

TOP 5 EUROPEAN CITIES FOR SECOND WORLD WAR HISTORY



The Second World War was a life-changing event for millions of people and left an indelible mark on much of the world. 75 years after peace was declared in 1945, the conflict continues to be somberly remembered. The actions of so many brave men and women are commemorated not just in books, movies, and TV shows, but also in monuments and museums across the globe. Europe was one of the most important theaters during the Second World War, and much of the bloodshed took place on European soil. To begin to understand the immensity of WWII and to pay tribute to all those who were killed or injured during the conflict, it's possible to visit some fascinating European cities that encourage us to keep remembering the past.

Le Havre, France

This city, located in the Normandy region of France, is a great starting point for anyone interested in WWII history. The Normandy beaches were the site of the D-Day landings, the largest sea-based invasion ever recorded, which took place on June 6, 1944. Close to 25,000 Allied troops (including American, British, Australian, French, and Canadian forces) took on heavy German defenses to begin the liberation of Nazi-occupied France and bring an end to the war.

[Several monuments located across the Normandy coastline](#) provide insight into the lives of soldiers and commanders who fought all those years ago. A visit to the American Military Cemetery is also a must. Its 9,387 graves are a striking and poignant reminder of the terrible cost of war. [Normandy has become an incredibly popular tourist spot](#) as a result of its importance in WWII.

London, England

While the streets of London weren't exactly combat theaters like Stalingrad or Berlin, England's capital didn't get off lightly during WWII. The city was continually attacked by German aerial bombs and rockets, in what became known as The Blitz. Tens of thousands lost their lives and many more were injured. Homes and businesses were also ruined as a result of the air attacks that usually took place at night. Perhaps most interesting is the Imperial War Museum in London, where you can hear the tales of Blitz survivors, as well as see British weapons, planes and vehicles used in the war. The IWM's Churchill War Rooms give a glimpse into how Britain planned and strategized a path to victory.

Keep in mind that London has many other free historical museums and attractions to check out, making

it rank as the top European city with free cultural activities.

Berlin, Germany

At the end of the Second World War, the city of Berlin was practically decimated by air raids and harsh street battles that claimed many lives. One of the last major victories for the Allies, the Battle of Berlin resulted in the German surrender and Adolf Hitler's suicide. Today, Berlin is rebuilt and thriving, but many reminders remain. Hitler's bunker, in fact, was destroyed and remade into a parking lot but a solitary plaque exists to mark the location. The Reichstag, which still houses the German parliament, or Bundestag, was rebuilt after the 1933 fire that many historians believe helped Hitler's rise to power.

Furthermore, the Holocaust Memorial is a unique yet somber tribute to the murdered Jews of Europe, with 2,700 concrete blocks of varying sizes all standing in rows. Many smaller reminders dot the streets, too, with tiny gold plaques placed outside of homes stating the names of Jewish victims who once lived there. Although built many years after WWII, the Berlin Wall was a consequence of the event and is an equally devastating part of the city's history. The Wall fell in 1989 but many sections remain standing and act as a stark reminder of Berlin's connection to the war.

Krakow, Poland

Krakow suffered greatly under Nazi oppression during WWII. Much like many other cities in Poland, tens of thousands of Polish Jews were sent to their deaths in concentration and death camps. Among the stories of sadness, however, are occasionally ones of hope. One such story is that of Oskar Schindler and his enamel and munitions factory. It's reported that Schindler saved at least 1,200 Polish lives, protecting Jews from concentration camps by insisting they be kept safe as employees and by bribing Nazi officials. The original factory still remains in Krakow and tells the story of Schindler and the many lives that were saved.

Amsterdam, Holland

Even if Amsterdam itself was spared much destruction during WWII, many of its citizens were forced to go into hiding as a result of the German occupation, living in cramped secret rooms, sometimes inside their own homes. The most famous of these is undoubtedly that of Anne Frank, a young Jewish girl who kept a diary and documented the terror of hiding from German soldiers, primarily from 1942 to 1944. Anne and her family were eventually captured and sent to a concentration camp, where Anne and many other Frank family members died. Anne's father, Otto, survived the war and the Holocaust and was able to publish Anne's diary. The Frank House in Amsterdam is a popular tourist spot where visitors can pay their respects to Anne and her family by hearing more of her story and witnessing the rooms where they managed to hide for several years.

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