



# BATTLE OF BRITAIN 2025 TOUR

*Itinerary*



delayed-action bombs for the 57-day assault. We'll make specific visits to the Cabinet War Rooms and Churchill Museum, where the prime minister and his war cabinet directed the war effort many storeys underground. As well, we'll stop at both the Bomber Command Memorial (unveiled at Green Park in 2012) and the Battle of Britain Memorial (opened at Victoria Embankment in 2005), before returning to our lodgings for the night.

## DAY 4 Wednesday, Sept 3, 2025

During our second day in the London area, we'll explore an underground facility where the RAF's Fighter Command tactical staff (led by Air Vice-Marshal Keith Park) conducted nearly round-the-clock operations for No. 11 Group. From this hub – 60 feet underground and with communications from Chain Home radar stations along the south and east coasts – Fighter Command strategists plotted inbound enemy aircraft and launched RAF fighter squadron response. The Germans generally dismissed RAF radar intelligence as second rate; however, the Uxbridge bunker allowed RAF commanders (often attended by Winston and Clementine Churchill) information that was no more than four minutes or 15 miles behind the actual battle. While generally recognized as a battle fought by about 2,500 British-born fighter pilots, in fact, hundreds of Commonwealth and other Allied airmen served in the RAF defending British skies, including 147 Polish airmen and nearly 300 Canadian pilots and ground crew. Amid the surroundings of Uxbridge's preserved op centre, we'll learn about the unique roles played by the Poles in RAF 303 Fighter Squadron and Canadians in RAF 242 Fighter Squadron. Back above ground, we'll head off to the Biggin Hill and Tangmere airfields, whose artifacts, aircraft and legendary Battle of Britain service remain preserved, treasured and accessible for those fortunate enough to visit. Then, on our way to new lodgings in Hastings, we'll explore some wartime mythology – the home of ITV's popular WWII detective series "Foyle's War," created by "Midsomer Murders" screenwriter and author Anthony Horowitz.

## DAY 5 Thursday, Sept 4, 2025

Our anniversary tour continues into the region of southern England (between the outskirts of London and the Channel coast) that for all intents

and purposes became the front-line in the Battle of Britain. During the war, Kent region was home to RAF airfields, Royal Navy dockyards, aircraft manufacturing plants and population centres – all in the line of fire of Luftwaffe air raids through the 113-day battle. Churchill called the triangle of land that is Kent, "Hellfire Corner," where Canadian fighter pilots recall seeing more "fighter aircraft and parachutes tumbling to earth" than anywhere else. It was on Kent's southern coastline that (on or about Sept. 15, 1940) Hitler planned to land nearly 300,000 troops, 30,000 vehicles and 60,000 horses in an amphibious invasion code named "Sea Lion." Today, near the site of one of the battle's busiest fighter stations, RAF Hawkinge, we'll visit the Battle of Britain Museum, which features artifacts recovered from more than 650 crashed aircraft – purportedly the largest accumulation of aircraft, vehicles, weapons and flying equipment (from both sides of the battle) in the U.K. Just down the road, we'll visit the coastline facility at Capel le Ferne with its National Memorial to the Few and visitors' centre. Then, at the southeast tip of England, we'll explore the tunnels beneath Dover Castle. Here, in the final days of the Battle of France in May 1940, Vice-Admiral Bertram Ramsay directed Royal Navy warships and civilian small ships in Operation Dynamo, evacuating 335,000 troops from Dunkirk and the French coast.

