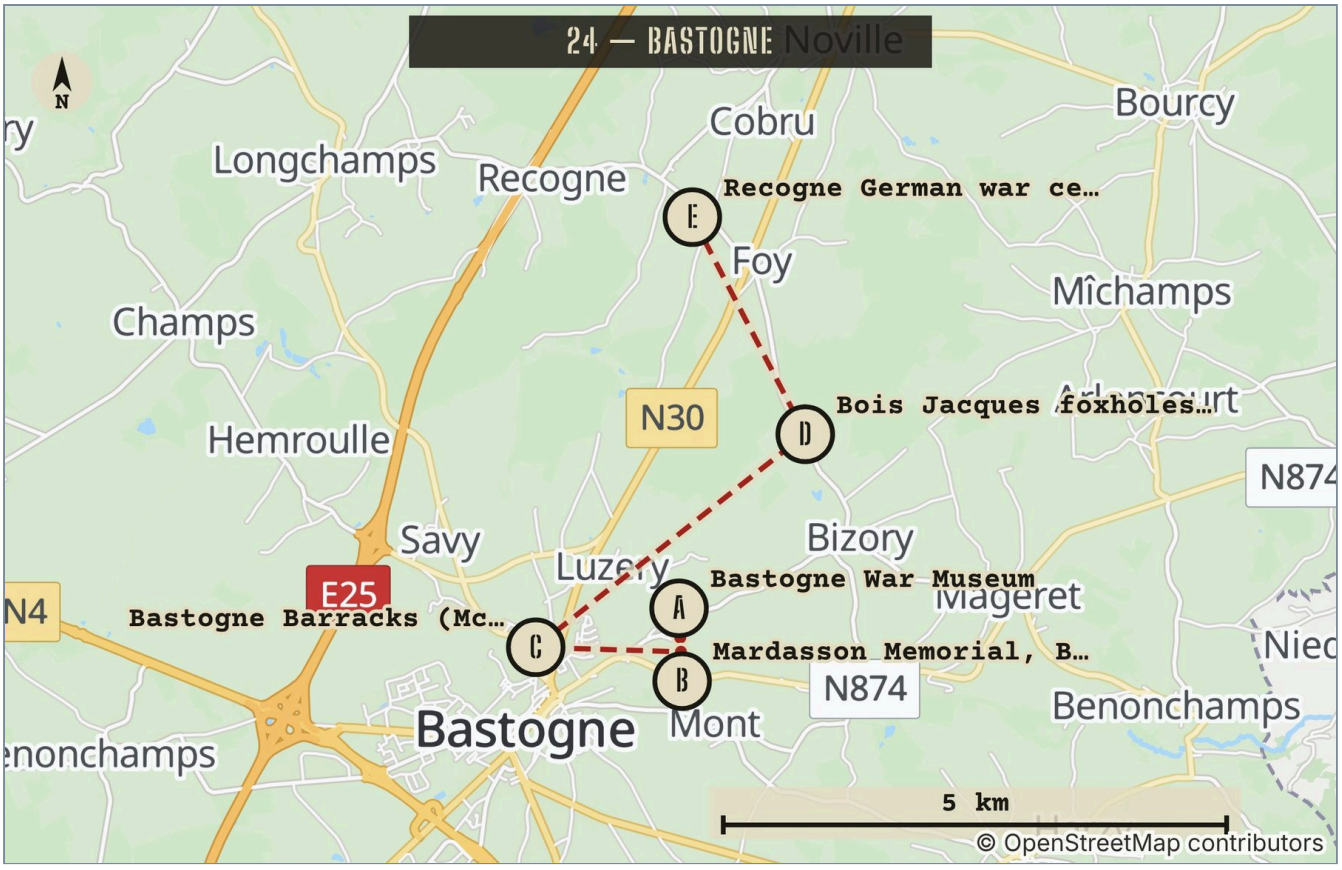
Plan: Check opening days and prices on mnhm.lu before you go; the site could not be read in October 2026. Multilingual group tours can be booked through reception@mnhm.lu or +352 808 908.

GPS 49.87102, 6.15905

Read more: National Museum of Military History (Wikipedia) · MNHM Diekirch (Liberation Route Europe) · MNHM (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Luxembourg. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

24 — BASTOGNE



Bastogne War Museum → Mardasson Memorial → Bastogne Barracks → Bois Jacques foxholes → Recogne German war cemetery · 5 stops

A day at the centre of the Bulge: Bastogne, the crossroads town held by the encircled 101st Airborne in December 1944, with its museum, memorial, McAuliffe's headquarters and the foxholes in the Bois Jacques.

A Bastogne War Museum

HIGH Museum · Belgium · ≈180 min · ★ must see

Opened on 21 March 2014 on the site of the former Bastogne Historical Center, the museum tells the story of the Battle of the Bulge from its origins to its aftermath. Bastogne mattered because all seven main roads through the central Ardennes met there. The 101st Airborne Division arrived on 19 December 1944 and, with Combat Command B of the 10th Armored Division and a scratch force of stragglers called Team SNAFU, held the town after Lüttwitz's XLVII Panzer Corps cut the roads on 20–21 December. The exhibition follows four fictional characters, an American paratrooper, a German Volksgrenadier officer, a Bastogne teacher and a 13-year-old boy, through the siege, with three immersive shows along the way.

What you can see: A long chronological walk-through with audio guide: original weapons, uniforms and vehicles, three immersive shows including a cellar scene under bombing, and near the end a restored 11th Armored Division tank stopped on 30 December 1944. The Mardasson Memorial stands next door.

Plan: Open daily 09:30–18:00 in October 2026. Tickets are sold online in time slots; booking ahead is advised in summer and around the December anniversaries. The ticket also covers the Bois Jacques Battlefield trail. Allow at least two hours. Check the website for prices.

GPS 50.01061, 5.73919

Read more: Bastogne War Museum (Wikipedia) · Siege of Bastogne (Wikipedia) · Bastogne War Museum (official)

Mardasson Memorial, Bastogne

HIGH Memorial · Belgium · ≈30 min · ★ must see

The memorial stands on Mardasson hill, chosen partly because it lies on the divide between the Meuse and Rhine basins and looks over the ground held during the siege. Earth from the site was presented to President Truman on 4 July 1946. Designed by the Belgian architect Georges Dedoyard, the memorial was inaugurated on 16 July 1950 in the presence of Prince Baudouin and General Anthony McAuliffe. It is a five-pointed star 12 m high with 31 m sides, carrying the names of the then 48 US states and, on its pillars, the history of the battle and the main American units. In 2020 the Belgian state handed its management to the American Battle Monuments Commission.

What you can see: Climb the spiral stairs to the walkway on top for a panorama of the siege perimeter. Read the ten stone panels describing the battle and the Latin dedication from the Belgian people, then go down to the crypt with three altars and mosaics by Fernand Léger.

Plan: Open-air memorial beside the Bastogne War Museum, free, with shared parking. Run since 2020 by the American Battle Monuments Commission, which now calls it the Battle of the Bulge Monument. Crypt access may be limited; check before you go.

GPS 50.00933, 5.73927

Read more: Mardasson Memorial (Wikipedia) · Mardasson Memorial (Liberation Route Europe)

Bastogne Barracks (McAuliffe's HQ)

HIGH Headquarters · Belgium · ≈120 min

In December 1944 the Heintz Barracks on the La Roche road housed the headquarters of the 101st Airborne Division. With its commander, Maxwell Taylor, away, the division was led by Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe. On 22 December General Heinrich von Lüttwitz of XLVII Panzer Corps sent a written demand for surrender; McAuliffe's reply was 'NUTS!'. Bad weather prevented air resupply until 23 December, and Patton's Third Army reached the town from Assenois on 26 December. The barracks remained a Belgian Army site and since 2010 has been an interpretation centre, now run by the War Heritage Institute, with a workshop restoring armoured vehicles from the national collection.

What you can see: Visits take you to the 'Nuts' cellar, where McAuliffe's headquarters is reconstructed, then through renovated halls of Second World War vehicles and equipment. You may see restorers at work in the vehicle workshop and, on some days, engines being run.

Plan: Tuesday–Sunday 09:00–17:00; closed Mondays and 1 Jan, 1 May, 1 Nov, 25 Dec. Adults €12, ages 6–18 and students €9, card only; free from 13:00 on the first Wednesday of the month. Guided group tours must be booked three weeks ahead. Check the website before you go.

GPS 50.00973, 5.71891

Read more: Siege of Bastogne (Wikipedia) · Bastogne Barracks (official)

Bois Jacques foxholes, Foy

MEDIUM Battlefield · Belgium · ≈60 min

During the siege, Easy Company, 2nd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, held foxholes in the Bois Jacques as part of the Bastogne perimeter, facing German-held Foy. The men endured snow, shortages and German tree bursts that showered splinters and shrapnel into their holes. On 24 December about 45 Germans attacked the position and were beaten off, for one American casualty. On 13 January 1945 the company attacked out of the wood to retake Foy. Their story became widely known through Stephen E. Ambrose's book Band of Brothers and the television series. A memorial on the Bizory–Foy road honours the company and 14 of its men killed in the area.

What you can see: From the Easy Company memorial on the Bizory–Foy road, paths lead into the managed pine wood where the hollows of foxholes are still visible. Stay on the paths and leave anything you find. Look out across the open ground towards Foy, which the company attacked in January 1945.

Plan: Public woodland, free and open at all times; park near the memorial. The Bastogne War Museum's Bois Jacques Battlefield trail, with six geolocated 360° videos in an app, is included in a museum ticket. Wear boots outside summer.

GPS 50.02890, 5.75671

Read more: Siege of Bastogne (Wikipedia) · Bois Jacques Battlefield (Bastogne War Museum) · Jack's Wood (Liberation Route Europe)

Recogne German war cemetery

HIGH Cemetery · Belgium · ≈30 min

The US Army opened a cemetery at Recogne, north of Bastogne, on 4 February 1945, burying about 2,700 Americans and over 3,000 Germans there. The American dead were later moved to Henri-Chapelle or repatriated, and the Belgian authorities concentrated German graves from field burials and local cemeteries here or at Lommel. Recogne now holds 6,807 German dead, most killed around Bastogne in the Battle of the Bulge, together with men who died in 1940 or during the occupation. The cemetery passed to the German War Graves Commission (Volksbund) in the 1950s and reopened to the public in 1960 after refurbishment.

What you can see: Beyond the entrance building, rows of low grey stone crosses stand on lawn among trees. Compare its subdued atmosphere with the white headstones and open lawns of the American cemeteries at Henri-Chapelle and Hamm.

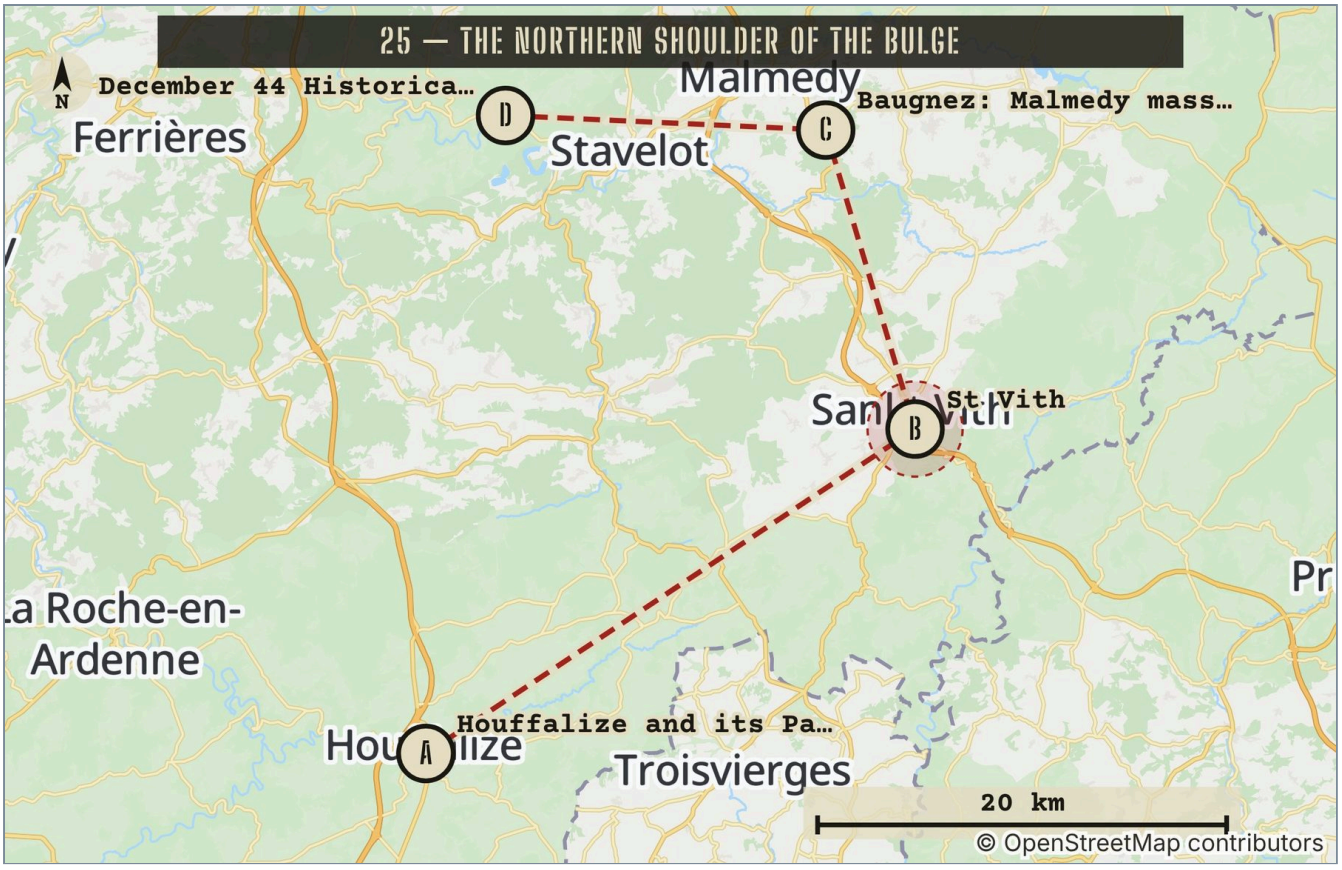
Plan: Open-air cemetery, free to visit, just off the N30 about 4 km north of Bastogne. Opening arrangements could not be checked on the Volksbund website; check before you go.

GPS 50.04842, 5.74087

Read more: Recogne German war cemetery (Wikipedia) · German War Cemetery Recogne (TracesOfWar)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Bastogne. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

25 — THE NORTHERN SHOULDER OF THE BULGE



Houffalize and its Panther tank → St Vith → Baugnez → December 44 Historical Museum · 4 stops

Head north across the Bulge, from Houffalize and St Vith, where the German advance was delayed, to Baugnez, where American prisoners were massacred, and La Gleize, where Peiper's battle group was finally stopped.

A Houffalize and its Panther tank

MEDIUM Memorial · Belgium · ≈45 min

Houffalize, on the Ourthe north of Bastogne, was taken by the 116th Panzer Division on 19 December 1944 and became a crossroads for German supply columns. On the night of 5–6 January 1945 about ninety RAF Lancasters flattened the town to block it. The Germans withdrew on 15 January, and on 16 January the US First Army, attacking from the north, and the Third Army from the south met at Houffalize, closing the Bulge. The Panther now on display, originally numbered 111, had fought in Normandy, the Netherlands and the Hürtgen Forest. It overturned into the Ourthe from a bridge, killing its five crew, was pulled out in 1948 and restored in 2023.

What you can see: The restored Panther Ausf. G stands on Square Saint-Pair by the Bastogne road, with about a dozen information panels and a small exhibition in a reconstructed period barracks. Walk to the Ourthe bridge on the road to La Roche, where the tank fell.

Plan: The tank and panels can be seen at any time, free. The small exhibition has limited opening; contact the Houffalize tourist office (+32 61 28 81 16) or check coeurdelardenne.be before you go.

GPS 50.12894, 5.79070

Read more: Houffalize (Wikipedia) · The Panther tank of Houffalize (Europe Remembers) · Cœur de l'Ardenne tourism (official)

B St Vith

LOW Town · Belgium · ≈60 min

St Vith, a German-speaking town transferred to Belgium in 1925, controlled a road junction the German plan expected to take by 18:00 on 17 December 1944. Instead Brigadier General Bruce Clarke's Combat Command B of the 7th Armored Division, with the 424th Infantry of the 106th Division, CCB of the 9th Armored Division and the 112th Infantry, held the approaches until 21 December, wrecking the German timetable. Meanwhile the 106th's 422nd and 423rd Infantry, cut off in the Schnee Eifel, surrendered on 19 December, about 7,000 men. American and RAF bombers destroyed the town on 25–26 December, and American forces retook it on 23 January 1945.

What you can see: Almost nothing pre-war survived except the Büchel Tower. Look for the 106th Infantry Division monument on Klosterstrasse, the 2nd Infantry Division memorial and the plaques in the park on Pulverstrasse. The Prümerberg, just east of the town, was the last defensive line.

Plan: A town stop; the memorials are outdoors and free. Combine with the 106th Division POW memorial at Schönberg and the 168th Engineer Combat Battalion memorial on the Prümerberg. Ask the local tourist office for walking routes.

GPS 50.27214, 6.12839

Read more: Battle of St. Vith (Wikipedia) · Sankt Vith (Wikipedia)

C Baugnez: Malmedy massacre memorial

HIGH Memorial · Belgium · ≈30 min

On 17 December 1944 the vanguard of Kampfgruppe Peiper met a convoy of Battery B, 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion, at the Baugnez crossroads south-east of Malmedy. After a brief fight the Americans surrendered and were assembled in a field beside the road, where they were machine-gunned; many were then shot in the head. Eighty-four prisoners died. Some feigned death or ran, and 43 survivors reached American-held Malmedy, spreading word of the killings. At the Dachau trials in 1946, 73 men were convicted and 43 sentenced to death, Peiper among them. No death sentence was carried out, and Peiper was paroled in December 1956.

What you can see: A low stone wall at the junction carries a plaque explaining the events and stones naming the dead. The field where the prisoners were assembled and shot lies beside the road. Across the junction stands the building of the former Baugnez 44 museum.

Plan: Roadside memorial, free and accessible at all times; take care at the busy N62/N632 junction. The Baugnez 44 Historical Center opposite was reported closed in 2023 and its old web address now shows unrelated content, so do not plan on visiting it.

GPS 50.40369, 6.06674

Read more: Malmedy massacre (Wikipedia) · Baugnez (Wikipedia) · Memorial Prisoners of War Baugnez (TracesOfWar)

D December 44 Historical Museum, La Gleize

HIGH Museum · Belgium · ≈90 min

Kampfgruppe Peiper, the armoured spearhead drawn from the 1st SS Panzer Division, drove west from 16 December 1944 towards the Meuse. Without supplies or contact with other German units, it was stopped in the Amblève valley. American attacks at Stoumont forced its remnants back to La Gleize, where they were almost trapped; on 21 December they captured Hal McCown, commander of 2nd Battalion, 119th Infantry. Short of fuel and with heavy losses, Joachim Peiper abandoned his vehicles on 24 December and led his remaining men out on foot, leaving wounded and prisoners behind. By his own account 717 men got back out of 3,000. The village museum, renovated in 2013, is devoted to these events.

What you can see: On the square stands Tiger II number 213, abandoned in December 1944, its broken gun barrel repaired in 1972. Inside the museum are 17 dioramas, vehicles and guns, Peiper's map case and many objects found around La Gleize. The church opposite was badly damaged in 1944 and rebuilt.

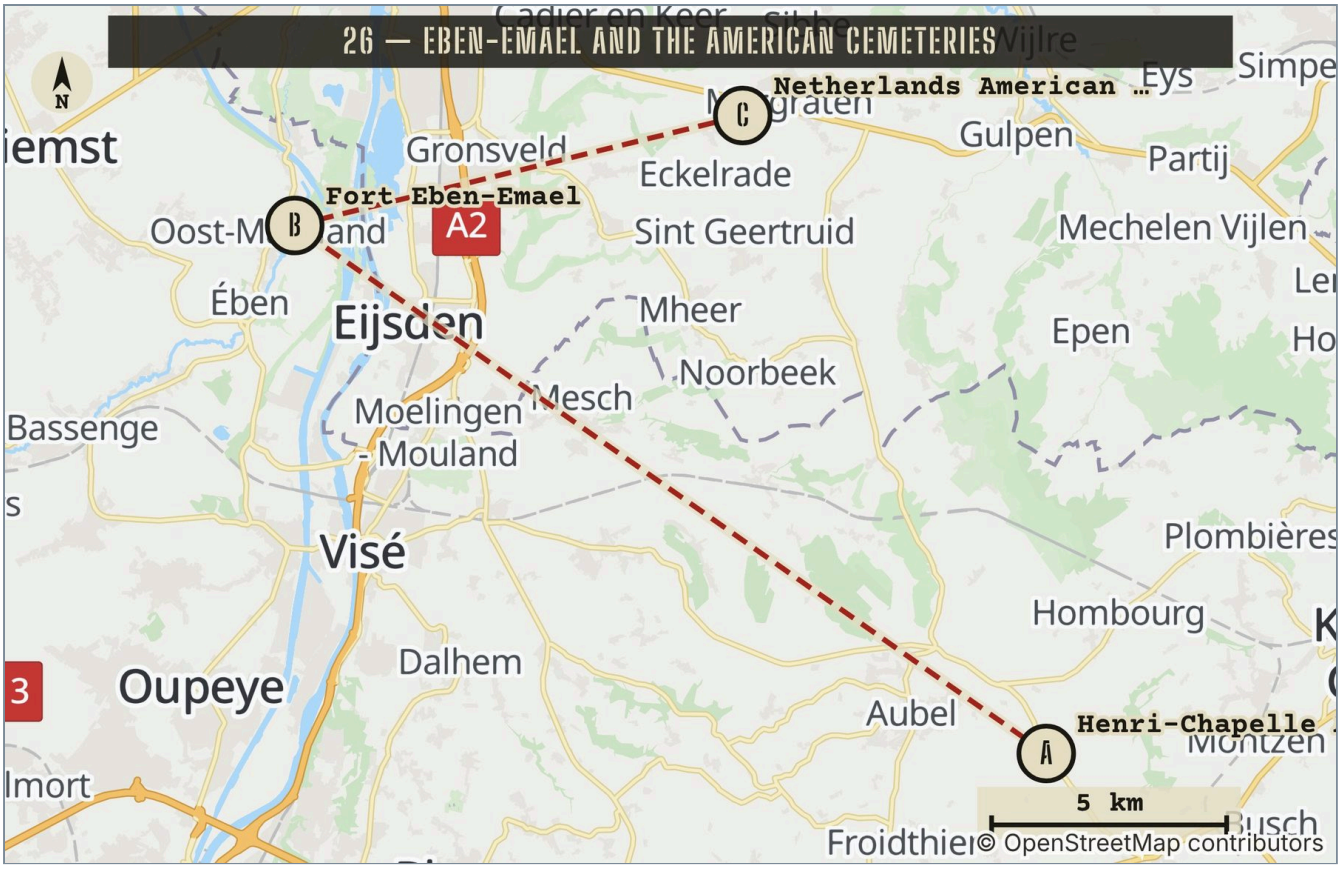
Plan: Private museum on the village square opposite the church. Opening is seasonal and could not be checked online (the site blocks automated reading); check december44.com before you go. The Tiger II outside can be seen at any time, free.

GPS 50.41006, 5.84559

Read more: La Gleize (Wikipedia) · Joachim Peiper (Wikipedia) · December 44 Museum (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Malmedy. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

26 — EBEN-EMAEL AND THE AMERICAN CEMETERIES



Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery → Fort Eben-Emael → Netherlands American Cemetery · 3 stops

A day where Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany meet: Fort Eben-Emael, taken by German glider troops in May 1940, and the two great American cemeteries at Henri-Chapelle and Margraten, before crossing to Aachen.

A Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery

HIGH Cemetery · Belgium · ≈60 min

Troops of the US 1st Infantry Division liberated this area on 12 September 1944, and a temporary cemetery opened a few hundred metres to the north on 28 September. The permanent cemetery, dedicated in 1960, covers 57 acres on a ridge near Hombourg. It holds 7,992 American dead, 94 of them unknown, most killed in the Battle of the Bulge or the advance into Germany in 1944–45, together with airmen lost over the region. A colonnade lists 450 missing; bronze rosettes mark those since found and identified. In 1947 the first repatriation of American war dead to the United States began here.

What you can see: Headstones curve across a sloping lawn facing the memorial, with a road running through the site. The chapel and map room show carved granite maps of the American advance, the colonnade carries the names of the missing, and the Angel of Peace statue stands nearby.

Plan: Free. American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries normally open daily 09:00–17:00, closed 25 December and 1 January; the ABMC website could not be checked, so confirm before you go. Staff at the visitor centre can help find a grave.

GPS 50.69661, 5.89908

Read more: Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery and Memorial (Wikipedia) · Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery (Liberation Route Europe)

B Fort Eben-Emael

HIGH Fortification · Belgium · ≈180 min

Built in 1931–35 above the Caestert cutting of the Albert Canal, Eben-Emael was the largest fort of the Fortified Position of Liège, armed with 120 mm, 75 mm and 60 mm guns in turrets and casemates and linked by over 4 km of galleries. At dawn on 10 May 1940 Assault Group Granit of Sturmabteilung Koch, 85 men in 11 DFS 230 gliders, set out for its roof. Nine landed; Oberleutnant Rudolf Witzig's tow rope snapped, so Oberfeldwebel Helmut Wenzel took charge. Shaped charges and a flamethrower knocked out guns and cupolas while other groups seized the Veldwezelt and Vroenhoven bridges. The garrison surrendered at 12:30 on 11 May; Belgian losses were 23 killed and 59 wounded, Granit's 6 killed.

What you can see: The fort is still Belgian Army property. Inside are the underground barracks, a museum, a 180° film of the attack and long, cold galleries. Above ground you can walk the grassed roof between the blocks, see casemates and cupolas holed by German charges, and look down into the canal cutting.

Plan: Open mid-February to early January on set days, usually Tuesday–Sunday 10:00–17:00, last entry 15:00; check the opening calendar. Guided tours of a combat bunker are best booked online. Galleries stay at 11 °C and involve many stairs; bunkers are not wheelchair accessible.

GPS 50.79680, 5.67333

Read more: Fort Eben-Emael (Wikipedia) · Battle of Fort Eben-Emael (Wikipedia) · Fort Eben-Emael (official)

C Netherlands American Cemetery, Margraten

HIGH Cemetery · Netherlands · ≈60 min

The only American war cemetery in the Netherlands lies beside the old Roman road east of Maastricht, in the first part of the country to be liberated, in September 1944. It holds more than 8,000 American dead, many from the US Ninth Army's fighting in the Rhineland and the advance into Germany, as well as from Market Garden and the air war. The Tablets of the Missing list 1,722 names. Since 1945 local families have adopted graves and names, visiting and laying flowers; today every grave has an adopter, and there is a waiting list. The cemetery was dedicated in 1960 and opened by Queen Juliana.

What you can see: A long approach through a court of honour with the Tablets of the Missing, a tall memorial tower and chapel, and beyond them sixteen plots of white marble crosses and Stars of David on a broad lawn. A visitor building at the entrance tells the story.

Plan: Free. Open daily 09:00–17:00; closed 25 December and 1 January. Staff in the visitor building can help locate graves. About 10 km east of Maastricht on the N278.

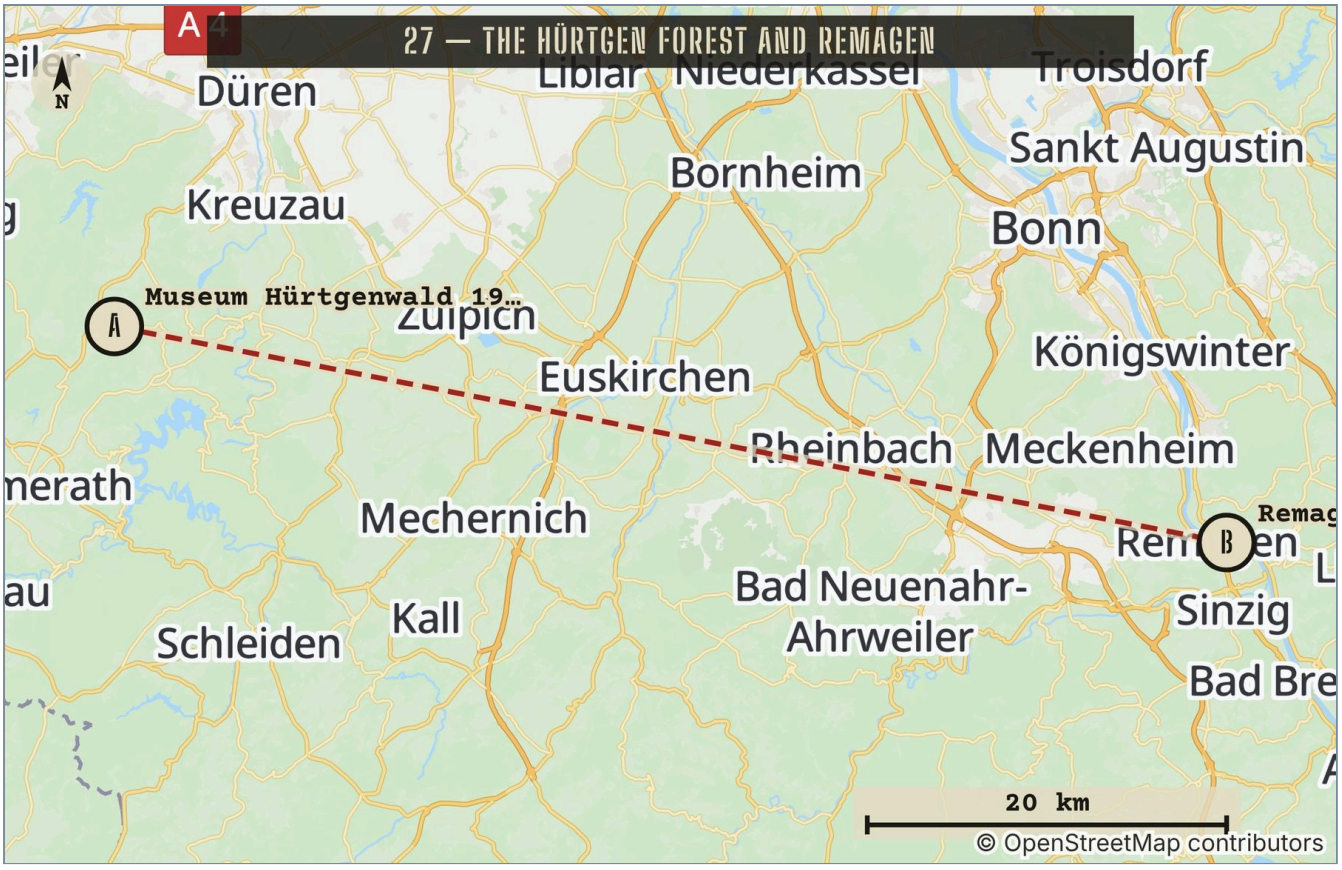
GPS 50.81762, 5.80790

Read more: Netherlands American Cemetery (Wikipedia) · Netherlands American Cemetery (ABMC)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Aachen. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

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27 — THE HÜRTGEN FOREST AND REMAGEN



Museum Hürtgenwald 1944 → Remagen bridge and Peace Museum · 2 stops

Into Germany for the autumn and winter of 1944–45: the Hürtgen Forest, a long and costly American battle, and Remagen, where the capture of the Ludendorff Bridge in March 1945 opened the way across the Rhine.

A Museum Hürtgenwald 1944, Vossenack

HIGH Museum · Germany · ≈90 min

The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest began on 19 September 1944 as the US First Army pushed into the dense, hilly woods south-east of Aachen, partly to protect its flank and later to reach the Rur dams. The 9th Infantry Division was followed by the 28th, whose 112th Infantry Regiment took Vossenack and then Schmidt on 2–3 November. A German tank counter-attack threw them out of Schmidt on 4 November, and the narrow Kall Trail supply route through the ravine below Vossenack became a death trap. The 4th, 8th and 1st Infantry Divisions followed. The fighting cost the Americans tens of thousands of casualties for a few miles of forest. The museum, run by the local history society, grew from Konrad Schall's collection, first shown at Kleinhau in 1983, and moved to Vossenack in 2001.

What you can see: A village museum with themed rooms on the Siegfried Line, the Wehrmacht and the US Army in the forest, maps, uniforms, weapons and relics dug from the woods, plus the post-war years. Use it as the base for walking the Kall Trail into the valley below.

Plan: Open Sundays 10:00–17:00 from March to November, with extra openings at Easter and special events; weekday group visits by arrangement. The Simonskall medical bunker opens on some first Sundays. Small admission fee. Check the website before you go.

GPS 50.68671, 6.37017

Read more: Battle of Hürtgen Forest (Wikipedia) · 1944 Hürtgen Forest Museum (Wikipedia) · Museum Hürtgenwald 1944 (official)

Remagen bridge and Peace Museum

HIGH Bridge · Germany · ≈90 min · ★ must see

On 7 March 1945 an advance party of the US 9th Armored Division under 2nd Lt Karl Timmermann reached the Ludendorff railway bridge at Remagen at about 13:00 and found it still standing. The German defenders set off their demolition charges, but the bridge lifted and settled back, damaged but passable. American infantry rushed across under fire, engineers cut the remaining wires, and within days several divisions were on the east bank: the first Allied crossing of the Rhine. Hitler's 'flying court martial' sentenced five German officers to death and four were shot. Weakened by the blast, shelling and air attack, the bridge collapsed into the Rhine on 17 March 1945, killing American engineers working on it. It was never rebuilt.

What you can see: The two black stone towers on the Remagen bank hold the Peace Museum, opened in 1980, with the story of the bridge, photographs and the theme of war and peace. On the far bank the Erpel towers stand in front of a railway tunnel. Only the stumps of the piers ever remained.

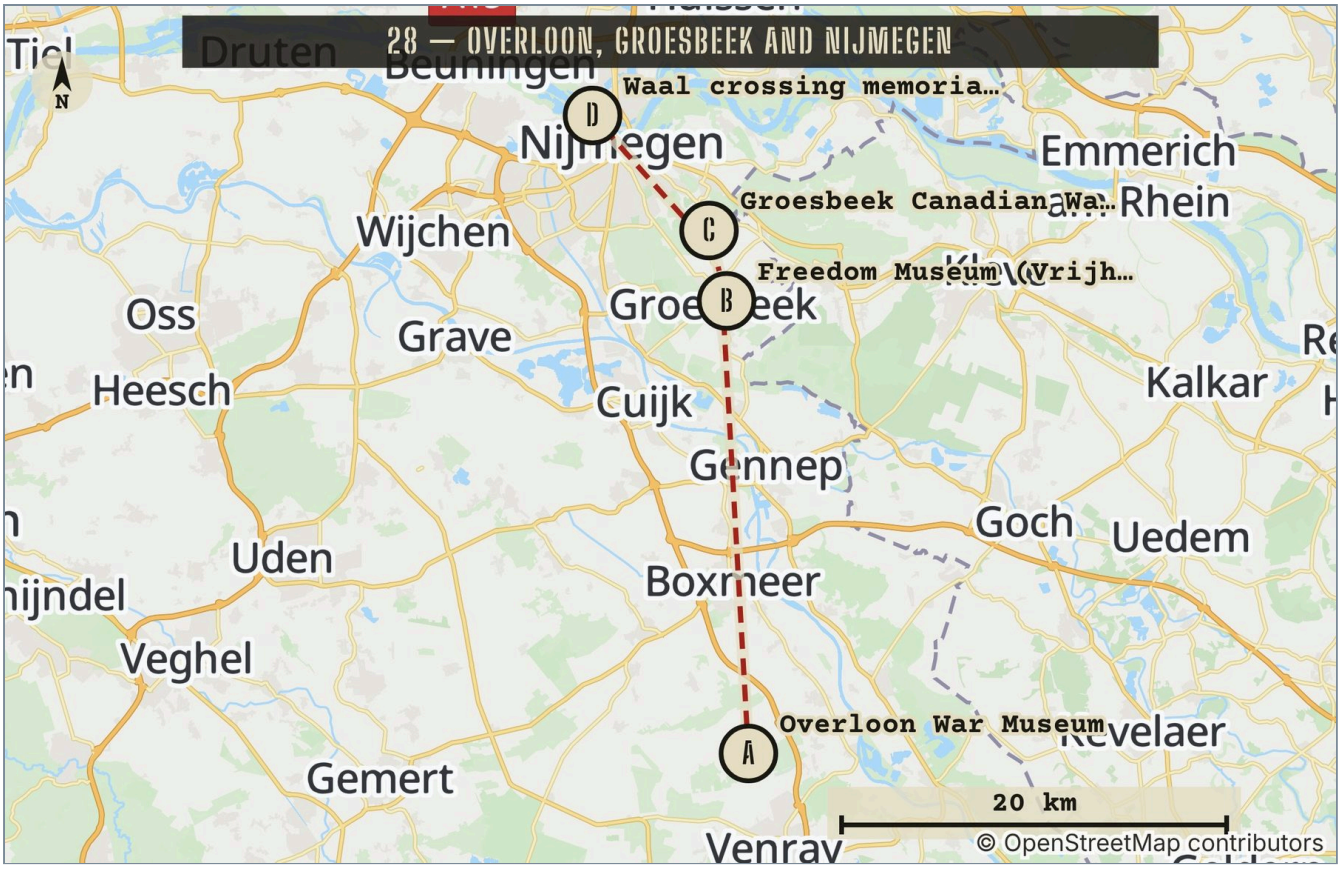
Plan: Open from early March to 1 November: weekends only in early March, then daily (Monday afternoons only) roughly 10:00–17:00, until 18:00 May–August. Adults €6. Guided group tours bookable. Closed November to early March.

GPS 50.57917, 7.24417

Read more: Ludendorff Bridge (Wikipedia) · Friedensmuseum Brücke von Remagen (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Remagen. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

28 — OVERLOON, GROESBEEK AND NIJMEGEN



Overloon War Museum → Freedom Museum → Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery and Memorial → Waal crossing memorial · 4 stops

The southern part of Operation Market Garden and its aftermath: the tank battle at Overloon, the museum and Canadian cemetery at Groesbeek, and the memorial to the American paratroopers who crossed the Waal under fire at Nijmegen.

A Overloon War Museum

HIGH Museum · Netherlands · ≈180 min

After Market Garden the Germans held a bridgehead west of the Maas around Venlo. From 30 September 1944 the US 7th Armored Division attacked Overloon and failed, losing many tanks in the woods. The British 3rd Infantry Division, supported by 11th Armoured Division, took over and captured Overloon and then Venray by 18 October; the 1st Royal Norfolks suffered especially heavy losses. The village was destroyed. So much wrecked equipment was left on the battlefield that a museum was set up among it, opening on 25 May 1946 as the National War and Resistance Museum, the oldest Second World War museum in Western Europe.

What you can see: Museum halls set in the wooded park where the battle was fought. Highlights include a Panther tank knocked out at Overloon, a running T-34, a B-25 Mitchell, a Spitfire, a Horsa glider, a Dakota, the 'Turning Point Europe' exhibition and a Lancaster pavilion. Allow several hours.

Plan: Open almost all year; online tickets are €1.50 cheaper than at the desk. Free parking, wheelchair friendly, dogs allowed on a lead. Hours and prices change by season: check the website before you go.

GPS 51.57056, 5.95694

Read more: Overloon War Museum (Wikipedia) · Battle of Overloon (Wikipedia) · Overloon War Museum (official)

B Freedom Museum (Vrijheidsmuseum), Groesbeek

HIGH Museum · Netherlands · ≈120 min

Groesbeek stands on the wooded heights south-east of Nijmegen, where the US 82nd Airborne Division landed on 17 September 1944 to cover the Nijmegen bridges from German attack out of the Reichswald. For five months the village was a front-line town. In February 1945 Operation Veritable, the Anglo-Canadian offensive into the Rhineland, was launched from here. The Freedom Museum, formerly the National Liberation Museum 1944–1945, tells the story of the Netherlands from the 1930s through occupation and liberation to post-war rebuilding, and its Honorary Dome lists the names of Allied soldiers who died between D-Day and 8 May 1945.

What you can see: A modern museum building on the Wylerbaan. Look for the Waco glider nose section, the large model of Operation Market Garden, a hiding-place cupboard where visitors can listen to Radio Orange, an air-raid shelter and the Honorary Dome of names.

Plan: Open Mon–Sat 10:00–17:00, Sun 12:00–17:00; closed 1 Jan and 25 Dec. Museumkaart valid; see the website for current prices. Hours can change for events, so check the website before you go.

GPS 51.78565, 5.93701

Read more: Freedom Museum (official) · Freedom Museum (TracesOfWar)

C Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery and Memorial

HIGH Cemetery · Netherlands · ≈45 min

Most of the men buried here died in February and March 1945 in Operation Veritable and the Rhineland battles fought out of the Groesbeek area, and the cemetery was sited so the Canadian dead lay close to the German soil where they fell. It holds 2,619 Commonwealth graves, 2,338 of them Canadian and 268 British. In the shelters stands the Groesbeek Memorial to more than 1,000 Commonwealth soldiers with no known grave who died in north-west Europe from late August 1944 to the end of the war, among them the Victoria Cross holders Sgt Aubrey Cosens and L/Sgt John Baskeyfield, killed at Oosterbeek.

What you can see: A large, quiet CWGC cemetery on a hill, with terraced rows of headstones, the Cross of Sacrifice and the colonnaded Groesbeek Memorial carrying panels of names. On clear days there are views towards the Reichswald and the German border.

Plan: Free, open at all times. On the Zevenheuvelenweg, a short drive or cycle north of the Freedom Museum. Combine with the 82nd Airborne memorial nearby.

GPS 51.79835, 5.93187

Read more: Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery (Wikipedia) · Canadian War Cemetery Groesbeek (TracesOfWar) · Official website

D Waal crossing memorial (De Oversteek), Nijmegen

MEDIUM Memorial · Netherlands · ≈45 min

With German troops holding both Nijmegen road and rail bridges, General James Gavin ordered Major Julian Cook's 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (82nd Airborne Division), to cross the Waal by boat and take the north ends. Only 26 canvas assault boats arrived. At 15:00 on 20 September 1944 the paratroopers paddled across the 250-metre-wide river about two kilometres downstream of the road bridge, near the Gelderland power station, under machine-gun, mortar and artillery fire. Survivors stormed the dyke and by evening had taken the north end of the railway bridge; the road bridge also fell, and British tanks of the Guards Armoured Division crossed that evening.

What you can see: The 2013 bridge 'De Oversteek' spans the river where the boats crossed. A plaque on the Generaal Gavinsingel in Lent marks the landing. Each evening at sunset a veteran-led 'Sunset March' crosses the bridge as its 48 pairs of lights come on one by one, one for each man killed.

Plan: Bridge and memorial are free and open at all times. The Sunset March starts at the south end of the bridge at sunset every day; anyone may join. Cycle or walk from Nijmegen centre (about 20 minutes).

GPS 51.85998, 5.84252

Read more: De Oversteek (Wikipedia) · Battle of Nijmegen (Wikipedia)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Nijmegen. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

29 — ARNHEM: A BRIDGE TOO FAR



John Frost Bridge → Airborne Museum Hartenstein → Old Church and Kate ter Horst house → Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery → Ginkel Heath drop zone · 5 stops

A day on the battle of Arnhem in September 1944, from the bridge held by Frost's battalion and the drop zones at Ginkel Heath to Oosterbeek, where the 1st Airborne Division made its last stand.

A John Frost Bridge, Arnhem

HIGH Bridge · Netherlands · ≈45 min · ★ must see

The road bridge over the Lower Rhine was the final objective of Operation Market Garden. On the evening of 17 September 1944 about 740 men, chiefly Lt-Col John Frost's 2nd Parachute Battalion, reached its northern end and occupied the houses around the ramp; an attempt to take the southern end failed. On 18 September the reconnaissance battalion of 9th SS Panzer Division under Viktor Gräbner tried to rush across from the south and was shot to pieces. Frost's force, never relieved, held until about 05:00 on 21 September. The bridge was bombed by the Americans on 7 October 1944, rebuilt in the same style in 1948, and renamed after Frost in 1977.

What you can see: A steel arch bridge, a near copy of the 1935 original. On the north ramp are information panels and memorials; the streets where Frost's men fought were rebuilt after the war. Walk onto the bridge to see how open the approach is, and the river Gräbner's vehicles crossed.

Plan: Public road bridge with footpaths, free at all times. Ten minutes' walk from Arnhem Centraal. The visitor centre 'Airborne at the Bridge' stands by the north ramp; check opening times before you go.

GPS 51.97472, 5.91194

Read more: John Frost Bridge (Wikipedia) · Battle of Arnhem (Wikipedia)

B Airborne Museum Hartenstein, Oosterbeek

HIGH Museum · Netherlands · ≈120 min · ★ must see

Villa Hartenstein, a hotel since 1942, became the headquarters of Major-General Roy Urquhart's British 1st Airborne Division in September 1944. From 21 September it stood at the centre of the Oosterbeek perimeter, about three miles round, held by some 3,600 men under constant shelling. Polish paratroopers dropped near Driel on 21 September but few could cross the Rhine. On the night of 25/26 September (Operation Berlin) about 2,400 men were ferried back across the river. The division lost nearly three-quarters of its strength. Urquhart himself opened the museum in the restored villa on 11 May 1978.

What you can see: The white villa, scarred and restored, with a British 17-pounder anti-tank gun on the lawn. Inside are weapons, uniforms and personal stories of British, Polish and German soldiers and civilians. Below ground the 'Airborne Experience' takes you through a glider fuselage and into reconstructed street fighting.

Plan: Open daily 10:00–17:00. Adults €16, children 8–17 €11; Museumkaart valid. Tickets online only (no phone booking). Bus or a 15-minute walk from Oosterbeek station; parking nearby.

GPS 51.98775, 5.83267

Read more: Airborne Museum Hartenstein (Wikipedia) · Airborne Museum (official)

C Old Church and Kate ter Horst house, Oosterbeek

HIGH Battlefield · Netherlands · ≈45 min

The Old Church (Oude Kerk) on the Benedendorpsweg stood at the south-eastern corner of the Oosterbeek perimeter, held by the mixed 'Lonsdale Force' of survivors from the battalions that had failed to reach the bridge. Next door, the old rectory of Jan and Kate ter Horst became a regimental aid post. Over eight days some 250 wounded men lay in its rooms while the house was repeatedly hit. Kate ter Horst, a mother of five, helped the doctors, sat with the dying and in the evenings read psalms to the wounded from an English Bible; the soldiers called her 'the Angel of Arnhem'. The church was left in ruins and reopened in 1949.

What you can see: A small restored church with a memorial stone by the entrance ending 'Not one shall be forgotten', and nearby a bench and Battle Marker for Lonsdale Force. The ter Horst house next door is a private home: view it from the road only. The Rhine meadows where the evacuation took place lie just south.

Plan: Churchyard and memorials free and open at all times; church interior opening varies, so check locally. The ter Horst house (Benedendorpsweg 136) is private. Walk on to the riverbank to see the evacuation crossing point.

GPS 51.97818, 5.83803

Read more: Kate ter Horst (Wikipedia) · Ter Horst House (TracesOfWar) · Official website

D Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery

HIGH Cemetery · Netherlands · ≈45 min · ★ must see

The cemetery gathers the dead of the Battle of Arnhem from temporary graves across the area. It holds around 1,760 Second World War graves, more than 240 of them unidentified, mostly British but also Polish, Canadian and Dutch. Among them are three posthumous Victoria Cross recipients: Lt John Grayburn of the 2nd Parachute Battalion, who fought at the bridge; Capt Lionel Queripel of the 10th Battalion; and Flt Lt David Lord of 271 Squadron RAF, who kept his burning Dakota over the drop zone to deliver supplies. Since 1945 local schoolchildren have laid flowers on every grave at the annual commemoration in September.

What you can see: A CWGC cemetery of white Portland headstones on a lawn edged by woodland, with the Cross of Sacrifice and Stone of Remembrance. Look for the Polish graves with their distinct pointed headstones, and the VC graves of Grayburn, Queripel and Lord.

Plan: Free, open at all times. On the Van Limburg Stirumweg, a short walk north-east of the Airborne Museum. The flower-laying ceremony is held on the first weekend of September; expect crowds.

GPS 51.99306, 5.84833

Read more: Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery (Wikipedia) · Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery (CWGC)

Ginkel Heath drop zone, Ede

MEDIUM Battlefield · Netherlands · ≈45 min

Ginkel Heath, west of Arnhem, was Drop Zone Y. On 17 September 1944 the 7th Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers landed nearby and spent the night holding the heath against growing German pressure. Brigadier John Hackett's 4th Parachute Brigade was due on the second lift, but ground fog in England delayed it by several hours. When the brigade jumped after 15:00 on 18 September it came down under fire on a contested drop zone, and lost men and time before it could move off towards Arnhem. The delay of the second lift was one of the reasons the division could not reinforce the bridge.

