ANZAC DAY
AT VILLERS-BRETONNEUX

Tour Information
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TOUR INFORMATION

You are travelling to Europe – a wonderful assembly of diverse countries that have, over hundreds of years, evolved and formulated their individual and often unique customs, styles and quirkiness. We want to (and sometimes have to) fit into the region’s natural patterns and irregularities. Much will appear so very different from ‘home’ – and surely it is exactly those very differences that inspired you to go there in the first place!

To help you, the following pages contains additional information specific to your tour including brief introductory information regarding the major sites and regions you will be visiting.

We would like to wish you a wonderful trip through Europe and a safe return home.

*Best wishes from the Albatross Team*
Paris
To many, Paris is the romantic capital of Europe - and to some, the romantic capital of the world! And who could blame them: From the animated discussions and laughter at the pavement cafes, through to lovers strolling along the Champs Elysees and on to the grand structure of the Eiffel Tower, and other famous buildings.

A beautiful city situated on the River Seine, Paris has many fine buildings and monuments, ranging from the well-known sights of the Eiffel Tower and the cathedral of Notre Dame to modern buildings such as the Pompidou Centre and the glass pyramids in front of the Musée du Louvre. Each area of Paris has its own particular character and appeal: the classical architecture of the Right Bank, with its perspectives down long, broad boulevards; the narrow streets of the Marais lined with museums and small shops; and the traditionally bohemian Latin Quarter.

Paris boasts a wealth of famous museums from the large collections of the Musée du Louvre and the Musée d’Orsay, to smaller museums dedicated to specific artists, such as the Musée Rodin and the Musée Picasso. The city also attracts visitors for its famous restaurants and cafés, and for its reputation as one of Europe’s fashion capitals, the home of haute couture. Make sure you spend free time strolling amongst the broad boulevards, shops and museums of Paris. Perhaps also visit the village-like Montmartre around the hilltop Basilique du Sacré Coeur.

Ypres (also known as Ieper)
Between 1916 and 1918 thousands of Australian and New Zealand soldiers came to Ypres where some of the heaviest fighting in WWI took place. The whole of Ypres was completely destroyed in the war. After the war the town was lovingly rebuilt using money paid by Germany in reparations, with the main square, including the Cloth Hall and town hall, being rebuilt as close to the original designs as possible.

The Cloth Hall today is home to In Flanders Fields Museum, dedicated to Ypres’s role in the First World War. Ypres these days has the title of “city of peace” and maintains a close friendship with another town on which war had a profound impact: Hiroshima. The association may be regarded as somewhat gruesome due to the fact that both towns witnessed warfare at its worst: Ypres was one of the first places where chemical warfare was employed, while Hiroshima suffered the debut of nuclear warfare.

The picturesque, central square is surrounded by grand old buildings, the magnificent Cloth Hall, St Georges Chapel and St Martin’s Church. The imposing Cloth Hall was built in the 13th century and was one of the largest commercial buildings of the Middle Ages. The structure we see today is the exact copy of the original medieval building, rebuilt after the war. The belfry that surmounts the hall houses a 49-bell carillon. The whole complex was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1999.
The New Sir John Monash Centre, Villers-Bretonneux

Opening in April 2018, the Sir John Monash Centre will tell the story of Australia’s experience of the Western Front and Belgium during the First World War.

Six thousand Australians made their way to the Australian National Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux, for ANZAC Day 2015 in remembrance of the 295,000 Australians who served on the Western Front during the First World War. This date marks an important time for Australian remembrance and commemoration of all Australians who served, fought and died during the Great War and various other conflicts and peace keeping missions. In the Somme we particularly remember those who fought upon our soil and liberated the town of Villers-Bretonneux in 1918, effectively stopping the Germans in their advance towards Amiens and its major communication lines. The centre is named after General Sir John Monash, the famous commander of the Australian Corps, who led operations in the Somme in 1918 and triumphed with his tactical innovation.