## DAY 6 Friday, Sept 5, 2025

Leaving the historic Battle of Britain region of south England, our coach travels inland northeast into County Norfolk to the Thorpe Abbots airbase near Norwich. Originally an RAF air station, in November 1942, as part of the "friendly invasion" of U.S. Army Air Force air and ground crew, the Thorpe Abbots base, barracks, supply depots, mess and airstrips became home to the 100th USAAF Bomb Group of the Eighth Air Force. Depicted in last year's \$250 million, AppleTV+ mini-series, "Masters of the Air," this airfield was home to "the bloody hundredth" and its B-17 Flying Fortresses from June 25, 1943, to the end of the war. Here the real pilots Majors Gale "Buck" Clevon, John "Bucky" Egan and navigator, Maj. Robert "Rosie" Rosenthal launched their 306 daylight combat missions; they flew 8,630 sorties, delivered 19,257 tons of bombs, lost 785 aircrew killed or MIA, 894 taken prisoner. The Memorial Museum (in the refurbished control tower) features artifacts, combat reports, letters, diaries and photos of the actual bloody hundredth.

## DAY 1 Sunday Aug 31, 2025

As we traditionally do for our trips to overseas battlefields, our group gathers in a pre-boarding lounge at Pearson for time to enjoy hospitality food and drink and to get acquainted (or reacquainted) with fellow travellers. We then board for our overnight trip from Toronto to London Heathrow.

## DAY 2 Monday, Sept 1, 2025

On our London arrival, we'll take time to gather luggage and board our dedicated coach for the tour. After a short stop for refreshment (coincidentally overlooking Windsor Castle), we'll travel a short distance to the first day's activity – perhaps the U.K.'s most famous military aviation museum. RAF Hendon, formerly a wartime air base, is now home to six refurbished hangars, two of which display mint-condition Messerschmitt 109, Supermarine Spitfire and Hawker Hurricane fighters as well as Junkers and Heinkel bombers all Battle of Britain vintage. With tangible impressions of the aircraft that served in the battle firmly planted in our minds, we'll make the short trip to our lodgings in London (for two nights) and then pause to enjoy our traditional Welcome Dinner.

## DAY 3 Tuesday Sept 2, 2025

We spend our first full day in London. Almost 85 years to the day (Sept. 7, 1940) when German Luftwaffe bombers commenced nearly continuous daytime and nighttime attacks, known as "the Blitz," on the British capital and other population centres around the U.K., we embark on a Blitz tour bus. Many of the sites we see during this orientation trip – Whitehall, St. Clement Danes RAF Church, St. Paul's, Tower of London, and Buckingham Palace – faced incendiary, high explosives and

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On our way westward to Cambridge, we'll make a brief stop in the town of Newmarket to visit a unique commemorative in honour of W.T. "Bill" Tutte, British-born Canadian, who made timely breakthroughs in cryptanalysis of the Nazi cipher system which helped turn the tide in air, sea and land intelligence during the war. On to Cambridge University and our lodgings.



## DAY 7

**Saturday Sept 6, 2025**

Today marks an experiential highlight of our tour as we travel to the former RAF base at Duxford for the 85th Anniversary Battle of Britain Air Show. During this timely commemorative day-long show, the organizers of some of the best aerobatics and formation flying exhibitions in Europe invite us to "Step back into the summer of 1940 to see historic Duxford come to life. Discover the sights and sounds of Spitfires, Hurricanes and a host of other aircraft from the Second World War and beyond as they take to the skies over Duxford." The visit also allows us time to explore the limitless number of displays in hangars, huts and operation centres across the base with all its mint-condition airworthy warbirds. In addition to all the history associated with the Second World War, Duxford was also home to much of the filming of the 1969 blockbuster movie *Battle of Britain*, produced in part by Canadian Harry Salzman. We return to our Cambridge lodgings.