What you can see: A wide, open heath of heather and sand, still much as it was in 1944. The airborne memorial stands beside the N224 (Verlengde Arnhemseweg) on the edge of the heath. Stand by it and look across the open ground the paratroopers had to cross under fire.

Plan: Open heath, free at all times, with car parks along the N224. A commemorative parachute drop is held on the heath each September; it draws large crowds and closes roads.

GPS 52.03694, 5.73405

Read more: Battle of Arnhem (Wikipedia) · Airborne Memorial Ginkelse Heide (TracesOfWar)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Arnhem. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

30 — MAY 1940 AND ANNE FRANK



Grebbeberg battlefield and military cemetery → Rotterdam 1940 → Anne Frank House · 3 stops

Begin with the German invasion of May 1940 at the Grebbeberg and the bombed centre of Rotterdam, then end with occupation and persecution at the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam.

A Grebbeberg battlefield and military cemetery

HIGH Cemetery · Netherlands · ≈60 min

The Grebbeberg, a wooded hill above the Rhine east of Rhenen, anchored the southern end of the Grebbe Line, the main Dutch defence position in 1940. From 11 to 13 May the German 207th Infantry Division and the SS regiment 'Der Führer' attacked troops of the Dutch II Corps, including the 8th Infantry Regiment. The Dutch held for three days, but a counter-attack on 13 May failed and the line was abandoned that night, the army falling back to the Water Line. The military cemetery (Militair Ereveld) was laid out on the hill on 20 May 1940; the German dead once buried here were later moved to Ysselsteyn.

What you can see: Rows of white headstones on a slope under beech woods, a Cross of Remembrance at the entrance, regimental monuments to the 8th and 22nd Infantry, and J.J.P. Oud's national army monument. In the woods behind, Dutch casemates and trench lines of the Grebbe Line survive.

Plan: The cemetery is free and open in daylight; it lies on the Grebbeweg (N225) about 2 km east of Rhenen. Walking routes lead to bunkers on the hill. A national commemoration is held here in May.

GPS 51.95583, 5.60028

Read more: Battle of the Grebbeberg (Wikipedia) · Grebbeberg War Cemetery (Wikipedia) · Official website

B Rotterdam 1940: 'The Destroyed City' monument

HIGH Memorial · Netherlands · ≈30 min

On 14 May 1940 German forces besieging Rotterdam sent an ultimatum to the Dutch commander, Colonel Scharroo. While negotiations were still under way, around 90 Heinkel He 111 bombers approached in two groups. Red flares signalled a recall; the southern group mostly turned back, but the north-eastern group bombed the old city centre. The fires that followed destroyed about 25,000 homes, and around 85,000 people were made homeless. Faced with a similar threat to Utrecht, the Dutch high command capitulated that evening, signing on 15 May. Ossip Zadkine's bronze 'De Verwoeste Stad' (The Destroyed City), unveiled on 15 May 1953, shows a figure with its heart torn out.

What you can see: A tall bronze figure, arms flung to the sky and a hole where the heart should be, stands on Plein 1940 at the head of the Leuvehaven, beside the Maritime Museum. Almost nothing old survives around it: the modern skyline is itself the legacy of the 1940 fire.

Plan: Public square, open at all times and free. Central Rotterdam, a short walk from Beurs or Leuvehaven metro stations. The 'fire boundary' (brandgrens) of 1940 is marked by lights across the city centre.

GPS 51.91760, 4.48310

Read more: De Verwoeste Stad (Wikipedia) · Rotterdam Blitz (Wikipedia)

C Anne Frank House, Amsterdam

HIGH Museum · Netherlands · ≈90 min · ★ must see

On 6 July 1942 Otto Frank's family went into hiding in the Secret Annex behind his business at Prinsengracht 263. The van Pels family followed a week later and Fritz Pfeffer in November: eight people in all, supplied by helpers including Miep Gies, Bep Voskuijl, Johannes Kleiman and Victor Kugler. On 4 August 1944 police raided the annex and arrested them. They were sent via Westerbork to Auschwitz; Anne and Margot died of typhus at Bergen-Belsen in February 1945. Only Otto survived. Anne's diary, saved by Miep Gies, was published as 'Het Achterhuis' on 25 June 1947. The house opened as a museum on 3 May 1960.

What you can see: A narrow canal-side house. Behind the moveable bookcase are the empty rooms of the Secret Annex, left unfurnished at Otto Frank's wish, with Anne's film-star pictures still on her wall and the pencil marks of the children's heights. The original diary is displayed.

Plan: Open daily 09:00–22:00 (shorter hours on some holidays; closed 21 Sep 2026 for Yom Kippur). Tickets only online, for a set time slot, released each Tuesday six weeks ahead; adults €16.50. Card payment only. Book early.

GPS 52.37525, 4.88432

Read more: Anne Frank House (Wikipedia) · Anne Frank House (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Amsterdam. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

31 — WESTERBORK AND BERGEN-BELSEN



Camp Westerbork Memorial Centre → Bergen-Belsen Memorial · 2 stops

A long drive east to two camps linked by the deportations: Westerbork, the Dutch transit camp from which Anne Frank and over 100,000 others were sent east, and Bergen-Belsen, where she died and which the British liberated in April 1945.

A Camp Westerbork Memorial Centre

HIGH Camp memorial · Netherlands · ≈180 min

Westerbork was built by the Dutch government in 1939 to house Jewish refugees from Germany. From 1 July 1942 the Germans used it as the transit camp for the deportation of Jews, and also Sinti and Roma, from the Netherlands. Ninety-three trains left Westerbork: 65 to Auschwitz, 19 to Sobibór and 9 to Theresienstadt and Bergen-Belsen. Anne Frank and the others from the Secret Annex arrived on 8 August 1944 and were put on the last train to Auschwitz on 3 September. Canadian troops liberated the camp on 12 April 1945, finding 876 prisoners. The memorial centre opened in 1983.

What you can see: The museum tells individual stories through film, letters and objects, including footage shot in the camp in 1944. A shuttle bus runs 3 km to the camp site, where the 102,000 stones memorial, the National Monument of curled rails and a goods wagon stand among the outlines of the barracks.

Plan: Open Mon–Fri 10:00–17:00, weekends and holidays 11:00–17:00; closed 25 and 31 Dec, 1 Jan, and about three weeks in January for maintenance. Adults €13.50, including shuttle bus and audio tour; debit card only. Cars cannot drive to the camp site.

GPS 52.92108, 6.56970

Read more: Westerbork transit camp (Wikipedia) · Camp Westerbork (official)

Bergen-Belsen Memorial

HIGH Camp memorial · Germany · ≈180 min · ★ must see

Bergen-Belsen began in 1940 as a Wehrmacht camp for prisoners of war; almost 20,000 Soviet prisoners died there. From 1943 the SS used part of it as an exchange camp for Jews, but in the last months it became a dumping ground for prisoners evacuated from other camps. Typhus spread through the overcrowded huts; Anne and Margot Frank died there in February or March 1945. On 15 April 1945 British troops, including 11th Armoured Division, found about 60,000 prisoners and more than 13,000 unburied bodies. Around 14,000 more died after liberation. The British burned the huts, and BBC reporter Richard Dimbleby's broadcast shocked Britain.

What you can see: Nothing of the camp stands. A documentation centre opened in 2007 leads onto open heath with grassed mass graves marked by stones giving numbers buried, an obelisk and inscription wall, the Jewish monument and memorial stones, including one for Anne and Margot Frank.

Plan: Daily 10:00–18:00 April–September and 10:00–17:00 October–March; grounds open daily. Free. No dogs or bicycles on the grounds; large bags go in lockers. Car is easiest.

GPS 52.75944, 9.91168

Read more: Bergen-Belsen concentration camp (Wikipedia) · Bergen-Belsen Memorial (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Hamburg. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

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32 — HAMBURG AND PEENEMÜNDE



St Nikolai Memorial → Peenemünde Historical-Technical Museum · 2 stops

From Hamburg, where the firestorm raids of July 1943 killed some 35,000 people, drive east along the Baltic to Peenemünde, where the V-2 rocket was developed and tested.

A St Nikolai Memorial, Hamburg

HIGH Ruins · Germany · ≈60 min

In late July 1943 RAF Bomber Command, flying by night, and the US Eighth Air Force, by day, attacked Hamburg in Operation Gomorrah. On the first night the RAF used 'Window' metal strips for the first time to blind German radar. On the night of 27/28 July 787 RAF aircraft created a firestorm across the working-class districts of Hammerbrook, Hamm, Borgfelde and Rothenburgsort. Around 37,000 people died and about a million fled the city. The 147-metre spire of St Nikolai, then among the tallest buildings in the world, served the bombers as a landmark and was badly damaged; the ruined church was kept as a memorial against war.

What you can see: The blackened tower and fragments of the nave walls stand in a small park. A glass lift climbs inside the spire to a platform at 75 metres with views over the city and port. The crypt holds an exhibition on the raids and on Coventry, Warsaw and Rotterdam.

Plan: Exhibition and lift are charged; opening times vary by season. The official site could not be read in October 2026, so check the website before you go.

GPS 53.54750, 9.99056

Read more: St. Nicholas Church, Hamburg (Wikipedia) · Bombing of Hamburg (Wikipedia) · Mahnmal St. Nikolai (official)

Peenemünde Historical-Technical Museum

HIGH Museum · Germany · ≈180 min · ★ must see

From 1937 the Army Research Centre at Peenemünde, on the island of Usedom, developed Germany's long-range rockets under Walter Dornberger, with Wernher von Braun as technical director; the Luftwaffe tested the V-1 flying bomb next door. Here the A4, later called the V-2, was developed. On the night of 17/18 August 1943 RAF Bomber Command attacked in Operation Hydra, hitting the staff housing first and also the camp at Trassenheide, where forced labourers had no shelters. Production moved to the underground Mittelwerk in the Harz, built and worked by concentration camp prisoners. Soviet troops took the wrecked site in May 1945.

What you can see: The museum fills the huge brick power station of the research centre. Outside are replicas of the A4 rocket and V-1, a V-1 launch ramp and a model of Test Stand VII. Exhibitions cover forced labourers and camp prisoners as well as the engineers.

Plan: April–September 10:00–18:00; October–March 10:00–16:00, closed Mondays November–March. Admission charged. Allow at least three hours. Check the website before you go.

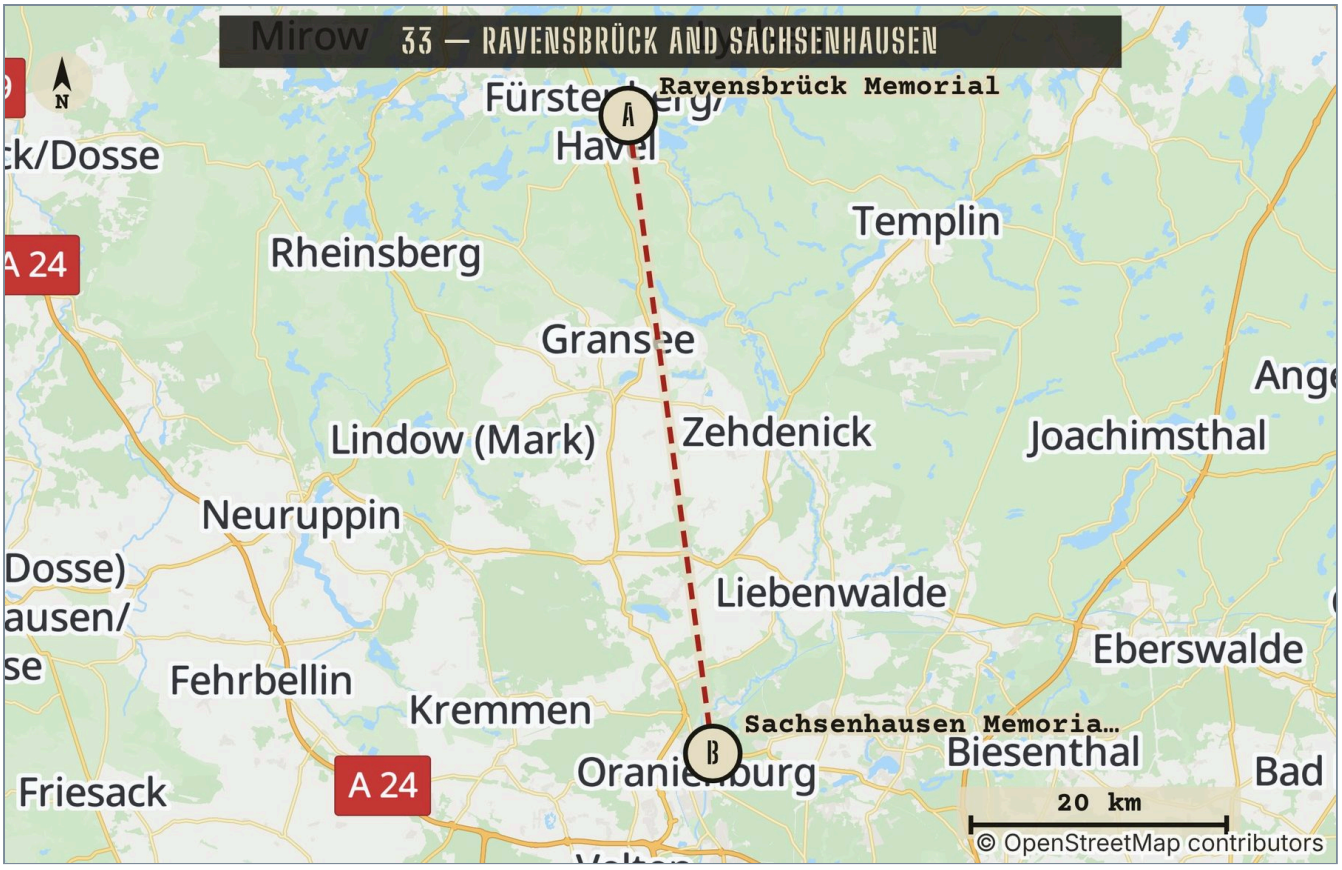
GPS 54.13778, 13.76889

Read more: Peenemünde Army Research Center (Wikipedia) · Historisch-Technisches Museum Peenemünde (German Wikipedia) · Peenemünde museum (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Wolgast. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

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33 — RAVENSBRÜCK AND SACHSENHAUSEN



Ravensbrück Memorial → Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum · 2 stops

Two camps north of Berlin: Ravensbrück, the largest concentration camp for women, and Sachsenhausen, a model camp for the SS system that held political prisoners, Soviet prisoners of war and many others.

A Ravensbrück Memorial

HIGH Camp memorial · Germany · ≈180 min

Ravensbrück, 90 km north of Berlin, opened in May 1939 when the SS moved 900 women there from Lichtenburg. It was the only large concentration camp built for women, and an estimated 130,000 to 132,000 passed through it, from across occupied Europe. Prisoners worked in SS textile workshops and for firms such as Siemens. From summer 1942 SS doctors carried out experiments on 86 women, mostly Polish, whom they called 'rabbits'. In January 1945 the SS converted a hut near the crematorium into a gas chamber. The Red Army liberated the camp on 30 April 1945, finding fewer than 3,500 prisoners alive.

What you can see: On the Schwedtsee shore Will Lammert's bronze 'Tragende', a woman carrying another, faces Fürstenberg across the lake. See the crematorium, the camp road, the female guards' houses and the main exhibition in the former commandant's building.

Plan: Exhibitions daily 10:00–18:00; grounds 9:00–20:00 (Apr–Sep), 9:00–18:00 (Oct–Mar). Free. Cell block closed for renovation until 2028. RE5 to Fürstenberg, then 25 minutes' walk.

GPS 53.18958, 13.17078

Read more: Ravensbrück concentration camp (Wikipedia) · Ravensbrück Memorial (official)

Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum

HIGH Camp memorial · Germany · ≈180 min · ★ must see

Built in July 1936 just north of Berlin, Sachsenhausen was laid out as a model camp, a triangle overseen from a single gatehouse, and it trained SS camp staff. More than 200,000 people passed through, including Soviet prisoners of war murdered in large numbers in 1941. Station Z, with its crematoria and later a gas chamber, was built outside the wall in 1942, and prisoners forged British and American banknotes for Operation Bernhard. In April 1945 the SS drove most prisoners out on a death march; Soviet and Polish troops freed about 3,400 left behind on 22 April. The NKVD then used the camp as Special Camp No. 7 until 1950.

What you can see: Enter through Tower A, with its 'Arbeit macht frei' gate, onto the semicircular roll-call ground. See the reconstructed barracks, the cell block, the foundations of Station Z and the 1961 East German obelisk. Exhibitions cover the camp, the Soviet special camp and the memorial.

Plan: Grounds and exhibitions 8:30–18:00 (31 Mar–26 Oct), 8:30–16:30 (27 Oct–30 Mar). Free; audio guide €3.50. S1 to Oranienburg then 20 minutes' walk. Allow half a day.

GPS 52.76583, 13.26417

Read more: Sachsenhausen concentration camp (Wikipedia) · Sachsenhausen Memorial (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Berlin. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

34 — BERLIN: THE GOVERNMENT QUARTER



Reichstag → Soviet War Memorial → Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe → Site of the Führerbunker → Topography of Terror → German Resistance Memorial · 6 stops

A day in Berlin's government quarter, where the Nazi state was run and fell: the Reichstag, the Topography of Terror, the Holocaust memorial, the Führerbunker site, the Bendlerblock of the 20 July plot and the Soviet memorial.

A Reichstag, Berlin

HIGH Battlefield · Germany · ≈90 min · ★ must see

Burnt out in the February 1933 fire and unused by the Nazi parliament, the Reichstag was still treated by the Red Army as the symbol of Berlin. Troops of the 3rd Shock Army stormed it from 30 April 1945 against a substantial German garrison, fighting room by room until the defenders gave up on 2 May. That day Yevgeny Khaldei photographed a soldier raising the Soviet flag on the roof, a picture that became the defining image of the war's end. Soviet soldiers covered the walls with graffiti. When Norman Foster rebuilt the building for the Bundestag in the 1990s, much of it was deliberately kept.

What you can see: Inside, preserved Soviet graffiti in Cyrillic and bullet scars survive on the walls, though most are seen only on guided tours. Visitors with a booking climb the glass dome and use the roof terrace. Outside, on the Tiergarten edge, slate plates remember the Reichstag deputies murdered by the Nazis.

Plan: Dome and roof terrace are free but need advance online registration with names and dates of birth; bring photo ID. The dome is closed for maintenance 19–30 October 2026 (terrace stays open). Check the website before you go.

GPS 52.51861, 13.37611

Read more: Reichstag building (Wikipedia) · Raising a Flag over the Reichstag (Wikipedia) · Visiting the dome (official)

B Soviet War Memorial, Tiergarten

HIGH Memorial · Germany · ≈20 min

Built within months of the fighting and unveiled on 11 November 1945, this was the first Soviet memorial in Berlin. Architect Mikhail Gorvits designed the curved colonnade, and Lev Kerbel and Vladimir Tsigal sculpted the bronze soldier on top. More than 2,000 of the Red Army soldiers killed in the Battle of Berlin are buried behind it. Two T-34 tanks and two ML-20 152mm guns, said to be among the first to enter the city, flank the approach. The memorial stood in the British sector, so throughout the Cold War Soviet guards marched into West Berlin to mount guard here under British protection.

What you can see: A curved colonnade of reddish stone topped by a soldier with a rifle slung, on Straße des 17. Juni a few hundred metres west of the Brandenburg Gate. Look for the tanks and guns on their plinths and the inscriptions in Russian.

Plan: Open-air and free; accessible at any time, with no booking needed. Easily combined on foot with the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate, a few minutes away.

GPS 52.51667, 13.37222

Read more: Soviet War Memorial, Tiergarten (Wikipedia) · Official website

C Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

HIGH Memorial · Germany · ≈60 min

Germany's central Holocaust memorial was designed by the American architect Peter Eisenman and dedicated on 10 May 2005, sixty years after the war ended. It covers a whole city block between the Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz, close to where Hitler's Chancellery stood. The field of 2,711 concrete stelae on undulating ground carries no names or symbols; Eisenman meant it to unsettle rather than explain. The explanation lies underneath, in the Information Centre, which tells the stories of individual families and holds the names of about three million Jewish victims obtained from Yad Vashem.

What you can see: Walk into the field: the ground dips and the stelae rise above head height, cutting off the city. The entrance to the underground Information Centre is at the south-east corner, with rooms on individual victims, families and the sites of murder across Europe.

Plan: Field of stelae open 24 hours, free. Information Centre Tue–Sun 10:00–18:00 (last entry 45 minutes before), free; closed Mondays and 24–26 Dec. Security checks can mean a queue.

GPS 52.51389, 13.37861

Read more: Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (Wikipedia) · Foundation Memorial (official)

D Site of the Führerbunker

HIGH Bunker · Germany · ≈20 min

Hitler moved into the bunker beneath the Reich Chancellery garden in January 1945 and directed the last months of the war from there. The main bunker's floor lay 8.5 metres underground. On 29 April he married Eva Braun, and on 30 April 1945 both killed themselves in his study; their bodies were burned in the garden above. Soviet troops reached the bunker on 2 May. The Soviets and later the East German authorities demolished the Chancellery and most of the bunker, and flats and a car park were built over the site in the late 1980s. Nothing of it is visible.

What you can see: A car park and blocks of flats at the corner of Gertrud-Kolmar-Straße and In den Ministergärten. An information board put up by Berliner Unterwelten in 2006 explains the bunker's layout and fate. It is two minutes from the Holocaust memorial.

Plan: Public street, free and open at all times; there is nothing to book. Combine it on foot with the Holocaust memorial and the Topography of Terror.

GPS 52.51247, 13.38108

Read more: Führerbunker (Wikipedia) · Führerbunker (German Wikipedia) · Official website

Topography of Terror, Berlin

HIGH Headquarters · Germany · ≈90 min · ★ must see

From 1933 the buildings on Prinz-Albrecht-Straße (now Niederkirchnerstraße) housed the Gestapo headquarters, with its notorious house prison at No. 8, and later the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) formed in September 1939. Here Himmler's SS and police apparatus ran persecution across Germany and occupied Europe, directing the Einsatzgruppen that murdered Jews behind the Eastern Front. The buildings were wrecked by bombing and cleared after the war. The site lay forgotten beside the Berlin Wall until citizens' groups dug out the cellars in the 1980s. The present documentation centre opened in May 2010.

What you can see: A low grey pavilion holds the main exhibition on the SS and Gestapo. Outside, an open-air trench exhibition runs along excavated cellar walls of the Gestapo buildings, beneath the longest surviving stretch of the outer Berlin Wall on Niederkirchnerstraße.

Plan: Open daily 10:00–20:00; free admission. No booking needed for individuals. The official site could not be loaded in October 2026, so check the website before you go.

GPS 52.50635, 13.38388

Read more: Topography of Terror (Wikipedia) · Topography of Terror (official)

German Resistance Memorial (Bendlerblock)

HIGH Memorial · Germany · ≈90 min

The Bendlerblock housed the headquarters of the Replacement Army, where officers planned Operation Valkyrie. On 20 July 1944 Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg planted a bomb at Hitler's headquarters in East Prussia and flew back here to launch the coup. Hitler survived, and by evening loyal troops had regained control. General Friedrich Fromm had the leaders arrested; Stauffenberg, General Friedrich Olbricht, Colonel Albrecht Mertz von Quirnheim and Lieutenant Werner von Haeften were shot in the courtyard that night, and Ludwig Beck was allowed to shoot himself. The memorial centre documents the whole breadth of German resistance.

What you can see: In the courtyard a bronze figure of a bound young man and a plaque mark the place of the executions. Upstairs, in the rooms used by the plotters, the permanent exhibition covers resistance from churches, workers, students, Jews and the military.

Plan: Free. Mon–Fri 9:00–18:00, weekends and holidays 10:00–18:00. Entrance at Stauffenbergstraße 13–14; no booking needed for individuals. Special exhibition on Ravensbrück resistance runs until 4 April 2027.

GPS 52.50694, 13.36139

Read more: Bendlerblock (Wikipedia) · 20 July plot (Wikipedia) · German Resistance Memorial Center (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Berlin. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

35 — POTSDAM, WANNSEE AND KARLSHORST



House of the Wannsee Conference → Cecilienhof → Soviet War Memorial → Museum Berlin-Karlshorst · 4 stops

From the villa at Wannsee where the 'Final Solution' was coordinated to Cecilienhof, where the victors decided post-war Germany, then the Soviet memorial at Treptow and Karlshorst, where Germany's final surrender was signed.

A House of the Wannsee Conference

HIGH Memorial · Germany · ≈90 min · ★ must see

On 20 January 1942 Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Main Office, met fifteen senior officials of ministries, the Nazi Party and the SS in this lakeside villa at Am Großen Wannsee 56–58. The meeting lasted about ninety minutes. The decision to murder Europe's Jews had already been taken; Heydrich's purpose was to secure the ministries' cooperation with deportations under SS control. Adolf Eichmann prepared the figures and the minutes, written in bureaucratic euphemism. Only one of thirty copies survived, found by US prosecutor Robert Kempner in Foreign Office files in 1947. The villa opened as a memorial and education centre on 20 January 1992.

What you can see: You walk through the rooms of the villa, including the dining room where the meeting is believed to have taken place. The exhibition explains the participants, the protocol and the course of the Holocaust. The garden runs down to the lake.

Plan: Exhibition and garden open daily 10:00–18:00; free. Closed 1–4 Jan, 8 Mar, Good Friday, 1 May, Ascension Day, 3 Oct and 24–31 Dec. Groups of 10+ must book. S-Bahn to Wannsee, then bus 114.

GPS 52.43306, 13.16556

Read more: Wannsee Conference (Wikipedia) · House of the Wannsee Conference (Wikipedia) · House of the Wannsee Conference (official)

B Cecilienhof: the Potsdam Conference

HIGH Headquarters · Germany · ≈60 min

From 17 July to 2 August 1945 Truman, Stalin and Churchill (replaced partway through by Clement Attlee after the British general election) met at Cecilienhof, a mock-Tudor country house in Potsdam's New Garden built for the last Crown Prince. It was the third and longest of the wartime summits, organised by the Soviets, who fitted the Great Hall with a round table. The conference settled the occupation of Germany, reparations, the move of Poland's border west to the Oder–Neisse line and the expulsion of Germans from the east, and issued the Potsdam Declaration demanding Japan's surrender.

What you can see: From outside you can see the half-timbered house in the New Garden and the red star of flowers the Soviets planted in the courtyard. When open, the Great Hall with its round table and the delegations' studies are shown.

Plan: The house is closed until further notice for restoration (October 2026); the park and exterior remain accessible and free. Check the SPSG website before you go.

GPS 52.41917, 13.07083

Read more: Cecilienhof (Wikipedia) · Potsdam Conference (Wikipedia) · Cecilienhof (SPSG, official)

C Soviet War Memorial, Treptower Park

HIGH Cemetery · Germany · ≈45 min

Opened on 8 May 1949, the fourth anniversary of the German surrender, Treptow is the largest Soviet war memorial outside the former USSR. It commemorates 7,000 of the roughly 80,000 Red Army soldiers killed in the Battle of Berlin; some 5,000 are buried in the central lawns. Architect Yakov Belopolsky laid out the park, and sculptor Yevgeny Vuchetich made the 12-metre bronze of a Soviet soldier holding a German child and a sword, standing on a broken swastika. Sixteen stone sarcophagi, one for each Soviet republic, carry reliefs and quotations from Stalin in Russian and German.

What you can see: Enter through a granite gateway past the kneeling soldiers, walk down the long axis between the sixteen sarcophagi and the grave lawns, and climb the mound to the soldier statue. Inside its base is a mosaic hall.

Plan: Open-air park memorial, free and open at all times, with no booking needed. Take the S-Bahn to Treptower Park station, then walk about ten minutes through the park.

GPS 52.48750, 13.46833

Read more: Soviet War Memorial, Treptower Park (Wikipedia) · Official website

D Museum Berlin-Karlshorst

HIGH Museum · Germany · ≈90 min · ★ must see

Shortly before midnight on 8 May 1945, in the officers' mess of a former Wehrmacht engineer school in Karlshorst, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Admiral Hans-Georg von Friedeburg and General Hans-Jürgen Stumpff signed Germany's unconditional surrender for the army, navy and Luftwaffe. Marshal Georgy Zhukov signed for the Soviet high command and Air Chief Marshal Arthur Tedder for Eisenhower's SHAEF, with General de Lattre de Tassigny and General Carl Spaatz as witnesses. It ratified the surrender signed at Reims the day before. The building became Zhukov's headquarters, then a Soviet museum; it reopened in 1995 and dropped 'German-Russian' from its name in 2022.

What you can see: The signing hall is kept as it was in 1945, with the flags of the four powers behind the table. The upper floor covers the German–Soviet war from both sides. Outside stand Soviet guns, a T-34 and an SU-100 tank destroyer.

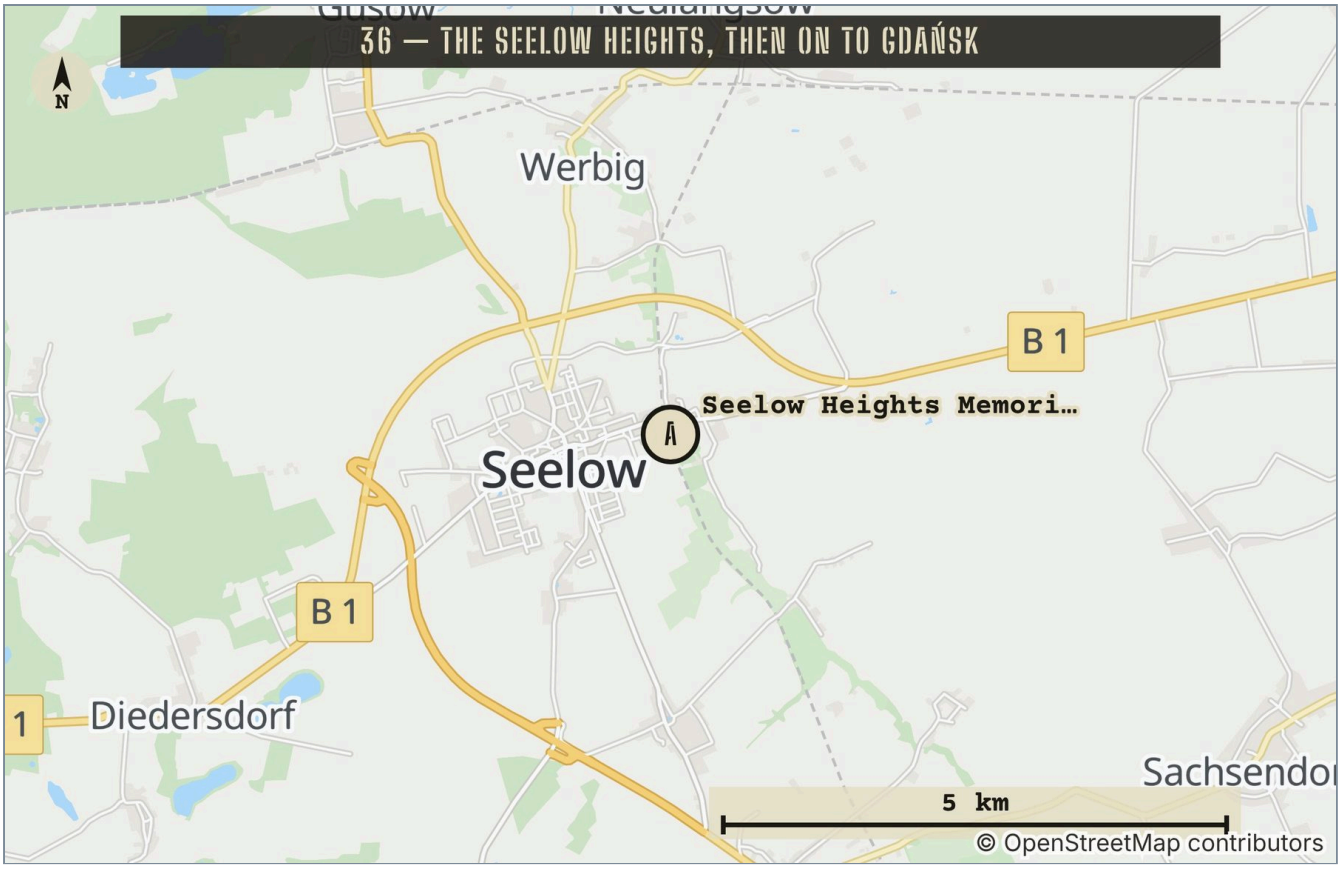
Plan: Tue–Sun 10:00–18:00, closed Mondays; admission free. No booking needed for individual visitors. Take the S-Bahn to Karlshorst, then walk about 15 minutes.

GPS 52.48611, 13.53972

Read more: Museum Berlin-Karlshorst (Wikipedia) · German Instrument of Surrender (Wikipedia) · Museum Berlin-Karlshorst (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Berlin. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

36 — THE SEELOW HEIGHTS, THEN ON TO GDAŃSK



Seelow Heights Memorial · 1 stop

The Seelow Heights, where the Red Army broke the last German line before Berlin in April 1945, then a long drive east across Poland to Gdańsk.

A Seelow Heights Memorial

HIGH Battlefield · Germany · ≈90 min · ★ must see

The Seelow Heights rise above the flat Oderbruch about 70 km east of Berlin. Early on 16 April 1945 Marshal Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front, close to a million men including the Polish 1st Army, attacked from its Oder bridgehead. Gotthard Heinrici had pulled General Theodor Busse's 9th Army back onto the heights, so the huge bombardment fell largely on empty ground, and searchlights meant to blind the defenders were defeated by dust and smoke. Zhukov fed his tank armies into the marshy valley and needed four days to break through. By 19 April the road to Berlin was open.

What you can see: On the crest stands the Soviet soldier statue by Lev Kerbel and Vladimir Tsigal, unveiled in November 1945, above graves of Soviet soldiers. The museum below, reworked in 2012, overlooks the Oderbruch. Soviet guns and vehicles stand outside. The view east explains the battle.

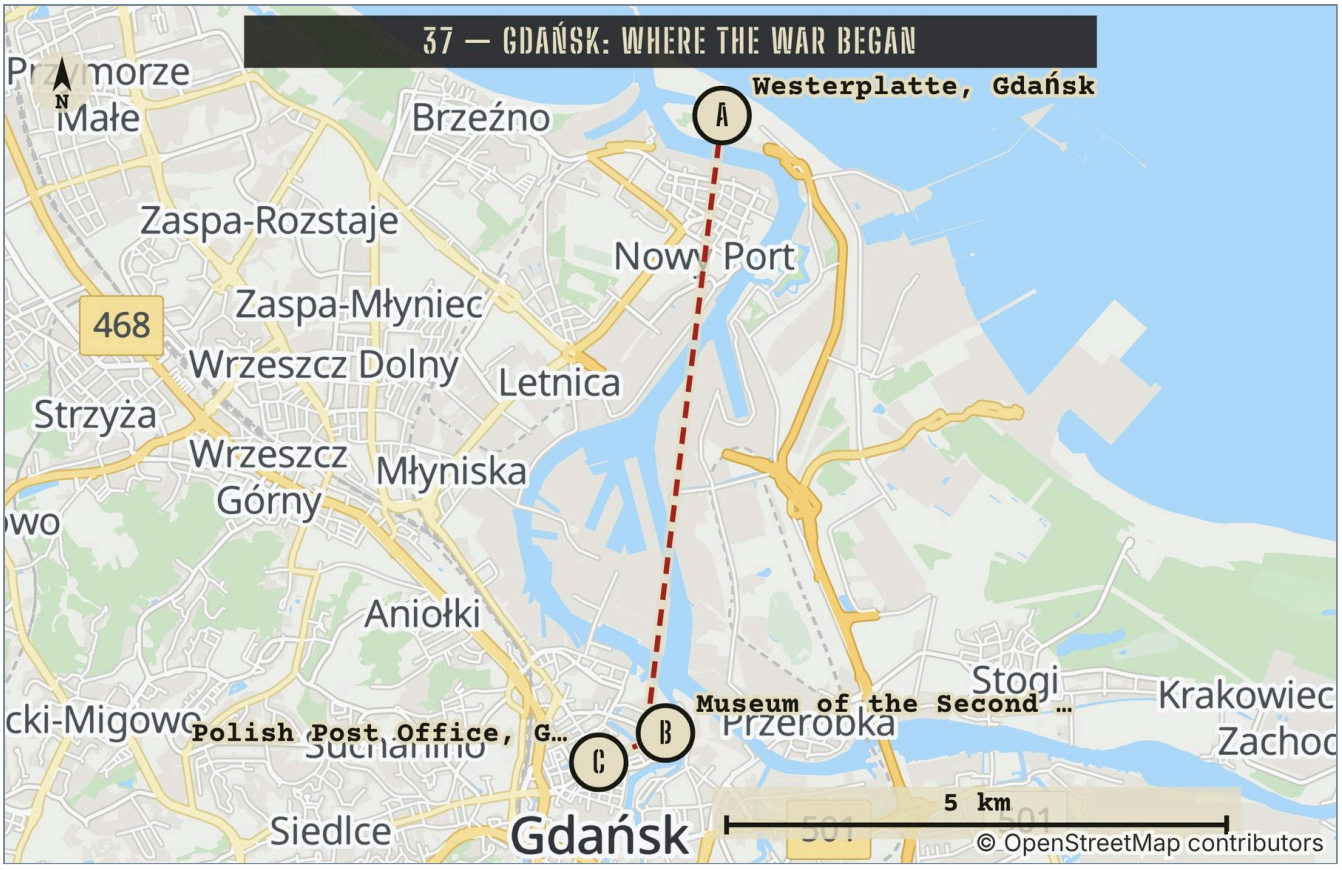
Plan: Tue–Sun 10:00–17:00; November–March 10:00–16:00; closed Mondays and over Christmas and New Year. Small admission charge for the museum; grounds free. Check the website before you go.

GPS 52.53490, 14.39573

Read more: Battle of the Seelow Heights (Wikipedia) · Gedenkstätte Seelower Höhen (German Wikipedia) · Seelow Heights Memorial (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Berlin. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

37 — GDAŃSK: WHERE THE WAR BEGAN



Westerplatte → Museum of the Second World War → Polish Post Office · 3 stops

A day in the city where the war began on 1 September 1939: Westerplatte, where the Polish garrison held out for a week, the defended Polish Post Office, and the Museum of the Second World War.

A Westerplatte, Gdańsk

HIGH Battlefield · Poland · ≈90 min · ★ must see

At about 04:45 on 1 September 1939 the old German battleship Schleswig-Holstein, moored in Danzig harbour, opened fire on the Polish Military Transit Depot on the Westerplatte peninsula. Major Henryk Sucharski and his deputy, Captain Franciszek Dąbrowski, held the depot with a garrison of roughly 200 men in guardhouses and a concrete barracks. The first assault by marines from the ship failed, and the Poles held out for a week against naval gunfire, artillery and air raids. A white flag went up at 09:45 on 7 September. Fifteen defenders were killed. Westerplatte's long defence became the founding symbol of Polish resistance.

What you can see: A wooded peninsula at the harbour mouth. Walk past the ruined barracks and surviving guardhouses to the tall Monument of the Coast Defenders (1966) on its mound. The old depot power station is now a Visitor Centre with an exhibition on recent archaeological finds.

Plan: Grounds are open. The Visitor Centre opened in 2025; it was opening 09:00–16:00 in October. The site is being developed into an open-air museum by the Museum of the Second World War, so expect works. Check the website before you go.

GPS 54.40750, 18.67139

Read more: Battle of Westerplatte (Wikipedia) · Westerplatte (Wikipedia) · Museum of the Second World War (official)

B Museum of the Second World War, Gdańsk

HIGH Museum · Poland · ≈180 min · ★ must see

Opened in March 2017 beside the Motława river, this is one of the largest museums of the war anywhere. The building, by the Gdynia studio Kwadrat, sinks most of its exhibition underground beneath a leaning tower. The permanent exhibition covers the whole war with a strong focus on civilians, occupation and the experience of Poland and Eastern Europe, from the road to war through Westerplatte, occupation terror and the Holocaust to the war's aftermath. It also runs the Westerplatte site. The museum was created by a team led by historian Paweł Machcewicz, and its exhibition became a political battleground after 2016.

What you can see: Look for the tilted red tower near the Polish Post Office. Inside, the main exhibition is underground and very large: reconstructed streets, vehicles including a Sherman and a T-34, and thousands of objects. Allow at least three hours and pace yourself.

Plan: Closed Mondays; generally open 10:00–18:00. Entry is by timed ticket; buy online in advance at bilety.muzeum1939.pl, as visitors without a booking have been turned away. Audio guide extra. Check the website before you go.

GPS 54.35605, 18.66056

Read more: Museum of the Second World War (Wikipedia) · Museum of the Second World War (official)

C Polish Post Office, Gdańsk

HIGH Museum · Poland · ≈45 min

The Polish Post Office in the Free City of Danzig was Polish state property and its staff were armed in secret. On 1 September 1939 the 56 people inside, most of them postal workers, held off Danzig police, SS and SA for about 15 hours. The Germans blew a hole in the wall with 600 kg of explosives and then poured petrol into the basement and set it alight. The director, Dr Jan Michoń, was shot as he came out with a white flag, and the rest surrendered. A court-martial condemned the survivors as illegal combatants, and they were shot at Zaspa on 5 October 1939.

What you can see: The red-brick post office still works as a post office, and the museum branch inside tells the story of the defence with the defenders' personal belongings. Look for bullet and grenade scars on the walls, and the steel monument to the defenders in the square outside.

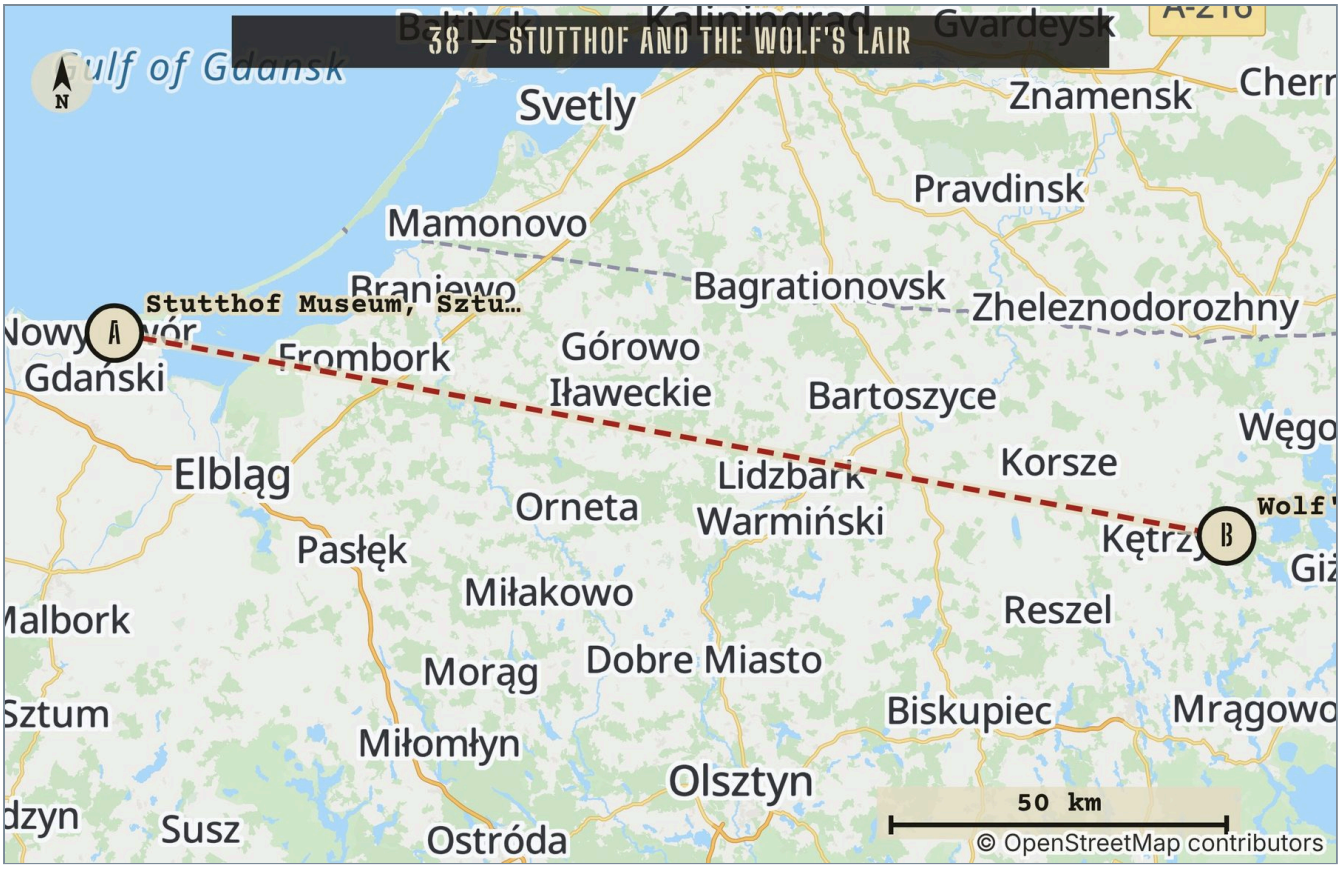
Plan: Museum branch of Muzeum Gdańska, open seasonally April–September, daily 10:00–18:00; about 15 zł, free on Mondays. Closed in winter. The monument outside can be seen at any time. Check the website before you go.

GPS 54.35511, 18.65685

Read more: Defence of the Polish Post Office in Danzig (Wikipedia) · Muzeum Gdańska branches (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Gdańsk. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

38 — STUTTHOF AND THE WOLF'S LAIR



Stutthof Museum → Wolf's Lair · 2 stops

East from Gdańsk to Stutthof, the first camp set up outside Germany's borders, then across former East Prussia to the Wolf's Lair, Hitler's headquarters for the war against the Soviet Union and site of the 1944 bomb plot.

A Stutthof Museum, Sztutowo

HIGH Camp memorial · Poland · ≈120 min

Stutthof opened on 2 September 1939, the first German concentration camp set up outside Germany's borders in the war. Its first prisoners were Poles from Danzig and Pomerania, especially the educated and community leaders. About 110,000 people from many countries passed through it; around 63,000–65,000 died, including some 28,000 Jews, many of them women brought from the Baltic ghettos and from Auschwitz in 1944. From 1944 the camp also had a gas chamber. The evacuation began on 25 January 1945, and thousands died on the death march. Soviet troops reached the camp only on 9 May 1945. The memorial museum opened in 1962.

What you can see: Wooden barracks, the commandant's villa, the gas chamber and crematorium, and the 'Death Gate' through which prisoners entered. A large memorial stands by the crematorium. A short documentary film runs hourly in the cinema.

Plan: Open daily: 8:00–15:00 from October, 8:00–18:00 from May; last entry 30 minutes before closing. Films hourly. Check admission and guiding on the website before you go.

GPS 54.32986, 19.15772

Read more: Stutthof concentration camp (Wikipedia) · Stutthof Museum (official)

Wolf's Lair, Gierłoż near Kętrzyn

MEDIUM Headquarters · Poland · ≈120 min · ★ must see

Organisation Todt built this forest headquarters near Rastenburg in East Prussia, and Hitler moved in on 24 June 1941, two days after the invasion of the Soviet Union began. He spent more than 800 days here, more than anywhere else during the war. On 20 July 1944 Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg left a briefcase bomb at a midday situation conference. Because the meeting was held in a lightly built hut rather than a concrete bunker, the blast was weakened and Hitler survived with minor injuries. He left for the last time on 20 November 1944, and German engineers blew up the bunkers on 24–25 January 1945.

What you can see: Massive slabs of shattered concrete, some walls more than 2 m thick, lie tilted in the forest. Look for the plaque marking the site of the July 1944 conference hut, Hitler's bunker (No. 13) and Göring's bunker, the best preserved.

Plan: Open daily from 08:00; closes 16:00 October–February and as late as 20:00 May–August. Paid entry (about 30 PLN in season, 2026); local guides and audio guides available. A new official site offers online booking. Check the website before you go.

GPS 54.08047, 21.49835

Read more: Wolf's Lair (Wikipedia) · Wilczy Szaniec (official, State Forests)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Kętrzyn. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

39 — WARSAW: THE RISING



Warsaw Rising Museum · 1 stop

Drive south to Warsaw for a day on the Warsaw Rising of August to October 1944, the Home Army's 63-day battle for the city, told at the museum in the old tram power station.

A Warsaw Rising Museum

HIGH Museum · Poland · ≈180 min · ★ must see

At 17:00 on 1 August 1944, 'W-hour', the Home Army rose against the German garrison of Warsaw as the Red Army approached the Vistula. The insurgents took much of the city but never linked their districts. From 5 August German forces massacred civilians in Wola, where this museum now stands, and in Ochota. Allied airdrops from Italy were small and often fell to the Germans, while the Soviets stayed on the far bank. After 63 days the Home Army surrendered on 2 October. Between 150,000 and 200,000 civilians died; the survivors were expelled and the Germans then demolished the city. The museum opened on 31 July 2004.