The aim of the Sir John Monash Centre is to transmit a lasting international legacy to the generations to come – both from Australia and Europe. This episode, one of the first Australian roles on an international scale, influenced the course of history and deserves to be better understood. The experience is designed so visitors gain a better understanding of the journey of ordinary Australians – told in their own voices through letters, diaries and life-size images – and connect with the places they fought and died. A visit to the Sir John Monash Centre will be a moving experience that leaves a lasting impression. The site will be included in the Australian Remembrance Trail.

Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux

Villers-Bretonneux became famous in 1918, when the German advance on Amiens ended in the capture of the village by their tanks and infantry on 23 April. On the following day, the 4th and 5th Australian Divisions, with units of the 8th and 18th Divisions, recaptured the whole of the village and on 8 August 1918, the 2nd and 5th Australian Divisions advanced from its eastern outskirts in the Battle of Amiens.

The memorial is the Australian National Memorial erected to commemorate all Australian soldiers who fought in France and Belgium during the First World War, to their dead, and especially to name those of the dead whose graves are not known. The Australian servicemen named in this register died in the battlefields of the Somme, Arras, the German advance of 1918 and the Advance to Victory. The memorial stands within Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery, which was made after the Armistice when graves were brought in from other burial grounds in the area and from the battlefields. Both the cemetery and memorial were designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. The memorial was unveiled by King George VI on 22 July 1938.

There are now 10,738 Australian servicemen officially commemorated by this memorial and named within the register.
Bruges
Please note that a certain amount of walking is required on a visit to Bruges. New town laws forbid access by coach directly to the old centre. Coaches are required to drop passengers off on the outskirts of the old town. Your Tour Manager will then lead you on a leisurely 30 minute walk to the old town, and the wonderful central square.

Recognised as one of Europe’s best preserved medieval cities, the Flemish city of Bruges (Brugge) is riddled with canals, bridges and quiet back streets and is often called the Venice of the North. The medieval belfry (Belfort), rising above the Gothic cloth hall, dominates the town.

Bruges is a pleasant town to explore on foot, with its meandering cobbled lanes and hidden medieval almshouses, tiny lace boutiques, tempting chocolate shops and cosy cafes. Maybe take a cruise along the canals or a ride in a traditional horse drawn carriage through the old town to admire the historic architecture. Or simply relax in one of the pavement cafes on the glorious old market square.

The Australian Memorial Park at Fromelles
Fromelles was the first major battle fought by Australian troops on the Western Front. Directed against a strong German position known as the Sugar Loaf salient, the attack was intended primarily as a feint to draw German troops away from the Somme offensive then being pursued further to the south. A seven-hour preparatory bombardment deprived the attack of any hope of surprise, and ultimately proved ineffective in subduing the well-entrenched defenders.

When the troops of the 5th Australian and 61st British Divisions attacked at 6 pm on 19 July 1916, they suffered heavily at the hands of German machine-gunners. The 5th Australian Division suffered 5,533 casualties, rendering it incapable of offensive action for many months; the 61st British Division suffered 1,547. The German casualties were little more than 1,000.

The attack was a complete failure as the Germans realised within a few hours it was merely a feint. It therefore had no impact whatsoever upon the progress of the Somme offensive.
“Now we are a Nation”

Up to the time of the war we were merely an offshoot of the British race .. Now we are a Nation. [Lieutenant General C B B White, 1919]

World War I was a central event in Australia’s development and this period in our history produced what we now call ‘the Anzac spirit’. The personal qualities shown by Australian soldiers under the terrible conditions of Gallipoli and the Western Front in France and Belgium gave them a pride in themselves and set an example to the nation. By the end of the war Australia had gained recognition as a valuable ally and the nation’s soldiers as a force to be reckoned with on the battlefield.

In Australia, the outbreak of World War I was greeted with enthusiasm and thousands flocked to enlist in the newly formed AIF (Australian Imperial Force). Indeed, between 1914 and 1918 from a population of less than five million people, over 416 000 men joined up of whom over 331,000 saw overseas service. Australia’s casualty rate was among the highest of any of the Allied nations. Over 64 per cent of the AIF became battle casualties and of these over 61,000 – 18 per cent – were killed in action or died of wounds.

