

Discovering London's WWII Legacy: Essential Sites and Tours

Episode 135 of the UK Travel Planning Podcast focuses on World War II sites

intro: Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Your host is the founder of the UK travel planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracy shares destination guides, travel tips and, itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation. Join us as we explore the uk from cosmopolitan cities to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands, and from the picturesque countryside to seaside towns.

Tracy: Hi, and welcome to episode 135 of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. So this week Doug and I. Hello. Are, here to chat about the best World War II sites in London and surrounds. We are often asked about this during our consults. We actually have an article on the London Travel Planning website so you can cheque out that which covers 21 plus different destinations to go and visit if you have an interest in World War II. We can't cover all of those in this episode of the podcast because the episode would probably be about 20 hours long. So we're going to kind of mention the most popular ones in central London and we're also going to mention some of the more, popular ones slightly further out of London. And then Doug's going to mention, a few other ones which are in other parts of the country which may pique your interest and you may want to include in an itinerary if you visit in the uk. But that's the way that we thought we would do it. And Doug is more of an expert on, World War II and has more of an interest in World War II than I do. So he will do a lot more of the talking this episode,

won't you?

Tracy: I will, yes. Yes. It's a big subject. I mean, there's so many people want to visit it for various different interests, but there's a bit of something for everybody. It's not stuffy, boring old histories that they've actually made them very interesting sites.

Tracy: Yeah, that's absolutely true. I totally agree with you on that.

There are three major sites in London which you should visit when visiting

So there are three major sites in London which you may wish to incorporate into your London UK itinerary if you're visiting. I'll quickly just talk about each of those three or just tell you which three they are. One is the Imperial War Museum, second is the Churchill War Rooms, and, the third is the HMS Belfast. Now those are the three most popular and the M3 that are often included in itineraries particular actually the Churchill War Rooms comes up very, very, very often.

Tracy: That's right. Very popular. Yeah.

Tracy: So let's start off I think with the Imperial War Museum, Doug. So chat to us a little bit about that.

Tracy: Okay, so it's located in Lambeth in London and it's part of the Imperial War Museum Group, which, covers five locations. The Imperial War Museum in Lambeth or in London. HMS Belfast and Churchill War Rooms are the three sites. There's two

others which we'll mention later, but it's free to visit. and there's just such a lot. They have themed topics, so things on display that do move around at the moment. There's, World War I, trenches there and the Blitz of London and, 39, 40. So that's worth visiting as well. It's not scary if you've got 10 small children. There's lots to say, lots to load. So you read into how much detail for your own personal interest. Because you don't have a huge interest in it, do you really? But you enjoy the day that we had there last time?

Tracy: Yeah, I did. and again, it's, it's a free museum. The Imperial War Museum is free. it's open from 10 to 6pm every day. it's. You get there by. Via the Lambeth north tube station or you can get a bus down to that area. Yeah, it's an interesting museum to visit, I'm not going to argue. Absolutely. It was, it was good. We did a really good tour, which we'll talk about a little bit later with a, with an expert, which really, really helped. And I used to be a history teacher, so I do quite, I know quite a lot about World War I and World War II. but I actually learned a lot. But yes, it's really good and I think that's a good starting off point actually. to visit the Imperial War Museum.

Tracy: That's right. The people know a lot about it until you get there and you realise actually there's a lot that I don't know. So it's not just literally about war machines, war equipment. There's a lot about people and the people of London and how they dealt with, the Blitz. So it's very, it's on different levels. There's lots of different levels to the museum. I think. You see, you can be quite superficial. You can go in quite deep.

Tracy: Yeah, absolutely. And, second, major kind of place to visit if you have an interest in World War II history in London has got to be the Churchill War Rooms.

Tracy: That's right, yes. All the Cabinet War Rooms. That was. It is incredibly interesting. I, I do like the, War Rooms. Because it's

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Tracy: not just about Winston, Churchill's, war years. It's a lot. It's about his childhood as well and his jobs before knows a reporter. And it's about Churchill as a person and his relationship with America. It's very important. Again, you can read into a lot of detail or you can be quite superficial, depending on your interest.