What you can see: Housed in a former tram power station in Wola. Look for the full-size B-24 Liberator in the hangar hall, the replica sewer you can crawl through, insurgent armbands and weapons, and the 3D film 'City of Ruins'. The Memorial Wall in the park lists thousands of the fallen.

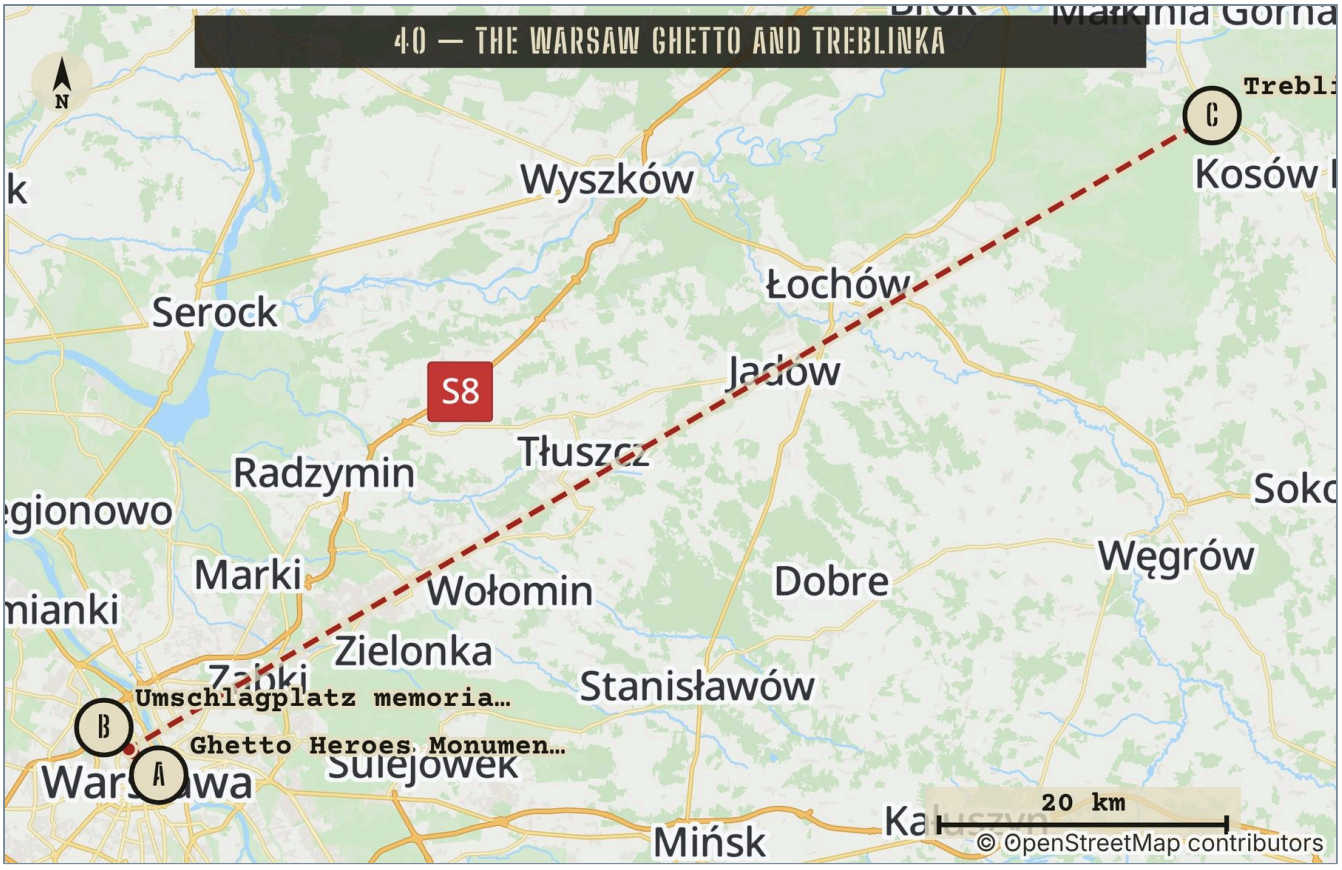
Plan: Closed Tuesdays. Mon and Wed–Fri 08:00–18:00, Sat–Sun 10:00–18:00. Tickets 35 PLN (reduced 30 PLN), best bought online at bilety.1944.pl. Busy at weekends. Check the website before you go.

GPS 52.23282, 20.98105

Read more: Warsaw Uprising (Wikipedia) · Warsaw Uprising Museum (Wikipedia) · Warsaw Rising Museum (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Warsaw. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

40 — THE WARSAW GHETTO AND TREBLINKA



Ghetto Heroes Monument and POLIN Museum → Umschlagplatz memorial → Treblinka Museum and memorial · 3 stops

Morning on the Warsaw Ghetto, its uprising of April 1943 and the Umschlagplatz from which its people were deported, then out to Treblinka, the extermination camp where most of them were murdered.

A Ghetto Heroes Monument and POLIN Museum, Warsaw

HIGH Memorial · Poland · ≈150 min

On 19 April 1943, when German forces entered the ghetto to complete its liquidation, Jewish fighters of the left-wing ŻOB under Mordechai Anielewicz and the right-wing ŻZW met them with pistols, grenades and petrol bombs. SS General Jürgen Stroop's troops burned the ghetto block by block. The ŻOB command bunker at Miła 18 fell on 8 May, and on 16 May Stroop blew up the Great Synagogue to mark the end. The monument by Nathan Rapoport, unveiled in 1948, stands where some of the first clashes took place. In 1970 West German Chancellor Willy Brandt knelt before it. The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews faces it.

What you can see: Rapoport's bronze relief of fighters set in dark stone, with a procession of victims on the back. The labradorite is said to have been ordered by Albert Speer for Nazi monuments. Across the square, POLIN's glass building traces a thousand years of Polish Jewish life, including the ghetto.

Plan: Monument: open-air, always accessible, free. POLIN: closed Tuesdays; open 10:00–18:00, Saturday to 20:00; core exhibition free on Thursdays; last entry two hours before closing. Tickets at bilety.polin.pl. Check the website before you go.

GPS 52.24972, 20.99389

Read more: Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (Wikipedia) · Monument to the Ghetto Heroes (Wikipedia) · POLIN Museum (official)

B Umschlagplatz memorial, Warsaw

HIGH Memorial · Poland · ≈20 min

The Umschlagplatz, a loading yard on Stawki Street beside the railway, was the place from which the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto were sent to Treblinka. During the Grossaktion Warschau, from 22 July to 21 September 1942, some 254,000–265,000 people were marched here, held in the yard and nearby buildings, and loaded into freight wagons; about 300,000 were deported in all. Among them on 6 August 1942 were Janusz Korczak and the children of his orphanage. The memorial, by Hanna Szmalenberg and Władysław Klamerus, was unveiled on 18 April 1988, on the eve of the uprising's 45th anniversary.

What you can see: A white marble enclosure about 4 m high, shaped like an open goods wagon. Inside, 400 Polish and Jewish first names are carved, from Aba to Żanna, each standing for a thousand victims. A single tree is visible through the opening.

Plan: Open-air memorial on Stawki Street, accessible at any time and free. About 10 minutes' walk from the Ghetto Heroes Monument and POLIN.

GPS 52.25226, 20.98908

Read more: Umschlagplatz (Wikipedia) · Umschlagplatz Monument (Wikipedia) · Official website

C Treblinka Museum and memorial

HIGH Camp memorial · Poland · ≈120 min · ★ must see

Treblinka II was a death camp of Operation Reinhard, the German plan to murder the Jews of the General Government. It opened on 23 July 1942, the day after the Warsaw deportations began, and trains brought Jews mainly from Warsaw and central Poland, as well as from abroad. Most were gassed within hours of arrival. On 2 August 1943 prisoners revolted and set fire to the camp; about 200 escaped and roughly 70 survived the war. The Germans dismantled the camp in autumn 1943 and planted a farm over it. Two kilometres away, the Treblinka I penal labour camp held over 20,000 prisoners, about half of whom died.

What you can see: Concrete sleepers mark the line of the railway spur. In the clearing where the gas chambers stood, a stone memorial rises from a field of thousands of jagged granite stones, many bearing the names of towns and villages. Paths lead to the Treblinka I gravel pit and the execution site.

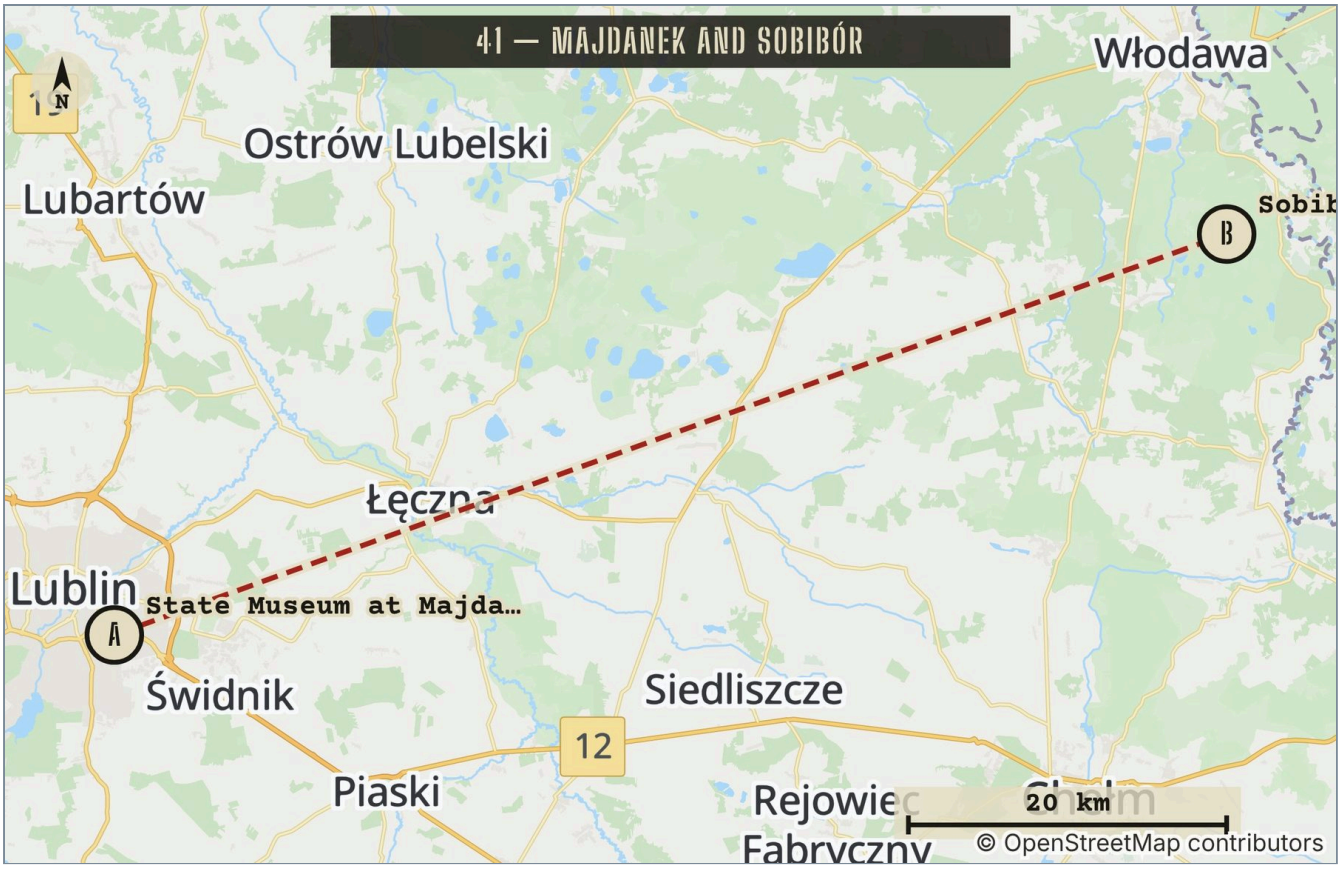
Plan: Grounds of Treblinka II, Treblinka I and the execution site open 9:00–18:30 (April–October); 10 PLN, free Mondays. The museum building is being rebuilt and its exhibition is closed until further notice (2026). Closed Easter, 24–26 Dec and 1 Jan. Check the website before you go.

GPS 52.63111, 22.05306

Read more: Treblinka extermination camp (Wikipedia) · Muzeum Treblinka (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Warsaw. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

41 — MAJDANEK AND SOBIBÓR



State Museum at Majdanek → Sobibór Museum and memorial · 2 stops

Two places of Operation Reinhard and the camps of the Lublin district: Majdanek, on the edge of Lublin and still largely intact, and Sobibór, where prisoners rose up and escaped in October 1943.

A State Museum at Majdanek, Lublin

HIGH Camp memorial · Poland · ≈150 min · ★ must see

Majdanek, on the edge of Lublin, was set up by the SS in autumn 1941 as a prisoner-of-war and then concentration camp, and also served as a killing site for Jews in Operation Reinhard. On 3 November 1943, in Operation Harvest Festival (Aktion Erntefest), SS and police units shot about 18,400 Jews here in a single day, in trenches beside the crematorium, to the sound of loud music. The Red Army reached the camp in late July 1944, and because it was captured nearly intact it was the first major camp seen by Allied forces and reporters. The museum was founded that autumn.

What you can see: Wooden barracks, watchtowers and fences still stand in open ground within sight of Lublin's housing estates. See the gas chambers and the crematorium. Wiktor Tołkin's 1969 monument stands at the entrance, and the domed mausoleum at the far end holds a mound of victims' ashes.

Plan: Grounds free to visit; Polish-language guided tours at weekends, 25 PLN (reduced 20). From 7 April 2026 the side entrances from Cmentarna and Tetmajera streets are closed: use the main entrance on Droga Męczenników Majdanka. Check opening hours on the website before you go.

GPS 51.22532, 22.60626

Read more: Majdanek concentration camp (Wikipedia) · State Museum at Majdanek (official)

Sobibór Museum and memorial

HIGH Camp memorial · Poland · ≈90 min

Sobibór was the second Operation Reinhard death camp, built in forest beside the Chełm–Włodawa railway close to the Bug river. From May 1942 transports brought Jews from the Lublin district and from the Netherlands, Slovakia, Germany and elsewhere; most were gassed within hours. On 14 October 1943 prisoners led by Leon Feldhendler's escape committee and the Soviet-Jewish officer Alexander Pechersky killed several SS men with axes and knives and broke out. About 300 escaped, and roughly 60 survived the war. The Germans closed the camp soon after and planted trees over it.

What you can see: A modern museum building and memorial landscape in the pine forest. Follow the route of the path the victims were driven along to the gas chambers, whose foundations archaeologists uncovered, and the large area over the mass graves. The old railway station stands nearby.

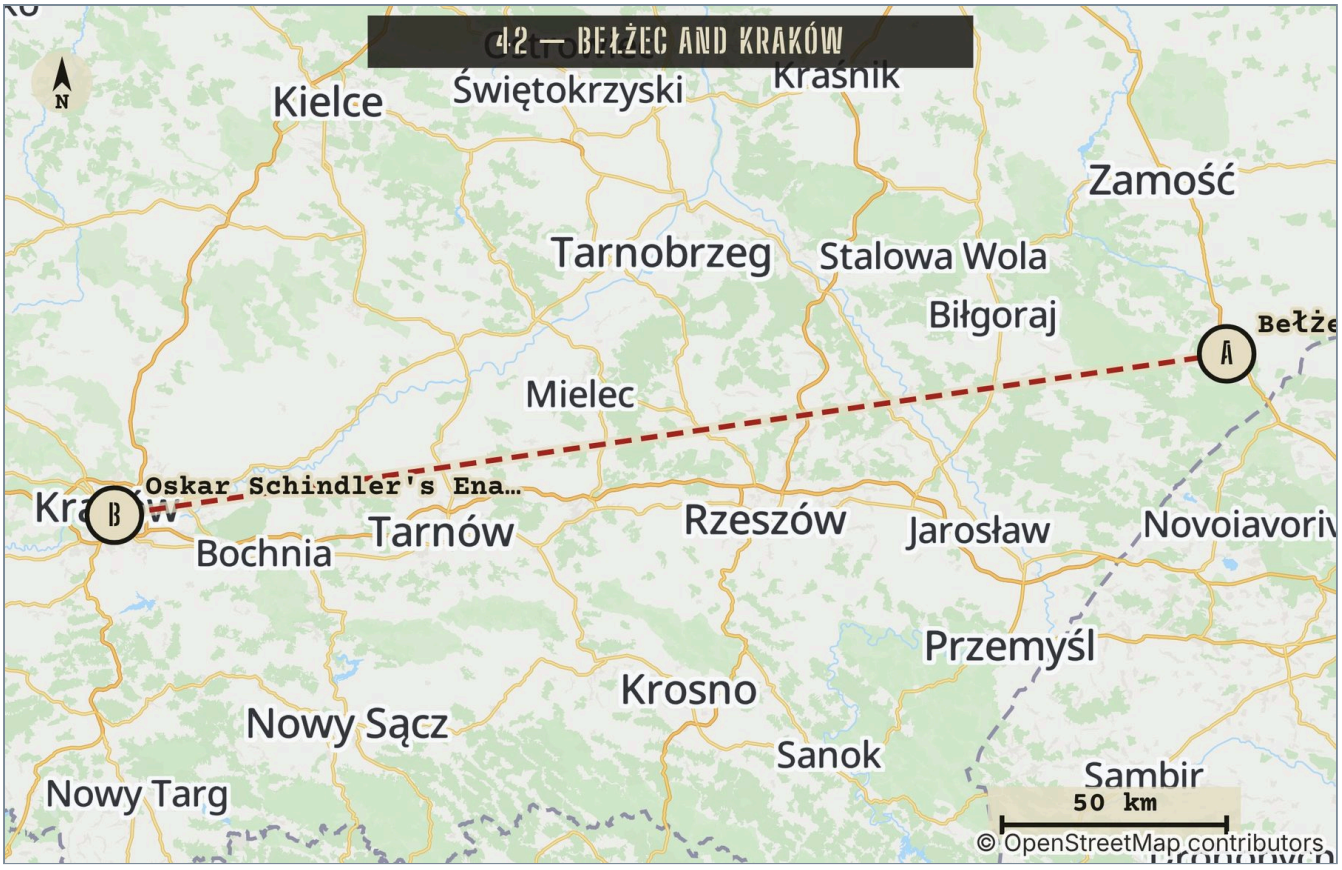
Plan: Free admission. Closed Mondays, and on 1 and 6 January, Easter, Corpus Christi, 11 November and 24–31 December. Mostly outdoors; no cloakroom or lockers; free parking. Check opening hours on the website before you go.

GPS 51.44722, 23.59361

Read more: Sobibor extermination camp (Wikipedia) · Sobibór Museum (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Lublin. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

42 — BEŁŻEC AND KRAKÓW



Bełżec Museum and memorial → Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory · 2 stops

Bełżec, the first of the Operation Reinhard extermination camps, then west to Kraków and Oskar Schindler's factory, which tells the story of the city under German occupation.

A Bełżec Museum and memorial

HIGH Camp memorial · Poland · ≈90 min

Bełżec was the first of the three Operation Reinhard death camps, opening on 17 March 1942 beside the Lublin–Lwów railway. Transports brought Jews from the Lublin district, Galicia and Kraków. Within ten months the camp killed some 430,000 to 500,000 people, and the last transport arrived on 11 December 1942. The SS then dug up and burned the bodies and dismantled the camp by mid-1943. Only a handful of prisoners survived; of them only Rudolf Reder, who escaped in late 1942, left a full testimony. The memorial was opened in 2004 as a branch of the Majdanek museum.

What you can see: The whole camp area is covered with dark industrial slag, marking the mass graves. A path cuts down through it in a narrowing ravine to a wall inscribed with victims' first names. The names of the towns from which transports came line the perimeter. A museum building stands at the entrance.

Plan: Branch of the State Museum at Majdanek. Guided tours can be booked through rezerwacje@belzec.eu. Check opening hours and admission on the website before you go.

GPS 50.37167, 23.45750

Read more: Belzec extermination camp (Wikipedia) · Bełżec Museum (official)

Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory, Kraków

HIGH Museum · Poland · ≈120 min

In November 1939 the German businessman Oskar Schindler took over the bankrupt Rekord enamelware works at Lipowa 4 in Kraków's Zabłocie district and renamed it Deutsche Emailwarenfabrik (DEF). He first hired Jews from the ghetto because they were cheap, but came to protect them. When the ghetto was destroyed he persuaded Amon Göth, commandant of Płaszów, to let him run a sub-camp at the factory; by 1944 about 1,100 Jews worked here. In autumn 1944 he moved his workers to Brünnlitz in Moravia. About 1,200 people on his lists survived. The factory is now a branch of the Museum of Kraków.

What you can see: The original gate and administration building, with Schindler's office and a wall of photographs of the people he saved. The main exhibition, 'Kraków under Nazi Occupation 1939–1945', covers the whole city's war: the invasion, the ghetto, Płaszów and resistance, using reconstructed streets and rooms.

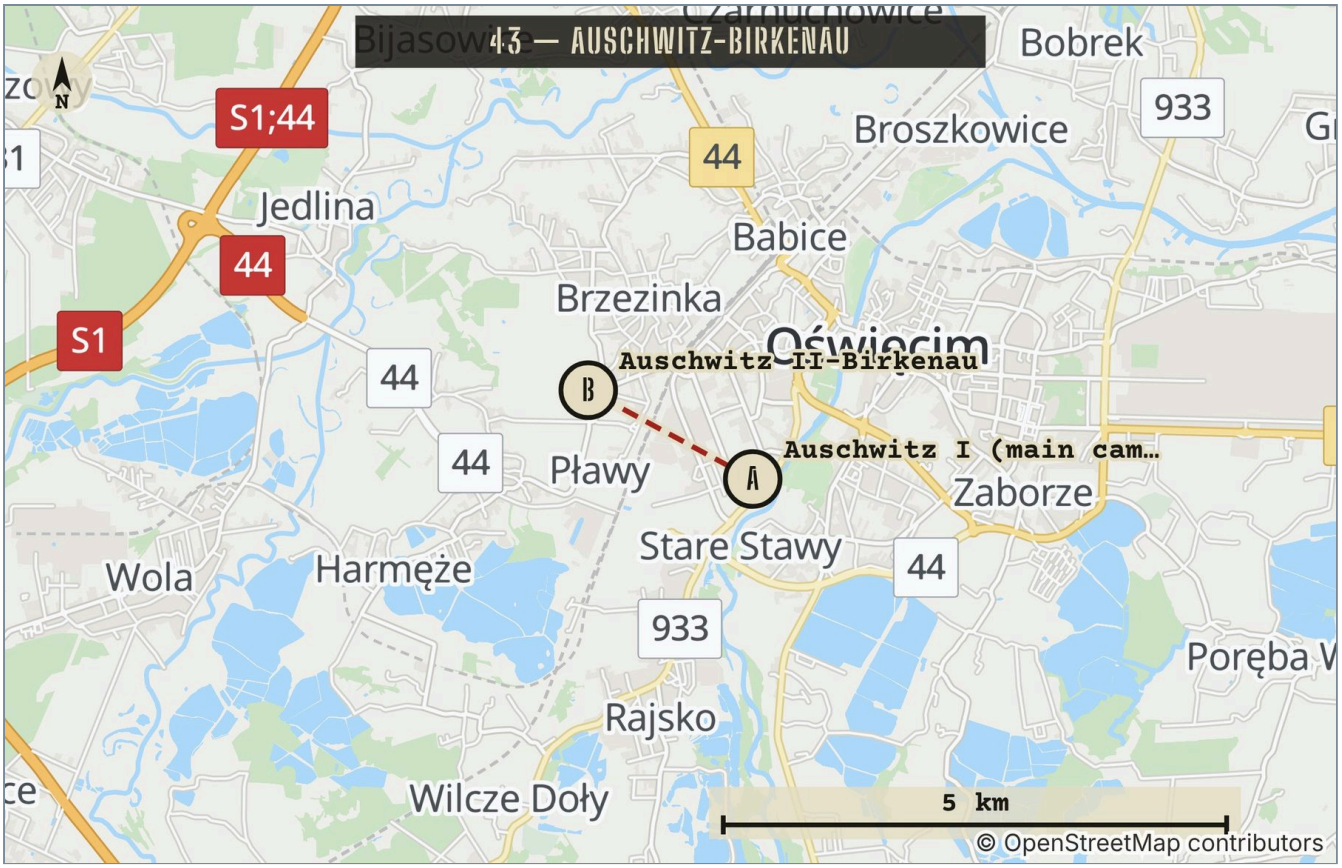
Plan: Tue–Sun 9:00–20:00, Mon 10:00–15:00 (free but limited and not bookable); closed the first Tuesday of each month. 60 PLN. Timed tickets online up to 90 days ahead; they often sell out, so book early and bring ID. Check the website before you go.

GPS 50.04740, 19.96175

Read more: Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory (Wikipedia) · Oskar Schindler (Wikipedia) · Museum of Kraków (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Kraków. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

43 — AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU



Auschwitz I → Auschwitz II-Birkenau · 2 stops

A full day at Auschwitz, the largest of the Nazi camps, where about 1.1 million people were murdered: the main camp at Auschwitz I and the extermination camp at Birkenau.

A Auschwitz I (main camp), Oświęcim

HIGH Camp memorial · Poland · ≈120 min · ★ must see

The Germans turned a former Polish army barracks at Oświęcim, renamed Auschwitz, into a concentration camp in 1940. The first mass transport, 728 Polish political prisoners from Tarnów, arrived on 14 June 1940, and Poles were the main prisoners in the early years. In August and September 1941 the SS first tested Zyklon B on Soviet prisoners of war and sick inmates in the cellars of Block 11 and in the old crematorium. Auschwitz I remained the administrative centre of a complex that grew to include Birkenau and Monowitz. The Red Army's 1st Ukrainian Front liberated the camps on 27 January 1945.

What you can see: Brick blocks behind the 'Arbeit macht frei' gate. The national exhibitions in the blocks hold piles of victims' shoes, suitcases and hair. See Block 11, the 'death block', the execution wall in its yard, and the gas chamber and crematorium beside the SS hospital.

Plan: Grounds free, but a named entry card is required, booked only online at visit.auschwitz.org; none are sold on site. At most times entry is only with a paid guide (about 3.5 hours, Auschwitz I then Birkenau). Closed 1 Jan, 25 Dec, Easter Sunday. Check the website before you go.

GPS 50.02640, 19.20396

Read more: Auschwitz concentration camp (Wikipedia) · Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (Wikipedia) · Visiting the Memorial (official) · Booking (official)

Auschwitz II-Birkenau

HIGH Camp memorial · Poland · ≈120 min · ★ must see

Construction of Birkenau began in October 1941 at Brzezinka, about 3 km from the main camp. It became the main killing centre of the Holocaust: by June 1943 crematoria II–V were working, with gas chambers in II and III. Most of the roughly 1.1 million people murdered at Auschwitz, about 90 per cent of them Jews, died here. In May 1944 a rail spur and ramp were completed inside the camp for the deportation of Hungary's Jews, who arrived from May to early July. On 7 October 1944 the Sonderkommando rose in revolt and destroyed Crematorium IV. The SS blew up the remaining crematoria before evacuating the camp in January 1945.

What you can see: Enter through the brick gatehouse, the 'Gate of Death', and see how vast the camp is. Follow the rails to the unloading ramp, then to the ruins of crematoria II and III and the International Monument. Wooden and brick barracks survive; elsewhere only chimneys remain.

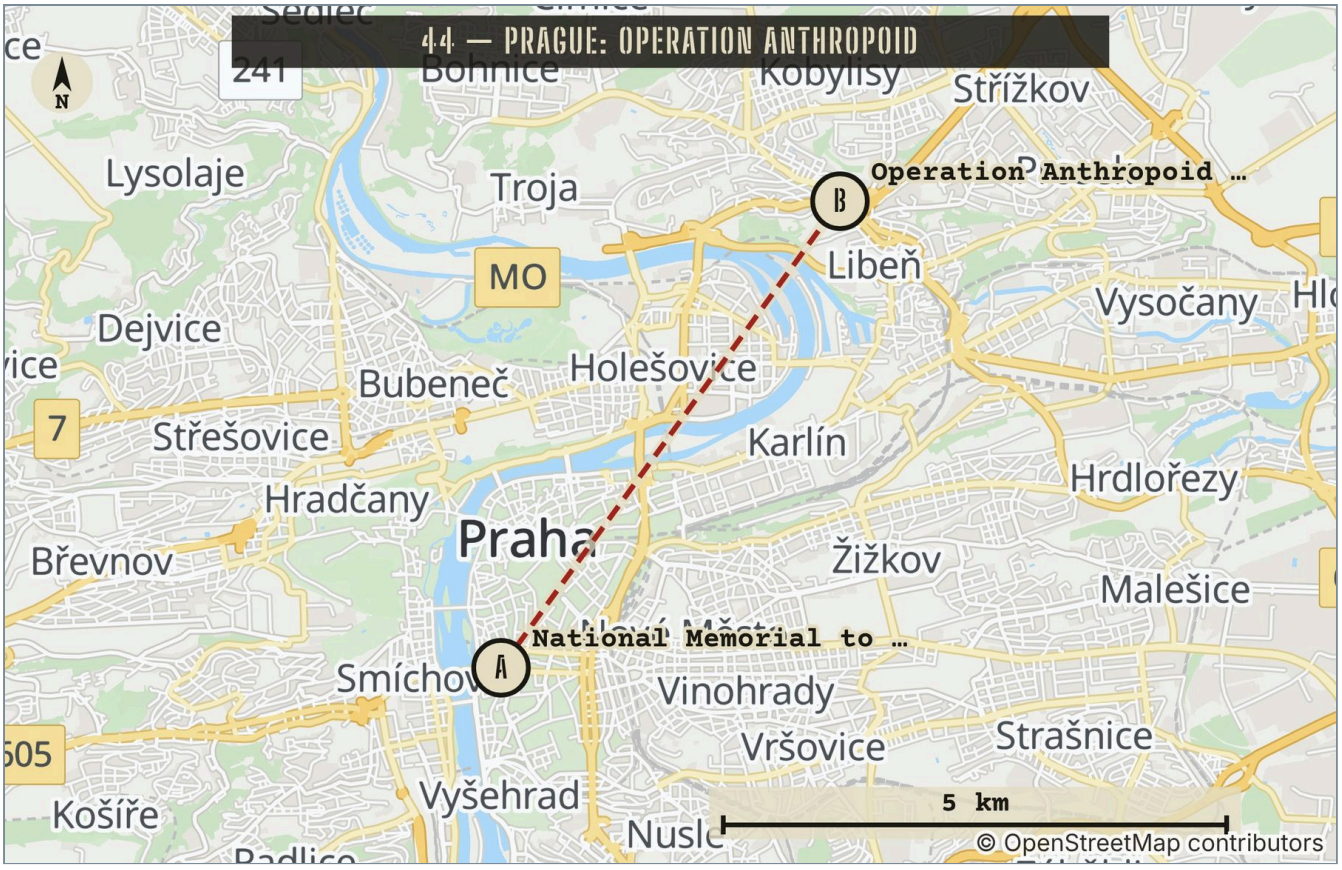
Plan: Same entry card as Auschwitz I, booked online only at visit.auschwitz.org; guided tours continue here from Auschwitz I. A free shuttle bus links the two sites. Mostly outdoors and exposed: dress for the weather. Check the website before you go.

GPS 50.03439, 19.18089

Read more: Auschwitz concentration camp (Wikipedia) · Visiting the Memorial (official) · Booking (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Kraków. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

44 — PRAGUE: OPERATION ANTHROPOID



National Memorial to the Heroes of the Heydrich Terror → Operation Anthropoid Memorial · 2 stops

A long drive west to Prague for Operation Anthropoid, the 1942 assassination of Reinhard Heydrich by Czechoslovak parachutists: the bend in Libeň where he was ambushed and the church crypt where they made their last stand.

A National Memorial to the Heroes of the Heydrich Terror

HIGH Memorial · Czech Republic · ≈60 min · ★ must see

After the attack on Heydrich, the Orthodox Church of Sts Cyril and Methodius in Resslova Street hid seven Czechoslovak paratroopers in its crypt, including Gabčík, Kubiš and Josef Valčík. Karel Čurda, another parachutist, gave the Gestapo the names of their helpers, and after the arrest of the Moravec family the SS surrounded the church before dawn on 18 June 1942. Adolf Opálka, Josef Bublík and Kubiš fought from the prayer loft until all three were dead or dying. Gabčík, Valčík, Jaroslav Švarc and Jan Hrubý held the crypt for hours against gunfire, tear gas and attempts to flood it, then killed themselves. Bishop Gorazd and the church's priests were executed in September 1942. Čurda was hanged for treason in 1947.

What you can see: The crypt itself, with the narrow ventilation slit to Resslova Street still scarred by bullets and the hole the paratroopers dug towards the sewer, plus an exhibition on the operation and the Heydrich terror. A plaque and memorial outside mark the bullet-pocked window.

Plan: Open Tuesday to Sunday 9:00–17:00, last entry 16:30, closed Mondays. Admission free. Run by the Military History Institute (VHU). The church above is a working Orthodox cathedral. Check the website before you go.

GPS 50.07596, 14.41762

Read more: Operation Anthropoid (Wikipedia) · Prague City Tourism: National Monument to the Heroes of the Heydrich Terror · Official website

Operation Anthropoid Memorial, Prague-Libeň

HIGH Memorial · Czech Republic · ≈30 min

On the morning of 27 May 1942 Reinhard Heydrich was driven in an open Mercedes from his country house towards Prague Castle. At a tight hairpin bend in Libeň, where Kirchmayerova třída (now Zenklova) met V Holešovičkách, Jozef Gabčík stepped out with a Sten gun, which jammed. Jan Kubiš threw a modified anti-tank grenade that burst against the rear wheel, wounding Heydrich; Josef Valčík kept watch further up the road. Both attackers escaped. Heydrich died of his wounds on 4 June. He was the most senior Nazi assassinated during the war, and the reprisals that followed killed thousands of Czechs.

What you can see: A tall corten-steel column on a traffic island of the modern interchange, with three bronze figures, two soldiers and one civilian, reaching out from its edges, unveiled on 27 May 2009 at 10:35. A bronze slab in front explains the attack. The original bend has been swallowed by the road layout.

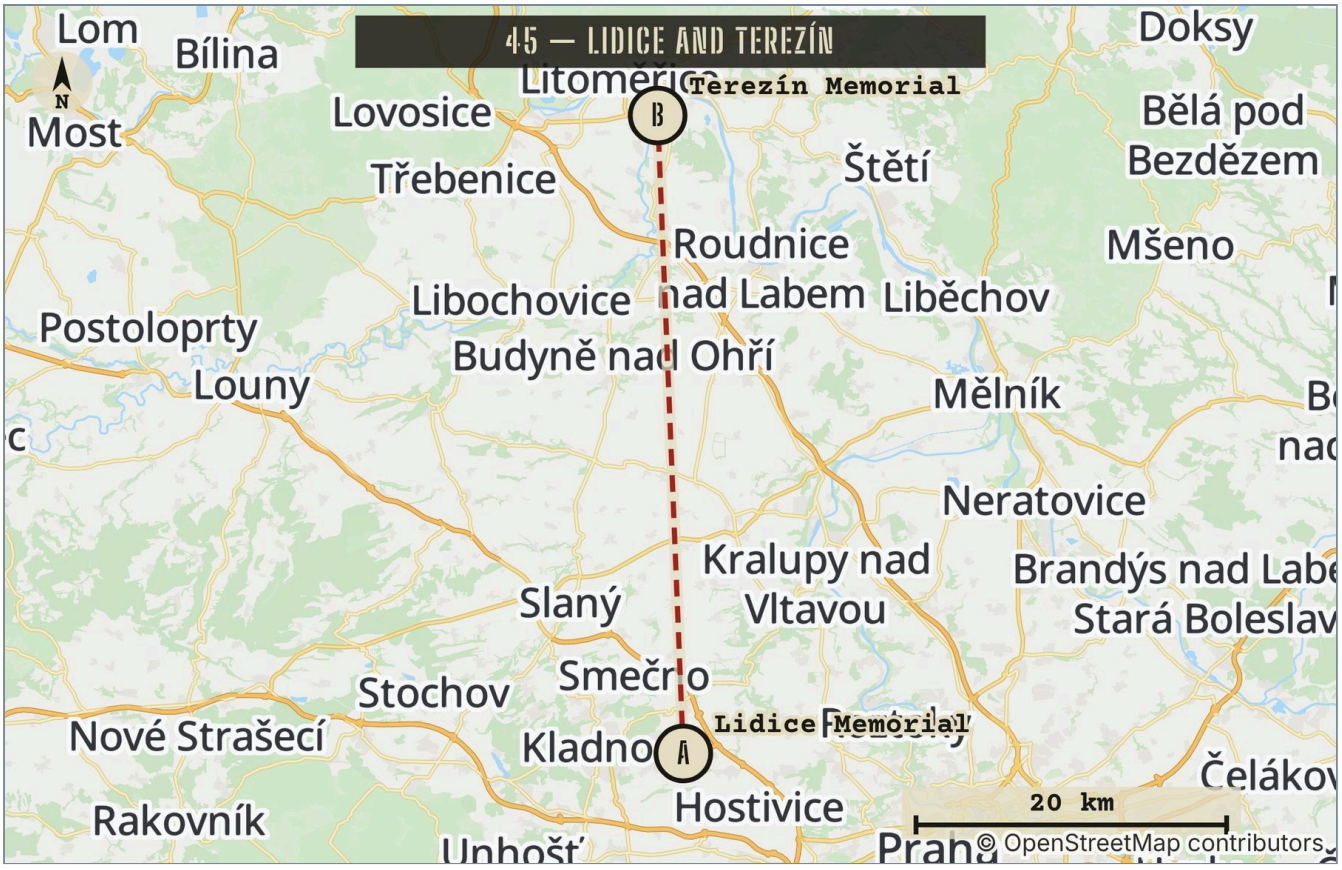
Plan: Open-air memorial, accessible at all times and free. It stands amid busy roads: use the pedestrian crossings. Trams stop nearby on V Holešovičkách.

GPS 50.11786, 14.46515

Read more: Operation Anthropoid Memorial (Wikipedia) · Operation Anthropoid (Wikipedia) · Prague 8: Operation Anthropoid Memorial (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Prague. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

45 — LIDICE AND TEREZÍN



Lidice Memorial → Terezín Memorial · 2 stops

Two places marked by the occupation of Czechoslovakia: Lidice, destroyed in reprisal for Heydrich's killing, and Terezín, the ghetto and transit camp of Theresienstadt, before crossing into Germany to Dresden.

A Lidice Memorial

MEDIUM Memorial · Czech Republic · ≈120 min · ★ must see

After the attack on Reinhard Heydrich, the Gestapo falsely linked the mining village of Lidice, west of Prague, to the assassins on the strength of an intercepted love letter. On 10 June 1942 German security police shot the village's men and boys over 15 on the Horák farm, sent the women to Ravensbrück and took the children; most of the children were later gassed at Chełmno, while a few judged 'racially suitable' were handed to German families. The village was burned, blown up and levelled, and its name erased from maps. The crime was publicised by the Nazis themselves, and towns from Britain to Latin America answered by taking the name Lidice. The memorial landscape was laid out between 1946 and 1962.

What you can see: A grassy valley where the village stood, with the foundations of the church, school and Horák farm, the cross over the men's mass grave, Marie Uchytilová's bronze group of 82 children, a rose garden of some 21,000 bushes and a museum with the exhibition 'And Those Innocent Were Guilty...'.

Plan: Open daily 9:00–17:00. Adults 150 Kč, children 70 Kč. The memorial landscape is open-air; allow time to walk down to the village site. About 30 minutes by bus or car from Prague. Check the website before you go.

GPS 50.14361, 14.19028

Read more: Lidice massacre (Wikipedia) · Lidice Memorial (official)

Terezín Memorial

MEDIUM Camp memorial · Czech Republic · ≈240 min · ★ must see

Terezín, an 18th-century fortress town 60 km north of Prague, served the Nazis in two ways. From June 1940 the Small Fortress across the river was the Prague Gestapo's main prison, holding about 32,000 people. From 24 November 1941 the town itself became the Theresienstadt ghetto, a transit camp for Jews from the Protectorate, Germany, Austria and beyond, including the elderly and prominent. About 33,000 died there of hunger and disease, and about 88,000 were deported on to Auschwitz, Treblinka and other killing sites. In June 1944 the SS staged a 'beautified' ghetto for a Red Cross delegation and later filmed it for propaganda. The Red Army reached Terezín on 8 May 1945.

What you can see: The Ghetto Museum in the former boys' home, the Magdeburg Barracks with rooms on the ghetto's art, music and theatre, the crematorium and cemetery outside the walls, and across the river the Small Fortress with its cells, courtyards and execution ground. The town is lived in today.

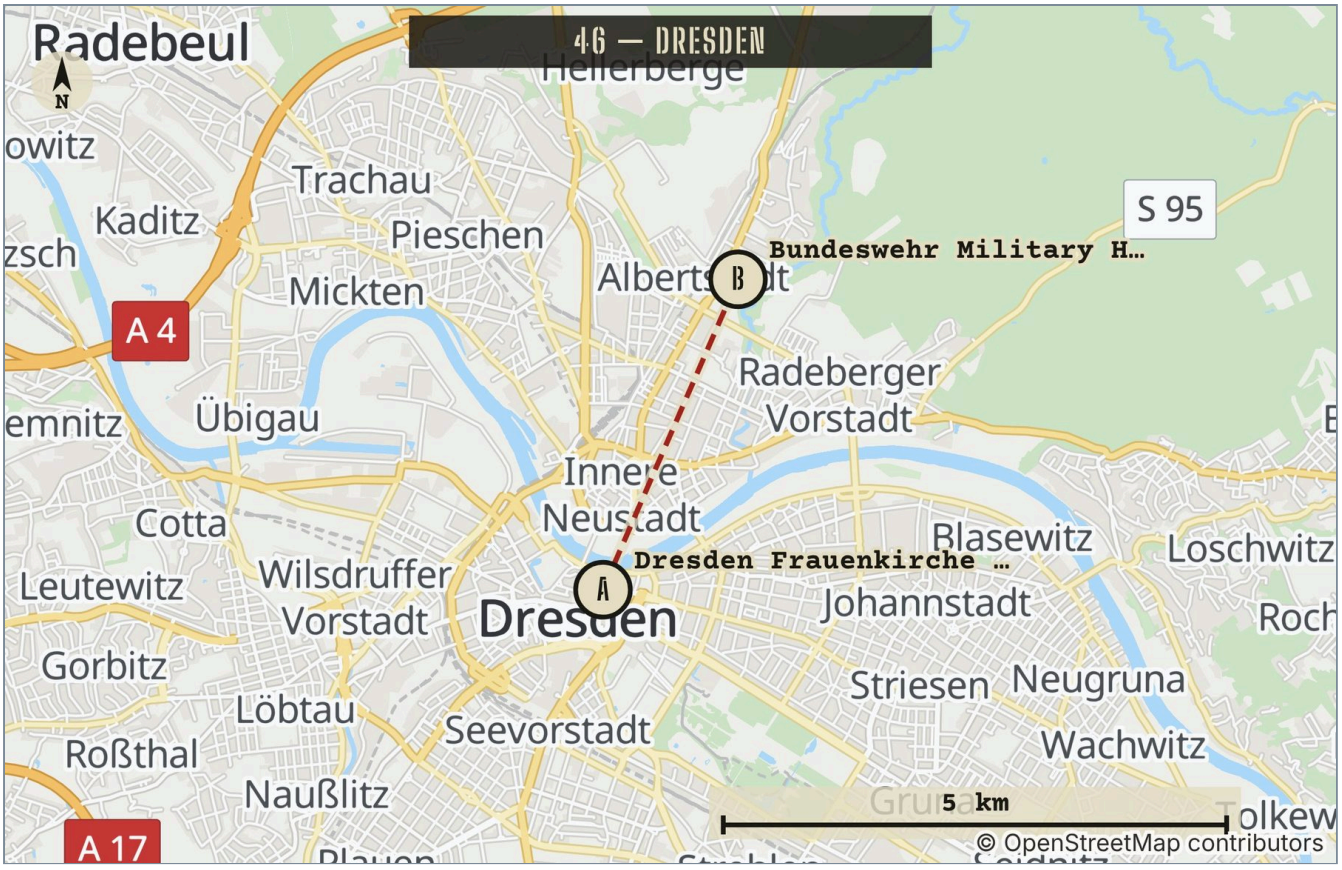
Plan: Small Fortress daily 9:00–17:00 (to 16:00 in winter); Ghetto Museum and Magdeburg Barracks daily 9:00–17:00; crematorium closed Saturdays. Combined tickets available. Some exhibitions are closed for reconstruction. Allow a full day. Check the website before you go.

GPS 50.51333, 14.16694

Read more: Theresienstadt Ghetto (Wikipedia) · Small Fortress (Wikipedia) · Terezín Memorial (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Prague. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

46 — DRESDEN



Dresden Frauenkirche and the 1945 bombing → Bundeswehr Military History Museum · 2 stops

A day in Dresden: the rebuilt Frauenkirche and the bombing of February 1945, and the Military History Museum, which looks at the war and German military history without glorifying it.

A Dresden Frauenkirche and the 1945 bombing

HIGH Memorial · Germany · ≈60 min

On the night of 13 February 1945 RAF Bomber Command attacked Dresden, followed by the US Eighth Air Force; over three days some 1,300 heavy bombers dropped more than 3,900 tons of bombs, and a firestorm destroyed the old city. The baroque Frauenkirche survived the night but, gutted by fire, its great stone dome collapsed at 10 am on 15 February. Under East German rule the heap of rubble was kept as a memorial against war. It was rebuilt from 1994 using original stones where possible and reconsecrated on 30 October 2005; the new orb and cross were made by Alan Smith, son of an RAF bomber crewman.

What you can see: Look at the exterior: darker, fire-blackened original stones are set among the pale new sandstone. Inside, the twisted original cross from the dome stands near the altar. A memorial room recalls the ruin, and the dome platform gives views over the rebuilt Altstadt.

Plan: Church open to visitors most days, roughly 10:00–11:30 and 13:00–17:30 between services; free. Dome ascent is charged. Times vary with services and concerts, so check the website before you go.

GPS 51.05194, 13.74167

Read more: Frauenkirche, Dresden (Wikipedia) · Bombing of Dresden (Wikipedia) · Frauenkirche Dresden (official)

Bundeswehr Military History Museum, Dresden

HIGH Museum · Germany · ≈180 min

Germany's national military museum occupies an arsenal built in 1873–1876 in Dresden's Albertstadt garrison quarter. When it reopened in October 2011, Daniel Libeskind had driven a steel and glass wedge through the old façade. Its tip points towards the former stadium in the Ostragehege, where RAF Pathfinders dropped the target markers for the bombing of 13 February 1945, and the wedge echoes the shape of the bombers' approach over the city. Rather than a parade of weapons, the museum asks about the causes and human cost of war, with strong sections on the Wehrmacht, the Holocaust and the bombing war.

What you can see: From outside, Libeskind's wedge splitting the neo-classical arsenal. Inside, a chronological route and themed displays in the wedge; climb to its viewing platform 29 metres up and look along the line to the marker point. Special exhibition 'WUNDERWAFFEN' runs to 9 March 2027.

