

Following in the Footsteps of the Allies for D-Day's 75th Anniversary



A parade in Ste.-Mère-Église, France, on June 3 was part of the observance of the anniversary of D-Day. Charly Triballeau/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

By Tanya Mohn

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The medieval church that graces the town square in Ste.-Mère-Église, France, has long drawn visitors to pay homage to the American paratroopers who [landed in the Normandy village](#) on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

“God bless the brave,” wrote a family from England in a recent entry in the church’s guest book. “God bless all who fought for peace,” wrote an unnamed visitor, whose sentiments were echoed by travelers from Australia and Portugal. Another simply wrote, “R.I.P.”

Ste.-Mère-Église is one of hundreds of villages and towns, museums, monuments and memorials, fortifications, war cemeteries, landing beaches, battlefields, and other points of interest on [Liberation Route Europe](#), which follows the path of Allied forces as they liberated Europe from German occupation in the final stages of World War II in 1944 and 1945.



American paratroopers landing in Ste.-Mère-Église on June 3. Charly Triballeau/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

“Remembrance tourism is important,” said Jurriaan de Mol, the route’s founder, to ensure that all the suffering and sacrifices made during World War II will not be forgotten. “Most of the eyewitnesses have died, and in a few more years, practically no one will be alive who will be able to tell us what happened,” he said. “People tend to take liberty and freedom for granted.”

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The route, which was officially inaugurated on June 6, 2014, in Arromanches, France, during the D-Day commemorations, is about to add new elements for the 75th anniversaries of D-Day and the end of the war.

Among them is [Europe Remembers 1944-45](#), an initiative that offers an online portal of places to visit, tourist information and a calendar of hundreds of activities, events, special exhibitions, concerts and festivals planned for 2019 and 2020.

Also, a new hiking trail from London to Berlin, a distance of about 1,850 miles, is in development, which will allow travelers to follow in the footsteps of those who fought to liberate Europe. The goal is for the trail to eventually include several thematic branches, similar to the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route. The first phase is expected to open in 2020, said Mr. de Mol, who plans to walk several portions next year with local schoolchildren and town mayors



Jurriaan de Mol, founder of Liberation Route Europe.
Michel deGroot for The New York Times

On Oct. 17 in Berlin, the architectural firm [Studio Libeskind](#) announced plans to design and begin installing next year a system of wayfinding trail markers, wall-mounted signs, plaques at crossroads and remembrance site markers that will display graphics, maps, photographs, information and audio stories to enhance the journey.

The architectural designs will be rendered in many scales and different materials, Daniel Libeskind, Studio Libeskind’s principal design architect, said in a telephone interview. “But in a language of communication which I think will be very clear and bold, so that anyone walking can see the vastness of the catastrophe and the vastness of the victory over these evils,” he said. Mr. Libeskind is the child of Holocaust survivors and lived in Poland under the Communist regime until he was 11.

“We forget at what cost liberation came and what heroism it took,” Mr. Libeskind said, noting the rise of neo-fascism, anti-Semitism and nationalism in Europe. “To remember is to create a better future.”

The idea for Liberation Route Europe began in 2008, when two Dutch tourism students found it difficult to obtain information about World War II sites to visit in Europe.



A rendering of a marker by Studio Libeskind, which has announced plans to design wayfinding trail markers, wall-mounted signs, plaques at crossroads and remembrance site markers along the route. Studio Libeskind

Today the route includes more than 400 sites, experiences, audio spots, historical content, biographies and story lines, in nine countries: Britain, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic and Italy.

“On and offline, we can relive it,” said Mr. de Mol, director of business development and operations for the Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions.

The route has personal significance for him.

His father, who died three years ago, was captured at age 20 and taken as a prisoner to Germany; he escaped soon after arriving at a labor camp. A young farmer in a German village took him in for several months until the war was over. They resumed their friendship nearly 30 years later.

The Liberation Route’s resources and its network of tour guides offer a layer of access for “people who want more of a deep dive,” to little-known, smaller museums and hard-to-reach locations, said Nathan Huegen, director of [educational travel](#) at [the National WWII Museum](#) in New Orleans, which takes about 1,000 to 1,500 history buffs to Europe every year.



A bridge over the Waal River, a tributary of the Rhine. Members of the 82nd Airborne Division crossed it in 1944 as part of Operation Market Garden. Jaleesa Derksen

The route also directs travelers to initiatives that may not be on everyone’s radar, like the [Sunset March](#), a daily tribute in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, to the 48 members of the 82nd Airborne Division who crossed the Waal River, a tributary of the Rhine, on Sept. 20, 1944, as part of [Operation Market Garden](#). That was the code name for an ultimately unsuccessful attempt by the Allies to cross the Rhine and its tributaries and advance into Germany.

Here are some highlights of the experiences to come over the next two years.

IN NORMANDY The Juno Beach Center plans a special exhibition in March: [“Great Women During the War 1939-1945.”](#) The [Caen Memorial Museum](#) plans a Norman Rockwell exhibition and a new building with an immersive experience. The rural town of Carentan, where the Battle of Carentan took place, will add a new IMAX-3D theater to its [D-Day Experience](#), which has two museums, a memorial and a historical trail.

IN THE NETHERLANDS The [Overloon War Museum](#) in Overloon is building a bicycle path that will go through the museum. It is scheduled to open for the 75th anniversary of Operation Market Garden. Visitors will be able to cycle through 90 meters (about 107 yards) of the museum hall at a height of three meters.

IN BELGIUM The [Bastogne War Museum](#) in Bastogne plans a street art exhibition around the Mardasson monument that honors American soldiers wounded or killed during the Battle of the Bulge, connecting its 75th anniversary with the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.