Triton has visited the War Rooms twice and enjoyed them very much

Will mention about the, At certain times it can be very busy and it can get quite hot down there as well. Which you found. I've spent quite a few hours visiting the war rooms. There's an audio, tour as well. And if it gets busy, you can be waiting a little while so you can actually view the rooms. And that's part of the audio tour itself.

Tracy: They do get very busy and they do get, as you say, very hot and quite packed. I've been twice now. The first time I wasn't so keen because it was in summer and it was hot and it was packed and it was busy. And I think I went through the war rooms in about 20 minutes, was probably the quickest that anybody's ever done them. But on a recent trip it was much quieter.

Tracy: Yeah. Because it was.

Tracy: It was afternoon, later afternoon in, end of September. So no school. No school groups and kind of more lower season, or shoulder season in London. So not as busy. So give us a chance. So I could really kind of explore it without feeling that there was lots of people down there and you know, it was. It was much better, I felt and I enjoyed it

and was. I found it really fascinating actually, just to see the living conditions when they had to live down there. And you don't see all of it because I think some of them are, ah, ah, kind of even further underground where a lot of the secretaries and people lived.

Tracy: That's right, yeah. You can just see the trapdoor entry down to the, sleeping quarters.

Tracy: But it's really interesting as well because you see that the map, whether we use it and you know, in some ways it's hard. We live in a world where information is at our fingertips. We've got smartphones, we've got Wi fi, we've got the Internet. You know, we can talk to people on the other side of the world in a blink of an eye. And it's hard to imagine during World War II, when they were trying to plan everything, that they had to wait for coded messages to come in, which we'll kind of talk about in a bit when we talk about one of other destinations. But just actually the Organisation of being able to plot everything out, figure out where everybody was, what they were doing, and plan was just so much harder in a world where communication was just so much more challenging.

Tracy: Triton is on many, many different fronts at exactly the same time. So the amount of information flow was just absolutely, amazing.

Tracy: So it's very interesting, it's very interesting to see how the kind of War Rooms were set up during World War II. It's also very interesting to find out more about Churchill. So if you are, you know, particularly keen to learn more about his career, his childhood, how it developed, how he became Prime Minister and kind of, you know, during the war, the, war years, what he did, his role, and then after the war as well, then the War Rooms are definitely the place to visit, for sure.

Tracy: Yeah. Really is, yeah.

Tracy: And I will just mention at this point, so we were invited very kindly by live tours to do a private tour with them at the end of September, which involved the Imperial War Museums and then going over to the Cabinet War Rooms or Churchill War Rooms, and it was absolutely fantastic. As I say, ah, you know, I used to be a history teacher, secondary school history teacher, but I knew absolutely nothing. My knowledge was minuscule compared to Andy, who was the, guide who took us around, who specialises in, World War history. He's got a PhD in it. He was fascinating to talk to.

Tracy: He really was on so many different levels. I mean, I thought I knew a little bit, but I, know virtually nothing.

Tracy: I think the fascinating thing about Andy was, is all that he could answer the questions that we asked and at our kind of level of interest. And if you, if you wanted to go deeper, he could, if, you know, if you wanted to kind of like a bit more of a simple explanation of what was happening, he could give you that.

Tracy: That's right. And I asked him to sort of reinforce or, you know, correct me when I sort of shared the bits of information that I know I was right on some occasions. But you're right, he went a lot more, a lot deeper than, the information I have in my, in my head, particular, ah, things like strategy and tactics. He's an unbelievable authority. I was very, very impressed with his.

Tracy: And I just love the way that he was able to, you know, he asked us how, what we wanted to know and kind of what, what specific focus we had or what interest we had, what particular did we want to know more about? So, you know, he was able to kind of

give us that information both at the Imperial War Museum. And, when we went to the Churchill War Museum as well, like, amount of information you knew about Churchill and I know we had, there was somebody else that was visiting, was asking him questions as well, was fascinating.

Tracy: I was going to say that when we were at the, Imperial War Museum, he was answering questions towards. And I did notice quite a few other people standing around sort of listening to what he was having to say as well. obviously Andy was aware of that and obviously very happy to sort of share his knowledge.