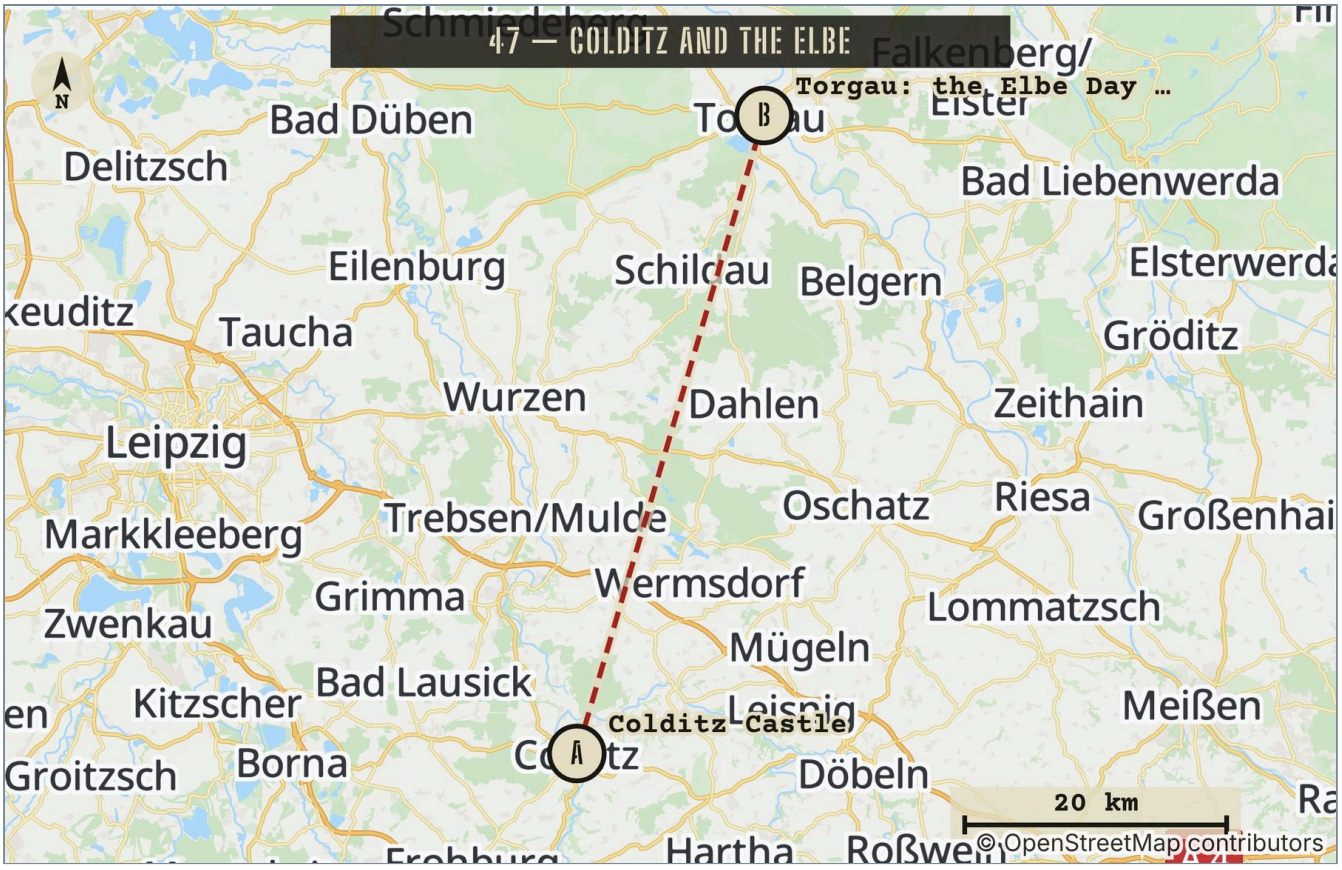
Plan: Thu–Tue 10:00–18:00, Mondays until 21:00; closed Wednesdays and 24–26, 31 Dec and 1 Jan. Adults €5 (combined ticket €7); under-18s free. Allow at least three hours.

GPS 51.07924, 13.76063

Read more: Military History Museum of the Bundeswehr (Wikipedia) · Militärhistorisches Museum (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Dresden. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

47 — COLDITZ AND THE ELBE



Colditz Castle → Torgau · 2 stops

Two stories from Saxony: Colditz Castle, the camp for Allied officers who kept trying to escape, and Torgau on the Elbe, where American and Soviet troops met in April 1945.

A Colditz Castle

HIGH Fortification · Germany · ≈120 min

Perched above the Mulde, Colditz Castle became Oflag IV-C, a prisoner-of-war camp for Allied officers the Germans classed as escape or security risks. Concentrating persistent escapers in one place produced the opposite of what was intended: tunnels, forged papers, home-made uniforms and one of the best escape records of any camp. In the winter of 1944–45 prisoners built a two-man glider, the Colditz Cock, in a hidden attic workshop, but it never flew. In the last days Himmler ordered prominent prisoners moved away. US troops took the castle on 16 April 1945 after a two-day fight in the town.

What you can see: Tour the inner courtyard where prisoners exercised, the chapel with the excavated tunnel under its floor, and the museum of escape devices. Guided tours show the routes of famous escapes; a replica of the Colditz Cock has been displayed.

Plan: Museum Mon–Fri 10:00–17:00, Sat–Sun 10:00–18:00; €12 (reduced €10). English 'Legendary Escapes' tours run on set dates; book ahead. Check the website before you go.

GPS 51.13111, 12.80750

Read more: Colditz Castle (Wikipedia) · Oflag IV-C (Wikipedia) · Colditz Castle (official)

Torgau: the Elbe Day meeting

MEDIUM Bridge · Germany · ≈45 min

On 25 April 1945 the US 69th Infantry Division and the Soviet 58th Guards Rifle Division met on the Elbe, cutting Germany in two. The first contact was made that morning near Strehla, some 30 km upstream, by Lieutenant Albert Kotzebue's patrol. At Torgau, Second Lieutenant William Robertson waved a home-made American flag from the tower of Hartenfels Castle; after confusion over signal flares he crossed the wreck of the blown bridge and met Soviet soldiers on it at about 4 pm. The famous handshake photographs were staged on the ruined bridge for the cameras the following day.

What you can see: On the riverbank stands the Monument to the Meeting, designed by Soviet architect Avraham Miletzki and dedicated in September 1945, beside a viewing platform that is all that remains of the old bridge. Hartenfels Castle, from whose tower Robertson signalled, rises behind.

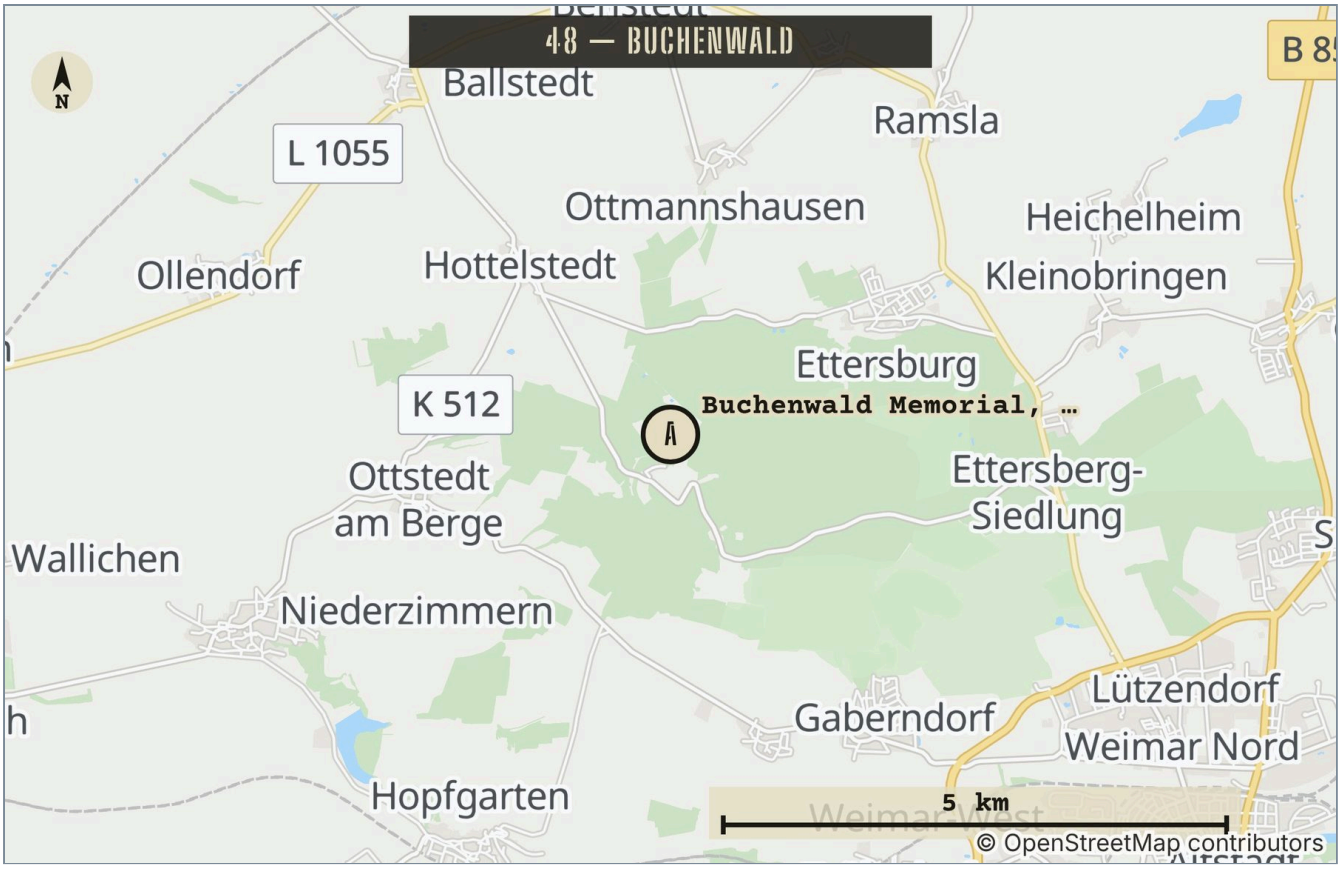
Plan: The monument and riverbank are open-air and free. Torgau holds Elbe Day events each April. Check the town website for castle opening times.

GPS 51.56005, 13.00939

Read more: Elbe Day (Wikipedia) · The meeting on the Elbe (Saxon Memorials Foundation)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Dresden. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

48 — BUCHENWALD



Buchenwald Memorial · 1 stop

Buchenwald, on the Ettersberg hill above Weimar, was one of the largest concentration camps inside Germany and was liberated by the Americans in April 1945; afterwards, a longer drive south to Nuremberg.

A Buchenwald Memorial, near Weimar

HIGH Camp memorial · Germany · ≈180 min · ★ must see

The SS opened Buchenwald on the Ettersberg above Weimar in July 1937. About 280,000 prisoners passed through it and its subcamps, and 56,545 died. When US troops of the 6th Armored Division arrived on 11 April 1945, prisoners had already taken control from the remaining guards; the gate clock is kept at 3.15 pm, the hour of liberation. General Patton ordered Weimar's mayor to bring about 1,000 citizens to see the camp on 16 April. From 1945 to 1950 the Soviets used it as Special Camp No. 2, where about 7,000 died. The East German memorial of 1958 told a story of communist resistance.

What you can see: Pass through the gatehouse with its inscription 'Jedem das Seine', readable from inside. The barracks are gone, marked by foundations; the crematorium and storehouse exhibitions remain. Below the hill stands the 1958 GDR bell tower, with the mass graves of 1945.

Plan: Exhibitions Tue–Sun 10:00–18:00 April–October, 10:00–16:00 November–March; closed Mondays; grounds open daily until dusk. Free. Bus 6 from Weimar. Check the website before you go.

GPS 51.02278, 11.24917

Read more: Buchenwald concentration camp (Wikipedia) · Buchenwald Memorial (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Weimar. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

49 — NUREMBERG: RALLIES AND TRIALS



Nazi Party Rally Grounds & Documentation Centre → Memorium Nuremberg Trials · 2 stops

Nuremberg, the city of the Nazi Party rallies and of the war crimes trials: the vast unfinished rally grounds and their documentation centre, and Courtroom 600, where the leading Nazis were tried in 1945–46.

A Nazi Party Rally Grounds & Documentation Centre

HIGH Museum · Germany · ≈180 min · ★ must see

Six Nazi Party rallies were held at Nuremberg between 1933 and 1938, mass rituals of marching columns, floodlights and speeches designed to show a nation united behind Hitler. Albert Speer designed most of the grounds, including the Zeppelin Field grandstand; the Congress Hall was designed by Ludwig and Franz Ruff. At the 1935 rally the Reichstag, summoned to Nuremberg, passed the Nuremberg Laws that stripped German Jews of citizenship. The Congress Hall was never finished: work stopped in 1943 at about 39 m of a planned 68.5 m, and its interior was never roofed. In April 1945 the US Army blew the giant swastika off the Zeppelin grandstand. The Documentation Centre opened in the north wing of the Congress Hall in 2001.

What you can see: Inside the Congress Hall the new permanent exhibition explains the rallies, their staging and their victims. Then walk the grounds: the unfinished horseshoe of the Congress Hall, the Great Road, the lake and the crumbling Zeppelin grandstand where Hitler spoke.

Plan: Mon–Fri 9:00–18:00, Sat–Sun 10:00–18:00; adults €7.50. The new permanent exhibition has run on trial since 22 May 2026, with an official opening on 4 November 2026 (closed 3–4 Nov). Grounds partly closed during the DTM race and Rock im Park. Check the website before you go.

GPS 49.43389, 11.11278

Read more: Nazi party rally grounds (Wikipedia) · Documentation Center (official) · Nuremberg tourism: Documentation Center

Memorium Nuremberg Trials (Courtroom 600)

HIGH Headquarters · Germany · ≈90 min · ★ must see

Nuremberg was chosen for the trial of the major war criminals because its Palace of Justice had survived the bombing largely intact and had a prison attached, and because the city stood for the party rallies. Before the International Military Tribunal of the four Allied powers, 24 leaders were indicted; 22 were tried, Martin Bormann in absentia. The trial opened in Courtroom 600 on 20 November 1945 and the verdicts came on 1 October 1946: 12 death sentences, seven prison terms and three acquittals. Ten men were hanged on 16 October; Göring killed himself the night before. Twelve further US trials of doctors, judges, industrialists and SS officers followed in the same room until 1949.

What you can see: The courtroom itself, still with its panelling and doors, on the top floor of the Palace of Justice, plus an exhibition on the defendants, the trial and its legacy for international law. A media installation recreates the 1945–46 room layout.

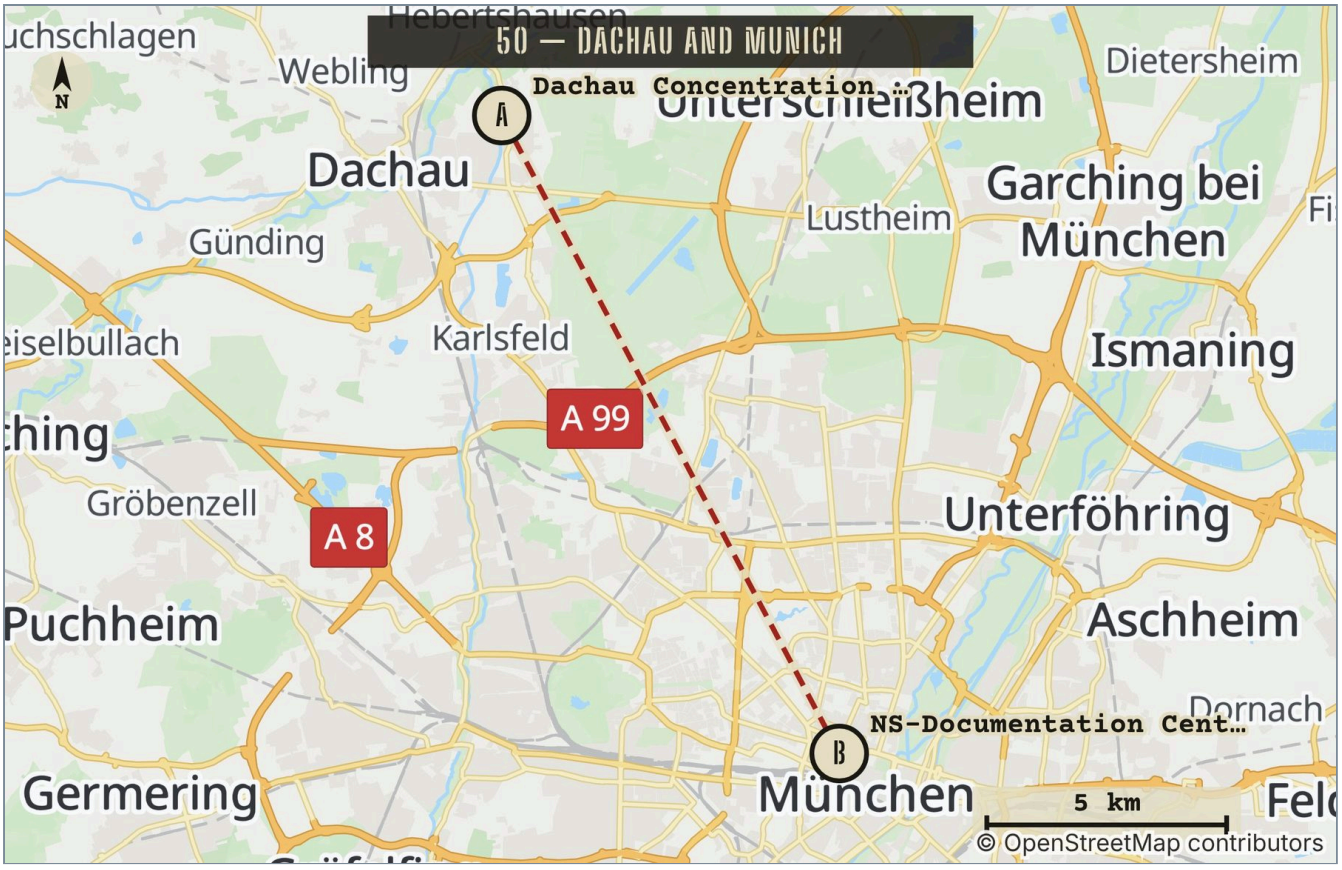
Plan: Mon and Wed–Fri 9:00–18:00, Sat–Sun 10:00–18:00, closed Tuesdays. Adults €7.50. Courtroom 600 is occasionally closed for events, so check the website before you go.

GPS 49.45490, 11.04650

Read more: Nuremberg trials (Wikipedia) · Palace of Justice, Nuremberg (Wikipedia) · Memorium Nuremberg Trials (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Nuremberg. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

50 — DACHAU AND MUNICH



Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site → NS-Documentation Centre · 2 stops

Dachau, the first concentration camp and the model for those that followed, then Munich, the birthplace of the Nazi movement, where the NS-Documentation Centre stands on the site of the party headquarters.

A Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site

HIGH Camp memorial · Germany · ≈180 min · ★ must see

Dachau opened on 22 March 1933, weeks after Hitler came to power, as the first regular concentration camp. Its second commandant, Theodor Eicke, drew up the rules, layout and guard training that became the model for the whole camp system, and he went on to run it as inspector of concentration camps. Political opponents came first, then Jews, Roma, clergy, homosexuals and, during the war, prisoners from more than 30 countries; around 200,000 passed through it and its subcamps. Tens of thousands died of starvation, disease, abuse and execution, many in the typhus epidemic of the final months. Units of the US 45th and 42nd Infantry Divisions liberated the main camp on 29 April 1945.

What you can see: The roll-call square, the maintenance building with the main exhibition, two reconstructed barracks and the foundations of the rest, the bunker (camp prison), the 'Arbeit macht frei' gate, and the crematorium area with the gas chamber, plus religious memorials at the far end.

Plan: Open daily 9:00–17:00 (crematorium area until 16:30), closed 24 December. Admission free. English guided tours daily at 11:00 and 13:00; audio guides available; groups should book. Allow at least three hours.

GPS 48.27028, 11.46806

Read more: Dachau concentration camp (Wikipedia) · Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site (official)

NS-Documentation Centre, Munich

HIGH Museum · Germany · ≈120 min

Munich was where the Nazi Party was founded and where Hitler first made his name; his failed Beer Hall Putsch of 9 November 1923 ended in gunfire at the Feldherrnhalle. After 1933 the regime styled Munich the 'Capital of the Movement'. The party's national headquarters, the Brown House, stood on Brienner Straße beside Königsplatz, flanked by the party's own buildings and 'temples of honour'. The NS-Documentation Centre, opened on 30 April 2015, stands on the site of the Brown House. Its white cube looks out over the surviving party buildings and explains why the movement grew in this city, who supported it, and what it did to its victims.

What you can see: Four floors of exhibition, read from the top down, with windows framing the surviving Nazi buildings on Königsplatz. Afterwards walk round the square to the Führerbau (now a music school) and the stumps of the Ehrentempel foundations.

Plan: Tuesday to Sunday 10:00–19:00, also open on public holidays that fall on a Monday. Admission free. No booking needed for individuals. Check the website for temporary exhibitions.

GPS 48.14528, 11.56750

Read more: Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism (Wikipedia) · NS-Dokumentationszentrum München (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Munich. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

51 — OBERSALZBERG AND THE EAGLE'S NEST



Obersalzberg Documentation Centre → Kehlsteinhaus · 2 stops

Above Berchtesgaden, the Obersalzberg was Hitler's mountain retreat and a second seat of government; the documentation centre explains it, and the Eagle's Nest stands on the summit above, before the drive on to Linz.

A Obersalzberg Documentation Centre

HIGH Museum · Germany · ≈120 min · ★ must see

Hitler rented a chalet on the Obersalzberg above Berchtesgaden in 1928, bought it in 1933 and rebuilt it as the Berghof. Martin Bormann turned the mountainside into a fenced 'Führer zone' with houses for Göring and Bormann, SS barracks and a network of bunkers. It became a second seat of government: Hitler spent much of August 1939 here preparing the attack on Poland, and his last stay ended on 14 July 1944. On 25 April 1945 RAF bombers wrecked most of the buildings, and the SS set fire to the Berghof before US and French troops arrived. Bavaria demolished the ruins in 1952. The Institute of Contemporary History opened the documentation centre in 1999; a new building and exhibition opened in 2023.

What you can see: The exhibition 'Idyll and Atrocity' links the mountain retreat to the crimes planned from it, then leads down into part of the original bunker system. The Berghof site itself is a short walk away in the woods, with only traces left.

Plan: Open daily 9:00–17:00, last entry 16:00. Adults €4.50, under 18 free. Closed 1 Nov, 24, 25 and 31 Dec, 1 Jan, and for maintenance 16–24 Nov 2026 and 1–8 Mar 2027. Free multimedia guide. Check the website before you go.

GPS 47.63167, 13.04028

Read more: Obersalzberg (Wikipedia) · Dokumentation Obersalzberg (official)

Kehlsteinhaus (Eagle's Nest)

HIGH Headquarters · Germany · ≈180 min

Martin Bormann had the Kehlsteinhaus built in 1937–38 just below the Kehlstein summit at about 1,838 m, with a road cut through five tunnels and a 124 m lift shaft inside the mountain. Designed by Roderich Fick, it cost some 30 million Reichsmarks and was presented to Hitler for his 50th birthday in 1939. Hitler, who disliked heights, visited only about 14 times; it was used for receptions and by Eva Braun. The French ambassador André François-Poncet called it the 'eagle's nest' after a visit in October 1938. In early May 1945 French troops of the 2e Division Blindée and US troops reached Berchtesgaden, and the building later served the Allies until 1960.

What you can see: Ride the bus up the narrow mountain road, walk the tunnel and take the brass-lined lift to the house, now a restaurant with a small history exhibition. On a clear day the views over the Berchtesgaden Alps and towards Salzburg explain the choice of site.

Plan: Open roughly early/mid May to early November (2026 season to 8 November), weather permitting. Access only by special bus from the Kehlstein bus station beside the Documentation Centre; the ticket includes the lift. Buy timed tickets online to avoid queues.

GPS 47.61111, 13.04167

Read more: Kehlsteinhaus (Wikipedia) · Kehlsteinhaus (official) · Berchtesgaden tourism: Kehlsteinhaus

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Berchtesgaden. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

52 — MAUTHAUSEN AND GUSEN



Mauthausen Memorial → Gusen Memorial · 2 stops

Mauthausen, near Linz, was the main camp of the Nazi system in Austria, where prisoners were worked to death in the granite quarry; its subcamp at Gusen, nearby, held still more and was even deadlier.

A Mauthausen Memorial

HIGH Camp memorial · Austria · ≈180 min · ★ must see

The SS opened Mauthausen on 8 August 1938, five months after the Anschluss, on a hill above the Danube 20 km east of Linz, beside the Wiener Graben granite quarry owned by the SS company DEST. It became the centre of a system of about 100 subcamps, the largest at Gusen. About 190,000 people from across Europe were deported there; prisoners hauled granite blocks up the 186 'Stairs of Death', and many were killed by gas, shooting or deliberate starvation. In February 1945 about 500 escaped prisoners, mostly Soviet officers, were hunted down and murdered by the SS, police and local civilians in the 'Mühlviertel hare hunt'. A reconnaissance squad of the US 11th Armored Division under Staff Sergeant Albert Kosiek reached the camp on 5 May 1945.

What you can see: The granite walls and gate of the main camp, the roll-call ground, surviving barracks, the camp prison, gas chamber and crematorium, a large exhibition in the former infirmary, national memorials outside the walls, and the quarry with the Stairs of Death below.

Plan: Open daily 9:00–17:30, last entry 16:45. Admission free, no registration needed; guided tours and audio guides charged and bookable online. The Stairs of Death are open 1 April to 26 October. Check the website before you go.

GPS 48.25694, 14.50111

Read more: Mauthausen concentration camp (Wikipedia) · Mauthausen Memorial (official)

Gusen Memorial

HIGH Camp memorial · Austria · ≈60 min

Gusen, 5 km west of Mauthausen, opened on 25 May 1940 as a subcamp but at times held more prisoners than the main camp. Polish intellectuals and Spanish Republicans were among the early inmates, worked in granite quarries under murderous conditions. From March 1944 Gusen II housed prisoners who dug the Bergkristall tunnels at St Georgen, where Messerschmitt built Me 262 jet fighter fuselages underground; 987 were completed before May 1945. Official records list 27,842 deaths, but estimates run to 35,000 or more, since many killed on arrival were never registered. US troops of the 11th Armored and 26th Infantry Divisions arrived on 5 May 1945. Most of the camp was later built over by housing.

What you can see: The memorial built by survivors around the camp's crematorium oven, a small visitor centre with an exhibition, and the surviving gatehouse (the 'Jourhaus', now a private house) among suburban homes. The site is being redesigned as a larger place of remembrance.

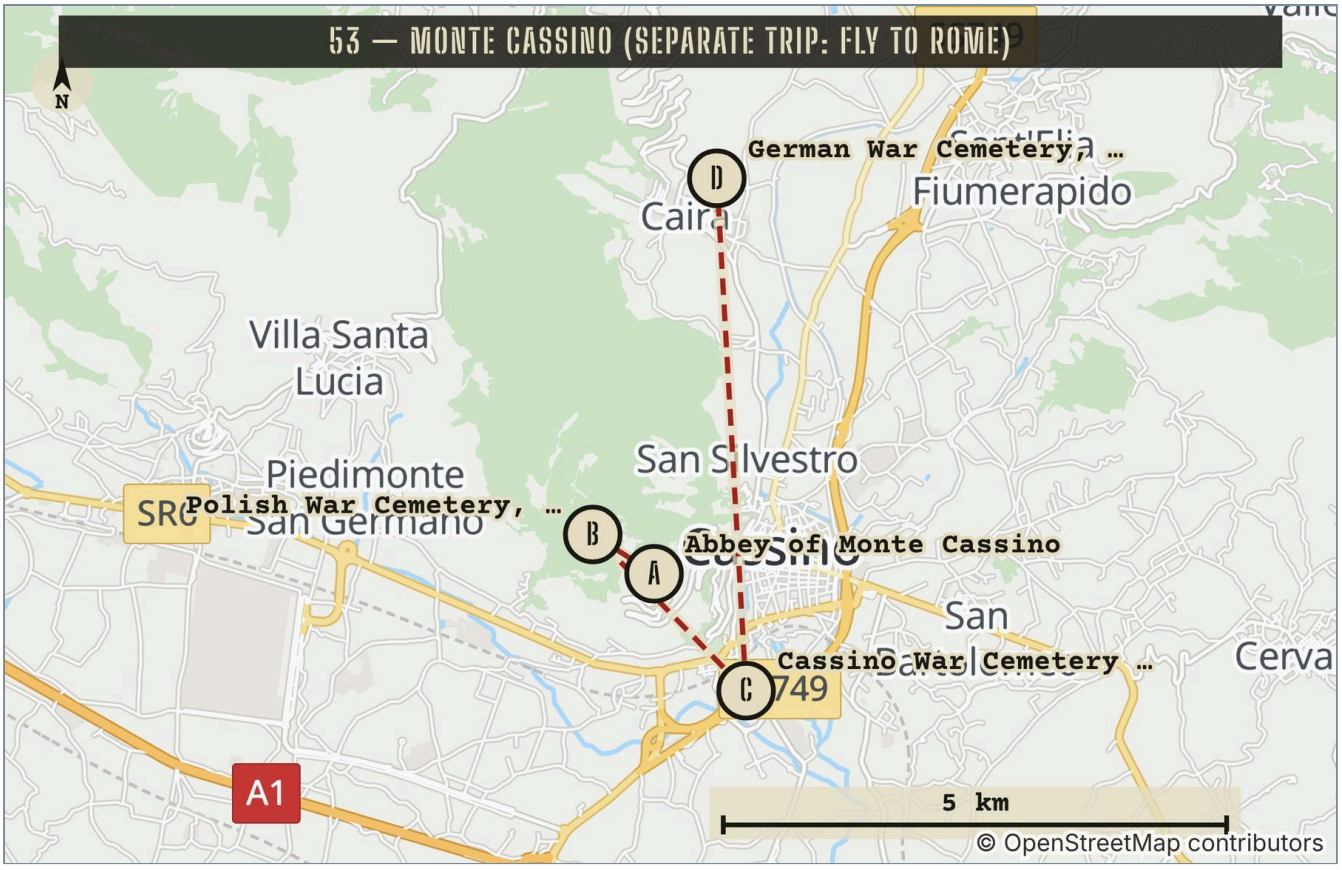
Plan: Open daily 9:00–17:00. Admission free, no registration needed; guided tours bookable through the Mauthausen Memorial. The memorial is being redeveloped, so expect changes. The Bergkristall tunnels open only on occasional guided tours. Check the website before you go.

GPS 48.25703, 14.46412

Read more: Gusen concentration camp (Wikipedia) · Gusen Memorial (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Linz. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

53 — MONTE CASSINO (SEPARATE TRIP: FLY TO ROME)



Abbey of Monte Cassino → Polish War Cemetery → Cassino War Cemetery and Memorial → German War Cemetery · 4 stops

A separate trip, flying to Rome: Monte Cassino, the abbey-crowned hill that blocked the road to Rome for four battles in early 1944, with the Polish, Commonwealth and German cemeteries around it.

A Abbey of Monte Cassino

HIGH Battlefield · Italy · ≈120 min · ★ must see

The Benedictine abbey on Monte Cassino looks down on Highway 6 and the Liri valley, the inland route to Rome and the hinge of the German Gustav Line. Four Allied offensives were fought below it between January and May 1944. On 15 February Allied bombers destroyed the abbey, killing about 230 Italian civilians sheltering inside. German paratroopers then occupied the ruins and made them a strongpoint. The New Zealand Corps, including 4th Indian Division, failed to take Monastery Hill in February and March. In Operation Diadem, Polish II Corps attacked the heights and on 18 May a Polish cavalry patrol raised its flag over the ruins. The abbey was rebuilt and Pope Paul VI consecrated the new basilica on 24 October 1964.

What you can see: A complete, rebuilt abbey on the summit, reached by a winding road. From the terraces you look down on the Polish cemetery, Cassino town, the Rapido valley and Highway 6, and can see why the hill dominated the battle. Look for photographs of the ruins and the abbey museum.

Plan: Summer (1 Apr–31 Oct) open daily 9:30–18:30; winter Mon–Sat 9:30–16:15, Sundays and holidays 9:30–17:15. A working monastery: dress modestly and keep quiet during services. Museum and guided visits by arrangement; check the website before you go.

GPS 41.49000, 13.81389

Read more: Monte Cassino (Wikipedia) · Battle of Monte Cassino (Wikipedia) · Abbey of Montecassino (official)

B Polish War Cemetery, Monte Cassino

HIGH Cemetery · Italy · ≈45 min · ★ must see

Polish II Corps under General Władysław Anders attacked the heights north-west of the abbey in May 1944, during Operation Diadem. After a week of fighting on Point 593 and the surrounding ridges, a patrol raised the Polish flag over the abbey ruins on 18 May. The cemetery lies on the slopes of Point 445, the Allied cemetery closest to the abbey. It was designed by Wacław Hryniewicz and Jerzy Skolimowski and consecrated on 1 September 1945. Crosses mark Christian graves and Stars of David mark Jewish ones. Anders, who died in London in 1970, chose to be buried among his men. A Memorial Museum on the 2nd Corps opened nearby in 2014.

What you can see: Terraced rows of travertine crosses rise to a large stone memorial, with the abbey directly above. Read the Simonides-style inscription ('Passer-by, go tell Poland...') and find General Anders' grave at the front. The small museum shows uniforms, photographs and film.

Plan: Free. Reached by the abbey road with parking nearby. Opening hours of the cemetery and the Memorial Museum could not be confirmed on an official site; check before you go and allow time if visiting with the abbey.

GPS 41.49384, 13.80587

Read more: Monte Cassino Polish war cemetery (Wikipedia) · Polish Military Cemetery (italia.it)

C Cassino War Cemetery and Memorial (CWGC)

HIGH Cemetery · Italy · ≈45 min

This Commonwealth cemetery lies on the valley floor below Monte Cassino, among the ground where British, Indian, New Zealand, Canadian and other Commonwealth troops fought between January and May 1944. It holds 4,271 Commonwealth servicemen, 289 of them unidentified. Inside the cemetery stands the Cassino Memorial, which carries the names of more than 4,000 Commonwealth servicemen who died in the Italian campaign and have no known grave. The New Zealand Corps attacks of February and March 1944 and the Eighth Army's crossing of the Rapido (Gari) in May were fought within sight of this spot.

What you can see: Rows of headstones in a walled garden, with the abbey on its hill above. The Cassino Memorial is a series of green marble panels around a pool. Look up from the cemetery to Monastery Hill to see the slopes the infantry had to climb.

Plan: Free. CWGC sites are normally open access; check the CWGC website for any works before you go. Short drive from Cassino town centre.

GPS 41.47760, 13.82710

Read more: Cassino War Cemetery (Wikipedia) · Cassino War Cemetery (CWGC)

D German War Cemetery, Cassino (Caira)

HIGH Cemetery · Italy · ≈45 min

About 3 km north of Cassino, on the southern foothills of Colle Marino, lies the largest German war cemetery in Italy. In 1959–1960 the Volksbund moved 20,076 German dead here from smaller cemeteries and field graves across the region, including the men who held the Gustav Line around Cassino and those who fought on the Garigliano and in the mountains. Around 3,100 graves have no name. The cemetery opened on 4 May 1965. In 2014 seven plaques were added in the memorial hall for 911 unidentified dead.

What you can see: Terraces and ellipses of graves climb the hillside, marked by stone crosses carrying several names each. The open-roofed, cube-shaped entrance building lights the sculpture 'Mourning and Consolation' by Suse Müller-Diefenbach. There is a small exhibition and wide views towards Monte Cassino.

Plan: Free. Summer: Mon–Fri 9:00–18:00, weekends and holidays 9:00–19:00; winter: daily 8:00–16:00. Parking at Piazza Marino Fardelli, Caira. Accessible. Check the Volksbund page before you go.

GPS 41.53130, 13.82299

Read more: Cassino German war cemetery (Volksbund)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Cassino. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

54 — ANZIO AND ROME



Anzio Beachhead Museum → Sicily-Rome American Cemetery → Fosse Ardeatine Mausoleum → Museum of the Liberation of Rome · 4 stops

The Anzio landings of January 1944, the beachhead museum and the American cemetery at Nettuno, then Rome under German occupation: the Ardeatine Caves massacre and the Gestapo prison at Via Tasso.

A Anzio Beachhead Museum (Museo dello Sbarco)

HIGH Museum · Italy · ≈60 min

On 22 January 1944 US VI Corps under Major General John P. Lucas landed at Anzio and Nettuno in Operation Shingle, to outflank the Gustav Line. US 3rd Infantry Division came ashore at X-Ray beach, British 1st Infantry Division at Peter beach and US Rangers took the port. Lucas consolidated rather than drive inland, and General von Mackensen's Fourteenth Army sealed the beachhead. Major General Lucian Truscott replaced Lucas on 22 February. The breakout, Operation Buffalo, began on 23 May, and Rome fell on 4 June. The museum was founded on 22 January 1994, the 50th anniversary, by a local research association.

What you can see: A single room in the 17th-century Villa Adele, organised in American, British, German and Italian sections: uniforms, weapons, maps, documents and veterans' photographs. Look for objects raised from the seabed off Anzio, including from HMS Janus, HMS Spartan and the hospital ship St David.

Plan: Open Tue and Thu–Sun 10:00–13:00 and 16:00–18:00; closed Mon and Wed. July–August 10:00–13:00 and 17:00–19:00. No booking needed. Short walk from Anzio station; check the website before you go.

GPS 41.45002, 12.63059

Read more: Operation Shingle (Wikipedia) · Anzio Landing Museum (official) · Museo dello Sbarco di Anzio (Ministero della Cultura)

B Sicily-Rome American Cemetery, Nettuno

HIGH Cemetery · Italy · ≈60 min

On the northern edge of Nettuno, inside the old Anzio beachhead, the American Battle Monuments Commission cemetery holds 7,858 American war dead on 77 acres. Most died in the campaigns from the landing in Sicily on 10 July 1943, through Salerno and the winter fighting, to the Anzio beachhead and the advance on Rome in June 1944. The white marble walls of the chapel carry 3,095 names of the missing. The memorial was designed by Murphy & Locraft and the grounds by Allyn R. Jennings; the cemetery was dedicated in 1956.

What you can see: Long curving rows of marble crosses and Stars of David on a lawn framed by Roman pines, leading to the chapel and the Tablets of the Missing. The memorial building has large maps of the Sicily and Italian campaigns. Staff in the visitor building can help find a grave.

Plan: Free; no booking. Open daily 9:00–17:00 (last entry 16:45), closed 25 December and 1 January. Piazzale Kennedy 1, Nettuno. Check the ABMC website before you go.

GPS 41.46528, 12.65833

Read more: Sicily–Rome American Cemetery (Wikipedia) · Plan your visit (ABMC)

C Fosse Ardeatine Mausoleum, Rome

HIGH Memorial · Italy · ≈60 min

On 23 March 1944 Communist-led GAP partisans bombed a column of the 11th Company, 3rd Battalion, SS Police Regiment 'Bozen' in Via Rasella; 33 policemen eventually died. Hitler authorised a reprisal of ten Italians for each German killed. Herbert Kappler, head of the security police in Rome, drew up the list, using prisoners, Jews and others; Erich Priebke and Karl Hass led the killing squads. On 24 March 335 men and boys, five more than ordered, were shot in disused quarries on the Via Ardeatina, and the tunnels were blown to hide the bodies. The mausoleum, the result of a national competition, was inaugurated on 24 March 1949.

What you can see: You enter through a gate with bronze sculpture, then walk through the tunnels where the shooting took place. The mausoleum is a vast, low concrete slab over 335 identical tombs, plus one for all Italy's fallen of the liberation war. A small museum explains the events.

Plan: Mon–Fri 8:15–15:15, Sat–Sun 8:15–16:45. Entry has traditionally been free. Guided visits through ANFIM (info@anfim.org). Via Ardeatina 174, near the Appian Way catacombs. Check the website before you go.

GPS 41.85842, 12.50884

Read more: Ardeatine massacre (Wikipedia) · Mausoleo Fosse Ardeatine (official) · Mausoleo delle Fosse Ardeatine (Turismo Roma)

D Museum of the Liberation of Rome (Via Tasso)

HIGH Museum · Italy · ≈60 min

This late-1930s apartment block near St John Lateran was first rented to the German embassy. After the Germans took Rome in September 1943, the SS security police and SD under Herbert Kappler made it their headquarters, with a prison at number 145. More than 2,000 anti-fascists, resisters and Jews passed through its cells; many were tortured, and some were later shot at Forte Bravetta or the Fosse Ardeatine. When the Germans fled in June 1944 they left some prisoners behind. Princess Josepha Ruspoli donated the flats to the state in 1950, and the museum opened on 4 June 1955.

What you can see: Small former cells on several floors, some kept with prisoners' scratched graffiti on the walls. Displays cover the occupation, the round-up of Rome's Jews, the Resistance and the Ardeatine massacre, with documents, photographs and personal objects.

Plan: Open daily 9:00–19:00, including Sundays and holidays; closed some holidays and 14–16 August. Free (voluntary donation). Booking required only for groups over six. Free guided visit first Sunday of the month at 10:30. Metro Manzoni.

GPS 41.88956, 12.50603

Read more: Museum of the Liberation of Rome (Wikipedia) · Museo Storico della Liberazione (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Rome. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

55 — MALTA UNDER SIEGE (SEPARATE TRIP)



Lascaris War Rooms → National War Museum → Malta at War Museum · 3 stops

A separate trip, flying to Malta, the island fortress that was besieged and bombed from 1940 to 1942 while it struck at Axis convoys to North Africa: the war rooms beneath Valletta and the museums at Fort St Elmo and Birgu.

A Lascaris War Rooms, Valletta

HIGH Headquarters · Malta · ≈90 min · ★ must see

Work on these tunnels beneath the Upper Barrakka Gardens and the Saluting Battery began in 1940, during the siege, and was finished in early 1943. They held the War Headquarters from which Malta's defence was run, including fighter control rooms that directed RAF squadrons against Axis raids. In July 1943 the complex served as the advance Allied headquarters for Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily, with Eisenhower, Admiral Cunningham, General Montgomery and Air Chief Marshal Tedder working here. After the war it housed the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet HQ and, from 1967, a NATO communications centre, until 1977. The heritage foundation Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna now runs it.

What you can see: A maze of rock-cut rooms deep under Valletta, with operations rooms restored with plotting tables, wall maps and figures, including the Sector Fighter Control room and the Operation Husky room. The ticket includes the separate Operation Husky Museum. Tickets can also be bought at the Saluting Battery above.

Plan: Mon–Sat 9:30–17:30 (last entry 17:00); closed Sundays and 24, 25, 31 Dec, 1 Jan, Good Friday and Easter. Adult €20, child €7, with audio guide; guided tours 10:30 and 12:30 (€5). Book online or at the entrance; check the website before you go.

`GPS 35.89450, 14.51105`

Read more: Lascaris War Rooms (Wikipedia) · Lascaris War Rooms (official)

B National War Museum, Fort St Elmo, Valletta

HIGH Museum · Malta · ≈90 min

Fort St Elmo guards the mouth of Grand Harbour at the tip of Valletta. The National War Museum, in the Old Drill Hall of Lower St Elmo, tells the story of the siege of Malta from June 1940 to November 1942. On the first day the island's only fighters were a few obsolete Gloster Sea Gladiators of the Hal Far Fighter Flight, later nicknamed Faith, Hope and Charity. Between 20 March and 28 April 1942 the Luftwaffe flew 11,819 sorties and dropped 6,557 tons of bombs on Malta. On 15 April 1942 King George VI awarded the island the George Cross. The museum reopened in 2015 after the fort's restoration.

What you can see: The fuselage of Sea Gladiator N5520 'Faith', the George Cross itself, and the Willys jeep 'Husky' used by Eisenhower and by Roosevelt on his visit to Malta. The wider museum covers Malta's military history; the star-shaped fort walls overlook Grand Harbour.

Plan: Adults €10, concessions €7.50, children €5.50. Open daily; hours change by season and the Sunday In Guardia parade delays general entry to 12:00. Closed 24, 25, 31 Dec, 1 Jan and Good Friday. WWI section closed until further notice. Check the website before you go.

GPS 35.90116, 14.51890

Read more: National War Museum, Malta (Wikipedia) · Siege of Malta (Wikipedia) · Fort St Elmo and National War Museum (Heritage Malta)

C Malta at War Museum, Birgu

HIGH Museum · Malta · ≈90 min

Birgu faces Valletta across Grand Harbour, beside the dockyard that was a prime target throughout the siege. The museum occupies the Couvre Porte, a 17th-century counterguard whose 18th-century casemates became barracks. During the war they served as a police headquarters and then a civil defence centre. In 1940 the police began digging an air-raid shelter into the rock below, which grew into a small underground village where the town's people slept, gave birth and sheltered from raids. The Luftwaffe's arrival in Sicily in January 1941, when Ju 87s bombed HMS Illustrious in the harbour, brought the war to Birgu's doorstep. The museum is run by Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna.

What you can see: Above ground, nine galleries of wartime memorabilia and the wartime documentary 'Malta G.C.'. Below, a rock-cut shelter with dormitories, a surgery, a birth room, family cubicles and long tunnels. Allow time for the hourly English guided tour.

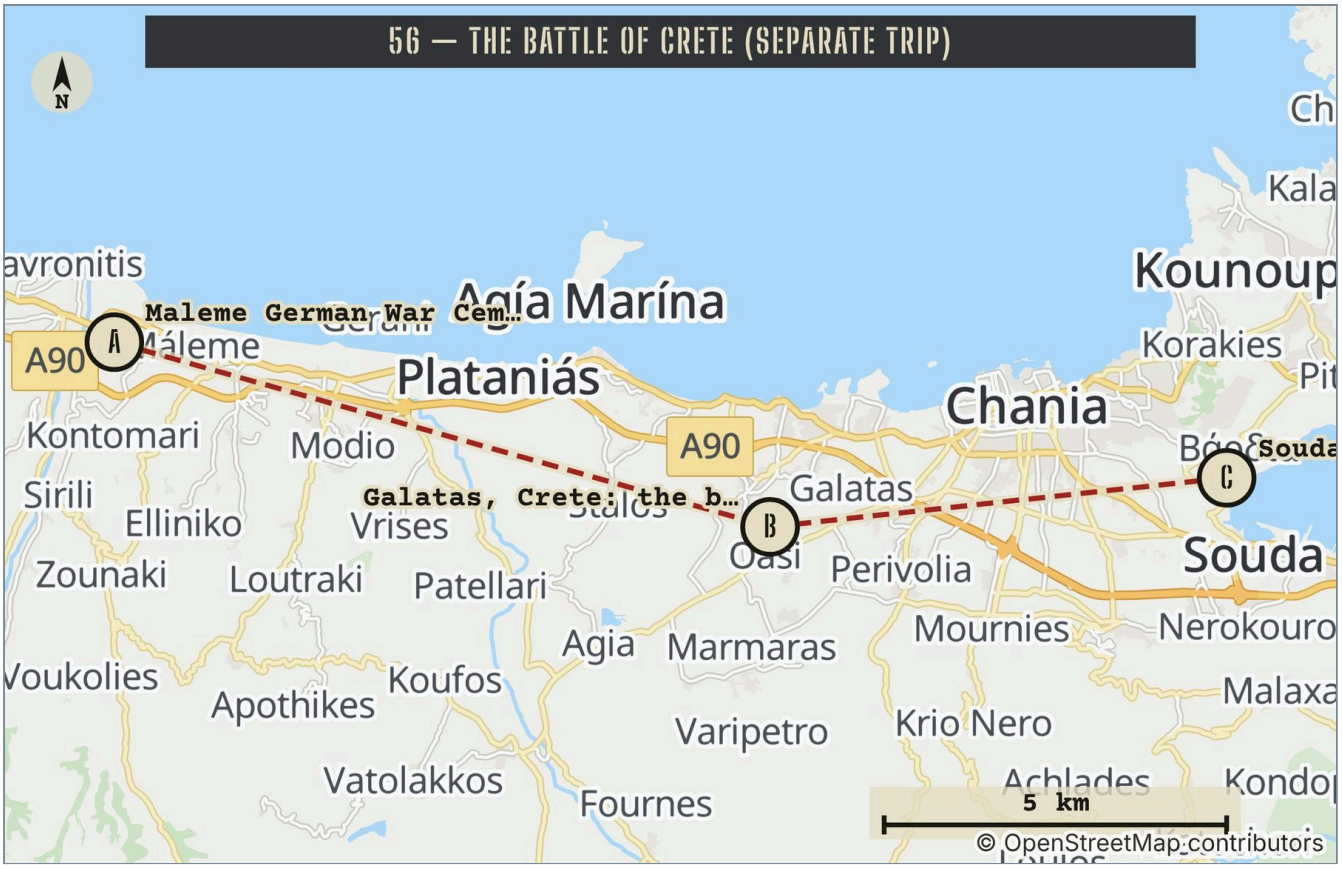
Plan: Mon–Sat 9:30–17:30 (last entry 17:00); closed Sundays and 24, 25, 31 Dec, 1 Jan, Good Friday and Easter. Adult €14, child €7; guided tour and audio guide included, English tours hourly 10:00–14:00. Check the website before you go.

GPS 35.88542, 14.52267

Read more: Malta at War Museum (Wikipedia) · Malta at War Museum (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Valletta. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

56 — THE BATTLE OF CRETE (SEPARATE TRIP)



Maleme German War Cemetery and Hill 107 → Galatas → Souda Bay War Cemetery · 3 stops

A separate trip, flying to Crete, scene of the German airborne invasion of May 1941: Hill 107 and the airfield at Maleme, the fighting for Galatas, and the Commonwealth cemetery at Souda Bay.

A Maleme German War Cemetery and Hill 107, Crete

HIGH Cemetery · Greece · ≈60 min · ★ must see

Hill 107 overlooks Maleme airfield, the key objective of the German airborne invasion of Crete. On 20 May 1941 German glider and parachute troops attacked the airfield and the hill, held by the New Zealand 22nd Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Leslie Andrew. Out of contact with two of his companies and refused reinforcements by Brigadier Hargest, Andrew withdrew from the hill that night. On 21 May the Germans took the airfield and Ju 52 transports began flying in the 5th Mountain Division. The Allied counter-attack on the night of 21/22 May started late and failed in daylight. This decided the battle. The German cemetery on the hilltop was consecrated on 6 October 1974.