During World War I Australia was part of the British Empire. By fighting for the Empire most Australians felt they were fighting Australia’s war as well. In April 1915, the war took Australian soldiers to the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey where, with men of many nations, they attempted to force Turkey out of the war. During the eight months of the Gallipoli campaign, over 8,700 Australians lost their lives and over 19,000 were wounded.
In March 1916, the infantry divisions of the AIF went to the Western Front in France and Belgium to fight in the trenches against the Germans. Those years between 1916 and 1918, saw the most costly conflict in which Australia has ever been involved. Of the 102,800 names on the national Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, over 45,000 died as a result of the fighting along the Western Front. For years after the war, place names such as Fromelles, Pozières, Bullecourt, Ypres, Villers-Bretonneux and Mont St Quentin, where so many Australians perished, were household words in Australia. By 1918, Australians were fighting in their own army corps – the Australian Corps. From May of that year the corps was commanded by an Australian – General Sir John Monash.

While the Australian infantry battled its way to victory in Europe, the men of the Desert Mounted Corps containing Australian light horse units, fought against the Turks in the Middle East. From mid 1916 to October 1918, the Australian Light Horse, along with New Zealand and British forces, fought its way from Egypt, through Palestine and on into Syria. By comparison with Europe, Australian casualties were mercifully light - just under 1,000 died and 3,300 were wounded in action – but this ultimately victorious campaign was hard fought and conducted under severe climatic conditions.

An often forgotten part of World War 1 was the important contribution of the RAN (Royal Australian Navy). Virtually the first widely celebrated Empire naval victory of the war was the destruction in November 1914 of the German raider Emden by HMAS Sydney off the Cocos Islands in the Indian Ocean. One of the major elements in the ultimate defeat of Germany was the naval blockade of Germany’s North Sea ports between 1914 and war’s end. Ships of the RAN took part in this blockade and the battle cruiser, HMAS Australia, took line honours when the German High Seas fleet sailed into Scapa Flow to surrender in 1918.

Australian women also played an important role in the nation’s war effort. Many women spent thousands of hours in the raising of money and the packing and posting of comfort parcels. These comforts – socks, scarves, chocolate, biscuits, tobacco etc. – were a great morale booster for the troops. Women also served in the AIF as nurses in the AANS (Australian Army Nursing Service) and in their work they lived daily with the destructive effects of modern war on men’s minds and bodies. Seven members of the AANS gained Military Medals awarded ‘for bravery in the field’.

What were the legacies of World War 1 for Australia? Firstly, that war gave the nation its most widely recognised national day – Anzac Day – the commemoration of the dawn landing on 25 April 1915 by the AIF on the Gallipoli peninsula. On 25 April 1916, as it has been ever since, that significant anniversary was celebrated in Australia. Secondly, Australia’s relatively small armed services made a significant contribution to the defeat of Germany and its allies. As one historian has summed up the military efforts of the AIF on the Western Front – [they] engaged the main army of the main enemy in the main theatre of war … Australian troops played a notable part in the final victory and in freeing Western Europe from the overbearing weight of German military autocracy.

Lastly, Australia took its place at the end of the war in the congress of nations, not simply as an adjunct of the British Empire, but with arguments, claims and demands of its own. Its right to do that had been earned by Australian blood spilt on the battlefield in the cause of Australia and its allies.
January 31, 2010
The first of more than 200 Australian WWI diggers forgotten in a French field for more than 90 years has been buried with full military honours in the new war memorial in the tiny village of Fromelles.

Light snow fell during the formal ceremony involving Australian, British and French military to begin filling the first war cemetery in 50 years. The first interment came amidst confirmation that 90 per cent of the samples taken from the bodies, buried by the Germans in mass graves beside Pheasant Wood, have yielded viable DNA.

The long and complex journey to match the DNA with living descendants begins now in the hope that the men can be provided with identities and individual headstones when the new cemetery opens formally on July 19, the 94th anniversary of one of the Australian military’s darkest days. Those who cannot be identified will have the inscription “Known unto God” inscribed on their headstones.