Tracy: Yeah, he was brilliant. So, I mean, if a private tour, is what you're after with an expert, then I highly, highly recommend booking with live tours. And there is a, ah, link in the show notes for this episode, on the website. so please, please use our link, if you're going to book with live tours. But we highly recommend, you know, if you want a private tour, if you have an interest in World War II, then this is a tour that you really need to go on to, really get in depth and in detailed information about it. Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

So the third site that I'm going to talk about is HMS HM Belfast

So the third site that I'm going to talk about is, HMS HM Belfast, which I haven't been to, but you have.

Tracy: I've been a couple of times, yeah. HMOS Belfast is a Town Class light cruiser and it's actually birthed opposite the, Tower of London, permanently. And every time I've been around that, I've been learning something different each time. I always tell a

happy story there about, some American sailors with unbelievable knowledge. And they had captive audience when I was visiting with a friend of mine and they knew everything about this ship. They really did. Their knowledge. Even the young sailors there, were listening. I think they were building their knowledge, listening to the American sailors.

Tracy: Oh, wow. And you've been a couple of times and you've enjoyed that, haven't you?

Tracy: I have. And particularly during school holidays to put other events on as well. it's all very engaging for people of all ages.

Tracy: Yeah, excellent. So those are the three major sites in London. There are far, far more. There are monuments you can visit, there are, you know, ghost signs you can see. There are tube stations which are now closed, such as Aldwych, which you can. Which were used in the Blitz. That's where, you know, people went down there for safety. So you can actually do a tour of Aldrich tube station again. I'll put a link on. We've got a 10 discount for that tour as well. I'll put a link on. If you want to do, a tour down to some of those, the disused tube stations. there's evidence even at the VA Museum, you can see on the wall where there's been shrapnel damage, onto the building itself. So there's lots and lots of different places. St Dunstan's in the east. Another one I'll throw out there. So do cheque out our article for more information and more details on pictures of alternative places or additional places you can add into your itinerary.

We're going to mention two places just outside of London that

interest us

But we're going to mention two places just outside of London. Now, the first one I'm going to mention, neither Doug and I have been, even though we really, really do want to go to, and that is Chartwell, which is where, the farm, former home of Winston Churchill. So that is, yeah, somewhere we'd both like to go to.

Tracy: Yeah, yeah. And it's, by train, you can go from London Bridge, train station, down to Edenbridge, and it's about half an hour, I think.

Tracy: Yeah. So that's something that hopefully we'll get to soon. And we can, add a bit more information in about that at future time. But we did want to just mention that, because I know Chartwell is a very, very popular destination. But the other one that I do want to spend a bit more time talking about, because we've both been to is. And also comes up quite often during itinerary consults, is Bletchley Park.

Tracy: Yeah, that's right. The home of the Cobreakers. We thoroughly enjoyed it. We planned on being there a few hours, but were there a bit longer than that even? Weren't. We spent best part of a day there, really. you were pleasantly surprised. I know that you were sort of going along to sort of keep me company originally, but you did enjoy it, didn't you?

Tracy: Oh, I did. I thought it was absolutely fascinating to find out about, you know, how they had, you know, basically broken those codes in the war and figured out, and just how clever it was and how the people had been recruited to work for them. And, yeah, it was amazing.

Tracy: mathematicians, you know, the men and ladies there. They were incredibly clever people from all walks of life. and they was all kept secret, obviously, for 50 years. But it's just the story. I mean, it's been made into films and there's a lot about Alan Turing, but the way he brings it home, the actual valued work that was done at Bletchley park is not to be underestimated. But there's more to it. Than just that there as well. There's the human element of the people that is there as well. It's not just the war service, it's actually about the people themselves.

Tracy: And it's quite easy to get to Bletchley park as well from London. Central London.

Tracy: Yeah. Just over half an hour from, London Houston. Just remember it's not, on, Not covered by an Oyster card. You would need a train ticket.

Tracy: Yeah. And I would recommend that you give yourself about four hours really to get there. And it's a very short walk from the train station to actually Bletchley

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Tracy: park itself.

Tracy: That's right. And if you go there and you're there for longer than you think, there is a very good little tea room there as well. And shop.