What you can see: Terraced graves with flat stones and small groups of crosses on the hilltop. From the edge you look straight down onto the old Maleme airfield runway and along the coast towards Chania, the ground the 22nd Battalion held. Small visitor building with information.

Plan: Free. Greek war-tourism portal lists it as always accessible and wheelchair-accessible, but the Volksbund page gives no hours, so check before you go. About 17 km west of Chania, signposted from the coast road at Maleme.

GPS 35.52290, 23.83119

Read more: Battle of Crete (Wikipedia) · Maleme war cemetery (Volksbund) · German Military Cemetery Hill 107 (Hellenic War Museum)

B Galatas, Crete: the battle for the village

MEDIUM Battlefield · Greece · ≈60 min

Galatas, a hill village south-west of Chania, anchored the line held by Colonel Howard Kippenberger's 10th Brigade and later by 4th New Zealand Brigade. On 25 May 1941 German mountain and parachute troops attacked after heavy bombing. A covering force on Pink Hill held out until overrun, and Brigadier Inglis threw in 23rd Battalion and improvised troops, including bandsmen and the Kiwi Concert Party. The Germans entered Galatas. That evening Kippenberger sent two companies of 23rd Battalion and the remnants of 18th Battalion in behind two light tanks of 3rd Hussars under Lieutenant Roy Farran. They charged into the square and drove the Germans out, but were too weak to stay and withdrew that night.

What you can see: The village square where the bayonet charge ended, the Allied memorial on the edge of the village and views to Pink Hill and the former 'Prison Valley' to the south. A small local museum covers the battle. Annual commemorations are held here each May.

Plan: Free to walk the village. A small Battle of Galatas museum is nearby but its opening hours could not be confirmed; check locally before you go. Galatas is about 6 km south-west of Chania.

GPS 35.49192, 23.96633

Read more: Battle for Crete, days 4–6 (NZHistory) · Battle of Crete (Wikipedia) · Allied War Memorial Galatas (TracesOfWar)

C Souda Bay War Cemetery, Crete

HIGH Cemetery · Greece · ≈45 min

In May 1941 Commonwealth forces on Crete held five defence areas along the north coast. After the German airborne landings began on 20 May, Maleme fell and the line west of Chania broke on 26 May. Souda Bay became indefensible, and the troops retreated over the mountains to Sfakia. Between 28 and 31 May the Royal Navy evacuated about 18,000 men from Crete, most of them from Sfakia. Of 32,000 Commonwealth soldiers on the island, about 12,000 were captured and 2,000 killed. After the war, Australian War Graves Units moved the dead here from German-made burial grounds at Chania, Heraklion, Rethymno and Galatas and from isolated graves. About 1,500 Second World War servicemen lie here, 776 unidentified.

What you can see: A quiet, walled cemetery in an olive grove on the shore of Souda Bay, designed by Louis de Soissons. Rows of headstones run down towards the water. Look for the grave of the archaeologist and SOE officer John Pendlebury and for the many headstones marked 'Known unto God'.

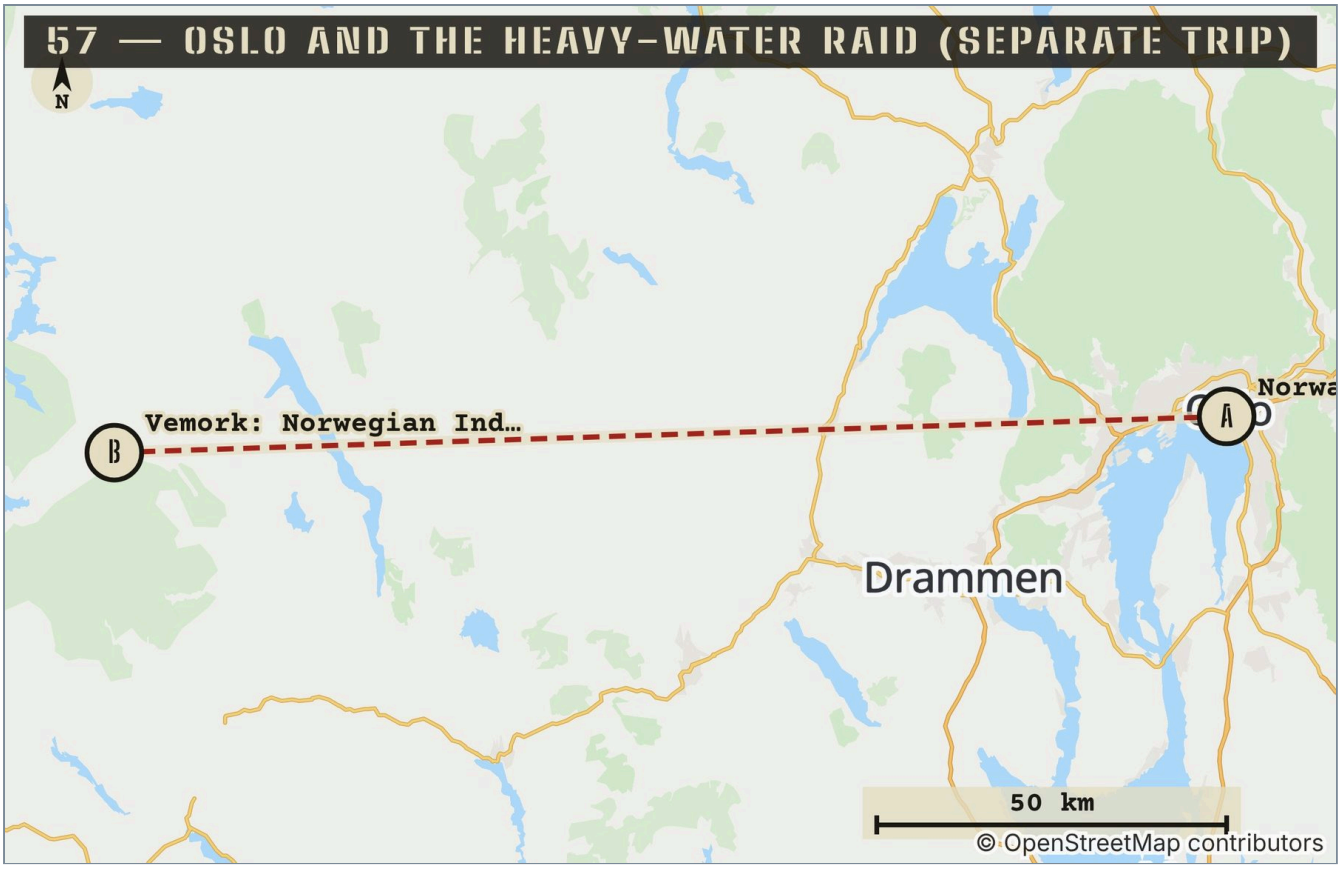
Plan: Free; open permanently. About 5 km east of Chania: follow Souda Boulevard to the Ellis junction, then CWGC signs via Mavridaki Street. Car park near the entrance.

GPS 35.50016, 24.06046

Read more: Souda Bay War Cemetery (Wikipedia) · Suda Bay War Cemetery (CWGC)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Chania. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

57 — OSLO AND THE HEAVY-WATER RAID (SEPARATE TRIP)



Norway's Resistance Museum → Vemork · 2 stops

A separate trip, flying to Oslo for the Resistance Museum and the story of the German invasion and occupation of Norway, then a drive west to Rjukan and Vemork, target of the heavy-water sabotage raids of 1943.

A Norway's Resistance Museum, Akershus Fortress

HIGH Museum · Norway · ≈90 min

Norway's Resistance Museum (Norges Hjemmefrontmuseum) stands inside Akershus Fortress in Oslo, which the Germans used during the occupation. It tells the story from the invasion of 9 April 1940 to the liberation in May 1945: the fighting of 1940, the government in exile in London, Quisling's collaborationist regime, civil resistance by teachers, clergy and sportsmen, the underground press, the Milorg military resistance and sabotage operations such as Vemork. It also covers the deportation of Norway's Jews in 1942. Resistance members were executed by the Germans at the fortress, and a memorial stands near the museum.

What you can see: A chronological walk through the occupation using dioramas, documents, weapons, radios and underground newspapers. Outside, the fortress walls and the memorial to executed Norwegian patriots. The fortress grounds give views over Oslo harbour.

Plan: Inside Akershus Fortress, a short walk from Oslo city centre; the fortress grounds are free. Since 2025 the museum is part of the Norwegian Armed Forces museums (Forsvarets museer): check their website for opening hours and prices before you go.

GPS 59.90790, 10.73580

Read more: Norway's Resistance Museum (Wikipedia)

Vemork: Norwegian Industrial Workers Museum

HIGH Ruins · Norway · ≈120 min · ★ must see

Vemork, outside Rjukan in Telemark, was a hydro-electric power station whose electrolysis plant produced heavy water, which German scientists wanted for nuclear research. On 19 November 1942 Operation Freshman sent two Halifax bombers towing gliders with British sappers; the gliders and one bomber crashed, and the survivors were captured and executed by the Germans. In February 1943 SOE-trained Norwegians of Operation Gunnerside parachuted in to join the Grouse team already waiting on the Hardangervidda. They entered the plant and set charges that destroyed the heavy-water section and about 500 kg of heavy water, and all escaped. Since 1988 the power station has been the Norwegian Industrial Workers Museum.

What you can see: The massive 1911 power station on a ledge above the Vestfjorddalen gorge, reached by a suspension bridge. Inside, exhibitions on the sabotage and heavy water, and on early industrial workers. The saboteurs' route up the gorge can be walked in summer.

Plan: Opening hours and prices could not be verified on the official site; hours are reduced outside summer, so check the website before you go. Rjukan is about 2.5 hours by road from Oslo.

GPS 59.87111, 8.49139

Read more: Vemork (Wikipedia) · Norwegian Industrial Workers Museum (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Rjukan. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

58 — NARVIK (FLY FROM OSLO)



Narvik War Museum · 1 stop

A flight north from Oslo to Narvik, the iron-ore port where British and German destroyers fought in April 1940 and Allied troops recaptured the town before being withdrawn as France fell.

A Narvik War Museum (Narviksenteret)

HIGH Museum · Norway · ≈90 min · ★ must see

Narvik mattered for its ice-free port, which shipped Swedish iron ore by rail. On 9 April 1940 German destroyers landed General Eduard Dietl's mountain troops; the Norwegian coastal defence ships Eidsvold and Norge were sunk and the town surrendered. On 10 April Commodore Bernard Warburton-Lee's destroyers attacked the harbour, sinking two German destroyers; he was killed and awarded a posthumous VC. On 13 April a force led by HMS Warspite destroyed the remaining German destroyers. After weeks of mountain fighting, Norwegian, French and Polish troops retook Narvik on 28 May, but the Allies withdrew in early June and Dietl reoccupied the town on 8 June.

What you can see: A modern museum in the centre of Narvik, sharing a building with the public library since 2016. Exhibitions cover the 1940 campaign and the occupation years to 1945. Look for Warburton-Lee's Victoria Cross and a German Enigma machine.

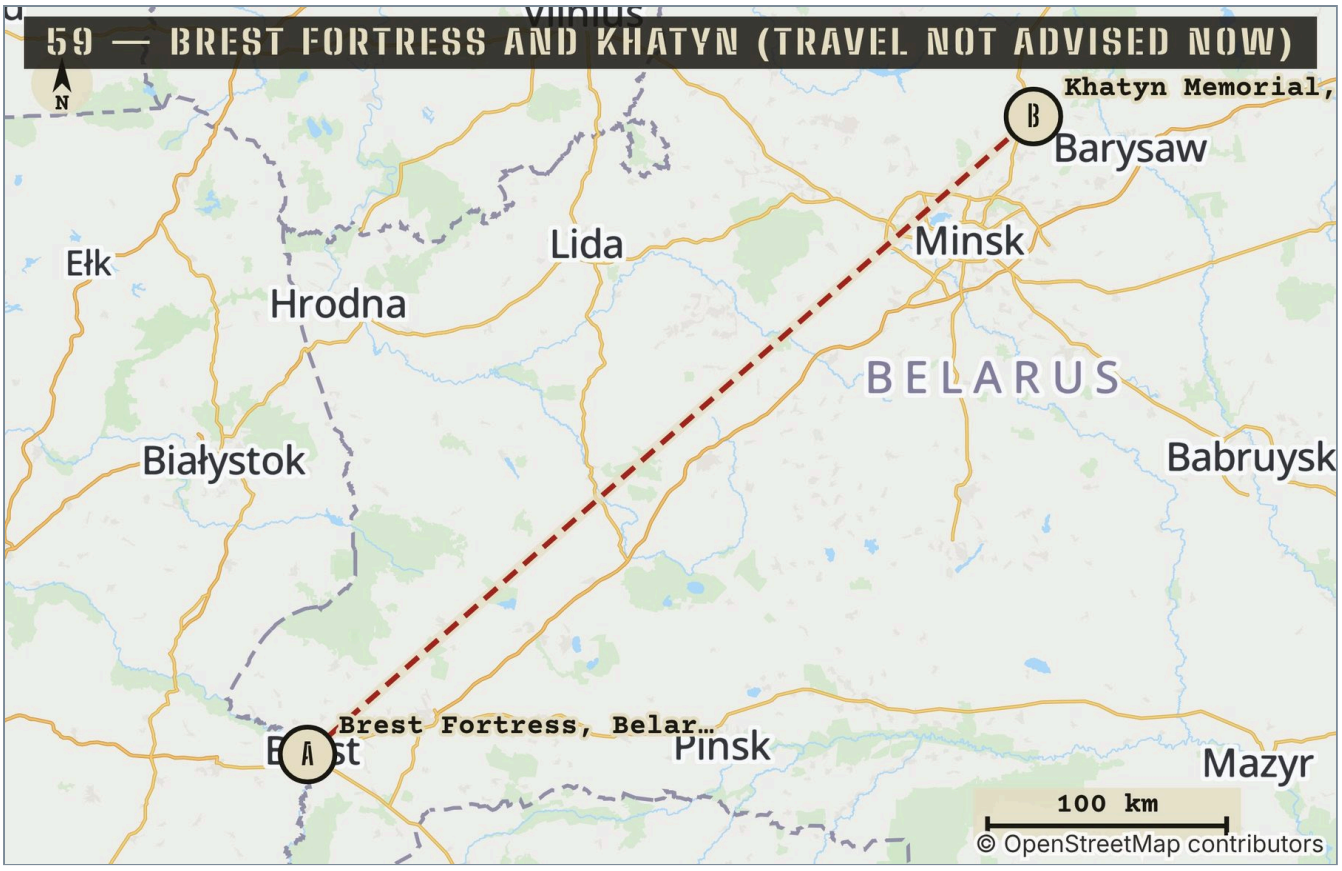
Plan: Opening hours and prices could not be verified on the official site; check the website before you go. The harbour, where the naval battles were fought, is a short walk away.

GPS 68.43778, 17.42537

Read more: Battles of Narvik (Wikipedia) · Narviksenteret (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Narvik. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

59 — BREST FORTRESS AND KHATYN (TRAVEL NOT ADVISED NOW)



Brest Fortress → Khatyn Memorial · 2 stops

Begin the war in the east at the Brest Fortress, which held out against the German invasion of June 1941, and Khatyn, the memorial to the hundreds of Belarusian villages burned with their inhabitants.

A Brest Fortress, Belarus (June 1941)

HIGH Fortification · Belarus · ≈180 min · ★ must see

At 04:15 Moscow time on 22 June 1941 German artillery, including 60 cm mortars, opened Operation Barbarossa against this 19th-century fortress on the Bug. The attackers were the Austrian 45th Infantry Division under Fritz Schlieper, about 17,000 men. Inside were around 9,000 Soviet troops from the 6th and 42nd Rifle Divisions and NKVD border guards, plus families. The Germans expected one day; it took about a week. Captain Ivan Zubachyov and Commissar Yefim Fomin led the citadel's resistance; Fomin was shot after capture. The East Fort surrendered on 29 June after Luftwaffe bombing. Major Pyotr Gavrilov, wounded, was taken on 23 July. About 6,800 Soviet soldiers were captured.

What you can see: Enter through the star-shaped main gate cut into the earth rampart, then walk to the huge stone head of the 'Courage' monument and the 100 m bayonet obelisk. Look for the battered Kholm and Terespol gates, the ruined barracks, the 'Thirst' sculpture and the defence museum in the old barracks ring.

Plan: FCDO advises against all travel to Belarus. The grounds are open; the Museum of the Defence opens 9:00–18:00, closed Mondays, with tickets on site. Some side exhibitions close on Tuesdays and the information centre is shut until 15 April 2027. Check the website before you go.

GPS 52.08241, 23.65685

Read more: Brest Fortress (Wikipedia) · Defense of Brest Fortress (Wikipedia) · Brest Hero-Fortress memorial complex (official)

Khatyn Memorial, Belarus

HIGH Memorial · Belarus · ≈90 min

On 22 March 1943, after a partisan ambush nearby, Schutzmannschaft Battalion 118, made up largely of Ukrainian and other Soviet collaborators, and the SS Dirlewanger unit surrounded the village of Khatyn, about 50 km north of Minsk. They herded the villagers into a barn, set it alight and shot those who broke out, then burned the village. About 149 people were killed, around 75 of them children. The blacksmith Yuzif Kaminsky was the only adult survivor. In 1969 the site became the Byelorussian SSR's national war memorial, designed by Yuri Gradov, Valentin Zankovich and Leonid Levin, and it stands for the hundreds of Belarusian villages destroyed in anti-partisan operations.

What you can see: Concrete outlines of the 26 houses, each with a chimney-shaped bell tower ringing in turn, the bronze 'Unbowed Man' of Kaminsky carrying his dead son, the stylised barn roof over the mass grave, the 'Cemetery of Villages' with 185 symbolic graves, and the wall naming camps and extermination sites in Belarus.

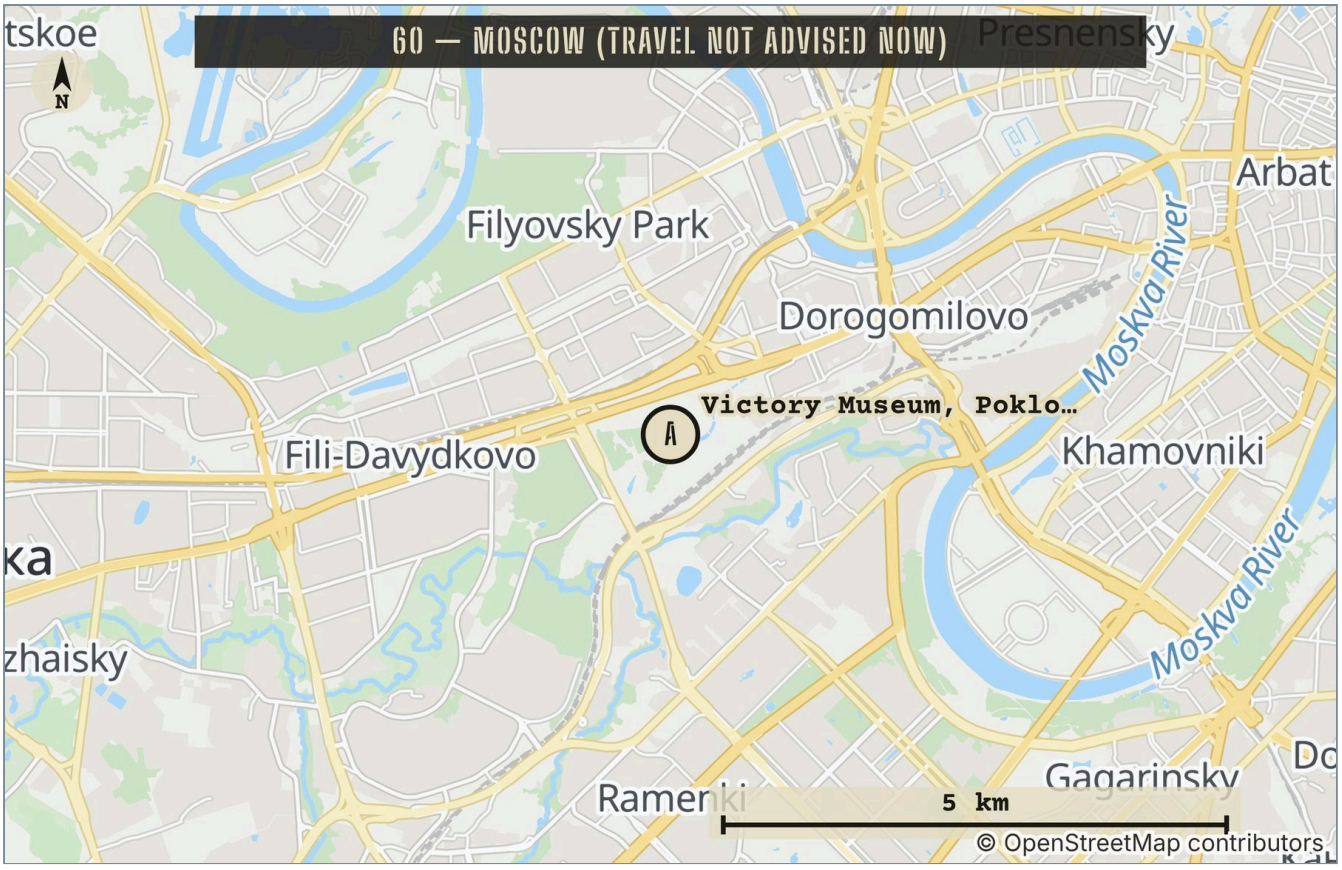
Plan: FCDO advises against all travel to Belarus. Memorial grounds open at all times; the Khatyn museum opens Tuesday–Sunday 10:00–19:00, closed Mondays. About an hour by car from Minsk; no regular public transport. Check the website before you go.

GPS 54.33444, 27.94361

Read more: Khatyn massacre (Wikipedia) · Khatyn Memorial Complex (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Minsk. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

60 — MOSCOW (TRAVEL NOT ADVISED NOW)



Victory Museum · 1 stop

Moscow, which the Germans came close to reaching in late 1941 before the Soviet counter-offensive pushed them back; the Victory Museum on Poklonnaya Hill tells the Soviet story of the whole war.

A Victory Museum, Poklonnaya Hill, Moscow

HIGH Museum · Russia · ≈180 min

Poklonnaya Hill, once a vantage point on the western road into Moscow, is where Napoleon waited in vain in 1812 for the keys to the Kremlin. In 1983 work began on a national museum of the 'Great Patriotic War', and the Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War, now called the Victory Museum, opened here on 9 May 1995 for the 50th anniversary of victory. It is Russia's main museum of the Soviet war of 1941–45, covering the battle for Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Kursk and the drive to Berlin. In front stands an obelisk 141.8 m high, 10 cm for each day of the war, and the surrounding Victory Park holds an outdoor display of weapons and vehicles.

What you can see: Approach across the Square of Victors to the tall obelisk with Nike, then enter the curved museum. Look for the Hall of Commanders with its 'Sword and Shield of Victory', the Hall of Remembrance, large dioramas of key battles and, outside, rows of tanks, guns and aircraft in the park.

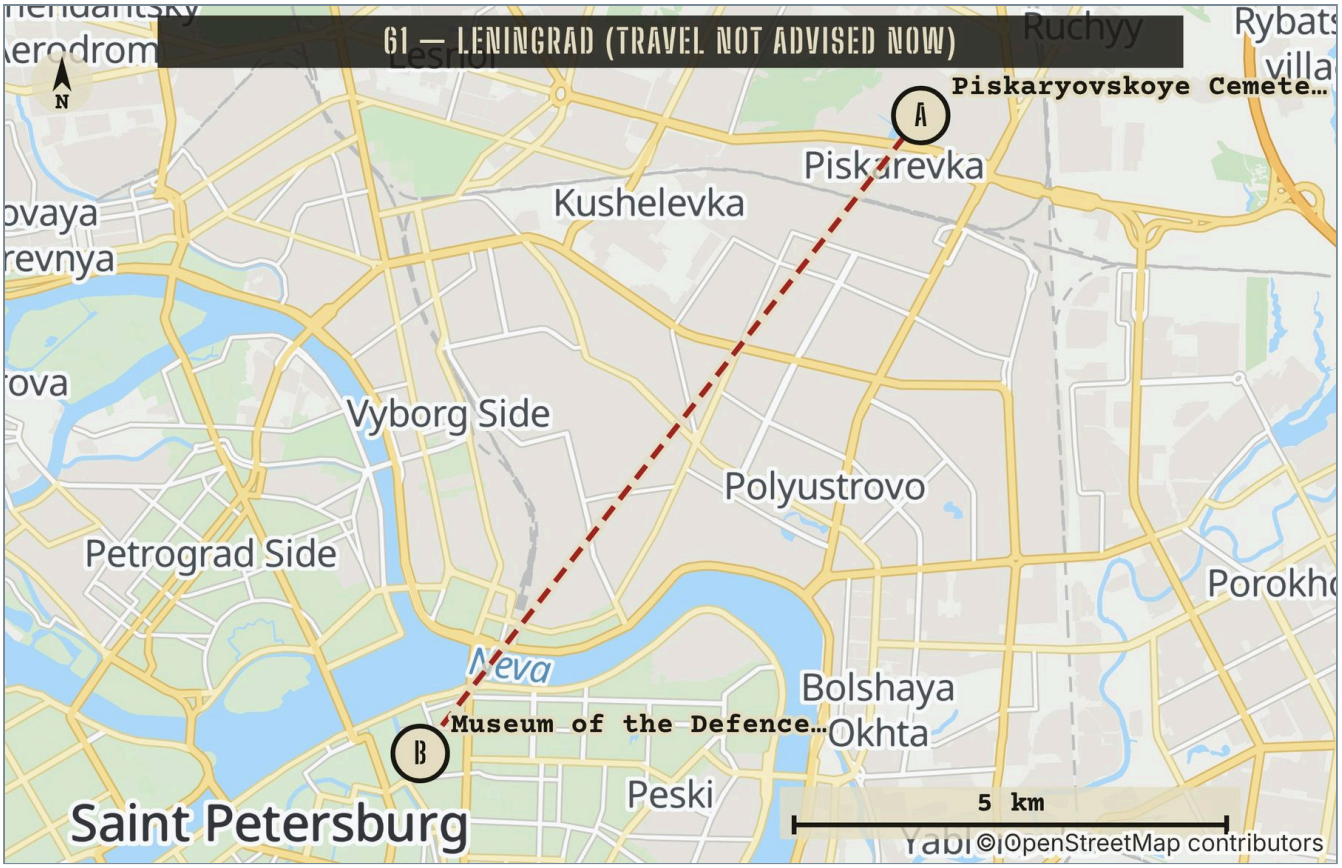
Plan: FCDO advises against all travel to Russia. Museum open Tuesday–Sunday (some exhibitions until 21:00), closed Mondays; tickets from about 600 roubles, sold online and on site. Park free. Check the website before you go.

GPS 55.73056, 37.50389

Read more: Museum of the Great Patriotic War, Moscow (Wikipedia) · Poklonnaya Hill (Wikipedia) · Victory Museum (official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Moscow. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

61 — LENINGRAD (TRAVEL NOT ADVISED NOW)



Piskaryovskoye Cemetery → Museum of the Defence and Siege of Leningrad · 2 stops

Leningrad was besieged for almost 900 days, and around a million civilians died; the Piskaryovskoye Cemetery holds hundreds of thousands of them, and the siege museum explains how the city survived.

A Piskaryovskoye Cemetery, St Petersburg

HIGH Cemetery · Russia · ≈60 min · ★ must see

During the siege of Leningrad, from September 1941 to 27 January 1944, the city's dead were brought here by lorry and sledge and buried in trenches. The cemetery holds about 420,000 civilians, most of whom died of starvation and cold, and about 50,000 soldiers of the Leningrad Front, in 186 mass graves. Each grave is marked only with the year of burial. The memorial, designed by Alexander Vasilyev and Yevgeny Levinson, opened on 9 May 1960. Its centrepiece is the bronze figure of the Motherland by Vera Isayeva and Robert Taurit. On the granite wall behind her is a poem by Olga Berggolts, the poet whose radio broadcasts kept the besieged city company.

What you can see: Begin at the eternal flame between two small pavilions with the exhibition, then walk down the 480 m central avenue between the low grassy mounds of the mass graves, each with a granite slab giving only a year and a hammer and sickle or a star. The Motherland statue and Berggolts's wall close the view.

Plan: FCDO advises against all travel to Russia. Grounds open daily 9:00–18:00 in autumn and winter, to 21:00 in spring and summer; exhibition pavilion 9:00–18:00 daily. Admission and guided tours free. Check the website before you go.

GPS 59.99653, 30.42260

Read more: Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery (Wikipedia) · Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery (official)

Museum of the Defence and Siege of Leningrad

HIGH Museum · Russia · ≈90 min

This museum began while the siege was still on: an exhibition, 'Heroic Defence of Leningrad', opened in the Solyanoy Gorodok halls on 30 April 1944, and it became the Leningrad Defence Museum on 27 January 1946, the second anniversary of the siege being lifted. In 1949 it was closed during the 'Leningrad Affair', Stalin's purge of the city's wartime leadership; its managers were persecuted, it was liquidated in 1952, and weapons were melted down. It reopened in the same building on 8 September 1989. It covers the 872 days of encirclement, the Road of Life across Lake Ladoga and daily life on bread rations that fell to 125 g for dependants.

What you can see: The main exhibition is in one large hall on the upper floor: weapons, uniforms, posters and models, a big map of the Road of Life, a recreated siege-time room with a small iron stove, and a display of the 125 g bread ration. Labels are mostly in Russian; an audio guide is offered.

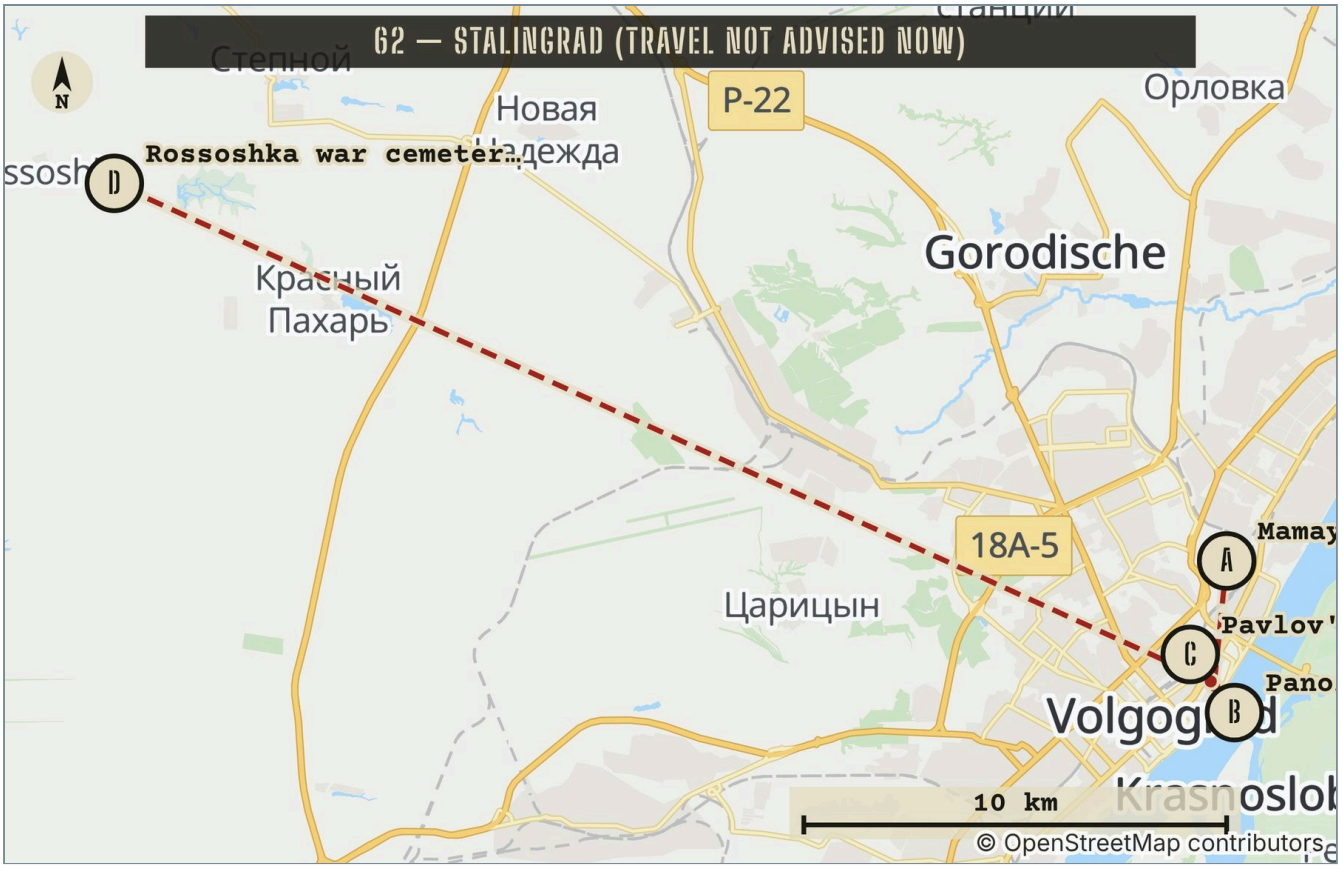
Plan: FCDO advises against all travel to Russia. Open 10:00–18:00, closed Tuesdays and the last Wednesday of the month (ticket office closes 17:30). Modest admission charge; audio guide extra. Check the website before you go.

GPS 59.94450, 30.34090

Read more: Siege of Leningrad (Wikipedia) · State Memorial Museum of the Defence and Siege of Leningrad (official) · Museum entry, St Petersburg Encyclopaedia

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is St Petersburg. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

62 — STALINGRAD (TRAVEL NOT ADVISED NOW)



Mamayev Kurgan and 'The Motherland Calls' → Panorama Museum & Gerhardt's Mill → Pavlov's House → Rossoshka war cemeteries · 4 stops

Stalingrad, the battle that turned the war in the east: the Mamayev Kurgan hill fought over for months, the ruined mill and Pavlov's House from the street fighting, and the German and Soviet cemeteries at Rossoshka.

A Mamayev Kurgan and 'The Motherland Calls'

HIGH Memorial · Russia · ≈120 min · ★ must see

Marked on military maps as Height 102.0, this hill overlooks central Stalingrad and the Volga crossings, and whoever held it could see and shell the river. From mid-September 1942 it changed hands repeatedly as the German 6th Army tried to reach the Volga and Chuikov's 62nd Army clung on. Fighting on the slopes went on until 26 January 1943, when Soviet forces advancing from the west broke through to the defenders. The memorial ensemble was built from 1959 and 'The Motherland Calls', 85 m to the tip of her sword, was unveiled on 15 October 1967. Yevgeny Vuchetich sculpted it; Nikolai Nikitin engineered it. About 34,505 defenders are buried on the hill, and Marshal Chuikov chose to be buried here.

What you can see: From the avenue at the foot, climb past the Square of Those Who Fought to the Death and the ruined-wall reliefs, to the circular Hall of Military Glory with its eternal flame and changing guard. Above, the vast sword-raising Motherland stands among the mass graves; Chuikov's grave is near her base.

Plan: FCDO advises against all travel to Russia. The memorial is open and free for all visitors; museum-reserve guided excursions run daily 9:00–15:30. Expect long flights of steps. Check the website before you go.

GPS 48.74250, 44.53694

Read more: Mamayev Kurgan (Wikipedia) · The Motherland Calls (Wikipedia) · Stalingrad Battle museum-reserve (official)

B Panorama Museum & Gerhardt's Mill, Volgograd

HIGH Museum · Russia · ≈120 min · ★ must see

The Panorama Museum on the Volga embankment is the main museum of the Battle of Stalingrad, with eight halls, four dioramas, a circular panorama painting and about 4,000 exhibits, among them the rifle of the sniper Vasily Zaitsev. Beside it stands the shell of Gerhardt's (or Grudinin's) mill. Bombed and set on fire on 14 September 1942, it was taken that night by men of General Rodimtsev's 13th Guards Rifle Division, newly ferried across the Volga. By 20 September the 3rd Battalion, 42nd Guards Rifle Regiment, held it as a strongpoint, and it stayed semi-encircled for 58 days. It was deliberately left unrestored after the war.

What you can see: Start with the scarred, roofless mill, its brick walls pitted by bullets and shells, then go into the museum for the dioramas, Zaitsev's rifle and the panorama on the top floor. Pavlov's House is across the square, which shows how close the lines were.

Plan: FCDO advises against all travel to Russia. Museum open Tuesday–Friday and Sunday 10:00–18:00, Saturday to 20:00, closed Mondays; ticket office closes 30 minutes earlier. Tickets sold online and on site. Mill seen from outside. Check the website before you go.

GPS 48.71504, 44.53273

Read more: Gerhardt's Mill (Wikipedia) · Stalingrad Battle museum-reserve (official)

C Pavlov's House, Volgograd

HIGH Town · Russia · ≈30 min

This four-storey 1930s block on what was 9 January Square was seized in late September 1942 by a group under Sergeant Yakov Pavlov of the 42nd Guards Rifle Regiment, 13th Guards Rifle Division. Reinforced to about 31 men under Lieutenant Ivan Afanasyev, they mined the approaches, set up machine guns and fired an anti-tank rifle from the roof, holding the house until the Soviet counter-offensive on 25 November. Three of the garrison were killed. The house became the best-known symbol of Stalingrad's street fighting, and General Chuikov later joked that the Germans lost more men attacking it than they did taking Paris.

What you can see: The rebuilt house is still lived in. On the end wall facing Sovetskaya Street is the memorial wall of 1985, built of bricks gathered after the battle, with a soldier relief and the garrison's names. Gerhardt's Mill and the Panorama Museum stand across the square.

Plan: FCDO advises against all travel to Russia. A residential building seen from the street, so always accessible and free. Do not enter the flats or stairwells. Combine with the Panorama Museum next door. **Private land — view from the road.**

GPS 48.71597, 44.53165

Read more: Pavlov's House (Wikipedia) · Pavlov's House (TracesOfWar) · Official website

D Rossoshka war cemeteries

HIGH Cemetery · Russia · ≈60 min

Rossoshka lies in the steppe about 37 km north-west of central Volgograd, in the middle of the pocket where the German 6th Army was encircled from November 1942 until its surrender in early February 1943. The villages of Bolshaya and Malaya Rossoshka were destroyed in the fighting. Two cemeteries face each other across the road. The Soviet cemetery opened on 23 August 1997 and holds about 18,520 Red Army dead, mostly unknown. The German cemetery, built by the Volksbund and dedicated in 1999, holds over 61,000 German soldiers, and granite cubes dedicated in 2006 carry the names of nearly 120,000 missing. A Chapel of Peace opened in 2016.

What you can see: On the German side, a circular enclosure about 150 m across with a central cross, and beyond it rows of tall granite cubes covered in names. Across the road, the Soviet cemetery with Vysotsky's lines on the entrance walls and the 'Mother in Sorrow' holding a bell without a clapper.

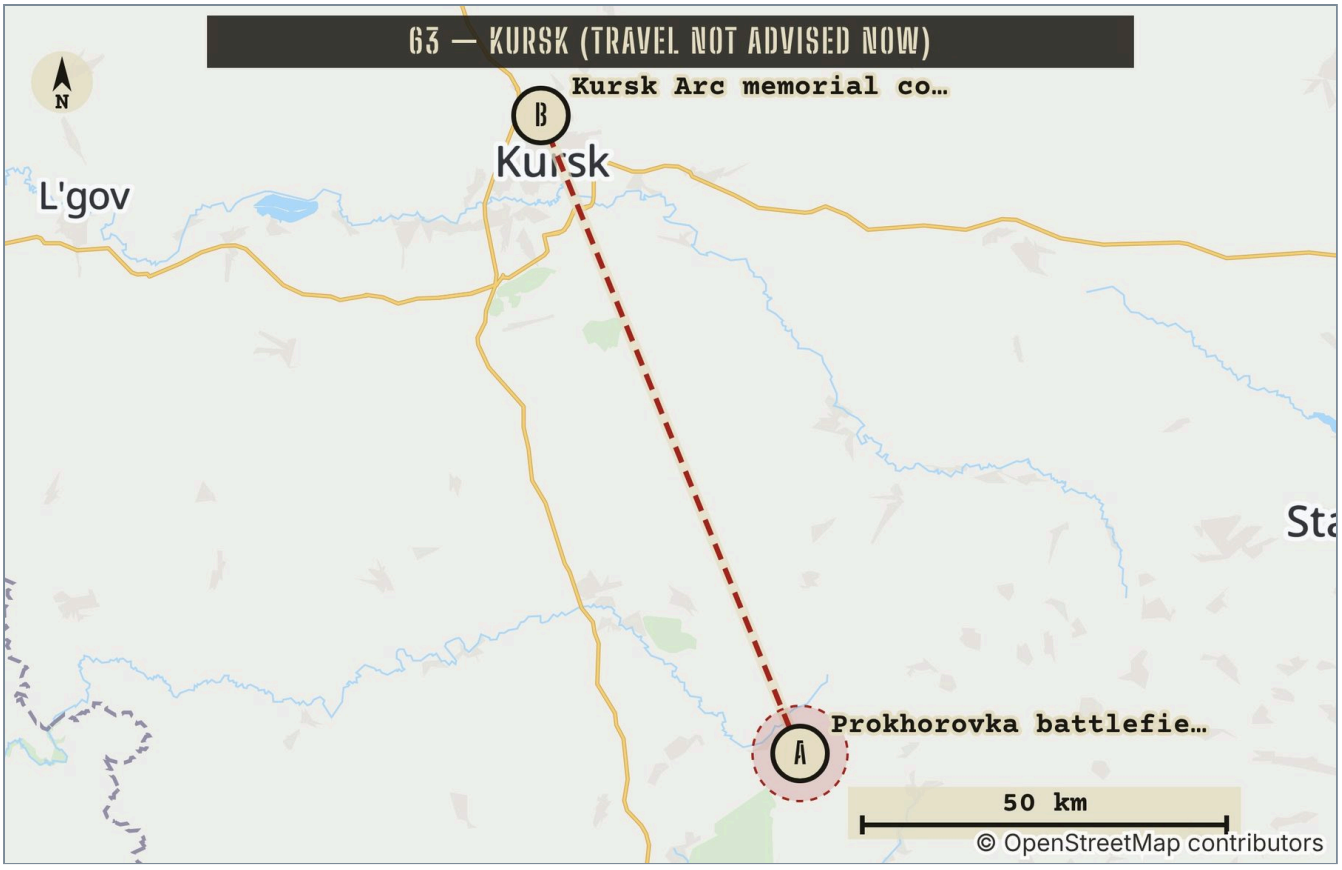
Plan: FCDO advises against all travel to Russia. Open-air cemeteries, free. No public transport: by car or taxi, past Volgograd airport then about 17 km on. Toilets on site. Check the Volksbund page before you go.

GPS 48.82545, 44.16532

Read more: Rossoschka German War Cemetery (Wikipedia) · Rossoschka (Volksbund, official)

Where to sleep after this part: a good area to stay is Volgograd. The phone guide opens hotels, Airbnb and campsites around it on a map, with prices and availability.

63 — KURSK (TRAVEL NOT ADVISED NOW)



Prokhorovka battlefield → Kursk Arc memorial complex · 2 stops

Kursk, the great battle of July 1943 and the last major German offensive in the east: the tank battlefield at Prokhorovka and the memorial complex at Kursk.

A Prokhorovka battlefield, Belgorod region

LOW Battlefield · Russia · ≈180 min · ★ must see

On 12 July 1943, during the German Kursk offensive (Operation Citadel), Pavel Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army counter-attacked Paul Hausser's II SS Panzer Corps on the fields south-west of Prokhorovka, about 87 km south-east of Kursk. Some 500 Soviet tanks attacked in two waves against 294 German tanks and assault guns. The Germans stopped the attack, but the Red Army stopped the German advance; Hitler ended Citadel on 13 July, partly because the Allies had landed in Sicily. Soviet losses were heavy: Valery Zamulin counts 340 tanks and self-propelled guns, against about 60–80 German armoured vehicles damaged or destroyed. A memorial bell tower was built in 1995 and the 'Third Military Field of Russia' museum in 2010.

What you can see: The 52 m white bell tower stands on the open field with its bells ringing every 20 minutes. Look for the 'Tank Battle' sculpture of colliding tanks in front of the museum, the Church of Sts Peter and Paul, a tank museum, preserved Soviet armour, and the long rolling fields where the armour met.

Plan: FCDO advises against all travel to Russia, and the Belgorod region borders Ukraine. Museum open Tuesday–Sunday 10:00–17:00 (ticket office to 16:30), closed Mondays; memorial grounds open at all times. Check the website before you go.

GPS 51.01735, 36.67231

Read more: Battle of Prokhorovka (Wikipedia) · Prokhorovskoe Pole museum-reserve (official)

Kursk Arc memorial complex, Kursk

HIGH Memorial · Russia · ≈45 min

The Battle of Kursk, from 5 July to 23 August 1943, began as Germany's last great offensive in the east, Operation Citadel, aimed at cutting off the Soviet salient around Kursk from north and south. Deep Soviet defences halted it within a week, and Soviet counter-offensives went on to take Orel and Kharkov. This memorial complex on Prospekt Pobedy opened in 1998 for the battle's 55th anniversary. It includes a mass grave with an eternal flame, a bronze statue of Marshal Georgy Zhukov unveiled on 5 July 1998, the Church of St George, a 24 m triumphal arch of 2000 crowned by St George slaying the dragon, and an alley of wartime weapons.

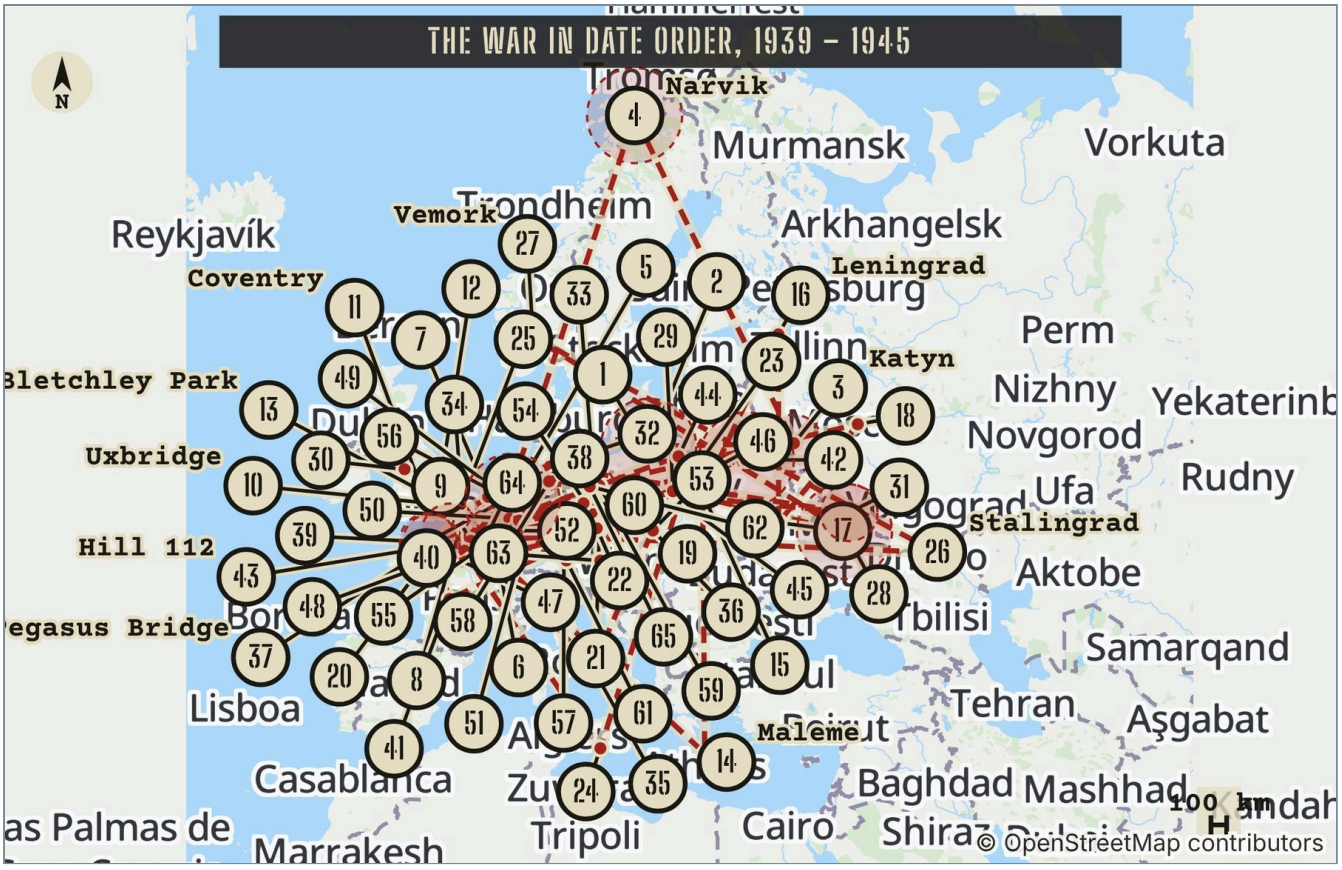
What you can see: A 600 m avenue lined by the triumphal arch with its soldier statues, the gilded-domed church of St George, the Zhukov statue, the mass grave and eternal flame, and an open-air line of equipment including a T-34, an ISU-152 and a Katyusha rocket launcher.