Just 250 remains - most of them Australian, the others British - have been recovered from the Pheasant Wood pits during an excavation last year. This compares to the list of missing from Fromelles – in which almost 2300 Australians and British soldiers were killed in a few hours as a failed diversionary tactic - contains 1500 names.

DNA specialists warn that this means that there is about a 16 per cent chance of identifying all the men - and that’s if all British and Australian offer samples representing at least one line from the maternal or paternal side of each family tree.

And the Minister for veterans Affairs, Alan Griffin, who attended the ceremony, also warned families not to expect such a high success rate in identifying the men: “There is an ongoing process at the moment, which I wouldn’t want to comment on, but I am very confident that a number of these brave men will be identified in time for the opening,” he said, adding that there “will be capacity in years ahead” for identification in future if people continue to come forward.

“Yes, there are only half a dozen bodies from which they haven’t got viable DNA, but it is one thing to have a viable sample and another entirely to get a match. It ain’t going to be 90 percent.”

Mr Griffin, whose grandfather fought at Bullecourt on the nearby battlefields of the Somme, said the service had been moving: “I think the snow added to the atmosphere. My grandfather got trench foot and had all his toes amputated so I had an inkling of what he felt up there today.”

The remaining bodies will be interred over the next four weeks; each with the same military formality as yesterday’s ceremony. Decisions about identification will be made in March by a special board whose members will consider not just DNA but “historical, anthropological and archaeological evidence”.

The British Veterans Affairs Minister Kevan Jones, who also attended yesterday’s event, said both governments would share the cost of the AUD$6.2 million project: “It was the wish of both governments to give these brave soldiers a fitting place to rest, honouring the commitment shown to our fallen.”

Admiral Sir Ian Garnett, vice chairman of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, described the memorial as significant: “The level of care and professionalism ... will stand as a lasting and fitting tribute to the sacrifice of the 250 men who will soon lie within its walls.”
Amiens
Amiens is the capital of the Picardie region, and a city which has been declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO. The city currently has a population of around 150,000 people.

The city boasts picturesque city canals, Jules Verne’s House and the Notre-Dame - Amien’s masterpiece 13th century gothic cathedral – a gem of French medieval architecture. This World Heritage Site is the tallest of the large ‘classic’ Gothic churches in France. After a fire destroyed the former cathedral, the new nave was begun in 1220 - and finished in 1247 Amiens Cathedral is notable for the particularly fine display of sculptures on the principal façade. It was described by John Ruskin as the “Parthenon of Gothic architecture”, and as “Gothic, clear of Roman tradition and of Arabian taint, Gothic pure, authoritative, unsurpassable, and unaccusable.’

In WWI the Battle of Amiens was the opening phase of the Hundred Days Offensive. This offensive eventually led to the armistice which ended the war.

Pozieres
Pozières is a small village in the Somme area of northern France.

The village was the scene of bitter and costly fighting for the 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions and was completely destroyed during what became the Battle of Pozières, which was part of the Battle of the Somme.

The village was captured initially by the 1st Division on 23 July 1916. The division clung to its gains despite almost continuous artillery fire and repeated German counter-attacks but suffered heavily. By the time it was relieved on 27 July it had suffered 5,285 casualties.

The 2nd Division took over from the 1st and mounted two further attacks - the first, on 29 July, was a costly failure; the second, on 2 August, resulted in the seizure of further German positions beyond the village. Again, the Australians suffered heavily from retaliatory bombardments. They were relieved on 6 August, having suffered 6,848 casualties.

The 4th Division was next into the line at Pozières. It too endured a massive artillery bombardment, and defeated a German counter-attack on 7 August; this was the last attempt by the Germans to retake Pozières.

The village was subsequently rebuilt, and is now the site of several war memorials.

In the fighting at Pozières, around the Windmill and northwards along the ridge towards Mouquet Farm, the AIF suffered more than 23,000 casualties in little more than six weeks, between 23 July and 5 September 1916. Of these casualties, nearly 7,000 were killed, had died of wounds or were ‘missing’.