Tracy: Yes, there is. Yes, we did. So we spent. We spent most. Best part of a day there actually. And it was. Yeah. So we do highly recommend it. So if you know that if you've got an interest In World War II history, you know there's. There are lots of places to visit and things to do in and around central London and a little bit out as well. But I know

there's some other places that you want to mention.

Tracy: Yeah, that's right. The, Talks Bridge, the Battle of Britain. Ah, bunker. I've not actually been to this one as well. It's a little bit outside the, P Dele Line, I think. Definitely worth going to. It's, not part of the Imperial War Museum Group, but it's obviously plays a valuable part in the Second World War. So that's one definitely worth going. Then a little bit further out in Cambridgeshire, again, part of the Imperial War Museum is the Aviation Museum at Duxford, which you can get to. there's three stations you could choose to go to. There's Whittlesford Parkway, Royston or Cambridge. You, can get a taxi from Royston and Cambridge, but from Whittlesford you have to take a bus. But, it doesn't run on a Sunday, so the details are on the website article. So a little bit further out than that again is some other sites around the UK I have been to see. There's the Imperial War Museum north. That's in Manchester. Most definitely worth a visit. It's not as big as the one at Lambeth, but it's incredibly interesting. And then m. One of my personal favourites outside London is the Western Approaches Museum in Liverpool, which details all the information as regards the Atlantic convoys. incredibly interested. I went with Tracy's brother who, is a real authority on anything military. That's incredibly useful to know. the Imperial War Museum dux that I've already mentioned. And the Leeds Armoury Museum, which details just what it says, basically military uniforms, weaponry. That's just outside Leeds train station in Yorkshire. Well worth a visit. And then all the way down onto the south coast is the Bovington Tank Museum. Most definitely worth a visit. If you're into your tanks and armoured cars. It is incredibly good. If you get the right day, you can see the tanks in operation as well. So there's a few there. I've been to all those ones. I can definitely say that they're worth a visit.

Tracy: Honestly. We could, we could do an entire podcast, an entire article about actually other World War II sites and places to visit across the UK because there are so

many.

Doug: There are several sites easy to get to by train

Tracy: Oh, I've just scratched the surface. Just literally scratches. There's a few. There's so many more.

Tracy: Absolutely. And those ones, I mean a Bovington Tank Museum comes up quite often as well in consults with. We've talked about that with quite a few people. Yeah. So I think one of Bobbington's not.

Tracy: So easy to get due by trains. It's at Wall on the south coast. but all the others are more straightforward to get to by train.

Tracy: Okay, well, I think that's given a fairly good introduction and coverage of some of the major sites in London. And just outside, as I say, we do have an article on the London Travel planning website which you can cheque out. We will link to the article in the show notes@uktravelplanet.com episode 135. We would also please encourage you to cheque out the show notes but also to look at our articles on both websites, uktravelplanning.com and londontravelplanning.com it is becoming increasingly more difficult to get our articles out there and seen because of changes in different search engines and with the event of AI these days. so we really would appreciate your support if you would please cheque out our websites, whether that's the show notes or actually take a look at the articles where you will find more information. Also, I'd like to say as well, if you're enjoying our podcast, why not become a supporter of the show and sponsor us? you can do this from as little as US\$3 a month. That's, that's not very

much if you think about it. It's far less than a cup of coffee and if you are getting value and you are enjoying the podcast episodes, we would ask that you could please show your support to us. In that way it really helps us to continue week on week. Put out this content, for you to help you plan the best trip that you possibly can have to the uk. But I think that was a great summary. Great episode, Doug.

Tracy: I know you got me talking more more on this one.

Tracy: That's good. I think people like to hear your voice. But anyway, until next week episode though, from myself and Doug, all we have to say is Happy UK Travel Planning. Thank you for tuning in to this week's episode of the UK Travel Planning Podcast.

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Tracy: As always, show notes can be found@uktravelplanning.com if you've enjoyed the show, why not leave us feedback via text or a review on your favourite podcast app? We love to hear from you. And you never know, you may receive a shout out in a future episode, but as always, that just leaves me to stay until next week. Happy UK Travel Planning.

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