Plan: FCDO advises against all travel to Russia, and the Kursk region borders Ukraine. The memorial is open 24 hours and free. Check local conditions before you go.

GPS 51.78735, 36.17067

Read more: Battle of Kursk (Wikipedia) · Kursk Arc memorial complex (Rusmania)

THE TIMELINE



65 historical positions in date order: what happened, where and when. The numbers follow the war in date order.

1 Westerplatte — the first shots

HIGH 1–7 Sep 1939 · Blitzkrieg, Sep 1939 – Jun 1940

At about 04:45 on 1 September 1939 (sources give times between 04:43 and 04:48) the old German battleship Schleswig-Holstein, on a 'courtesy visit' to Danzig, opened fire on the Polish military depot on the Westerplatte peninsula. Major Henryk Sucharski's garrison — 182 men in the older accounts, perhaps 210–240 by recent research — held out for seven days against naval guns, dive-bombers and assault troops, and surrendered on 7 September. Fifteen defenders were killed. Westerplatte became the symbol of Poland's fight in 1939.

On the ground: Shell-scarred guardhouses and the ruined barracks among the trees, the defenders' cemetery and, on a mound above the harbour mouth, the tall 1966 Monument to the Defenders of the Coast. Ships still pass the channel where the battleship lay.

GPS 54.40750, 18.67139

2 Hel — the last stronghold on the coast

LOW 1 Sep – 2 Oct 1939 · Blitzkrieg, Sep 1939 – Jun 1940

The Hel peninsula, a 35 km sand spit closing the Bay of Gdańsk, was the base of Poland's coastal defence. About 3,000 soldiers and sailors under Rear-Admiral Józef Unrug held it for a month under fire from land, sea and air — after the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland on 17 September and the surrender of Warsaw on 28 September. The garrison gave up on 2 October 1939. The last battle of the campaign, at Kock, ended on 6 October; Poland was then divided between Germany and the Soviet Union.

On the ground: A fishing and holiday town at the tip of the spit. Concrete gun positions, bunkers and observation towers of the 1930s coastal batteries survive in the pine woods, some open as a museum of coastal defence.

GPS 54.61167, 18.80806

3 Katyn — the NKVD murders

MEDIUM Apr – May 1940 · Blitzkrieg, Sep 1939 – Jun 1940

Under the secret protocol of the Nazi–Soviet Pact the Red Army occupied eastern Poland and took about a quarter of a million Polish prisoners. In April and May 1940, on a Politburo order, the NKVD shot some 22,000 Polish officers, police, officials and professionals — 21,857 by the Soviet files released in 1990 — here in the Katyn forest near Smolensk, at Kalinin (Tver), Kharkiv and other sites. Germany announced the discovery of the Katyn graves in April 1943; the Soviet Union blamed the Germans until 1990.

On the ground: The Polish war cemetery opened in 2000, with the names of 4,412 victims from the Kozelsk camp on iron plaques, beside a Russian section for victims of Stalin's purges. Current UK and US advice is against all travel to Russia.

GPS 54.77222, 31.79000

4 Narvik — the fight for the iron-ore port

LOW 9 Apr – 8 Jun 1940 · Blitzkrieg, Sep 1939 – Jun 1940

Germany invaded Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940, partly to secure the winter route for Swedish iron ore through ice-free Narvik. Ten destroyers landed about 2,000 of General Dietl's mountain troops here. The Royal Navy struck back in two battles in the fjord, on 10 and 13 April — the second with the battleship Warspite — and sank all ten destroyers. Norwegian, French and Polish troops retook the town on 28 May, the first Allied land victory of the war, but with France collapsing the Allies left on 8 June and Norway capitulated.

On the ground: The Narvik War Museum (Narviksenteret) in the town centre tells the story of the campaign. Wrecks of German destroyers still lie in the fjord, and soldiers and sailors of several nations are buried in the town.

GPS 68.42056, 17.56000

5 Eben-Emael — gliders on the roof

HIGH 10–11 May 1940 · Blitzkrieg, Sep 1939 – Jun 1940

Finished in 1935 to guard the Albert Canal and the Meuse bridges north of Liège, Fort Eben-Emael was thought one of the strongest forts in Europe. At dawn on 10 May 1940 nine gliders of 'Group Granite' — about 80 men of Sturmabteilung Koch — landed on its roof and wrecked casemates and gun cupolas with hollow charges, the first use of such weapons in battle. Other glider troops seized two of the three canal bridges. The garrison, about 750 men present, surrendered at 12:30 on 11 May. The way into Belgium was open.

On the ground: The fort opens on set days, run by a volunteer association: walk the long galleries and gun casemates inside, then climb out onto the grassy roof to see the shattered cupolas the glider troops attacked. Allow half a day.

GPS 50.79694, 5.67972

6 Sedan — the panzers cross the Meuse

MEDIUM 13–14 May 1940 · Blitzkrieg, Sep 1939 – Jun 1940

While the best Allied armies advanced into Belgium to meet what they took for the main attack, seven panzer divisions came through the Ardennes. On 13 May Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps attacked across the Meuse at Sedan after hours of Luftwaffe bombing that did little damage to bunkers but broke French communications and nerve. Infantry of the 1st Panzer Division crossed in rubber boats near Gaulier; that evening a false report of tanks at Bulson set off a panic in the French 55th Division. Tanks crossed on 14 May and turned west for the Channel.

On the ground: From the ramparts of the huge château-fort, look down on the loop of the Meuse and the meadows where the assault boats crossed. A few French blockhouses of 1940 survive along the river south of the town.

GPS 49.70250, 4.94250

7 Rotterdam — the bombing of the old city

HIGH 14 May 1940 · Blitzkrieg, Sep 1939 – Jun 1940

German airborne troops landed around Rotterdam and The Hague on 10 May, but the Dutch held the Maas bridges in Rotterdam for four days. On 14 May, while surrender talks were under way, bombers of KG 54 struck the old city centre; a recall reached only part of the force. Fires burned out the heart of the city, about 850 people were killed and some 80,000 lost their homes. Threatened with the same for Utrecht, the Netherlands surrendered the next day.

On the ground: Ossip Zadkine's bronze 'The Destroyed City' (1953), a figure with a hole torn through its body, stands on Plein 1940 by the Leuvehaven. Rotterdam's modern skyline is itself the legacy of the bombing; a line of lamps marks the edge of the fire zone.

GPS 51.91760, 4.48310

8 Dunkirk — Operation Dynamo

HIGH 26 May – 4 Jun 1940 · Blitzkrieg, Sep 1939 – Jun 1940

Cut off by the panzers' dash to the Channel, the British Expeditionary Force and part of the French First Army fell back into a perimeter round Dunkirk. Hitler's halt order of 24 May gave them time to dig in. Between 26 May and 4 June, directed from Dover by Vice-Admiral Bertram Ramsay, 338,226 men were brought out — about 239,000 from the harbour, most of them over the narrow East Mole, and some 99,000 from the beaches. About 40,000 French troops of the rearguard were captured when the town fell on 4 June.

On the ground: The East Mole (Jetée de l'Est) still runs out from the harbour mouth; Bastion 32, Admiral Abrial's headquarters, now houses the Dunkirk 1940 Museum. At low tide wrecks appear off Malo-les-Bains and Bray-Dunes.

GPS 51.05041, 2.36870

9 Compiègne — France signs an armistice

HIGH 22 Jun 1940 · Blitzkrieg, Sep 1939 – Jun 1940

The Germans entered Paris on 14 June; Italy had declared war on 10 June; Marshal Pétain asked for terms on 17 June. Hitler had the French sign them on 22 June in the same railway carriage, in the same clearing in the forest of Compiègne, where Germany had signed the armistice of November 1918. France was split into an occupied north and west and an unoccupied south governed from Vichy. The carriage was taken to Berlin as a trophy and burned by the SS in 1945.

On the ground: The restored glade with the Foch statue and the stone slab where the carriages stood in 1918 and 1940. The museum holds an identical 1913 dining car fitted out like the original, and surviving fragments of the real one.

GPS 49.42722, 2.90639

10 Uxbridge — the Battle of Britain bunker

HIGH Jul – Oct 1940; 15 Sep · Britain alone, Jul 1940 – Jun 1941

No. 11 Group of RAF Fighter Command, under Air Vice-Marshal Keith Park, defended London and the south-east from this underground operations room. Radar and Observer Corps reports, filtered at Bentley Priory, appeared on the plotting table, and controllers sent squadrons up by telephone and radio. Churchill watched here on 15 September 1940 as Park committed every squadron he had. The defeat of that day's great raids, now Battle of Britain Day, showed that the Luftwaffe had not won command of the air; on 17 September Hitler postponed the invasion.

On the ground: Steps lead down to the restored operations room with its map table, the tote board of squadrons and the controllers' gallery, as on 15 September. A visitor centre and exhibition stand above ground.

GPS 51.54125, -0.46528

11 Coventry — the Moonlight Sonata raid

HIGH 14–15 Nov 1940 · Britain alone, Jul 1940 – Jun 1941

The Blitz on Britain's cities ran from September 1940 to May 1941 and killed about 43,000 civilians. On the night of 14–15 November some 500 German bombers, guided by radio beams, attacked Coventry for about eleven hours. They aimed at its aircraft and engine factories but burned out the medieval centre, including St Michael's Cathedral; 568 people were killed. The Germans coined a word, 'coventrieren', for such destruction. The RAF's own area bombing of German cities would later far exceed it.

On the ground: The roofless shell and tower of the old cathedral, with the Charred Cross and the words 'Father Forgive' behind the altar, joined by a porch to Basil Spence's new cathedral, consecrated in 1962.

GPS 52.40830, -1.50720

12 St Paul's — the second Great Fire of London

HIGH 29–30 Dec 1940 · Britain alone, Jul 1940 – Jun 1941

London was bombed on 57 consecutive nights from 7 September 1940. On the night of 29–30 December an incendiary raid on the City started some 1,500 fires. Churchill sent word that St Paul's must be saved at all costs, and the volunteer St Paul's Watch and the fire brigades kept the flames off it; Herbert Mason's photograph of the dome rising above the smoke became the image of London's endurance. In September a delayed-action bomb had been dug out beside the cathedral, earning two Royal Engineers the George Cross.

On the ground: The cathedral itself, with the American Memorial Chapel behind the high altar honouring about 28,000 Americans based in Britain who died in the war. The streets around it, flattened that night, were rebuilt after the war.

GPS 51.51380, -0.09830

13 Bletchley Park — the codebreakers

HIGH 1939–45; naval Enigma read from mid-1941 · Britain alone, Jul 1940 – Jun 1941

The Government Code and Cypher School moved here in August 1939. Building on Polish work on the Enigma machine, Alan Turing and Gordon Welchman designed the 'bombe' to find the daily settings. Luftwaffe keys were read from 1940; naval Enigma, after captures of material at sea in spring 1941, from mid-1941. The intelligence, called Ultra, routed convoys away from U-boats, tracked Rommel's supply ships and, with the Colossus computers from February 1944, read the German high command's teleprinter cipher. By January 1945 nearly 9,000 people worked for it, three-quarters of them women.

On the ground: The Victorian mansion, the restored wooden huts and brick blocks where the codebreakers worked, a rebuilt working bombe and exhibitions. The National Museum of Computing next door shows a rebuilt Colossus.

GPS 51.99806, -0.74111

14 Maleme — the airborne invasion of Crete

HIGH 20 May – 1 Jun 1941 · Britain alone, Jul 1940 – Jun 1941

After overrunning Yugoslavia and Greece in April 1941, Germany attacked Crete from the air. On 20 May paratroopers and glider troops of Operation Mercury landed around Maleme, Chania, Rethymno and Heraklion and suffered terrible losses. Ultra had warned Freyberg's Creforce, but that night the 22nd New Zealand Battalion pulled back from Hill 107 above Maleme airfield. Transport aircraft began landing mountain troops, and the island was lost. About 18,000 men were evacuated, mostly from Sfakia, and some 12,000 British and Commonwealth troops were captured. Germany never again made a large airborne assault.

On the ground: The German war cemetery, laid out in terraces on Hill 107, looks down over the old airfield and the coast where the gliders and paratroops came down. The Commonwealth cemetery is at Souda Bay, 20 km east.

GPS 35.52240, 23.83119

15 Brest Fortress — Barbarossa begins

HIGH 22 Jun 1941 · Barbarossa, Jun 1941 – Jan 1942

At 04:15 Moscow time on 22 June 1941 more than three million German and allied troops invaded the Soviet Union on a front from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The 19th-century fortress at Brest, on the Bug, was hit by a massive bombardment and surrounded by 09:00, yet its trapped garrison fought on. Most resistance ended within about a week, but pockets held out for weeks; Major Pyotr Gavrilov was captured, wounded, on 23 July. In Soviet memory the fortress became the symbol of the desperate frontier battles.

On the ground: The memorial complex of 1971: a star-shaped entrance cut through the ramparts, a giant stone soldier's head, the sculpture 'Thirst', and the bullet-scarred Kholm Gate and barracks. Check current UK and US travel advice before going to Belarus.

GPS 52.08296, 23.65425

16 Leningrad — the siege

HIGH 8 Sep 1941 – 27 Jan 1944 · Barbarossa, Jun 1941 – Jan 1942

Army Group North and the Finns cut Leningrad's land links on 8 September 1941. Hitler meant to starve the city rather than storm it. In the winter of 1941–42 the bread ration fell for many to 125 grams a day, and the only supply route was the 'Road of Life' over the ice of Lake Ladoga. A land corridor was opened in January 1943, and the siege was lifted on 27 January 1944 after 872 days. Estimates of civilian deaths range from about 650,000 to over a million.

On the ground: Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery, opened in 1960: 186 grass mass graves, marked only by year, lead to the Mother Motherland statue and Olga Berggolts's words 'No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten'. About 420,000 civilians lie here. Current advice is against travel to Russia.

GPS 59.99690, 30.42140

17 Babi Yar — the Holocaust by bullets

HIGH 29–30 Sep 1941 · Barbarossa, Jun 1941 – Jan 1942

Behind the armies, the four Einsatzgruppen of the SS and police, with Order Police battalions, army units and local auxiliaries, shot Jewish men and then whole communities. Kyiv fell on 19 September 1941. On 29–30 September Sonderkommando 4a of Einsatzgruppe C and police units murdered 33,771 Jews in this ravine on the city's edge. Over the next two years between 100,000 and 150,000 people in all — Jews, Roma, Soviet prisoners, psychiatric patients and others — were killed here. In 1943 prisoners were forced to dig up and burn the bodies.

On the ground: A wooded park in north-west Kyiv with memorials from different eras, among them the Soviet monument of 1976 and the Menorah of 1991. Ukraine is at war: check current travel advice before going.

GPS 50.47139, 30.44889

18 Moscow — the Red Army strikes back

HIGH 30 Sep 1941 – Jan 1942 · Barbarossa, Jun 1941 – Jan 1942

Operation Typhoon, the drive on Moscow, opened on 30 September 1941 and trapped some 500,000–670,000 Soviet soldiers in pockets at Vyazma and Bryansk. Then autumn rain, frost, exhaustion and stiffening resistance slowed it; on 2 December a German reconnaissance unit reached Khimki, about 30 km from the Kremlin. On 5–6 December Zhukov counter-attacked with fresh reserves, many from Siberia and the Far East, and drove the Germans back 100–250 km. There would be no quick victory. Days later Germany declared war on the United States.

On the ground: The Museum of the Great Patriotic War on Poklonnaya Hill (1995), with its Hall of Remembrance and an outdoor park of tanks and guns, in Victory Park. Current advice is against travel to Russia.

GPS 55.73056, 37.50389

19 Wannsee — the Final Solution organised

HIGH 20 Jan 1942 · Barbarossa, Jun 1941 – Jan 1942

In this lakeside villa, an SS guest house, Reinhard Heydrich chaired a meeting of 15 senior officials of the SS, the Party and government ministries. Mass murder was already under way: in the occupied Soviet Union since 1941 and, since December, in gas vans at Chełmno. The meeting was to coordinate the deportation and murder of all of Europe's Jews, whom Heydrich counted at 11 million, under SS direction. Adolf Eichmann's minutes, found in 1947, are the plainest record of the bureaucracy of genocide.

On the ground: The villa has been a memorial and education centre since 1992. The permanent exhibition, in the rooms where the officials met, sets out the conference, its participants and its consequences. The garden looks out over the lake.

GPS 52.43306, 13.16556

20 Saint-Nazaire — the Normandie dock raid

HIGH 28 Mar 1942 · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

The Normandie dock was the only dry dock on the Atlantic coast big enough for the battleship Tirpitz. In Operation Chariot the old destroyer HMS Campbeltown, packed with explosives, rammed its outer gate at 01:34 on 28 March 1942 while commandos landed from motor launches to wreck the dock machinery. Of some 612 men, 169 were killed and 215 captured; five Victoria Crosses were awarded. Campbeltown blew up around noon, killing many Germans aboard and on the quay, and the dock was out of use for the rest of the war.

On the ground: The Normandie dock is still in use: walk round it to the memorial where Campbeltown struck. The vast U-boat base beside it, with a roof terrace over the harbour, shows why the port mattered.

GPS 47.27500, -2.19667

21 Prague — Operation Anthropoid

HIGH 27 May – 18 Jun 1942 · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Main Office and acting Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, was attacked in his open car in Prague-Libeň on 27 May 1942 by Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš, Czechoslovak soldiers parachuted from Britain. Gabčík's Sten jammed; Kubiš's grenade wounded Heydrich, who died on 4 June. Betrayed, the parachutists were trapped in the crypt of the Orthodox Cathedral of Sts Cyril and Methodius, where all seven died on 18 June after hours of fighting with hundreds of SS troops.

On the ground: The crypt is now the National Memorial to the Heroes of the Heydrich Terror. Outside on Resslova Street, the narrow vent where the SS tried to flood the crypt is still pitted with bullet and shell marks.

GPS 50.07596, 14.41762

22 Lidice — the reprisal

HIGH 10 Jun 1942 · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

In reprisal for Heydrich's death, on the false claim that the village had sheltered his killers, German police surrounded Lidice on the night of 9–10 June 1942. All the men and boys over 15 who were there — 173 by the memorial's count, 172 in some accounts — were shot; the women were sent to Ravensbrück, and most of the children were later gassed at Chełmno. The village was burned and razed. About 340 people from Lidice died. The hamlet of Ležáky was destroyed two weeks later.

On the ground: A green valley where the village stood: the common grave, the site of the Horák farm where the men were shot, Marie Uchytilová's bronze group of 82 children, a museum and a rose garden. The new village stands above.

GPS 50.14361, 14.19028

23 Treblinka — Operation Reinhard

HIGH 23 Jul 1942 – Oct 1943 · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

Treblinka II, with Bełżec and Sobibór, was built for Operation Reinhard, the murder of the Jews of occupied Poland. From 23 July 1942 the trains came above all from the Warsaw ghetto — some 265,000 people that summer — then from across Poland and from as far as Greece. People were gassed with engine exhaust within hours of arrival. Most estimates put the dead at between 800,000 and 925,000, almost all of them Jews. After a prisoners' revolt on 2 August 1943 the camp was dismantled and the ground ploughed over.

On the ground: A memorial landscape of 1959–64: a great stone monument where the gas chambers stood, a symbolic railway line of concrete sleepers, and a field of about 17,000 jagged stones, many carved with the names of destroyed communities. A museum stands at the entrance.

GPS 52.63111, 22.05306

24 Malta — the island under siege

HIGH Jun 1940 – Nov 1942; Pedestal 15 Aug 1942 · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

Malta, 90 km south of Sicily, was the base from which British submarines and aircraft attacked Rommel's supply convoys to North Africa, and the Axis tried to bomb and starve it into surrender. In April 1942 King George VI awarded the whole island the George Cross. By August it was close to starvation. Operation Pedestal fought 14 merchant ships through from Gibraltar; only five arrived, the crippled tanker Ohio towed into Grand Harbour on 15 August, but they kept Malta in the war. From these tunnels Eisenhower later directed the landings in Sicily.

On the ground: The Lascaris War Rooms, tunnelled into the rock under the Upper Barrakka Gardens in Valletta, keep the operations rooms used during the siege and for the Sicily landings. The Saluting Battery and the view over Grand Harbour are just above.

GPS 35.89450, 14.51105

25 Dieppe — the raid that failed

MEDIUM 19 Aug 1942 · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

Operation Jubilee was a one-day raid by about 6,000 men, nearly 5,000 of them from the 2nd Canadian Division, with British commandos and a few US Rangers, to seize a port briefly and test the German defences. Landings began at 04:50. On the main beach in front of the town, tanks stuck on the shingle and the infantry were cut down from the cliffs; the withdrawal ended by 14:00. Of the Canadians, more than 900 were killed and nearly 2,000 captured. The lesson for D-Day: never attack a defended port head-on.

On the ground: The long shingle beach below the cliffs and the castle, with memorials to the Canadian regiments along the seafront. The Canadian War Cemetery is at Hautot-sur-Mer, just south of the town.

GPS 49.93330, 1.08330

26 Stalingrad — Mamayev Kurgan

HIGH 13 Sep 1942 – 2 Feb 1943 · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

Hitler's 1942 summer offensive aimed at the Caucasus oilfields, with the Sixth Army guarding its flank on the Volga. From 13 September it fought for Stalingrad street by street; Mamayev Kurgan, the hill commanding the city and the river crossings, changed hands again and again. Chuikov's 62nd Army clung to a strip along the river. On 19 November Operation Uranus broke the Romanian armies on the flanks and trapped some 250,000–300,000 Axis troops. Paulus surrendered on 31 January; the last pocket gave up on 2 February 1943.

On the ground: The memorial ensemble of 1967 climbs the hill past ruined walls and the Hall of Military Glory to Vuchetich's 'The Motherland Calls', 85 m from base to sword tip. Marshal Chuikov is buried here. Current advice is against travel to Russia.

GPS 48.74193, 44.53892

27 Vemork — the heavy-water raid

HIGH night of 27–28 Feb 1943 · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

The Norsk Hydro plant at Vemork was the world's only large producer of heavy water, which German scientists needed for nuclear research. A British glider raid, Operation Freshman, ended in disaster in November 1942, and the survivors were murdered. On the night of 27–28 February 1943 six Norwegian commandos of Operation Gunnerside, joined by the Grouse team already waiting on the plateau, climbed through the gorge, entered the plant without firing a shot and destroyed the electrolysis cells. In February 1944 the resistance sank the ferry Hydro carrying the remaining stock.

On the ground: The 1911 power station, now the Norwegian Industrial Workers Museum, with exhibitions on the sabotage, reached across a bridge over the gorge the saboteurs climbed. The electrolysis building they attacked has gone.

GPS 59.87111, 8.49139

28 Kharkov — Manstein's counterstroke

LOW Feb – Mar 1943 · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

After Stalingrad the Red Army surged west and on 16 February 1943 retook Kharkov, the Soviet Union's fourth city, after the SS Panzer Corps abandoned it against Hitler's orders. Field Marshal von Manstein then struck the overstretched Soviet fronts in the flank; the SS divisions retook the city in mid-March and Belgorod on 18 March. It was Germany's last great victory in the East. The front it left bulged westward around Kursk — the target of the next German summer offensive. The city changed hands for the last time in August 1943.

On the ground: Kharkiv, Ukraine's second city, has war memorials including the Memorial of Glory in the Forest Park. It has been heavily shelled since 2022: current advice is against travel.

GPS 49.96667, 36.31667

29 Warsaw — the Ghetto Uprising

HIGH 19 Apr – 16 May 1943 · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

About 400,000 Jews were crowded into the Warsaw ghetto from 1940; thousands died of hunger and typhus every month. In the 'Great Action' of July–September 1942 some 265,000 were deported to Treblinka. When the SS entered the ghetto on 19 April 1943 to clear it, a few hundred fighters of the Jewish Combat Organisation (ŻOB) under Mordechai Anielewicz and the Jewish Military Union (ŻZW) fought back. The Germans burned it block by block; on 16 May SS General Jürgen Stroop ended the action by blowing up the Great Synagogue.

On the ground: Nathan Rapoport's Monument to the Ghetto Heroes (1948), where Willy Brandt knelt in 1970, stands in front of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. A trail of memorial stones leads to the Umschlagplatz, the deportation square.

GPS 52.24972, 20.99389

30 Liverpool — Western Approaches and 'Black May'

HIGH Feb 1941 – May 1945; May 1943 · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

From February 1941 the Royal Navy's Western Approaches Command and RAF Coastal Command's No. 15 Group ran the convoy battle from this bunker under Derby House. In early 1943 the U-boat packs came close to cutting the Atlantic lifeline. Then, under Admiral Sir Max Horton, escort support groups, escort carriers, very-long-range Liberators, centimetric radar and Ultra turned the battle. In May 1943 the Germans lost 41 U-boats, and on 24 May Dönitz withdrew his boats from the North Atlantic. They never regained the initiative.

On the ground: The restored operations room with its wall-sized plot of the Atlantic, the teleprinter and cipher rooms, and Horton's office, in the basement of an office block behind Liverpool Town Hall.

GPS 53.40740, -2.99320

31 Prokhorovka — the tank battle at Kursk

MEDIUM 5–13 Jul 1943; 12 Jul · The turning points, Feb 1942 – Jul 1943

Operation Citadel, Germany's pincer attack on the Kursk salient, began on 5 July 1943 against defences dug in depth for months. In the south, the II SS Panzer Corps drove towards Prokhorovka. On 12 July Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army counter-attacked with some 600 tanks and self-propelled guns against fewer than 300 German. Soviet losses were heavy, German losses far lighter, but the advance was stopped. On 13 July Hitler called off Citadel, citing the Allied landing in Sicily, and the Red Army went over to an offensive that did not stop.

On the ground: The 'Third Military Field of Russia': a museum, a memorial belfry and tank monuments on open farmland where the armour met. Current advice is against travel to Russia; this border region has been attacked since 2022.

GPS 51.03639, 36.73639

32 Hamburg — Operation Gomorrah

HIGH 24 Jul – 3 Aug 1943 · Bombers, rockets and Italy, Jul 1943 – May 1944

In a week of raids from 24 July 1943, RAF Bomber Command by night and the US Eighth Air Force by day attacked Hamburg, Germany's second city and greatest port. 'Window' — strips of foil — blinded German radar for the first time. On the night of 27–28 July hot, dry weather and concentrated bombing raised a firestorm that swept the eastern districts. About 34,000–40,000 people died that week, most of them in that one night, and around a million fled the city. The spire of St Nikolai served the bomber crews as a landmark.

On the ground: The ruined church of St Nikolai, its 147 m tower kept as a memorial to the victims of war and tyranny 1933–1945, with a documentation centre in the crypt and a lift to a viewing platform at about 75 m.

GPS 53.54750, 9.99056

33 Peenemünde — the rocket centre

HIGH 17–18 Aug 1943 · Bombers, rockets and Italy, Jul 1943 – May 1944

On the island of Usedom the German Army and Luftwaffe built their research centre for long-range weapons. Here Walter Dornberger and Wernher von Braun developed the A4 rocket, later called the V-2, and the Luftwaffe tested the V-1 flying bomb. On the night of 17–18 August 1943 about 600 Bomber Command aircraft attacked in Operation Hydra, killing staff and hundreds of forced labourers in the Trassenheide camp. Production moved underground to the Mittelwerk in the Harz, built and worked by concentration-camp prisoners, thousands of whom died.

On the ground: The Historical-Technical Museum in the great brick power station, with exhibitions on the weapons, the people who built them and the forced labour behind them, rockets displayed outside, and ruins of the test site in the woods.

GPS 54.13778, 13.76889

34 La Coupole — the V-2 dome

HIGH Oct 1943 – Jul 1944 · Bombers, rockets and Italy, Jul 1943 – May 1944

In a chalk quarry near Saint-Omer the Organisation Todt, using forced labour, built a bomb-proof base to store, fuel and launch V-2 rockets at London under a concrete dome 71 m across and 5 m thick. Allied intelligence found it, and in the Crossbow campaign against the V-weapon sites it was bombed repeatedly, including with 12,000 lb Tallboy bombs in June and July 1944. Construction stopped and no rocket was ever launched from it. The V-2s that hit London and Antwerp from September 1944 came from mobile launchers instead.

On the ground: The museum inside the bunker: tunnels, the shaft beneath the dome, exhibitions on the V-weapons, the occupation of northern France and deportation, and a planetarium. The Blockhaus d'Éperlecques, the other great V-weapon bunker, is nearby.

GPS 50.70526, 2.24362

35 Monte Cassino — the Gustav Line

HIGH 17 Jan – 18 May 1944 · Bombers, rockets and Italy, Jul 1943 – May 1944

Italy changed sides in September 1943, but German armies under Kesselring held the peninsula line by line. The Gustav Line, anchored on Monte Cassino, stopped the Allies through the winter, and the Anzio landing of 22 January was sealed off. Four battles were fought below the Benedictine abbey, which Allied bombers destroyed on 15 February 1944; American, British, French, New Zealand, Indian and Polish troops all attacked it. In May French colonial troops broke through the mountains, and on 18 May Polish soldiers raised their flag over the ruins. Rome fell on 4 June.

On the ground: The rebuilt abbey (consecrated 1964) on its summit, a working monastery with a dress code; on the slope below, the Polish war cemetery. The companion 'Into Europe' guide covers the Italian campaign in detail.

GPS 41.49000, 13.81389

36 Auschwitz-Birkenau — the Hungarian deportations

HIGH May – Jul 1944 · Bombers, rockets and Italy, Jul 1943 – May 1944

Auschwitz began in June 1940 as a camp for Polish political prisoners. Birkenau, built from October 1941, became the largest killing centre of the Holocaust: from 1942 trains brought Jews from all over Europe to the ramp, where most were sent straight to the gas chambers. After Germany occupied Hungary in March 1944, about 424,000 Hungarian Jews were deported here between mid-May and early July, along a new railway spur into the camp. About 1.1 million people were murdered at Auschwitz, about a million of them Jews.

On the ground: The gate tower and the 1944 railway ramp, rows of brick and wooden barracks, the chimneys of vanished huts and, at the far end, the blown-up ruins of the gas chambers and crematoria with the international monument between them.

GPS 50.03583, 19.17833

37 Pegasus Bridge — the first action of D-Day

HIGH 6 Jun 1944, 00:16 · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

The invasion began in the dark, with three airborne divisions landing on the flanks of the beaches. At 00:16 on 6 June 1944 the first of six Horsa gliders carrying D Company, 2nd Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, under Major John Howard, landed beside the Caen Canal bridge at Bénouville. Within minutes they had taken it and the Orne bridge nearby; Lieutenant Den Brotheridge was mortally wounded in the rush. Paratroops of the 6th Airborne Division and, in the early afternoon, Lord Lovat's commandos from Sword Beach joined them.

On the ground: A 1994 bridge of the same design; the original stands in the grounds of Memorial Pegasus at Ranville with a full-size Horsa. Café Gondrée, said to be the first house liberated in France, faces the bridge.

GPS 49.24222, -0.27444

38 Omaha Beach — the hardest landing

MEDIUM 6 Jun 1944, from 06:30 · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

About 156,000 men landed in Normandy by sea and air on D-Day. On Omaha the US 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions, with Rangers, faced bluffs held by the German 352nd Infantry Division, stronger than expected. Rough seas swamped most of the swimming tanks and scattered the landing craft, and the bombing fell inland. For hours men lay pinned at the shingle. Small groups worked up the bluffs between the strongpoints while destroyers came in close to fire. By night two shallow footholds were held, at a cost of about 2,400 casualties.

On the ground: Anilore Banon's steel sculpture 'Les Braves' (2004) on the sand at Saint-Laurent, the remains of strongpoint WN62 above Colleville, and the Normandy American Cemetery on the bluff, with 9,388 graves.

GPS 49.37093, -0.87977

39 Juno Beach — the Canadians land

HIGH 6 Jun 1944, from about 07:35 · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

On Juno, between Gold and Sword, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade landed around Courseulles, Bernières and Saint-Aubin. The rising tide had delayed them, so many obstacles were already under water, and the first waves took heavy losses at the sea wall. But by evening the Canadians had pushed further inland than any other Allied division. About 14,000 Canadians came ashore on D-Day and 359 were killed. The Germans' 12th SS Panzer Division counter-attacked them over the following days.

On the ground: The Juno Beach Centre (2003), Canada's museum in Normandy, stands among the dunes at Courseulles. Restored bunkers of the German strongpoint survive in front of it, and the beach is open to walk.

GPS 49.33639, -0.46167

40 Arromanches — the Mulberry harbour

MEDIUM Jun 1944 – early 1945 · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

Rather than capture a port, the Allies brought two prefabricated harbours across the Channel. Concrete Phoenix caissons sunk from 8 June formed a breakwater off Arromanches, with floating roadways running ashore. The American Mulberry off Omaha was wrecked by the great storm of 19–22 June, but this one, 'Port Winston', survived and was used for ten months. Figures for what it landed vary, but run to more than two million men and millions of tons of supplies. Even so, most supplies came over the open beaches.

On the ground: Dozens of Phoenix caissons still lie in an arc offshore, clearest at low tide from the cliff-top viewpoint east of the town. The D-Day Museum on the seafront explains how the harbour worked.

GPS 49.34000, -0.62110

41 Oradour-sur-Glane — the massacre

HIGH 10 Jun 1944 · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

As the 2nd SS Panzer Division Das Reich moved north from Montauban towards Normandy, it waged a campaign of terror against the Resistance and civilians; at Tulle, 99 men were hanged on 9 June. On 10 June a company of the Der Führer regiment under Adolf Diekmann surrounded Oradour-sur-Glane. The men were shot in barns and garages; the women and children were locked in the church, which was set on fire. 642 people died (643 by a later count). The 1953 trial in Bordeaux, and the amnesty of the Alsatians convicted, still divide France.

On the ground: The ruined village, left as it was on General de Gaulle's order: burnt-out houses, cars, sewing machines, tram rails and the church. Enter through the Centre de la mémoire (1999). A place for silence.

GPS 45.92800, 1.04100

42 Minsk — Operation Bagration

LOW 22 Jun – 19 Aug 1944; Minsk 3 Jul · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

Three years after Barbarossa, the Red Army attacked Army Group Centre in Belorussia, which Hitler had stripped of armour in expectation of a blow further south. Deception, partisans cutting the railways and four fronts attacking with massed artillery and aircraft tore it apart. Vitebsk and Bobruisk were encircled; Minsk was retaken on 3 July, trapping about 100,000 Germans east of the city. Some 28 divisions were destroyed and German losses were around 400,000 or more. By August the Red Army stood on the Vistula. It was the worst defeat in German military history.

On the ground: Minsk, rebuilt after the war, has the Belarusian Museum of the Great Patriotic War and the Khatyn memorial to burned villages about 50 km north. Check current UK and US travel advice before going to Belarus.

GPS 53.90056, 27.55861

43 Hill 112 — the battle for Caen

HIGH 10–11 Jul 1944 · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

Montgomery's plan drew most of the German armour onto the British and Canadian front around Caen while the Americans prepared to break out in the west. The price was a grinding battle. On 10 July 1944, in Operation Jupiter, the 43rd (Wessex) Division attacked Hill 112, a low rise south-west of Caen overlooking the Odon and Orne valleys. It was taken and lost again against the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions, and the division lost about 2,000 men in two days. Northern Caen had fallen on 9 July; the rest followed in Operation Goodwood on 18–19 July.

On the ground: Memorials to the 43rd (Wessex) Division and a Churchill tank stand on the flat summit among open fields, with a wide view north to Caen. The Caen Memorial museum is the best place for the whole battle.

GPS 49.12374, -0.46058

44 Wolf's Lair — the 20 July bomb

HIGH 20 Jul 1944, 12:42 · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

Hitler's East Prussian headquarters, where he spent more than 800 days of the war. On 20 July 1944 Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg left a briefcase bomb under the table in the conference hut and flew to Berlin to launch Operation Valkyrie. It exploded at 12:42; four men died of their wounds, but Hitler was only slightly hurt, and the coup collapsed that night. Stauffenberg and three others were shot in the Bendlerblock courtyard in Berlin. Some 200 people were later executed. The bunkers were blown up in January 1945.

On the ground: Huge tilted slabs of blown-up concrete bunkers in the forest near Kętrzyn, linked by paths; a memorial stone marks the site of the conference hut. Expect mosquitoes and ticks in summer.

GPS 54.08040, 21.49410

45 Majdanek — the first camp liberated

HIGH 22–24 Jul 1944 · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

Majdanek, on the edge of Lublin, was a concentration camp and killing site from October 1941. On 3 November 1943, in 'Operation Harvest Festival', the SS shot about 18,000 Jewish prisoners in trenches here in a single day. The Red Army reached the camp on 22–24 July 1944, so fast that the SS could not destroy it: gas chambers, crematorium and a warehouse of victims' shoes were filmed and shown to the world. Current research puts the dead at about 78,000, 59,000 of them Jews; early post-war estimates were far higher.

On the ground: The camp survives largely as it was, beside the main road into Lublin: barracks, watchtowers, gas chambers and crematorium, with Wiktor Tołkin's 1969 monument at the gate and the domed mausoleum of ashes at the far end.

GPS 51.22056, 22.59944

46 Warsaw — the Rising

HIGH 1 Aug – 2 Oct 1944 · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

As Soviet tanks approached the Vistula, the Polish Home Army rose in Warsaw at 17:00 on 1 August 1944 to free the capital before the Red Army arrived. Some 20,000–49,000 poorly armed fighters under General Bór-Komorowski held parts of the city for 63 days. German SS and police units murdered tens of thousands of civilians in Wola in the first week. The Red Army halted across the river, and Stalin long refused landing rights to Allied supply aircraft. About 16,000 insurgents and 150,000–200,000 civilians died; the city was then systematically destroyed.

On the ground: The Warsaw Rising Museum (2004) in a former tram power station in Wola: a replica Liberator, a sewer passage, armbands, weapons and film, and the Memorial Wall with the fighters' names in the park outside.

GPS 52.23282, 20.98105

47 Mont-Ormel — closing the Falaise Pocket

HIGH 19–21 Aug 1944 · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

The Americans broke out west of Saint-Lô on 25 July in Operation Cobra. Hitler ordered a counter-attack at Mortain instead of a retreat, and two German armies were nearly encircled between Falaise and Argentan. At the mouth of the pocket the 1st Polish Armoured Division seized the Mont-Ormel ridge, 'Maczuga', on 19 August and, cut off and short of ammunition, held it against Germans trying to break out until the Canadian Grenadier Guards arrived on 21 August. Perhaps 20,000–50,000 Germans escaped, mostly without their vehicles; the rest were killed or captured.

On the ground: The Montormel Memorial on the ridge, with a Sherman tank and a viewing terrace looking down the Dives valley, the 'corridor of death', towards Chambois, where Poles and Americans met on 19 August.

GPS 48.83733, 0.14218

48 Paris — the city liberated

HIGH 19–25 Aug 1944 · D-Day and Bagration, Jun – Aug 1944

On 19 August 1944 the Paris police and the Resistance's FFI rose against the German garrison. Eisenhower had meant to bypass the city, but at de Gaulle's urging he let General Leclerc's French 2nd Armoured Division, with the US 4th Infantry Division, go in. Captain Raymond Dronne's men reached the Hôtel de Ville late on 24 August; next day General von Choltitz surrendered, without carrying out Hitler's order to leave the city in ruins. That evening de Gaulle spoke here: 'Paris outraged! Paris broken! Paris martyred! But Paris liberated!'

On the ground: The Hôtel de Ville and its square; plaques across Paris mark where Resistance fighters and soldiers fell. The Musée de la Libération at Place Denfert-Rochereau shows Colonel Rol-Tanguy's underground command post.

GPS 48.85640, 2.35250

49 Arnhem — a bridge too far

HIGH 17–21 Sep 1944 · Arnhem and the Ardennes, Sep – Dec 1944

Operation Market Garden aimed to lay a carpet of airborne troops along one road so that XXX Corps could cross the Maas, the Waal and the Lower Rhine and outflank the Siegfried Line. The British 1st Airborne Division landed 10–13 km west of Arnhem; only about 740 men, mostly of Lieutenant-Colonel John Frost's 2nd Parachute Battalion, reached the north end of the road bridge on 17 September. They held it for nearly four days against SS panzer units. The rest of the division held a perimeter at Oosterbeek until evacuated on the night of 25–26 September.

On the ground: The rebuilt road bridge (1948), renamed John Frostbrug in 1977, with a memorial and panels at the north end where Frost's men held the houses. The Airborne Museum Hartenstein in Oosterbeek is about 5 km west.

GPS 51.97472, 5.91194

50 Hürtgen Forest — the battle in the trees

HIGH Sep 1944 – Feb 1945; Vossenack 2–8 Nov · Arnhem and the Ardennes, Sep – Dec 1944

After the dash across France the Allied armies ran short of fuel and supplies at the German border, where the West Wall and the forests favoured the defender. Aachen, the first German city to fall, was taken on 21 October. To the south-east, the US First Army fought from September to February through the dense, hilly Hürtgen Forest. In November the 28th Infantry Division took Vossenack and Schmidt and was thrown back, its only supply route the narrow Kall Trail. US casualties were about 33,000. Historian Charles MacDonald called it 'a misconceived and basically fruitless battle'.

On the ground: Museum Hürtgenwald 1944 in Vossenack, the German war cemeteries at Vossenack and Hürtgen, and the steep Kall Trail, now a marked walk through the woods. Stay on the paths: munitions still lie in the forest.

GPS 50.68671, 6.37017

51 Natzweiler-Struthof — the camp in France

HIGH May 1941 – Sep 1944; reached 23 Nov 1944 · Arnhem and the Ardennes, Sep – Dec 1944

Natzweiler-Struthof, opened in May 1941 in annexed Alsace, was the only concentration camp the Germans set up on French territory. About 52,000 prisoners of 32 nationalities passed through it and its 70 or so subcamps, many of them resistance members held under the 'Night and Fog' decree; some 22,000 died. Four women agents of SOE were executed here on 6 July 1944, and in August 1943, 86 Jews were gassed for a Strasbourg professor's skeleton collection. The SS evacuated it in September; Allied troops found it emptied in late November 1944.

On the ground: High in the Vosges: the gate, the terraced camp with two rebuilt barracks, the cell block and crematorium, the national cemetery and memorial, and the European Centre of Deported Resistance Members. The gas chamber is lower down the road.

GPS 48.45667, 7.25389

52 Bastogne — the Battle of the Bulge

HIGH 16 Dec 1944 – Jan 1945; Bastogne 20–26 Dec · Arnhem and the Ardennes, Sep – Dec 1944

On 16 December 1944 three German armies struck the thinly held Ardennes front, aiming for Antwerp. Fog grounded Allied aircraft; on 17 December Kampfgruppe Peiper's SS troops murdered American prisoners at Baugnez near Malmedy. Bastogne, a vital road junction, was held by the 101st Airborne Division and armoured units, surrounded from 20 December. To a German demand for surrender on 22 December, Brigadier-General Anthony McAuliffe replied 'Nuts!'. Patton's Third Army broke through on 26 December. The offensive failed short of the Meuse and used up Germany's last reserves.

On the ground: The Mardasson Memorial (1950), a five-pointed star bearing the names of the US states, beside the Bastogne War Museum on the hill east of town. A Sherman tank stands in McAuliffe Square; the Bois Jacques foxholes are north near Foy.

GPS 50.01060, 5.73920

53 Auschwitz — the Red Army arrives

HIGH 27 Jan 1945 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

The Soviet Vistula–Oder offensive opened on 12 January 1945 and in three weeks carried the Red Army from the Vistula to the Oder, some 70 km from Berlin. As it approached, the SS drove about 58,000 prisoners out of Auschwitz on death marches to the west and blew up the Birkenau gas chambers and crematoria. On 27 January soldiers of the Soviet 60th Army entered the camps and found about 7,000 prisoners, most of them sick or dying. The day is now International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

On the ground: Auschwitz I, the main camp: the 'Arbeit macht frei' gate, brick blocks with national exhibitions, the execution wall, and the gas chamber and crematorium. Entry is free but must be booked in advance; most visitors take a guided tour.

GPS 50.02750, 19.20500

54 Dresden — the firestorm

HIGH 13–15 Feb 1945 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

On the night of 13–14 February 1945 two waves of RAF Lancasters bombed Dresden, then crowded with refugees from the east, and the US Eighth Air Force followed on 14 and 15 February. A firestorm destroyed the old city. An independent historians' commission concluded in 2010 that up to 25,000 people died, far below the 200,000 or more claimed by Nazi propaganda and repeated for decades. The raids, meant to disrupt traffic behind the Eastern Front, became the centre of the argument over area bombing; Churchill himself questioned it in a memo of 28 March.

On the ground: The Frauenkirche, whose dome fell on 15 February 1945, was left a ruin under East Germany and rebuilt in 1994–2005, with blackened original stones set among the new. Its gilded orb and cross were made in London.

GPS 51.05194, 13.74167

55 Remagen — the bridge on the Rhine

HIGH 7–17 Mar 1945 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

Hitler had ordered every Rhine bridge destroyed. On 7 March 1945 men of the US 9th Armored Division found the Ludendorff railway bridge at Remagen still standing. The German demolition charge only partly damaged it, and Lieutenant Karl Timmermann's infantry company rushed across. The Americans built up a bridgehead on the east bank while the Germans tried to destroy the bridge with artillery, aircraft and even V-2 rockets. Weakened, it collapsed on 17 March, killing 28 US engineers; pontoon bridges were by then in use. Hitler had four officers shot for its loss.

On the ground: Only the stone towers remain, on both banks. The western towers at Remagen house the Peace Museum; across the river at Erpel the railway tunnel under the cliff is now an arts venue.

GPS 50.57917, 7.24417

56 Wesel — crossing the Rhine

LOW 23–24 Mar 1945 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

Montgomery's 21st Army Group crossed the lower Rhine on the night of 23–24 March 1945 at Rees and around Wesel, a town almost entirely destroyed by bombing and shelling beforehand. The British Second Army and US Ninth Army crossed under a huge artillery barrage; the next morning, in Operation Varsity, the British 6th and US 17th Airborne Divisions landed beyond the river in daylight, at heavy cost. Churchill watched and briefly crossed himself. By early April the Ruhr was encircled, and more than 300,000 Germans surrendered there later that month.

On the ground: Rebuilt Wesel and the wide Rhine meadows. The Berliner Tor, one of the few old buildings to survive, stands in the centre. The Reichswald Forest War Cemetery near Kleve, the largest Commonwealth war cemetery in Germany, is about 40 km north-west.

GPS 51.65861, 6.61778

57 Buchenwald — the camp above Weimar

HIGH 11 Apr 1945 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

Buchenwald, opened in July 1937 on the Ettersberg above Weimar, the city of Goethe, held about 280,000 prisoners in all; some 56,000 died. As US troops approached in April 1945 the SS sent many on death marches. On 11 April tanks of the US 6th Armored Division arrived; the prisoners' underground had already taken control of the camp. On 4 April the Americans had found the subcamp at Ohrdruf, which Eisenhower, Bradley and Patton visited on 12 April. From 1945 to 1950 the Soviet NKVD used Buchenwald as a special camp.

On the ground: The gate with its clock stopped at 3.15 — the hour of liberation — and the words 'Jedem das Seine', the crematorium, the open site of the barracks, the museum in the former depot, and the 1958 East German memorial on the hill's southern slope.

GPS 51.02278, 11.24917

58 Bergen-Belsen — the British find Belsen

HIGH 15 Apr 1945 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

Bergen-Belsen began as a prisoner-of-war camp, where some 20,000 Soviet prisoners died, and from 1943 was an SS camp for Jews held for possible exchange. In the last months, as transports arrived from camps in the east, it became a place of mass death from starvation and typhus; Anne and Margot Frank died there in early 1945. The British 11th Armoured Division entered on 15 April under a local truce and found about 60,000 prisoners and thousands of unburied dead. About 14,000 more died after liberation despite a huge medical effort.

On the ground: No barracks survive: the British burned them to stop the typhus. A documentation centre stands at the edge of heathland with mass-grave mounds, the obelisk and inscription wall, and a memorial stone to Anne and Margot Frank.