## DAY 8

**Sunday Sept 7, 2025**

Having explored the story of American bomber crews based in the U.K., we shift to the Commonwealth aircrews who served not two

years in the war, but nearly six years based in northeastern England. Our first stop of the day, just outside the city of Lincoln, is the interpretive centre and memorial at the International Bomber Command Centre. The museum facility offers the stories of the servicemen and women who carried out the wartime bombing operations over northwest Europe, including holographically generated witnesses telling their stories. Outside the museum stands the Spire Memorial (made of corten, a weathering steel) erected in 2015 and standing 102-feet high (the wingspan of a Lancaster bomber). The spire is encircled by walls carrying the names of all 57,871 men and women who gave their lives in Bomber Command operations over Europe. As well, on this day, our travels take us to the centre of the City of Lincoln, over which towers the famous Lincoln Cathedral. Our visit will include a specially arranged visit to the chapel set aside to commemorate Britain's war dead. Just down the road, in East Kirkby, lies the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre. It was opened to the public in 1988 by Lincolnshire farmers Fred and Harold Panton, as a memorial to their older brother, Christopher Whitton Panton, who died during WWII. The centre's main exhibit is Avro Lancaster Mk VII, NX611, named "Just Jane" after a popular wartime comic character. At day's end we travel to the village of Woodhall Spa and our lodgings for the next two nights, the Petwood Hotel, which, after the famous May 1943 Ruhr River dams raid, became the officers' mess for No. 617 RAF Squadron, by then known as the Dam Busters Squadron. During our stay, Emma Brealey, director of the Petwood, will deliver history of the hotel and its extraordinary (if eccentric) owner, Lady Grace Emily Weigall Maple.

## DAY 9

**Monday Sept 8, 2025**

During the war, Lincolnshire was home to RAF No. 617 Bomber Squadron, a.k.a. the Dam Busters. On the night of May 16-17, 1943, after an intensive, eight-week training session under S/L Guy Gibson VC, 19 modified Lancaster bombers launched a secret, low-level, nighttime raid against the massive dams of the Ruhr River to immobilize Nazis' military industrial complex. Of the 133 aircrew on the raid, 33 were Canadians; they destroyed two dams and damaged a third. In their honour, our first stop is a visit to the RAF Scampton base which housed No. 617; we'll visit Gibson's office (exactly as it was) and the small museum adjoining it. Next, our coach takes us northwest to the High Peak district; there we'll

stop for lunch at a favourite spot in the area – the Ladybower Inn. Then, we travel a short distance to visit the Derwent Dam and Reservoir, over which the Dam Buster crews trained in spring 1943 for the raid against the Ruhr River dams. While our trip has not included as many cemetery visits as usual, one emotional destination we'll visit this day is the small Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery near Scopwick. Here lies P/O John Gillespie McGee, the RCAF pilot, born in China, raised in the U.S., trained as a pilot in Canada, and author of the famous poem "High Flight." McGee died in a training accident in 1941 and is buried near the station where he served. Our day-long tribute to the Dam Busters returns us to the Petwood for refreshment in the Dam Busters bar and dinner.

## DAY 10

**Tuesday Sept 9, 2025**

On our final day of the tour – another highlight – a stop at Bletchley Park. At an unassuming estate near Milton Keynes (just north of London), worked some of the brightest minds in the U.K. Known as the Government Code and Cypher School, and unknown to the Germans, 10,000 people (mostly women) worked with a team of codebreakers, including Alan Turing, to penetrate, replicate and decode messages created by the German's encryption apparatus, Enigma. Bletchley's intelligence work likely shortened the war by two to four years. This is the actual location and these are the true stories depicted in the Academy-Award-winning feature movie "The Imitation Game," that starred Benedict Cumberbatch. While at Bletchley we'll also visit the National Museum of Computing, which houses Colossus, the world's first semi-programmable computer; it was also invented here during the war and still operates on its original tubes (valves). On our way to our final U.K. lodgings of the tour, we'll make a brief stop at the Runnymede Air Forces Memorial. Overlooking the Thames River near Heathrow sits a tower, cloister and memorial wall on which are inscribed the names of more than 116,000 men and women (including 3,050 Canadian) aircrew with no known graves. After paying our respects, we make our way to our hotel and enjoy one last meal together – the Farewell Dinner – before our return trip the next day.

## DAY 11

**Wednesday Sept 10, 2025**

Depart home.