GPS 52.75778, 9.90778

59 Seelow Heights — the road to Berlin

HIGH 16–19 Apr 1945 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front opened the Berlin offensive before dawn on 16 April 1945 from its bridgehead over the Oder. Searchlights meant to blind the defenders dazzled his own troops, and the Germans had pulled back to the Seelow ridge, which held for three days against repeated mass attacks. Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front, attacking further south, made faster progress. When the heights fell on 19 April the way to Berlin was open, and the two fronts encircled the capital by 25 April. Tens of thousands of soldiers died in the battle for the heights.

On the ground: The Soviet memorial of November 1945, with its statue of a Red Army soldier, above the town of Seelow; a museum of 1972, renewed since; Soviet guns and tanks; and the view east over the Oder flats the attackers crossed.

GPS 52.53490, 14.39573

60 Torgau — East meets West

HIGH 25 Apr 1945 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

On 25 April 1945 patrols of the US 69th Infantry Division met soldiers of the Soviet 58th Guards Rifle Division on the Elbe — first near Strehla and Lorenzkirch, then that afternoon on the wrecked bridge at Torgau, where Lieutenant William Robertson's patrol crossed. Germany was cut in two. The commanders' official handshake followed the next day, and newsreels made Torgau the symbol of the meeting. The Western Allies had already decided to halt on the Elbe and leave Berlin to the Red Army.

On the ground: The Elbe bank below Hartenfels Castle, with the 1945 Soviet monument and a plaque marking the meeting; the bridge has been replaced. A documentation centre in the town covers its military prisons and the Soviet special camps after the war.

GPS 51.56028, 13.00556

61 Dachau — the first camp

HIGH 29 Apr 1945 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

Opened on 22 March 1933, weeks after Hitler took power, Dachau was the first concentration camp and the model for the SS camp system. About 200,000 prisoners from across Europe passed through it and its subcamps, and some 41,500 died. On 29 April 1945 troops of the US Seventh Army found a train from Buchenwald outside with more than 2,000 bodies in its wagons, and about 30,000 survivors inside. Some SS guards were shot after surrendering, an incident later investigated by the US Army.

On the ground: The gate with 'Arbeit macht frei', the roll-call square, two reconstructed barracks and the foundations of the rest, the museum in the former maintenance building, the crematorium area and the religious memorials at the north end.

GPS 48.27028, 11.46806

62 Reichstag — the flag over Berlin

HIGH 30 Apr – 2 May 1945 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

The battle for Berlin cost the Red Army about 80,000 dead. The Reichstag, burned out in 1933 and unused since, was to the Soviets the symbol of the Nazi state. Troops of the 150th Rifle Division stormed it from 30 April — the afternoon Hitler killed himself in his bunker about a kilometre to the south. Fighting in the building went on into 1 May, and Berlin's garrison surrendered on 2 May. Yevgeny Khaldei's famous photograph of the flag over the roof was taken on 2 May, restaged after the fighting.

On the ground: The rebuilt parliament under Norman Foster's glass dome (book a free visit online). Inside, Cyrillic graffiti left by Soviet soldiers in 1945 has been kept on the walls. The Brandenburg Gate is next door.

GPS 52.51861, 13.37611

63 Mauthausen — the stairs of death

HIGH 5 May 1945 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

Mauthausen, opened in August 1938 after the annexation of Austria, was the SS's harshest camp, meant for 'incorrigible' enemies. With Gusen and its other subcamps it held about 190,000–200,000 prisoners, of whom more than 90,000 died, many worked to death in the Wiener Graben granite quarry, carrying blocks up its 186 steps. In February 1945 some 500 Soviet officers broke out; almost all were hunted down and killed. A patrol of the US 11th Armored Division reached the camp on 5 May 1945.

On the ground: The fortress-like stone camp above the Danube: walls and gate, roll-call square, barracks, gas chamber and crematorium, and below it the quarry and the 'stairs of death'. National memorials line the slope outside the walls.

GPS 48.25694, 14.50111

64 Reims — the surrender at SHAEF

HIGH 7 May 1945, 02:41 · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

Hitler's successor, Grand Admiral Dönitz, hoped to surrender to the Western Allies alone; Eisenhower refused. At 02:41 on 7 May 1945, in a technical school used as SHAEF's war room, General Alfred Jodl signed the unconditional surrender of all German forces. General Walter Bedell Smith signed for the Allied Expeditionary Force, General Ivan Susloparov for the Soviet Union, and General François Sevez of France as witness. It took effect at 23:01 Central European Time on 8 May. Stalin insisted on a second, formal signing in Berlin.

On the ground: The Musée de la Reddition in the school, now the Lycée Roosevelt: the map room is kept as it was that morning, with the operations maps still on the walls, seen through glass.

GPS 49.26298, 4.02693

65 Karlshorst — the final surrender

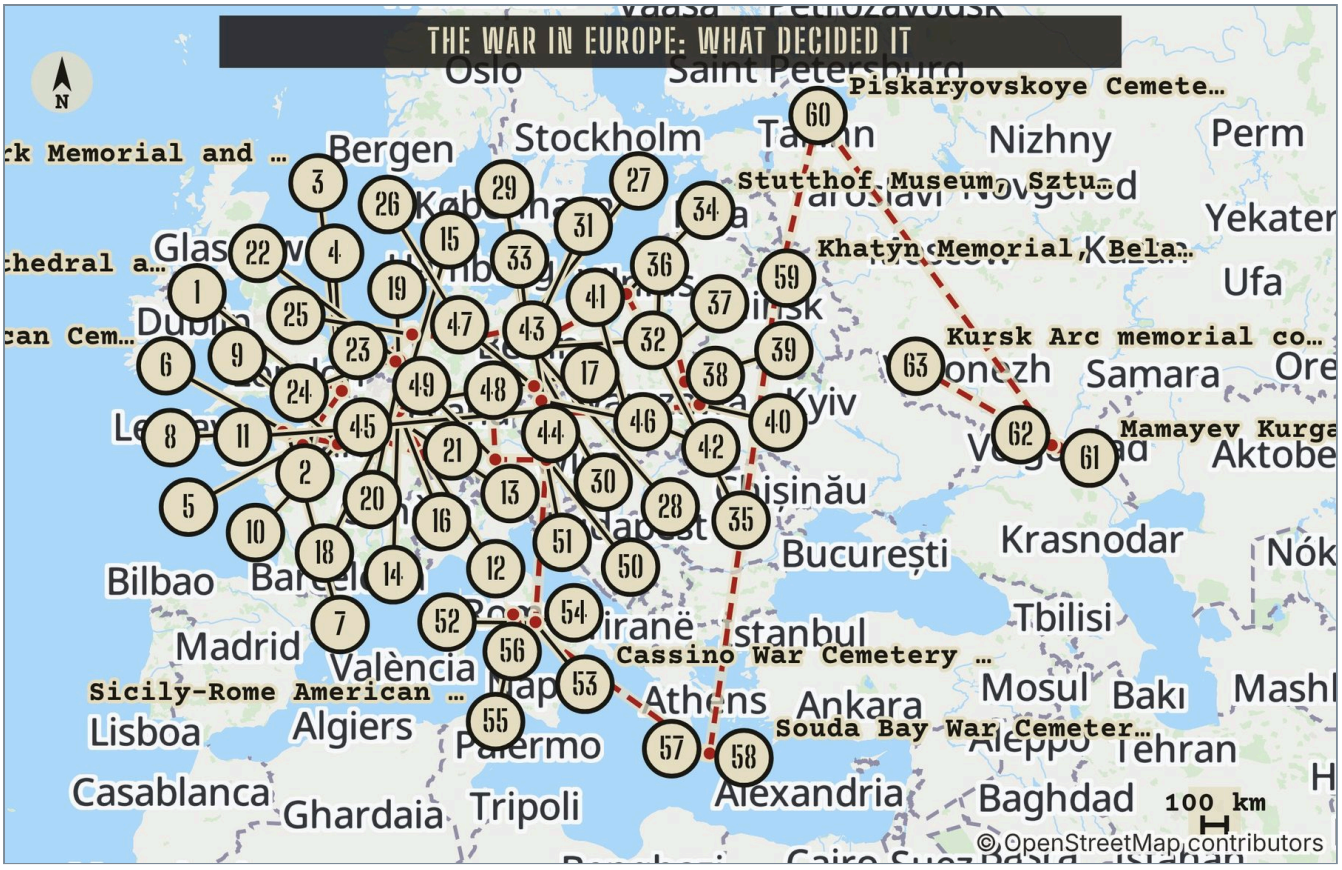
HIGH 8 May 1945, late evening · The fall of Germany, Jan – May 1945

In the officers' mess of a former German army engineering school in Karlshorst, then Soviet headquarters, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Admiral Hans-Georg von Friedeburg and Colonel-General Hans-Jürgen Stumpff signed the ratified surrender shortly before midnight on 8 May 1945 — already 9 May in Moscow. Marshal Zhukov and Air Chief Marshal Tedder signed for the Allies, with General Spaatz and General de Lattre de Tassigny as witnesses. The war in Europe was over: the West marks VE Day on 8 May, Russia Victory Day on 9 May.

On the ground: Museum Berlin-Karlshorst keeps the hall where the surrender was signed, with a permanent exhibition on the German–Soviet war of 1941–45. Entry is free. Soviet tanks and guns stand outside.

GPS 52.48611, 13.53972

THE WAR IN EUROPE: WHAT DECIDED IT



BATTLE MAPS

Space and distance. Germany fought a war of short campaigns because it could not afford a long one. In the west in 1940 that worked: distances were small, roads good and the enemy within reach. In the Soviet Union it did not. The front ran some 1,600 km from the Baltic to the Black Sea and widened as it went east; the railways changed gauge at the border; the roads turned to mud in the autumn and spring rasputitsa. Every kilometre gained stretched German supply lines further and gave the Red Army room to retreat, rebuild and strike back. In the west, the Channel saved Britain in 1940, and the Atlantic kept American industry out of reach of German bombers for the whole war. Front in the East · c. 1,600 km in 1941, far longer by 1942

Industry and manpower. Germany began the war better armed, not better supplied. Once the Soviet Union and the United States were in, the Allies could outbuild the Axis many times over. The Soviets moved some 1,500 factories east of the Urals in 1941 and from 1942 out-produced Germany in tanks and guns. In 1943 alone the United States built about 86,000 aircraft, Germany about 25,000. German production rose late, under Albert Speer, and relied increasingly on millions of forced labourers and concentration-camp prisoners, many of them brought from the occupied East. Manpower told the same story: Germany could not replace its losses in the East, while the Red Army, for all its terrible casualties, could. American lorries, locomotives and food sent under Lend-Lease let Soviet factories concentrate on weapons. Aircraft built in 1943 · USA c. 86,000 · Germany c. 25,000

Oil. Modern armies run on oil, and Germany had very little. It relied on Romanian oil from Ploiești, on stocks seized in 1940 and on synthetic fuel made from coal. Fuel shaped strategy: the 1942 summer offensive was aimed at the oilfields of the Caucasus, and Stalingrad was a flank of that drive. From May 1944 the US bombers turned on the synthetic-oil plants and production of aviation fuel collapsed; Romania changed sides in August 1944. By the Ardennes offensive in December, German tanks went into battle hoping to capture Allied fuel dumps, and new Luftwaffe pilots had too little fuel to train. The Allies drew on American and Middle Eastern oil, moved by tanker across the Atlantic, and in 1944 laid a pipeline under the Channel to France. US offensive against synthetic-oil plants · from May 1944

Codebreaking, intelligence and deception. Polish mathematicians first broke the German Enigma machine in the 1930s and handed their work to Britain and France in July 1939. At Bletchley Park the British turned it into an industry, and the resulting intelligence, Ultra, helped win the Battle of the Atlantic, tracked German movements in Africa and Normandy, and allowed the Allies to see whether their deceptions were believed. The Germans had successes too: their naval codebreakers read British convoy codes into 1943. Deception mattered as much as decoding. Operation Fortitude convinced Hitler that the main landing would come

at Calais, holding his Fifteenth Army there for weeks after D-Day, and Soviet maskirovka hid the build-up for Bagration. Germany, by contrast, ran almost no agents in Britain who were not caught or turned. Polish Enigma work shared with the Allies · July 1939

Air power. In 1939–40 the Luftwaffe worked as flying artillery for the panzers. Over Britain in 1940 it met an integrated air defence — radar, observers, operations rooms and fighters — and failed. The Allied bomber offensive took years to become effective and cost Bomber Command 55,573 aircrew, while killing several hundred thousand German civilians; historians still argue over its value. But it forced Germany to pull fighters and thousands of anti-aircraft guns home from the fronts, and in early 1944, with long-range Mustang escorts, the Americans destroyed the Luftwaffe's fighter force. That gave the Allies command of the air over Normandy. In the East, where the air war was mainly flown in support of the armies, Soviet ground-attack aircraft such as the Il-2 were built in vast numbers. RAF Bomber Command · 55,573 aircrew killed

Sea power and the Atlantic. Britain could only fight on if food, fuel and arms crossed the Atlantic, and the American armies that liberated western Europe had to be shipped across it. The U-boats sank thousands of Allied merchant ships, and in early 1943 they came close to cutting the route. Convoys, long-range aircraft, radar, escort carriers and codebreaking turned the battle in May 1943; about three-quarters of U-boat crews were killed by the end. Sea power also carried Lend-Lease supplies to Murmansk on the Arctic convoys and made possible every Allied landing, from North Africa and Sicily to Normandy, where some 7,000 vessels took part on D-Day. Germany, a land power, lost much of its small surface fleet off Norway in 1940 and never had the ships to invade Britain. Battle of the Atlantic · Sep 1939 – May 1945

The scale of the Eastern Front. Most of the fighting on land, and most of the dying, happened in the East. From June 1941 the bulk of the German army was in the Soviet Union, and most German soldiers killed in the war died there or in its aftermath. The Soviet Union lost about 27 million people, soldiers and civilians — an estimate that has its critics, but nobody doubts the order of magnitude. Stalingrad, Kursk and Bagration each destroyed or broke more German divisions than any battle in the west. The western Allies' bombing, their campaigns in Africa and Italy and finally the second front in France drew off German aircraft and divisions, but the Red Army bore the heaviest weight. That is why so many of the war's largest battles, and its largest cemeteries, lie in the East. Soviet war dead · about 27 million (estimates vary)

Coalition warfare. The Grand Alliance of Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States was a marriage of necessity between a democracy with an empire, a communist dictatorship and a republic that had wanted to stay out. It held together because each needed the others. Lend-Lease sent the Soviets trucks, locomotives, food and fuel; Stalin pressed for a second front in France, which came only in 1944; Churchill favoured the Mediterranean. At Tehran (1943) and Yalta (1945) the leaders fixed the shape of the post-war world, and for Poland — the country for which Britain had gone to war — the result was Soviet domination. Germany's own allies, Italy, Hungary, Romania and Finland, were weaker and less committed, and Hitler rarely consulted them; by late 1944 all but Hungary had left the war. Tehran Nov 1943 · Yalta Feb 1945

Ideology, terror and genocide. Nazi Germany fought in the East a war of conquest and annihilation. Orders before Barbarossa freed troops from punishment for crimes against civilians and ordered the shooting of Soviet political commissars; plans foresaw the starvation of millions. About 3 million of the 5.7 million Soviet prisoners of war died in German hands. The murder of about six million Jews was not a by-product of the war but one of its aims, carried out across occupied Europe. Terror against civilians bred resistance from Norway to Greece and in the vast partisan movements of the East. It cost Germany labour and goodwill it could have used — but it also bound many Germans to the regime until the end, fearing what defeat would bring. About 6 million Jews murdered · 1941–45

Logistics. Armies win on what reaches the front. Germany invaded the Soviet Union with some 600,000 horses and most of its infantry on foot, and a supply system that could not keep pace with its own panzers. The Allies, by contrast, were rich in lorries but short of ports. After the breakout from Normandy in August 1944 their supplies still came over the beaches and Cherbourg, hundreds of kilometres behind the front, and the advance stalled on the German border for lack of fuel and ammunition. Antwerp, captured on 4 September, could not be used until its river approaches were cleared in November, and Market Garden was in part a gamble to win the war before the supply crisis bit. The Red Army, too, outran its railways after every great offensive and had to pause to repair them. Antwerp open to Allied shipping · 28 Nov 1944

CEMETERIES, MEMORIALS AND CAMPS

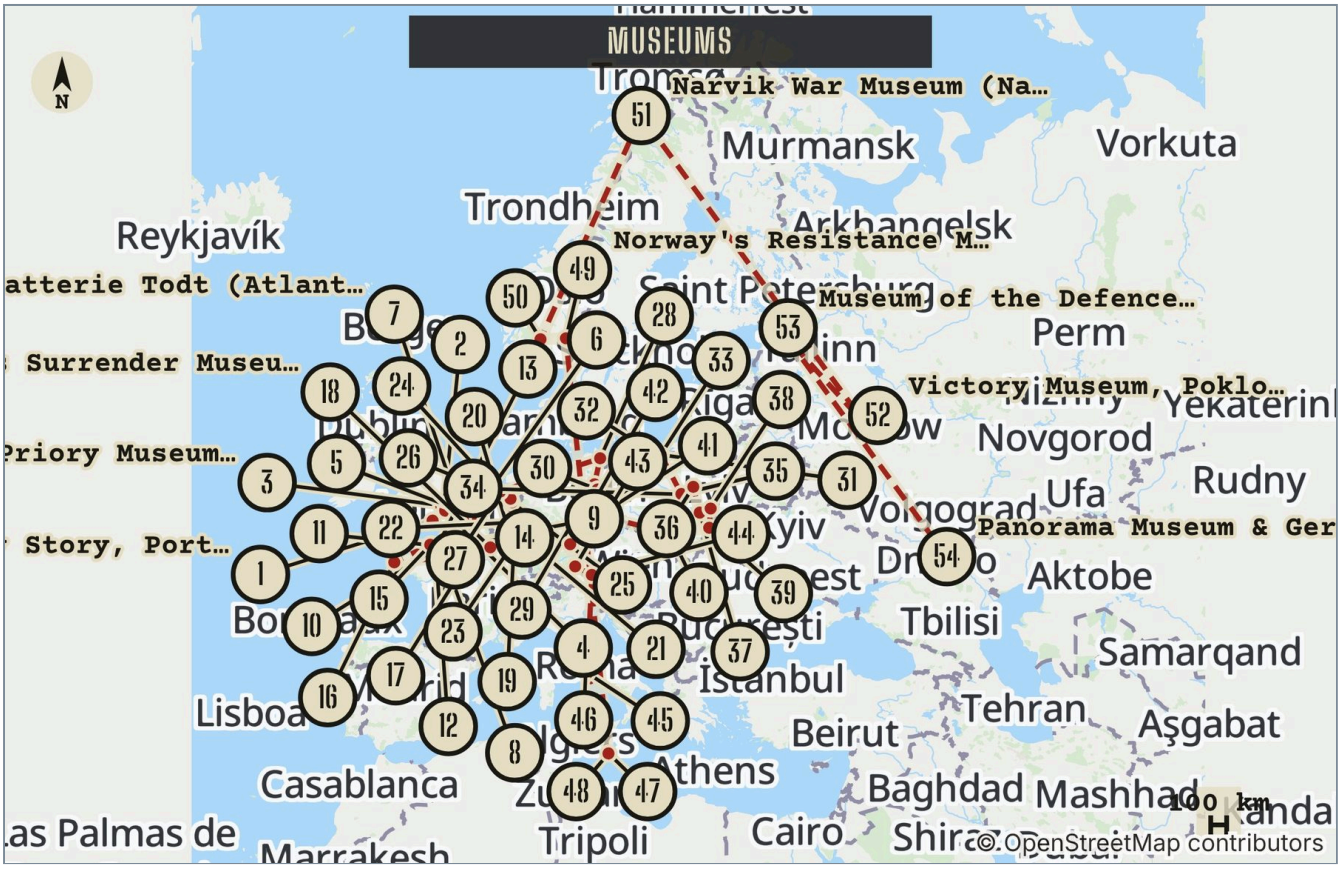
Every one of these is a stop on the tour, with its full story in the numbered chapters.

1. **St Paul's Cathedral and the Blitz, London** — Sep 1940 – Apr 1941 · memorial
2. **Battle of Britain Memorial, Capel-le-Ferne** — Jul–Oct 1940 (memorial unveiled 9 Jul 1993) · memorial

3. **Dunkirk Memorial and Town Cemetery (CWGC)** — 1939–1940 (unveiled 29 Jun 1957) · cemetery
4. **La Plaine au Bois massacre memorial, Esquelbecq (Wormhout)** — 28 May 1940 · memorial
5. **Montormel Memorial, Falaise Pocket** — 19–21 Aug 1944 · memorial
6. **Normandy American Cemetery, Colleville-sur-Mer** — 1944–1956 · cemetery
7. **Bayeux War Cemetery and Memorial** — 1944–1952 · cemetery
8. **La Cambe German war cemetery** — Jun 1944 – 1961 · cemetery
9. **Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris** — 1942–1944 · memorial
10. **Mont-Valérien memorial, Suresnes** — 1941–1944 · memorial
11. **Glade of the Armistice, Compiègne** — 22 Jun 1940 · memorial
12. **Natzweiler-Struthof** — May 1941–Nov 1944 · camp memorial
13. **Luxembourg American Cemetery, Hamm** — Opened 29 Dec 1944; dedicated 1960 · cemetery
14. **Mardasson Memorial, Bastogne** — Dec 1944 – Jan 1945; inaugurated 16 Jul 1950 · memorial
15. **Recogne German war cemetery** — Opened 4 Feb 1945 · cemetery
16. **Houffalize and its Panther tank** — 19 Dec 1944 – 16 Jan 1945 · memorial
17. **Baugnez: Malmedy massacre memorial** — 17 Dec 1944 · memorial
18. **Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery** — Opened 28 Sep 1944; dedicated 1960 · cemetery
19. **Netherlands American Cemetery, Margraten** — 1944–1945 · cemetery
20. **Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery and Memorial** — Feb–Mar 1945 · cemetery
21. **Waal crossing memorial (De Oversteek), Nijmegen** — 20 Sep 1944 · memorial
22. **Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery** — Sep 1944 · cemetery
23. **Grebbeberg battlefield and military cemetery** — 11–13 May 1940 · cemetery
24. **Rotterdam 1940: 'The Destroyed City' monument** — 14 May 1940 · memorial
25. **Camp Westerbork Memorial Centre** — Jul 1942 – Apr 1945 · camp memorial
26. **Bergen-Belsen Memorial** — 1940–15 Apr 1945 · camp memorial
27. **Ravensbrück Memorial** — May 1939–30 Apr 1945 · camp memorial
28. **Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum** — Jul 1936–22 Apr 1945 · camp memorial
29. **Soviet War Memorial, Tiergarten** — Apr–May 1945 (unveiled 11 Nov 1945) · memorial
30. **Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe** — 1941–1945 (opened 2005) · memorial
31. **German Resistance Memorial (Bendlerblock)** — 20–21 Jul 1944 · memorial
32. **House of the Wannsee Conference** — 20 Jan 1942 · memorial
33. **Soviet War Memorial, Treptower Park** — Apr–May 1945 (opened 8 May 1949) · cemetery
34. **Stutthof Museum, Sztutowo** — 2 Sep 1939 – 9 May 1945 · camp memorial
35. **Ghetto Heroes Monument and POLIN Museum, Warsaw** — 19 Apr – 16 May 1943 · memorial
36. **Umschlagplatz memorial, Warsaw** — 22 Jul – 21 Sep 1942 · memorial
37. **Treblinka Museum and memorial** — 23 Jul 1942 – Oct 1943 · camp memorial
38. **State Museum at Majdanek, Lublin** — Oct 1941 – Jul 1944; 'Harvest Festival' 3 Nov 1943 · camp memorial
39. **Sobibór Museum and memorial** — May 1942 – Oct 1943; revolt 14 Oct 1943 · camp memorial
40. **Bełżec Museum and memorial** — 17 Mar 1942 – Jun 1943 · camp memorial
41. **Auschwitz I (main camp), Oświęcim** — Jun 1940 – 27 Jan 1945 · camp memorial
42. **Auschwitz II-Birkenau** — Oct 1941 – 27 Jan 1945 · camp memorial
43. **National Memorial to the Heroes of the Heydrich Terror** — 18 Jun 1942 · memorial
44. **Operation Anthropoid Memorial, Prague-Libeň** — 27 May 1942 · memorial
45. **Lidice Memorial** — 10 Jun 1942 · memorial
46. **Terezín Memorial** — Jun 1940 – May 1945 · camp memorial
47. **Dresden Frauenkirche and the 1945 bombing** — 13–15 Feb 1945 · memorial
48. **Buchenwald Memorial, near Weimar** — Jul 1937–11 Apr 1945 · camp memorial
49. **Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site** — 22 Mar 1933 – 29 Apr 1945 · camp memorial
50. **Mauthausen Memorial** — 8 Aug 1938 – 5 May 1945 · camp memorial
51. **Gusen Memorial** — 25 May 1940 – 5 May 1945 · camp memorial
52. **Polish War Cemetery, Monte Cassino** — 11–18 May 1944 · cemetery
53. **Cassino War Cemetery and Memorial (CWGC)** — Jan–May 1944 · cemetery
54. **German War Cemetery, Cassino (Caira)** — 1943–1944 (opened 4 May 1965) · cemetery
55. **Sicily-Rome American Cemetery, Nettuno** — Jul 1943 – Jun 1944 · cemetery
56. **Fosse Ardeatine Mausoleum, Rome** — 24 Mar 1944 · memorial
57. **Maleme German War Cemetery and Hill 107, Crete** — 20–22 May 1941 · cemetery

58. **Souda Bay War Cemetery, Crete** — 20 May – 1 Jun 1941 · cemetery
59. **Khatyn Memorial, Belarus** — 22 Mar 1943 (memorial 1969) · memorial
60. **Piskaryovskoye Cemetery, St Petersburg** — Sep 1941 – Jan 1944 (memorial opened 9 May 1960) · cemetery
61. **Mamayev Kurgan and 'The Motherland Calls'** — Sep 1942 – Jan 1943 · memorial
62. **Rossoshka war cemeteries** — Nov 1942 – Feb 1943 (cemeteries 1997 and 1999) · cemetery
63. **Kursk Arc memorial complex, Kursk** — 5 Jul – 23 Aug 1943 (memorial 1998–2000) · memorial

MUSEUMS



The museums worth your time, west to east, with the chapter they are in (their full stories are there). Check opening days before you travel.

1. **The D-Day Story, Portsmouth** — Southsea, Portsmouth, United Kingdom · see 1 · allow 2 hr
2. **Imperial War Museum London** — Lambeth, London, United Kingdom · see 2 · allow 3 hr
3. **Bentley Priory Museum, Stanmore** — Stanmore (London Borough of Harrow), United Kingdom · see 3 · allow 1 hr 30 min
4. **Biggin Hill Memorial Museum** — Biggin Hill (London Borough of Bromley), United Kingdom · see 6 · allow 1 hr 30 min
5. **RAF Manston Spitfire & Hurricane Memorial Museum** — Manston, near Ramsgate, Kent, United Kingdom · see 6 · allow 1 hr
6. **Dunkirk 1940 Museum (Bastion 32)** — Dunkirk (Dunkerque), France · see 8 · allow 1 hr 30 min
7. **Batterie Todt (Atlantic Wall Museum), Audinghen** — Audinghen (Cap Gris-Nez), France · see 9 · allow 1 hr 30 min
8. **Memorial of Civilians in Wartime, Falaise** — Falaise, France · see 10 · allow 1 hr 30 min
9. **Caen Memorial (Mémorial de Caen)** — Caen, France · see 11 · allow 4 hr
10. **Juno Beach Centre, Courseulles-sur-Mer** — Courseulles-sur-Mer, France · see 12 · allow 2 hr
11. **Arromanches: Mulberry harbour and D-Day Museum** — Arromanches-les-Bains, France · see 12 · allow 1 hr 30 min
12. **Overlord Museum, Colleville-sur-Mer** — Colleville-sur-Mer, France · see 13 · allow 1 hr 30 min
13. **Museum of the Battle of Normandy, Bayeux** — Bayeux, France · see 14 · allow 1 hr 30 min
14. **Utah Beach Museum, Sainte-Marie-du-Mont** — Sainte-Marie-du-Mont (La Madeleine), France · see 15 · allow 2 hr
15. **Sainte-Mère-Église and the Airborne Museum** — Sainte-Mère-Église, France · see 15 · allow 2 hr
16. **Brest: the U-boat base and the Naval Museum** — Brest, France · see 16 · allow 2 hr
17. **Musée de la Libération de Paris – Leclerc – Jean Moulin** — Paris (14th), France · see 19 · allow 1 hr 30 min
18. **Reims Surrender Museum (Musée de la Reddition)** — Reims, France · see 20 · allow 1 hr
19. **National Museum of Military History, Diekirch** — Diekirch, Luxembourg · see 23 · allow 2 hr
20. **Bastogne War Museum** — Bastogne, Belgium · see 24 · allow 3 hr
21. **December 44 Historical Museum, La Gleize** — La Gleize (Stoumont), Belgium · see 25 · allow 1 hr 30 min
22. **Museum Hürtgenwald 1944, Vossenack** — Vossenack (Hürtgenwald), Germany · see 27 · allow 1 hr 30 min
23. **Remagen bridge and Peace Museum** — Remagen, Germany · see 27 · allow 1 hr 30 min

24. **Overloon War Museum** — Overloon, Netherlands · see 28 · allow 3 hr
25. **Freedom Museum (Vrijheidsmuseum), Groesbeek** — Groesbeek, Netherlands · see 28 · allow 2 hr
26. **Airborne Museum Hartenstein, Oosterbeek** — Oosterbeek, Netherlands · see 29 · allow 2 hr
27. **Anne Frank House, Amsterdam** — Amsterdam, Netherlands · see 30 · allow 1 hr 30 min
28. **Peenemünde Historical-Technical Museum** — Peenemünde (Usedom), Germany · see 32 · allow 3 hr
29. **Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum** — Oranienburg, Germany · see 33 · allow 3 hr
30. **Museum Berlin-Karlshorst** — Berlin-Karlshorst, Germany · see 35 · allow 1 hr 30 min
31. **Museum of the Second World War, Gdańsk** — Gdańsk, Poland · see 37 · allow 3 hr
32. **Polish Post Office, Gdańsk** — Gdańsk, Poland · see 37 · allow 45 min
33. **Stutthof Museum, Sztutowo** — Sztutowo, Poland · see 38 · allow 2 hr
34. **Warsaw Rising Museum** — Warsaw, Poland · see 39 · allow 3 hr
35. **Ghetto Heroes Monument and POLIN Museum, Warsaw** — Warsaw, Poland · see 40 · allow 2 hr 30 min
36. **Treblinka Museum and memorial** — Wólka Okrąglik (Kosów Lacki), Poland · see 40 · allow 2 hr
37. **State Museum at Majdanek, Lublin** — Lublin, Poland · see 41 · allow 2 hr 30 min
38. **Sobibór Museum and memorial** — Sobibór (Włodawa), Poland · see 41 · allow 1 hr 30 min
39. **Bełżec Museum and memorial** — Bełżec, Poland · see 42 · allow 1 hr 30 min
40. **Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory, Kraków** — Kraków, Poland · see 42 · allow 2 hr
41. **Bundeswehr Military History Museum, Dresden** — Dresden, Germany · see 46 · allow 3 hr
42. **Nazi Party Rally Grounds & Documentation Centre** — Nuremberg, Germany · see 49 · allow 3 hr
43. **NS-Documentation Centre, Munich** — Munich, Germany · see 50 · allow 2 hr
44. **Obersalzberg Documentation Centre** — Berchtesgaden, Germany · see 51 · allow 2 hr
45. **Anzio Beachhead Museum (Museo dello Sbarco)** — Anzio, Italy · see 54 · allow 1 hr
46. **Museum of the Liberation of Rome (Via Tasso)** — Rome, Italy · see 54 · allow 1 hr
47. **National War Museum, Fort St Elmo, Valletta** — Valletta, Malta · see 55 · allow 1 hr 30 min
48. **Malta at War Museum, Birgu** — Birgu (Vittoriosa), Malta · see 55 · allow 1 hr 30 min
49. **Norway's Resistance Museum, Akershus Fortress** — Oslo, Norway · see 57 · allow 1 hr 30 min
50. **Vemork: Norwegian Industrial Workers Museum** — Rjukan (Tinn), Norway · see 57 · allow 2 hr
51. **Narvik War Museum (Narviksenteret)** — Narvik, Norway · see 58 · allow 1 hr 30 min
52. **Victory Museum, Poklonnaya Hill, Moscow** — Moscow, Russia · see 60 · allow 3 hr
53. **Museum of the Defence and Siege of Leningrad** — St Petersburg, Russia · see 61 · allow 1 hr 30 min
54. **Panorama Museum & Gerhardt's Mill, Volgograd** — Volgograd, Russia · see 62 · allow 2 hr

THE ARMIES

Armies of a dozen nations fought across Europe between 1939 and 1945, organised in different ways and equipped very differently. These notes explain the main ones; the Weapons page shows what they carried.

Common building blocks. Almost every army used the same ladder: sections or squads of about ten men, platoons of about thirty, companies of about 120, battalions of 600–900, regiments or brigades of three battalions, and divisions of 10,000–18,000 men with their own artillery, engineers and supply. Two to five divisions made a corps, several corps an army, and several armies an army group — called a Front in the Red Army.

German. The German army of 1939–40 was mostly infantry that marched on foot with horse-drawn supply; its edge came from a small number of panzer divisions, close air support and well-trained junior leaders encouraged to use initiative. It grew to well over 200 divisions, many of them worn down to a fraction of their strength by 1944. The Waffen-SS expanded alongside it, and from 1944 the Volksgrenadier divisions and the Volkssturm militia filled the gaps with older men and boys.

British and Commonwealth. Britain sent a small, fully motorised Expeditionary Force to France in 1939–40. It grew into a citizen army that fought alongside contingents from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India — whose army became the largest volunteer force in history — and was strongest in artillery. Infantry divisions of three brigades were backed by armoured divisions and independent tank brigades.

French. France mobilised about five million men behind the Maginot Line in 1939. Its army had good tanks but spread many of them among infantry units, relied on slow communications and was organised for a methodical war like 1918. After 1942 the Free French and the army of North Africa, re-equipped by the Americans, fought in Tunisia, Italy and France.

American. The US Army grew from fewer than 200,000 men in 1939 to more than eight million in 1945, including the Army Air Forces, and fielded 89 divisions. Its divisions were fully motorised, supplied on a lavish scale and supported by plentiful artillery with very good fire control.

Soviet. The Red Army was purged of much of its senior command in 1937–38 and was caught reorganising in 1941. It lost millions of men that year but rebuilt itself: rifle divisions were smaller than western ones, while tank and mechanised corps and massed artillery were concentrated for breakthroughs. By 1944 it was a skilled, hard-hitting force, though still careless of casualties, and moved by American-built lorries.

Polish. Poland mobilised about a million men in 1939, with infantry divisions and cavalry brigades but few tanks or modern aircraft. After its defeat, Poles fought on in the west — in France in 1940, in the Battle of Britain, at Tobruk, Monte Cassino, Falaise and Arnhem — while the Home Army fought underground at home and a Soviet-sponsored Polish army fought its way from the east to Berlin.

KEY FIGURES

A WAR OF MANY NATIONS

The war in Europe was shaped by a handful of political leaders, a few dozen commanders and millions of ordinary people. These cards cover some of those whose names you will meet at the sites: the men who ran the war, the generals on all three sides, people who resisted, rescued or bore witness, and a few soldiers and airmen whose stories are told where they fought. Inclusion is not approval. Where the record is disputed or a reputation has been polished since 1945, the card says so.

The Western Allies. Churchill and Roosevelt set strategy through the Combined Chiefs of Staff from early 1942. Eisenhower commanded the Allied landings in North Africa and the Mediterranean, then from January 1944 the invasion of north-west Europe as Supreme Commander. Under him, Montgomery led the land battle in Normandy and then 21st Army Group (British and Canadian) in the north, while Bradley's 12th Army Group, with Patton's Third Army, held the centre. The RAF's Fighter and Bomber Commands answered to the Air Ministry, not to the army.

The Soviet Union. Stalin was head of government, defence commissar and supreme commander. He ran the war through the Stavka (supreme headquarters) and the General Staff, which sent senior figures such as Zhukov to coordinate groups of fronts. A Soviet front was roughly an army group: Rokossovsky, Konev and their colleagues each led several armies, such as Chuikov's 62nd (later 8th Guards) Army at Stalingrad and Berlin. Political commissars and the NKVD watched every level.

Germany. Hitler was head of state and supreme commander, and from December 1941 commander of the army as well. The OKW ran most theatres, the OKH the Eastern Front, and orders reached army groups led by field marshals such as Rundstedt, Manstein and Model. The Luftwaffe, under Göring, and the SS, under Himmler, were separate empires. Hitler sacked commanders often, increasingly interfered in tactical decisions and forbade retreats.

LEADERS

Winston Churchill “Winnie” — British Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, May 1940 – July 1945. Born 30 Nov 1874, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire · died 24 Jan 1965, London

A soldier, journalist and politician whose career seemed finished in the 1930s, when he warned against German rearmament and appeasement, Churchill returned as First Lord of the Admiralty in September 1939. He became Prime Minister on 10 May 1940, the day Germany attacked in the west. Within weeks France was collapsing and the army was being lifted from Dunkirk. In late May he argued down colleagues who wanted to explore peace terms through Mussolini, and his speeches to Parliament and on the radio that summer set the tone of a country that would fight on alone.

He ran the war from Downing Street and the underground Cabinet War Rooms, travelling constantly to meet Roosevelt and Stalin, from the Atlantic Charter in August 1941 to Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam. He favoured operations in the Mediterranean and argued for delay before a cross-Channel invasion, a source of friction with American planners. By 1944 Britain was the junior partner to the United States and the Soviet Union. He was voted out in the general election of July 1945, the result announced while the Potsdam conference was under way.

Caveat. His record is argued over: the Norway and Greece campaigns, his share in the policy of area bombing, which he began to distance himself from in a memo of 28 March 1945, and his government's handling of the 1943 Bengal famine, in which some three million people died.

Decorations: Queen's Sudan Medal — served at Omdurman with the 21st Lancers, 1898; Companion of Honour, 1922; Order of Merit, 1946; Knight of the Garter, 1953; Nobel Prize in Literature, 1953 (not a decoration, but often listed with them).

After the war: Leader of the Opposition, then Prime Minister again 1951–55. He wrote a six-volume history of the war that shaped how it was remembered for decades. He died in 1965 and was given a state funeral; he is buried at Bladon, near Blenheim.

Franklin D. Roosevelt “FDR” — President of the United States, 1933–1945. Born 30 Jan 1882, Hyde Park, New York · died 12 Apr 1945, Warm Springs, Georgia

Paralysed from the waist down by illness in 1921, Roosevelt led the United States out of the Depression and, after 1939, steadily towards the Allied side while the country stayed formally neutral. The destroyers-for-bases deal of 1940 and the Lend-Lease Act of March 1941 sent ships, aircraft and supplies to Britain, and later to the Soviet Union. After Pearl Harbor and Germany's declaration of war on the United States on 11 December 1941, he held to the decision that Germany should be defeated first.

At Casablanca in January 1943 he announced that the Allies would accept only unconditional surrender. He met Churchill many times and Stalin twice, at Tehran in November 1943 and at Yalta in February 1945, where the post-war shape of Poland and eastern Europe was largely conceded to Soviet power. Already gravely ill at Yalta, he died of a cerebral haemorrhage less than four weeks before the German surrender. Harry Truman succeeded him. He had chosen Eisenhower to command the invasion of France, which he pressed for against British doubts.

Caveat. Historians still debate his response to the Holocaust: tight immigration limits for Jewish refugees in the 1930s, the late creation of the War Refugee Board in January 1944, and the decision not to bomb Auschwitz or the railways to it. In the Pacific war he ordered the internment of some 120,000 Japanese Americans.

After the war: He died in office in April 1945 and is buried at Hyde Park. The United Nations, which he had championed, held its founding conference in San Francisco two weeks after his death.

Joseph Stalin — Soviet leader; People's Commissar for Defence and Supreme Commander from 1941. Born 18 Dec 1878, Gori, Georgia · died 5 Mar 1953, Kuntsevo near Moscow

Born Ioseb Jughashvili, Stalin had made himself absolute ruler of the Soviet Union by the 1930s, through forced collectivisation, famine and the purges that killed or imprisoned much of the Red Army's officer corps. In August 1939 his Pact with Hitler divided eastern Europe: the Soviet Union invaded Poland on 17 September 1939, and in spring 1940 the NKVD shot about 22,000 Polish officers and others at Katyn and elsewhere. He dismissed repeated warnings of a German attack, and the invasion of 22 June 1941 caught the Red Army badly unprepared.

He stayed in Moscow when the Germans approached in October 1941. Orders such as No. 227 of July 1942, 'Not one step back', were enforced by blocking detachments and penal units. From 1942 he learned to listen more to commanders such as Zhukov and Vasilevsky, while keeping the final word. At Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam he secured a Soviet sphere in eastern Europe that his armies already held. The Soviet Union lost around 27 million people in the war, soldiers and civilians.

Caveat. Soviet victory and Soviet repression are both part of his war: mass deportations of whole peoples such as the Chechens and Crimean Tatars, the fate of returning prisoners of war, and the halt of the Red Army while the Warsaw Uprising was crushed in 1944, a point still argued.

Decorations: Hero of Socialist Labour, 1939; Order of Victory (twice), 1944 and 1945; Hero of the Soviet Union, June 1945 (accounts say he never wore the star).

After the war: Took the rank of Generalissimo in June 1945 and led the Soviet Union into the Cold War. He died in 1953; in 1956 Khrushchev denounced his crimes, and Stalingrad was renamed Volgograd in 1961.

Adolf Hitler — Leader of Nazi Germany (Führer), Chancellor from 1933, supreme commander of the armed forces. Born 20 Apr 1889, Braunau am Inn, Austria · died 30 Apr 1945, Berlin (suicide)

An Austrian who served in a Bavarian regiment in the First World War, Hitler led the Nazi Party from Munich, failed in a coup in 1923 and came to power legally as Chancellor on 30 January 1933. Within months he had abolished democracy. Rearmament, the occupation of the Rhineland, the annexation of Austria and the seizure of Czechoslovakia followed; the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 started the war. In June 1940 he had the French sign their armistice at Compiègne in the same railway carriage used in 1918.

His aims were racial as well as territorial: living space in the east, the enslavement of Slavs and the destruction of Europe's Jews, which became systematic murder from 1941. He ordered the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and declared war on the United States that December. As the war turned he forbade retreats, sacked his generals and ran operations from headquarters such as the Wolf's Lair, where he survived Stauffenberg's bomb on 20 July 1944. He shot himself in the bunker under the Reich Chancellery on 30 April 1945.

Caveat. Almost every claim about him has been examined; the decisive points are not in doubt. Myths that his Iron Cross was undeserved, or that he survived the war, are not supported by the evidence.

Decorations: Iron Cross, 2nd Class — December 1914; Iron Cross, 1st Class — August 1918, on the recommendation of a Jewish officer, Hugo Gutmann; Wound Badge in Black — 1918.

After the war: His body and Eva Braun's were burned in the Chancellery garden. Soviet investigators took the remains; they were finally destroyed in 1970. The bunker site is now a car park with an information board.

Charles de Gaulle — Leader of the Free French, then head of the Provisional Government of France, 1944–46. Born 22 Nov 1890, Lille · died 9 Nov 1970, Colombey-les-Deux-Églises

Wounded three times in the First World War and captured at Douaumont, near Verdun, on 2 March 1916, de Gaulle spent the inter-war years arguing for armoured divisions. In May 1940 he led the 4th Armoured Division in counter-attacks at Montcornet and Abbeville, and on 5 June became a junior minister for war. When the government moved towards an armistice he flew to London on 17 June and broadcast his appeal on the BBC the next evening, calling on the French to continue the fight. A Vichy court condemned him to death in his absence.

Starting almost alone, he built the Free French forces and won over colonies in Africa, while quarrelling with Churchill and Roosevelt, who distrusted him. His envoy Jean Moulin united the main resistance movements inside France in 1943. On 25 August 1944 he entered liberated Paris, and the next day walked down the Champs-Élysées. He led the provisional government that restored the Republic, gave French women the vote and purged collaborators. The French 2nd Armoured Division under General Leclerc, which he had insisted be allowed to lead, was the first Allied force into the capital.

Caveat. His Paris speech of 25 August 1944 spoke of a France that had liberated itself, playing down Allied and colonial troops. His view that Vichy was not France left the state's role in deporting Jews unacknowledged until President Chirac's speech of 1995.

Decorations: Croix de guerre 1914–1918 — Verdun; Légion d'honneur — First World War service; Founder and Grand Master of the Order of the Liberation, created by him in 1940.

After the war: Resigned in January 1946, returned to power in 1958 and founded the Fifth Republic, ending the Algerian War. President 1959–69. He opened the national memorial at Mont-Valérien in 1960. He died at home in 1970.

Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich — Head of the SS and German police (Himmler); head of the Reich Security Main Office (Heydrich). Born Himmler 7 Oct 1900, Munich · Heydrich 7 Mar 1904, Halle an der Saale · died Himmler 23 May 1945, Lüneburg (suicide) · Heydrich 4 Jun 1942, Prague (assassinated)

Himmler became Reichsführer-SS in 1929 and built Hitler's bodyguard into a state within the state. As Munich police chief he opened Dachau in March 1933, the model for the concentration camp system; by 1936 he controlled all German police. Heydrich, a naval officer dismissed in 1931, ran the SS security service (SD) and from 1939 the Reich Security Main Office, whose headquarters stood on the site of today's Topography of Terror. His Einsatzgruppen shot hundreds of thousands of Jews and others behind the Eastern Front from June 1941.

On 20 January 1942 Heydrich chaired the Wannsee Conference, which coordinated the deportation and murder of Europe's Jews across government departments. Himmler's SS ran the death camps of Operation Reinhard (Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka) and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Heydrich, also acting governor of Bohemia and Moravia, died of wounds after the Prague attack of 27 May 1942; reprisals included the destruction of Lidice. Himmler stayed in post to the end, tried to negotiate with the Western Allies in April 1945, and was captured in disguise in May.

After the war: Himmler bit on a cyanide capsule in British custody at Lüneburg on 23 May 1945 and was buried in an unmarked grave. Heydrich received a state funeral in Berlin; his grave in the Invalidenfriedhof is unmarked.

ALLIED COMMANDERS

Dwight D. Eisenhower “Ike” — Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, 1944–45. Born 14 Oct 1890, Denison, Texas · died 28 Mar 1969, Washington DC

A staff officer who had never seen combat, Eisenhower was chosen by General Marshall for his skill at planning and at getting allies to work together. He commanded the landings in French North Africa in November 1942, then Sicily and the invasion of mainland Italy. In January 1944 he took over the invasion of north-west Europe. At Southwick House near Portsmouth, on the evening of 4 June and early on 5 June, he weighed a narrow break in the weather and gave the order for D-Day; he had already drafted a note taking the blame if the landings failed.

From September 1944 he commanded the land battle himself, advancing on a broad front rather than the single thrust that Montgomery wanted. When the Germans struck in the Ardennes in December he committed his reserves at once to hold Bastogne and the shoulders of the bulge. In April 1945 he toured the newly liberated camp at Ohrdruf, part of the Buchenwald system, and called in journalists and politicians to see it. His chief of staff signed the German surrender at his headquarters in Reims on 7 May.

Caveat. Whether the broad-front strategy lengthened the war, and his decision to leave Berlin to the Red Army, are still argued. Claims that his policy on 'disarmed enemy forces' caused hundreds of thousands of German prisoners' deaths have been rejected by historians.

Decorations: Army Distinguished Service Medal — commanding the Tank Corps training centre at Camp Colt, Gettysburg, 1918.

After the war: Army Chief of Staff, first Supreme Allied Commander Europe for NATO (1951–52), then 34th President of the United States, 1953–61. Buried at Abilene, Kansas.

Bernard Montgomery “Monty” — Commander of Allied land forces in Normandy, then 21st Army Group, 1944–45. Born 17 Nov 1887, Kennington, London · died 24 Mar 1976, Alton, Hampshire

After victory at El Alamein in November 1942 and the campaigns in Tunisia, Sicily and southern Italy, Montgomery returned to England at the start of 1944 to command the land forces for D-Day under Eisenhower. He widened the plan from three divisions to five landing beaches. In Normandy his British and Canadian armies fought a costly battle around Caen, holding most of the German armour while the Americans broke out in the west at the end of July. The German armies in Normandy were destroyed in the Falaise pocket in August.

From September he commanded 21st Army Group. He planned Operation Market Garden, the attempt to seize a corridor of bridges to Arnhem, which failed in September 1944. In the Ardennes he took over the American armies north of the bulge, then angered American commanders with a press conference on 7 January 1945 that seemed to claim the credit. His troops crossed the Rhine in March and on 4 May he received the surrender of German forces in north-west Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark on Lüneburg Heath.

Caveat. His later claim that Normandy went exactly to plan is not accepted: Caen, a D-Day objective, fell only in July. He was also criticised for not clearing the approaches to Antwerp before Market Garden, which delayed the use of the port until late November.

Decorations: Distinguished Service Order — Méteren, near the Belgian border, 13 October 1914, where he was shot through the lung.

After the war: Chief of the Imperial General Staff 1946–48 and deputy commander of NATO forces in Europe until 1958. Created Viscount Montgomery of Alamein. His memoirs (1958) upset many former colleagues.

Omar N. Bradley “the GI's General” — Commander, US First Army in Normandy, then 12th Army Group, 1944–45. Born 12 Feb 1893, Clark, Missouri · died 8 Apr 1981, New York City

A quiet Missourian from the West Point class of 1915, Bradley spent the First World War guarding copper mines in Montana. He rose in Tunisia and Sicily under Patton, whom he then overtook. On D-Day his First Army landed at Utah and Omaha; at Omaha he considered diverting later waves elsewhere before the troops fought their way off the beach. His Operation Cobra, opened by heavy bombing west of Saint-Lô on 25 July 1944, broke the German line, and from 1 August he commanded 12th Army Group, which grew to more than 1.3 million men.

His armies swept across France, then slowed at the German border, where he committed First Army to months of fighting in the Hürtgen Forest. The German offensive in the Ardennes in December fell on his thinly held sector, and Eisenhower gave his northern armies to Montgomery for a month. In March 1945 he quickly reinforced the bridgehead won at Remagen, and in April his armies encircled the Ruhr, taking more than 300,000 prisoners. Calmer and more careful than Patton, he was made known by the war correspondent Ernie Pyle as the soldier's general.

Caveat. His order of 13 August 1944 halting Patton's troops at Argentan, leaving the Falaise gap open for several more days, let many Germans escape. Why he gave it, and how many got away, are still debated.

Decorations: Army Distinguished Service Medal — several awards for his Second World War commands.

After the war: Head of the Veterans Administration, Army Chief of Staff, then the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1949–53. Made General of the Army in 1950; he was the last surviving five-star officer.

George S. Patton Jr. “Old Blood and Guts” — Commander, US Third Army, 1944–45. Born 11 Nov 1885, San Gabriel, California · died 21 Dec 1945, Heidelberg, Germany

Sidelined after Sicily, where he had struck two soldiers suffering from battle fatigue, Patton spent early 1944 in England as the figurehead of a fictitious army group meant to convince the Germans that the main landing would come at Calais. His Third Army became operational in Normandy on 1 August 1944 and raced through Brittany and across France to the Moselle. There it ran short of fuel and spent the autumn in a slow, bloody fight for Metz and Lorraine.

When the Germans attacked in the Ardennes on 16 December, he told Eisenhower at Verdun on the 19th that he could attack northwards within days. He turned much of his army ninety degrees in winter weather, and on 26 December the 4th Armored Division broke through to the encircled garrison of Bastogne. In March 1945 his troops crossed the Rhine at Oppenheim and then drove into Bavaria and Czechoslovakia. Profane and theatrical in public, he was a careful student of war who drove his staff and supply services as hard as his tanks.

Caveat. Besides the slapping incidents of August 1943, he made antisemitic remarks about Jewish survivors in camps for displaced persons in 1945, and was removed as military governor of Bavaria for keeping former Nazis in office. The failed raid on the Hammelburg prison camp in March 1945, which his son-in-law was in, is also held against him.

Decorations: Distinguished Service Cross — wounded leading tanks in the Meuse-Argonne, 26 September 1918.

After the war: Injured in a car accident near Mannheim on 9 December 1945, he died twelve days later. He is buried among his soldiers at the Luxembourg American Cemetery at Hamm.

Hugh Dowding “Stuffy” — Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, RAF Fighter Command, 1936–40. Born 24 Apr 1882, Moffat, Dumfriesshire · died 15 Feb 1970, Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Dowding took over Fighter Command in July 1936. From Bentley Priory, he joined radar stations, the Royal Observer Corps, operations rooms and radio-controlled fighters into a single reporting and control network, later called the Dowding system. As head of research before that he had backed both radar and the eight-gun monoplane fighters that became the Hurricane and Spitfire. In May 1940, with France collapsing, he wrote to the Air Ministry warning that sending more fighter squadrons across the Channel would leave Britain defenceless.

In the Battle of Britain, from July to October 1940, his system let a smaller force meet the Luftwaffe where and when it mattered, with Keith Park's 11 Group bearing the brunt from its bunker at Uxbridge. He husbanded aircraft and pilots and resisted calls to fight in great formations. His reserved manner made him enemies in the Air Ministry. Criticised over night defence during the Blitz and over the 'Big Wing' dispute between Park and Leigh-Mallory, he was replaced in November 1940.

Caveat. Many historians judge his removal shabby, and it was made with little thanks. Others note that night air defence was failing in the autumn of 1940 and that he had been due to retire before the battle began.

Decorations: Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George, 1919; Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order, 1937; Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, 1940.

After the war: Made Baron Dowding in 1943. In retirement he wrote on spiritualism and campaigned against cruelty to animals. His ashes lie beneath the Battle of Britain window in Westminster Abbey.

Arthur Harris “Bomber, or Butch” — Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, RAF Bomber Command, 1942–45. Born 13 Apr 1892, Cheltenham · died 5 Apr 1984, Goring-on-Thames

Harris took over Bomber Command in February 1942, days after a new directive made the morale of German civilians, and so the bombing of whole urban areas, its main aim. He set out to prove that bombing could win the war. The first thousand-bomber raid, on Cologne on the night of 30/31 May 1942, was a gamble to save his command. With new four-engined bombers, navigation aids and the Pathfinder Force, his crews burned much of Hamburg in July and August 1943, killing around 37,000 people, many in the firestorm of 27/28 July.

His winter campaign against Berlin in 1943–44 failed at heavy cost. Diverted to support D-Day in 1944, his bombers were accurate and effective against railways and coastal defences. He argued against attacks on oil targets as 'panaceas', then returned to the cities; on 13–14 February 1945 his bombers began the raid on Dresden. Bomber Command lost 55,573 aircrew killed during the war, about 44 per cent of those who served in it. In public he never wavered in his belief that bombing cities had shortened the war.

Caveat. Area bombing remains disputed on moral and military grounds. Allied bombing as a whole killed some 350,000–400,000 German civilians, tied down guns, fighters and workers, and damaged production, but area attacks did not break morale as promised. His crews' sacrifice was long left without a campaign medal; a clasp was issued in 2013.

Decorations: Air Force Cross, November 1918 — Royal Flying Corps service; Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, 1945; Baronet, 1953.

After the war: Disappointed at his treatment, he left for South Africa and ran a shipping company. He returned in 1953 and accepted a baronetcy. A statue to him outside St Clement Danes in London, unveiled in 1992, drew protests.

Bernard Freyberg “Tiny” — Commander, 2nd New Zealand Division; Allied commander on Crete, 1941. Born 21 Mar 1889, Richmond, Surrey · died 4 Jul 1963, Windsor

Raised in New Zealand, Freyberg was among the most decorated British Empire soldiers of the First World War: at Gallipoli he swam ashore alone at night to light decoy flares, and on the Somme he won the Victoria Cross. In 1939 he took command of New Zealand's expeditionary force. After the retreat from Greece he was given command on Crete on 30 April 1941. German paratroops and gliders landed on 20 May; overnight the New Zealand battalion on Hill 107 above Maleme airfield withdrew, and the Germans flew in reinforcements.

Despite fierce fighting at Galatas and elsewhere, the island was lost and about 18,000 men were evacuated by sea from Sfakia and Heraklion by 1 June; more than 12,000 were left behind as prisoners. Freyberg went on to lead the New Zealanders through North Africa and Italy. At Cassino in February 1944, commanding a corps, he asked for the bombing of the abbey of Monte Cassino, which was destroyed on 15 February; the attacks that followed failed. His division had fought at El Alamein and in Tunisia before landing in Italy in late 1943.

Caveat. How far he misread his Ultra intelligence before Crete, focusing on a seaborne landing at the expense of the airfields, is still debated. After the war the abbey's monks said German troops had not been inside the building before it was bombed.

Decorations: Distinguished Service Order — the decoy swim at Gallipoli, April 1915; Victoria Cross — Beaucourt-sur-Ancre, 13 November 1916; Three bars to the DSO — two for 1918, the second for seizing the bridge at Lessines minutes before the Armistice, and one for Italy, 1945.

After the war: Governor-General of New Zealand 1946–52; created Baron Freyberg in 1951. He became Lieutenant-Governor of Windsor Castle, where he died when an old war wound ruptured.

Władysław Anders — Commander, Polish Army in the USSR, then 2nd Polish Corps in Italy. Born 11 Aug 1892, Krośniewice-Błonie, near Kutno · died 12 May 1970, London

A cavalry officer, Anders led the Nowogródzka Cavalry Brigade in September 1939. Twice wounded, he was captured by the Red Army after the Soviet invasion and held in the NKVD's Lubyanka prison in Moscow. After Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Stalin released him in August 1941 to form a Polish army from deported soldiers and civilians. In 1942 he led that army and its dependants, together well over 100,000 people, out across the Caspian to Iran. Among them were thousands of children and families released from Soviet labour camps and exile.

Re-formed in the Middle East as the 2nd Polish Corps, his troops joined the British Eighth Army in Italy. In May 1944, after three earlier Allied attempts had failed, they attacked the heights above Cassino, and on 18 May a Polish patrol raised its flag over the ruins of the abbey. The corps went on to take Ancona in July and fought at Bologna in April 1945. Yalta, which gave eastern Poland to the Soviet Union, left most of his men without homes to return to.

Caveat. Several thousand Jewish soldiers left his army in Palestine in 1942–44, Menachem Begin among them. Anders let most go without pursuit; claims of antisemitism in the ranks were real but are argued over in scale.

Decorations: Virtuti Militari, Silver Cross — Polish–Soviet War, 1920; Cross of Valour (four times); Order of the White Eagle — posthumous, 1995.

After the war: Stripped of Polish citizenship by the communist government in 1946, he stayed in London as a leading figure of the exile community. He is buried, at his wish, in the Polish War Cemetery at Monte Cassino.

SOVIET COMMANDERS

Georgy Zhukov — Deputy Supreme Commander; commander of the 1st Belorussian Front at Berlin. Born 1 Dec 1896, Strelkovka, Kaluga province · died 18 Jun 1974, Moscow

A peasant's son and former tsarist cavalry NCO, Zhukov survived the purges and made his name defeating the Japanese at Khalkhin Gol in August 1939. Chief of the General Staff when Germany invaded, he was removed after telling Stalin that Kiev should be abandoned. In September 1941 he took over the defence of Leningrad, and in October was sent to save Moscow, where his Western Front held and then counter-attacked in December. From August 1942 he was Stalin's deputy, sent wherever the crisis was greatest.

With Vasilevsky he planned Operation Uranus, which encircled the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad in November 1942. He coordinated fronts at Kursk in 1943 and in the great summer offensive of 1944. In 1945 his 1st Belorussian Front drove from the Vistula to the Oder, then attacked towards Berlin on 16 April; the frontal assault on the Seelow Heights cost tens of thousands of lives. On the night of 8–9 May he accepted the German surrender at Karlshorst, and in June he took the salute at the Victory Parade in Moscow.

Caveat. His reputation as the general who never lost is contested. Operation Mars at Rzhev in late 1942 failed at enormous cost, and many argue he spent soldiers' lives freely, at Seelow above all. Rokossovsky and others disputed his account of who planned what.

Decorations: Hero of the Soviet Union (four times) — 1939, 1944, 1945 and 1956; Order of Victory (twice) — 1944 and 1945.

After the war: Stalin, wary of his fame, sent him to command the Odessa and then the Urals military districts. Defence Minister under Khrushchev 1955–57, then forced into retirement. His memoirs appeared, censored, in 1969.

Konstantin Rokossovsky — Commander of the Don, Central and 1st and 2nd Belorussian Fronts. Born 21 Dec 1896, Warsaw (place disputed) · died 3 Aug 1968, Moscow

The son of a Polish railway worker, Rokossovsky rose as a cavalry commander in the Red Army until his arrest by the NKVD in August 1937. He was beaten in prison, refused to sign a false confession and was released in March 1940. He commanded a corps and then an army in the battles of 1941 before Moscow. In September 1942 he took over the Don Front north of Stalingrad. After the encirclement his forces carried out Operation Ring in January 1943, and on 31 January Paulus surrendered to officers of his front.

At Kursk in July 1943 his Central Front held Model's attack on the northern face of the salient with a defence in depth. In Operation Bagration in June 1944 he argued successfully for two breakthroughs instead of one, and his 1st Belorussian Front helped destroy Army Group Centre; he was made a marshal. By August 1944 his troops reached the Vistula opposite Warsaw. In 1945 he led the 2nd Belorussian Front through East Prussia and Pomerania. Calm and courteous, he was one of the few Soviet commanders said to have argued with Stalin and kept his post.

Caveat. Why his armies did not help the Warsaw Uprising of August–October 1944 is still argued: he cited exhausted troops and German counter-attacks, while the Polish Home Army was loyal to the London government that Stalin wished to sweep aside. Both factors are documented.

Decorations: Hero of the Soviet Union (twice) — 1944 and 1945; Order of Victory — 1945.

After the war: He commanded the Moscow Victory Parade in 1945. From 1949 to 1956 he was Poland's Minister of National Defence and a Marshal of Poland, an unpopular figure there; he returned to the Soviet Union after the 1956 thaw.

Vasily Chuikov — Commander, 62nd Army at Stalingrad (later 8th Guards Army). Born 12 Feb 1900, Serebryanye Prudy, Tula province · died 18 Mar 1982, Moscow

A regimental commander at nineteen in the Civil War, Chuikov had led an army in the Winter War against Finland and served as military attaché in China. On 11–12 September 1942 he took command of the 62nd Army, by then pressed against the Volga in Stalingrad. His orders were to hold the city at any cost. He fed in reinforcements across the river at night and fought a close-quarter battle in ruins, factories and houses, keeping his men so near the Germans that their aircraft and artillery could not be used without hitting their own troops.

The army, renamed the 8th Guards Army, fought its way west through Ukraine and Poland, liberating Lublin and the Majdanek camp in July 1944 and taking the fortress of Poznań in February 1945. It attacked across the Oder at the Seelow Heights in April and fought into central Berlin. On 1 May 1945 General Krebs came to his headquarters to seek terms after Hitler's death; Chuikov demanded unconditional surrender, and on 2 May the Berlin garrison surrendered to him. Krebs had shot himself in the meantime.

Caveat. His defence of Stalingrad included summary executions of officers and soldiers to enforce discipline, as his own memoirs and Soviet records show.

Decorations: Hero of the Soviet Union (twice) — 1944 and 1945.

After the war: Commanded Soviet forces in Germany 1949–53, became a marshal in 1955, then led the Soviet ground forces and civil defence. At his request he was buried on Mamayev Kurgan in Volgograd, among the defenders of Stalingrad.

Ivan Konev — Commander of the Steppe and 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts. Born 28 Dec 1897, Lodeyno, Vologda province · died 21 May 1973, Moscow

A former commissar who became a front commander, Konev led the Western Front in October 1941 when the Germans encircled several Soviet armies at Vyazma; Zhukov is said to have saved him from Stalin's anger. He recovered his standing, commanded the Steppe Front in the Kursk counter-offensive of August 1943 and destroyed German forces in the Korsun pocket in February 1944, earning his marshal's star. From May 1944 he led the 1st Ukrainian Front. He was an able, demanding and often harsh commander.

In the Vistula–Oder offensive of January 1945 his armies took Kraków almost undamaged on 18 January, and on 27 January soldiers of his 60th Army reached Auschwitz, where about 7,000 prisoners had been left behind. In April Stalin set him to race Zhukov for Berlin; his tank armies reached the south of the city, but Zhukov was given the Reichstag. On 25 April his troops met the Americans at Torgau on the Elbe, and on 9 May they entered Prague.

Caveat. His statue in Prague, put up in 1980, was removed in 2020; Czechs remembered him also for planning the Warsaw Pact crushing of Hungary in 1956 and for his role in Berlin in 1961.

Decorations: Hero of the Soviet Union (twice) — 1944 and 1945; Order of Victory — 1945.

After the war: Commander of Warsaw Pact forces in the later 1950s, he directed the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and commanded Soviet forces in Germany in 1961–62, when the Berlin Wall was built. His ashes are in the Kremlin Wall.

GERMAN COMMANDERS

Gerd von Rundstedt — Commander of Army Groups South and A; Commander-in-Chief West, 1942–45. Born 12 Dec 1875, Aschersleben · died 24 Feb 1953, Hanover

The senior serving German officer, Rundstedt had retired in 1938 and was recalled to lead Army Group South in Poland. In May 1940 his Army Group A made the main thrust through the Ardennes and across the Meuse at Sedan to the Channel. On 24 May he agreed to a pause by his armour short of Dunkirk, which Hitler confirmed; the halt helped the British evacuate their army. He led Army Group South into Ukraine in 1941 and was dismissed in December after allowing a retreat from Rostov.

Recalled as Commander-in-Chief West in March 1942, he was responsible for the defence of France and doubted the value of the Atlantic Wall. He disagreed with Rommel on how to fight an invasion. After D-Day he urged Hitler to make peace and was dismissed in early July 1944, then recalled in September. The Ardennes offensive was often called the 'Rundstedt offensive', though Hitler planned it and Model ran it. He was finally dismissed in March 1945. For most of his time in the west his headquarters were at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, outside Paris.

Caveat. He presented himself as an apolitical soldier. Yet in 1941 he passed on Reichenau's order urging 'severe but just' measures against Jews with his approval, and in 1944 he chaired the army Court of Honour that expelled 20 July conspirators so they could be tried and hanged.

Decorations: Iron Cross, 1st Class — First World War; Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords — Swords awarded February 1945.

After the war: Held by the British, he was charged with war crimes but released on health grounds in 1949 without trial. He died in Hanover in 1953.

Erwin Rommel “the Desert Fox” — Commander, Afrika Korps and Army Group B in Normandy. Born 15 Nov 1891, Heidenheim, Württemberg · died 14 Oct 1944, Herrlingen (forced suicide)

Rommel won the Pour le Mérite in Italy in 1917 and gained Hitler's attention with a book on infantry tactics. In May 1940 his 7th Panzer Division crossed the Meuse near Dinant and drove so fast and far that it was called the 'ghost division'. From February 1941 he led German forces in North Africa, where his successes made him famous on both sides, until defeat at El Alamein in late 1942. In November 1943 he was given the task of inspecting the coastal defences in the west, then command of Army Group B.

Convinced the invasion had to be stopped on the beaches, he filled them with millions of mines and obstacles and wanted the panzer divisions close to the coast, against Rundstedt's views. On 6 June he was at home in Germany for his wife's birthday. On 17 July his car was strafed by Allied fighters near Sainte-Foy-de-Montgommery, and he was badly injured. Named by conspirators after the 20 July plot, he was given the choice of a trial or poison on 14 October and took the poison.

Caveat. The image of the chivalrous, apolitical Desert Fox owes much to post-war memoirs and British admiration. He was close to Hitler and Goebbels' propaganda for years, and how much he knew of or supported the 20 July plot is disputed.

Decorations: Pour le Mérite — capture of Monte Matajur, Italy, October 1917; Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds — Diamonds March 1943, North Africa.

After the war: The regime announced he had died of his wounds and gave him a state funeral. His son Manfred became a long-serving mayor of Stuttgart.

Heinz Guderian “Fast Heinz” — Panzer corps and group commander 1939–41; Chief of the Army General Staff 1944–45. Born 17 Jun 1888, Kulm (Chełmno), West Prussia · died 14 May 1954, Schwangau, Bavaria

A signals officer who became an advocate of tank warfare in the 1930s, Guderian led a panzer corps through Poland in 1939; at Brest-Litovsk, on 22 September, he and the Soviet brigade commander Semyon Krivoshein watched German and Soviet troops parade as the town was handed to the Red Army. In May 1940 his XIX Corps crossed the Meuse at Sedan on 13 May and raced to the Channel coast, reaching the sea near Abbeville on 20 May. His ideas stressed radios in every tank and commanders who led from the front.

In 1941 his 2nd Panzer Group helped close the Minsk and Smolensk pockets, then turned south to trap Soviet armies around Kiev, before the late drive on Moscow stalled in the winter. Hitler relieved him in December after he withdrew without permission. Recalled as Inspector of Armoured Troops in 1943, he became Chief of the Army General Staff the day after the 20 July plot and held the post until dismissed in March 1945. He argued for an elastic defence in the east and quarrelled openly with Hitler in early 1945.

Caveat. His memoir 'Panzer Leader' (1952) made him the father of the panzer force and left out a great deal. He sat on the Court of Honour that expelled 20 July conspirators, and accepted from Hitler a large estate in occupied Poland, at Deipenhof, whose Polish owners had been expelled.

Decorations: Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross — Poland, October 1939; Oak Leaves — July 1941, Soviet Union.

After the war: Held by the Americans until 1948 and never charged. He wrote his memoirs and advised on the new West German army before his death in 1954.

Erich von Manstein — Author of the 1940 Ardennes plan; commander of Eleventh Army and Army Group Don/South. Born 24 Nov 1887, Berlin · died 10 Jun 1973, Irschenhausen, Bavaria

Born Erich von Lewinski and adopted by an aunt's family, Manstein proposed as a staff officer the plan to send the main armoured thrust through the Ardennes to the Channel, adopted in February 1940. In 1941–42 his Eleventh Army conquered the Crimea; he was made a field marshal on 1 July 1942 as Sevastopol fell. In November 1942 he took over Army Group Don and tried to break through to the trapped Sixth Army at Stalingrad. The relief attack, Winter Storm, stopped roughly 50 km short in December, and Paulus did not break out to meet it.

In February and March 1943 his counter-offensive retook Kharkov and stabilised the southern front, one of the last major German successes in the east. At Kursk in July his Army Group South led the southern pincer, and its SS panzer corps fought the Soviet tank armies around Prokhorovka. Retreating through Ukraine and quarrelling with Hitler over withdrawals, he was dismissed in March 1944. Many German officers rated him their ablest operational commander. He was approached by the conspirators against Hitler but refused to join them.

Caveat. On 20 November 1941 he issued an order telling his troops that the 'Jewish-Bolshevik system' must be exterminated; his army supported the killing units of Einsatzgruppe D in the Crimea. A British court convicted him in 1949 of war crimes, including failing to protect civilians.

Decorations: Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross — France, 1940; Oak Leaves — Kharkov, March 1943; Swords — March 1944.

After the war: Sentenced to 18 years, reduced to 12, he was released in 1953. His memoir 'Lost Victories' (1955) blamed Hitler for defeat. He advised the West German government on rebuilding its army.

Walter Model “Hitler's fireman” — Commander of Ninth Army, then several army groups; at Arnhem, Hürtgen and the Ardennes. Born 24 Jan 1891, Genthin, Prussian Saxony · died 21 Apr 1945, near Duisburg (suicide)

A blunt, energetic officer favoured by Hitler, Model held the Rzhev salient with Ninth Army through 1942, then led its attack on the northern face of the Kursk salient in July 1943, which gained less than 12 km. Hitler sent him from crisis to crisis: to the Baltic, Ukraine, Belorussia after the collapse of Army Group Centre in summer 1944, and in August to France as the Normandy front broke. He was known for his energy, his rudeness to subordinates and his readiness to carry out Hitler's no-retreat orders, while often finding ways around them.

On 17 September 1944 his Army Group B headquarters was in the Tafelberg hotel at Oosterbeek when British paratroopers landed nearby. He reacted quickly, sending II SS Panzer Corps against the British at Arnhem. That autumn his armies held the Americans in the Hürtgen Forest and he commanded the Ardennes offensive of December. Trapped in the Ruhr in April 1945, he ignored Hitler's orders to destroy industry, dissolved his army group, and shot himself in a wood on 21 April.

Caveat. In Russia his troops carried out deportations, reprisals and scorched-earth destruction; the Soviets intended to try him for war crimes, which helped decide his suicide.

Decorations: Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross — 1941, Soviet Union; Oak Leaves — 1942, Rzhev; Swords — 1943; Diamonds — August 1944, for stabilising the Eastern Front.

After the war: First buried where he died, his remains were moved in 1955 to the German war cemetery at Vossenack in the Hürtgen Forest, among soldiers who fought there.

Friedrich Paulus — Commander, German Sixth Army at Stalingrad, 1942–43. Born 23 Sep 1890, Guxhagen, Hesse · died 1 Feb 1957, Dresden

A staff officer rather than a field commander, Paulus helped draft the plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union as deputy chief of the General Staff. In January 1942 he took over Sixth Army after Reichenau's death. That summer his army drove to the Volga and entered Stalingrad in September, but could not clear the last Soviet footholds by the river. On 19–23 November Soviet armies broke through the weak Romanian forces on his flanks and encircled some 250,000–300,000 German and allied troops.

Hitler ordered him to stand fast, trusting the Luftwaffe to supply the pocket by air, which it could not do. Paulus did not break out when Manstein's relief attack came closest in December. Hitler promoted him to field marshal on 30 January 1943, expecting him to kill himself rather than surrender. On 31 January he surrendered in the basement of the Univermag department store; the northern pocket gave up on 2 February. Of some 91,000 prisoners taken, only about 5,000 returned home.

Caveat. Whether he should have broken out against orders in December 1942 is still argued; most historians think his army by then lacked the fuel and strength to do so.

Decorations: Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross — August 1942; Oak Leaves — January 1943.

After the war: In captivity he joined the Soviet-backed League of German Officers and appeared as a witness for the Soviet prosecution at Nuremberg in February 1946. Released in 1953, he lived in Dresden, East Germany, until his death.

Albert Kesselring “Smiling Albert” — Luftwaffe air fleet commander, then Commander-in-Chief South (Italy), 1943–45. Born 30 Nov 1885, Marktsteft, Bavaria · died 16 Jul 1960, Bad Nauheim

An artillery officer transferred to the new Luftwaffe, Kesselring led air fleets over Poland, the Netherlands and France. His bombers destroyed the centre of Rotterdam on 14 May 1940, while surrender talks were under way, killing some 800 people. He commanded Luftflotte 2 in the Battle of Britain and the Blitz. From late 1941, as Commander-in-Chief South, he directed the air offensive against Malta, which came close to starving the island in 1942, and supported Rommel in North Africa. Unlike most Luftwaffe commanders he had been an army staff officer, which served him well in joint operations.

After Italy's armistice in September 1943 he argued, against Rommel, that Italy could be held south of Rome. His defence lines, above all the Gustav Line at Cassino, held the Allies for months; his counter-attacks nearly crushed the Anzio beachhead. He then fell back fighting to the Gothic Line in the north. In March 1945 he was sent to command in the west, too late to change anything. Allied commanders acknowledged his skill at delaying a much stronger enemy in difficult country.

Caveat. His anti-partisan orders of 1944 promised to cover commanders who used excessive force, and were followed by massacres of civilians. In 1947 a British court in Venice sentenced him to death for the Ardeatine Caves killings of 335 men in Rome in March 1944 and for inciting reprisals.

Decorations: Knight's Cross — Poland, 1939; Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds — Diamonds July 1944, Italy.

After the war: His sentence was commuted to life and he was released in 1952. When he said Italians should build him a monument, the jurist Piero Calamandrei answered with a poem, now carved in stone at Cuneo. He died in 1960.

Claus von Stauffenberg — Army staff officer who planted the bomb of 20 July 1944. Born 15 Nov 1907, Jettingen, Bavaria · died 21 Jul 1944, Berlin (shot)

From an old Swabian Catholic noble family, Stauffenberg joined the 17th Cavalry Regiment at Bamberg in 1926 and served as a staff officer in Poland, France and Russia. On 7 April 1943 his car was strafed in Tunisia; he lost his left eye, his right hand and two fingers of the left. By then he had joined the military conspiracy against Hitler. As chief of staff to the commander of the Replacement Army from July 1944, he had access to Hitler's briefings and to the Valkyrie plan, meant for internal emergencies, which the plotters intended to use to seize power.

On 20 July 1944 at the Wolf's Lair he carried a briefcase with explosives into a conference in a wooden hut. Interrupted, he armed only one of two charges. The bomb went off at about 12:40 after he had left, killing four men, but Hitler, shielded by the heavy table, was only lightly hurt. Stauffenberg flew back to Berlin believing Hitler dead, but the coup faltered. That night he was shot in the courtyard of the Bendlerblock with three fellow officers.

Caveat. He was not a democrat. He welcomed some of Hitler's early policies, and his letters from Poland in 1939 show contempt for Poles. Historians differ on how far his motives were moral, including the crimes against Jews, and how far military and patriotic.

Decorations: Iron Cross, 1st Class — France, 1940; Wound Badge in Gold — April 1943; German Cross in Gold — May 1943.

After the war: Around 200 people linked to the plot were executed, including his brother Berthold. His wife was imprisoned and their children were given new names. The Bendlerblock courtyard is now the German Resistance Memorial.

Witold Pilecki — Polish underground officer who was imprisoned in Auschwitz to organise resistance. Born 13 May 1901, Olonets, Karelia (Russian Empire) · died 25 May 1948, Warsaw (executed)

A cavalry officer and veteran of the Polish–Soviet War, Pilecki co-founded the Secret Polish Army underground in Warsaw in 1939. In September 1940, under the name Tomasz Serafiński, he let himself be caught in a street round-up so that he would be sent to Auschwitz, which was then mainly a camp for Polish prisoners. He arrived on 22 September as prisoner 4859. Inside he built a resistance network, organised food and help for prisoners and smuggled reports to Warsaw from October 1940 onwards, including, later, news of the mass murder of Jews.

When an uprising inside the camp proved impossible and his own arrest seemed close, he escaped on the night of 26–27 April 1943 with two others. He wrote detailed accounts of the camp, including 'Witold's Report'. He urged the Home Army to attack the camp from outside, but its commanders judged that impossible. During the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 he fought in the city centre, ending as a company commander, and was held as a prisoner of war until 1945. He returned to Poland from Italy to gather intelligence for the 2nd Polish Corps.

Caveat. How voluntary his entry into Auschwitz was is discussed: he was invited, not ordered, and some think he took it as a test. Claims that he was the first to report the Holocaust go beyond the evidence; his reports dealt mainly with Polish prisoners until 1942.

Decorations: Cross of Valour (twice); Silver Cross of Merit — 1938; Order of Polonia Restituta — posthumous, 1995; Order of the White Eagle — posthumous, 2006.

After the war: Arrested by the communist security police in May 1947 and tortured, he was sentenced at a show trial and shot at Mokotów prison. His grave has never been found. He was rehabilitated in 1990 and made a colonel posthumously in 2013.

Jan Karski — Courier of the Polish underground who carried eyewitness news of the Holocaust to the West. Born 24 Jun 1914, Łódź · died 13 Jul 2000, Washington DC

Born Jan Kozielewski, Karski was a young diplomat and reserve officer in 1939. Captured by the Red Army, he hid his rank, was handed over to the Germans in a prisoner exchange, which spared him the Katyn massacres, and escaped from a train. As a courier for the underground he was caught by the Gestapo in Slovakia in 1940, tortured and smuggled out of a hospital. In 1942 he prepared for a mission to London by entering the Warsaw ghetto twice with Jewish leaders, and, disguised as a guard, a transit camp at Izbica Lubelska.

Reaching London in November 1942, he briefed Polish and British leaders, including the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden. On 28 July 1943 he described what he had seen to President Roosevelt in the White House. He also met journalists, writers and Jewish leaders. Many listened politely; few acted, and some did not believe him. He met the Supreme Court justice Felix Frankfurter, who told him he could not believe what he heard; Karski stressed later that Frankfurter did not call him a liar. His book 'Story of a Secret State' was published in 1944.

Caveat. In his 1944 book he called the camp he visited Bełżec, but historians have shown that it was the transit camp at Izbica, from which Jews were sent to Bełżec; his 1943 reports had named Izbica correctly.

Decorations: Righteous Among the Nations — Yad Vashem, 1982; Order of the White Eagle — 1995; Presidential Medal of Freedom — posthumous, 2012.

After the war: He settled in the United States and taught at Georgetown University for some forty years. He stayed silent about his mission until Claude Lanzmann filmed him for 'Shoah' (1985). Israel made him an honorary citizen in 1994.

Anne Frank — Jewish girl who hid in Amsterdam for two years; author of the diary. Born 12 Jun 1929, Frankfurt am Main · died Feb or Mar 1945, Bergen-Belsen

Anne's family left Frankfurt for Amsterdam in 1933–34, after the Nazis came to power. Germany occupied the Netherlands in May 1940 and anti-Jewish laws followed. When Anne's sister Margot was called up for 'labour service' in July 1942, the family went into hiding on 6 July in the annexe behind Otto Frank's business premises on the Prinsengracht, joined by four other Jews. Helpers among Otto's staff brought food and news. Anne kept a diary, and from 1944 began revising it for publication after the war.

On 4 August 1944 the German security police and Dutch officers raided the annexe. The eight were sent via Westerbork to Auschwitz on the last transport from the Netherlands, on 3 September. Anne's mother Edith died at Birkenau. Anne and Margot were moved to Bergen-Belsen at the end of October or early November, where both died of typhus in the overcrowded camp, a few weeks before British troops arrived on 15 April 1945. Margot died shortly before her; a friend who spoke to Anne through the fence said she believed both her parents were dead.

Caveat. Who, if anyone, betrayed the hiding place is unknown. A 2022 'cold case' book named the notary Arnold van den Bergh; historians found the evidence far too thin and the Dutch publisher withdrew it. Research by the Anne Frank House in 2015 suggests she died in February rather than March 1945.

After the war: Her father Otto, the only one of the eight to survive, received the diary from the helper Miep Gies and published it in 1947. It has been translated into some 70 languages. The Anne Frank House opened in 1960.

Irena Sendler — Warsaw social worker who helped save Jewish children; head of Żegota's children's section. Born 15 Feb 1910, Warsaw · died 12 May 2008, Warsaw

A social worker for the Warsaw city welfare department, Sendler used her pass to enter the ghetto, sealed in November 1940, on the pretext of checking for infectious disease. With colleagues she brought in food and medicine and, when deportations to Treblinka began in July 1942, helped smuggle children out through the courthouse, the sewers and ambulances, or hidden in carts. They were placed with Polish families, convents and orphanages under false names. In 1943 she became head of the children's section of Żegota, the underground Council to Aid Jews.

The Gestapo arrested her on 18 October 1943. Held in Pawiak prison and beaten, she gave nothing away. She was sentenced to death, but Żegota bribed a guard and she was freed on the way to execution. She spent the rest of the war in hiding, still working for the network and, in 1944, as a nurse in the Warsaw Uprising. Many of the children had lost their parents in the deportations; after the war attempts to reunite them with surviving relatives often failed, and some were never told of their origins.

Caveat. She is often credited with saving 2,500 children, a figure she later gave herself. The true number is unknown; she always named many others in the network, and the lists of children she said she buried in jars have never been found.

Decorations: Gold Cross of Merit — 1946, for saving Jews; Righteous Among the Nations — Yad Vashem, 1965; Order of the White Eagle — 2003.

After the war: She worked in social welfare in communist Poland, little known until a group of Kansas schoolchildren wrote a play about her in 1999. She died in Warsaw in 2008, aged 98.

Jan Kubiš and Jozef Gabčík — Czechoslovak soldiers parachuted from Britain to kill Reinhard Heydrich (Operation Anthropoid). Born Kubiš 24 Jun 1913, Dolní Vilémovice, Moravia · Gabčík 8 Apr 1912, Poluvsie, Slovakia · died 18 Jun 1942, Church of Sts Cyril and Methodius, Prague

A Czech and a Slovak, both NCOs of the Czechoslovak army, escaped after the German occupation of 1939, fought in France in 1940 and were trained in Britain by SOE. They were dropped near Prague on the night of 28–29 December 1941. On 27 May 1942 they waited at a sharp bend in Prague-Libeň where Heydrich's open car would slow down. Gabčík's Sten gun jammed; Kubiš threw a modified anti-tank grenade, which burst against the rear wheel. Both escaped. Heydrich died of his wounds on 4 June.

The Germans declared martial law and killed hundreds. On 10 June they destroyed the village of Lidice, falsely linked to the attack: 173 men were shot, the women sent to Ravensbrück and most of the children later gassed at Chełmno. The parachutists hid in the crypt of the Orthodox church in Resslova Street until another parachutist, Karel Čurda, gave information to the Gestapo. On 18 June about 750 SS troops surrounded the church. Kubiš was mortally wounded fighting from the gallery; Gabčík and three others, trapped in the crypt as the Germans tried to flood it, shot themselves when their ammunition ran out.

Caveat. The attack was planned by the exile government in London partly to show that the Czech lands were resisting; the home resistance warned of terrible reprisals and asked for it to be called off. Whether it was worth the cost is still debated in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Decorations: Czechoslovak War Cross 1939 — both; French Croix de guerre — both, for France 1940; Order of the White Lion 'For Victory' — posthumous, 1968 (Kubiš).

After the war: Čurda was hanged for treason in 1947. The crypt, with bullet marks still visible around its air vent, is now the National Memorial to the Heroes of the Heydrich Terror.

Alan Turing — Mathematician and codebreaker at Bletchley Park; head of Hut 8 (naval Enigma). Born 23 Jun 1912, Maida Vale, London · died 7 Jun 1954, Wilmslow, Cheshire

A Cambridge mathematician whose 1936 paper had defined a universal computing machine, Turing reported to Bletchley Park on 4 September 1939. Building on the work of Polish cryptologists who had broken Enigma before the war, he designed the 'bombe', an electro-mechanical machine that tested possible Enigma settings at speed; Gordon Welchman's improvement made it far more effective. Hundreds were built and run, mostly by women of the Women's Royal Naval Service. The intelligence from Bletchley, known as Ultra, was shared only with a small circle of commanders.

He led Hut 8, which attacked the German navy's Enigma, harder to break than the army and air force versions. His statistical method 'Banburismus' and captured material, such as that taken from U-110 in May 1941, let Hut 8 read U-boat signals for much of 1941, helping convoys avoid wolf packs. A new four-rotor machine blacked out the U-boat traffic for most of 1942. In late 1942 he went to the United States to advise on American bombes, and later worked on a portable speech-encryption device.

Caveat. Films and popular books often present him as the man who broke Enigma alone. The work was collective, depended on the Poles, and the Colossus computer was built by Tommy Flowers for a different cipher. The verdict of suicide on his death is accepted by most, but questioned by some.

Decorations: OBE — 1946, for wartime service (kept secret at the time).

After the war: He worked on early computers at Manchester. Convicted of 'gross indecency' in 1952 for a relationship with a man, he accepted hormone treatment in place of prison. He died of cyanide poisoning in 1954. Pardoned in 2013; he appears on the £50 note.

Noor Inayat Khan “Madeleine” — SOE wireless operator in Paris, 1943. Born 1 Jan 1914, Moscow · died 13 Sep 1944, Dachau (executed)

The daughter of an Indian Sufi teacher and an American mother, Noor grew up in Suresnes outside Paris and wrote children's stories. The family escaped to England in 1940; she joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and trained as a wireless operator, then was recruited by the Special Operations Executive. Some instructors doubted she was suited to the work. She was flown to France on the night of 16–17 June 1943, the first woman radio operator sent into occupied France, to work for the Prosper network around Paris.

Within days the Germans began arresting the network. She refused to come home and for months was one of the few operators still sending from Paris, moving often. In October 1943 she was betrayed and arrested. She tried to escape from the SD headquarters on the Avenue Foch, refused to give information and was sent to Germany as a 'Night and Fog' prisoner. Held in chains at Pforzheim, she was moved to Dachau in September 1944 with three other SOE women; all four were shot there.

Caveat. Who betrayed her is not certain; Renée Garry, the sister of a colleague, was tried and acquitted in 1946. The Germans used her notebook of messages to deceive London. The details of her last hours rest on a second-hand account.

Decorations: George Cross — posthumous, 1949; Croix de guerre with gold star — posthumous; Mentioned in Despatches — 1946.

After the war: A bust was unveiled in Gordon Square, London, in 2012 and a blue plaque at her wartime home in 2020. A memorial plaque at Dachau names her with the three women shot with her.

SOLDIERS AND AIRMEN

Douglas Bader — RAF fighter pilot and wing leader; commander of 242 Squadron in the Battle of Britain. Born 21 Feb 1910, St John's Wood, London · died 5 Sep 1982, Chiswick, London

Bader lost both legs in December 1931 when he crashed a Bristol Bulldog while performing low aerobatics at Woodley near Reading. Invalided out, he talked his way back into the RAF when war came and, flying on artificial legs, took command of No. 242 Squadron, a Hurricane unit of mostly Canadian pilots, in June 1940. Flying from Coltishall and Duxford in 12 Group, he led the Duxford 'Big Wing' of up to five squadrons in September 1940. His confidence and aggressive style made him a popular leader.

In 1941 he led the Tangmere wing on offensive sweeps over northern France. On 9 August 1941 he came down near Saint-Omer, believing he had collided with a Messerschmitt; one of his artificial legs stayed in the cockpit, and the RAF was allowed to drop a replacement. He escaped from hospital and from camps several times and was sent to Colditz in August 1942, where he stayed until American troops liberated the castle in April 1945. His captors regarded him as a difficult prisoner.

Caveat. His championing of the Big Wing helped bring down Park and Dowding, and the wing's claims were exaggerated. Some researchers think he was shot down by a fellow RAF pilot by mistake; this is not proven.

Decorations: Distinguished Service Order — 1940, Battle of Britain; Distinguished Flying Cross — awarded December 1940; Bar to the DSO and Bar to the DFC — 1941, Tangmere wing; Knight Bachelor — 1976, for services to disabled people.

After the war: Paul Brickhill's 'Reach for the Sky' (1954) and the 1956 film made him a national figure. He worked for Shell and campaigned for disabled people. He died of a heart attack in 1982.

John Frost "Johnny" — Commander, 2nd Parachute Battalion, at the Bruneval raid and Arnhem bridge. Born 31 Dec 1912, Poona, India · died 21 May 1993, West Sussex

A Cameronians officer who volunteered for the new airborne forces, Frost led the company that dropped on Bruneval on the French coast on 27–28 February 1942, seized parts of a German Würzburg radar and a technician, and escaped by sea. He then commanded the 2nd Parachute Battalion in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. In Tunisia at the end of 1942 his battalion was dropped near Depienne, left stranded and had to fight its way back across country, losing more than 250 men. A keen huntsman, he carried a hunting horn, which he used to rally his men.

On 17 September 1944, the first day of Market Garden, his battalion landed west of Arnhem, marched about 13 km into the town and took the north end of the road bridge over the Rhine. Around 740 men of several units held the houses around the ramp for some three and a half days against tanks and artillery, waiting for XXX Corps, which was expected within about two days but never reached them. Frost was wounded on 20 September; the last defenders were overrun early on the 21st.

Caveat. Arnhem was a defeat, and the bridge stand is often romanticised. It did, however, block the bridge to German traffic towards Nijmegen for several days.

Decorations: Military Cross — Bruneval raid, 1942; Distinguished Service Order — Tunisia, 1943; Bar to the DSO — Arnhem, 1945.

After the war: Freed from captivity in 1945, he stayed in the army, retiring as a major-general in 1968 to farm in West Sussex. The rebuilt bridge at Arnhem was named the John Frost Bridge in the late 1970s.

Yakov Pavlov — Sergeant, 42nd Guards Rifle Regiment, defender of 'Pavlov's House' at Stalingrad. Born 17 Oct 1917, Krestovaya, Novgorod province · died 28 Sep 1981, Novgorod

On the night of 27 September 1942 Sergeant Pavlov led a small group of the 13th Guards Rifle Division to retake a four-storey block of flats on what is now Lenin Square, near the Volga. Reinforced by a machine-gun platoon under Lieutenant Ivan Afanasyev and by anti-tank riflemen and mortar crews, a garrison of some 25 men of many Soviet nationalities held the building through October and November, with civilians sheltering in the cellar. Mines, wire and a trench back to the Soviet lines turned it into a strongpoint.

The house overlooked the square and broke up German movement across it. The defenders were relieved when the Soviet counter-offensive began in late November. Pavlov's name, painted on the walls and used by army newspapers, made him one of the best-known soldiers of the battle. He fought on and ended the war in Germany. After the battle the house was among the first buildings in the city to be restored, and it became a place of pilgrimage for veterans and schoolchildren. He was named a Hero of the Soviet Union in June 1945, after the war in Europe had ended.

Caveat. Afanasyev, not Pavlov, was the senior officer in the house for most of the defence, and Chuikov's later claim that the Germans lost more men attacking it than in taking Paris is propaganda. German records do not show heavy assaults there; some veterans resented the fame given to one man.

Decorations: Hero of the Soviet Union — June 1945.

After the war: He returned to Novgorod, joined the Communist Party and was elected three times to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian republic (RSFSR). The house was rebuilt and is still lived in; a memorial wall faces the Volga.

WORDS TO KNOW

Wehrmacht — Germany's armed forces as a whole from 1935: the army (Heer), navy (Kriegsmarine) and air force (Luftwaffe)

OKW / OKH — The High Command of the Armed Forces and the High Command of the Army; from late 1941 Hitler commanded the army himself

Waffen-SS — The armed branch of Himmler's SS, which grew from a few regiments to some 38 divisions; it fought alongside the army and committed many massacres

SS and SD — Himmler's Party organisation, which ran the police, the concentration camps and the security service (SD)

RSHA — Reich Security Main Office, under Heydrich and then Kaltenbrunner — the headquarters of the Gestapo, the criminal police and the SD

Einsatzgruppen — SS and police mobile killing units that followed the army into Poland and the Soviet Union and shot Jews, communists and others

Final Solution — The Nazi term for the murder of all of Europe's Jews

Operation Reinhard — The 1942–43 programme to murder the Jews of occupied Poland in the camps of Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka

Luftwaffe — The German air force

Kriegsmarine — The German navy; its U-boat arm was led by Admiral Karl Dönitz

Blitzkrieg — 'Lightning war' — fast, concentrated attacks by tanks and aircraft; a label used more by journalists than by German doctrine

Panzer — German tank, and the armoured divisions built round tanks

Kessel — 'Cauldron' — a pocket of encircled troops

Atlantic Wall — The German coastal defences from Norway to the Spanish border, strengthened under Rommel in 1944

West Wall — Germany's border fortifications, called the Siegfried Line by the Allies

Organisation Todt — The German construction organisation that built the Atlantic Wall and U-boat bases, largely with forced labour

Red Army — The Soviet army; its army groups were called Fronts

NKVD — The Soviet secret police, responsible for Katyn, deportations and the post-war special camps

Great Patriotic War — The Russian name for the war against Germany, 1941–45

Home Army (AK) — Poland's underground army, loyal to the government-in-exile in London

FFI — French Forces of the Interior, the armed Resistance in 1944

SOE — Special Operations Executive — the British organisation that ran sabotage and agents in occupied Europe

RAF Fighter Command — The RAF's fighter organisation, which fought the Battle of Britain through its Groups; No. 11 Group defended the south-east

Bomber Command — The RAF's bomber force, under Sir Arthur Harris from February 1942; it bombed mainly by night

Eighth Air Force — The US strategic bomber force in Britain, which bombed by day

Enigma — The German cipher machine used by all the armed forces

Ultra — The British name for intelligence from broken high-level German codes and ciphers

Lend-Lease — The US programme, from March 1941, that supplied Britain, the Soviet Union and other Allies with arms, vehicles, fuel and food

BEF — British Expeditionary Force — the British army in France in 1939–40

SHAEF — Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Eisenhower's command in north-west Europe from 1944

21st Army Group — Montgomery's British and Canadian command in north-west Europe, 1944–45

Overlord / Neptune — The invasion of Normandy; Neptune was its naval and landing phase

Barbarossa — The German invasion of the Soviet Union, 22 June 1941

Bagration — The Soviet offensive in Belarus, June–August 1944

Market Garden — The airborne and ground attack towards Arnhem, September 1944

V-1 / V-2 — German 'vengeance weapons': a pulse-jet flying bomb and a ballistic rocket

CWGC — Commonwealth War Graves Commission

ABMC — American Battle Monuments Commission

Volksbund — The German War Graves Commission (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge)

CREDITS

Sources differ on when the American dead were moved: Wikipedia says 1945–46, TracesOfWar summer 1948.

Sources give different totals: Wikipedia states 1,072 Polish graves, while Italy's official tourism site counts 1,051 crosses.

Sources differ on when the battery first fired: English Wikipedia gives 20 January 1942, while French Wikipedia cites a 1940 German press report of a shell fired during construction.

Sources give different dates for the end of the siege, from 18 to 23 September 1944, depending on whether they count the city, Ramcke's own surrender or the last outposts. The cause of the Sadi-Carnot explosion is also uncertain.

Sources disagree on the dates of its first life: the St Petersburg Encyclopaedia gives closure in August 1949 and liquidation in 1952, while some guides give closure in 1952 or 1953.

Sources: Wikipedia, Britannica, the memorials' and museums' own biographies, national archives. Disputed points are noted in each card.

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