

Liberation Tours – Ten Reasons We Loved It



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I posted the [last](#) in a series of twenty-seven articles describing a tour I took with Liberation Tours, based in Ontario. The trip not only met the expectations of myself, my wife Alison and my sisters Anne and Kaye, but exceeded it by almost any measure possible. In this final post I want to explain to those potentially interested in taking a Canadian based military history tour why Liberation Tours is an excellent option.

Liberation Tours' John Cannon & Phil Craig

1. John Cannon and Phil Craig. – John and Phil are the two people responsible for creating Liberation Tours. Both have a common bond in their keen interest (I hesitate to use the word love, but it's probably more true) in Canadian military history – especially WWI and WWII. Phil is an actor by profession. Here is a link to his [Wikipedia entry](#). When you read it you will note that he has appeared with many of the biggest names in the acting business. John was the tour director, making sure that everything was in place and on schedule.

Their decision to create specialized military tours aimed at Canadians was not based on the desire to make a profit, but rather to take Canadians to sites that were incredibly important in shaping the Canadian nation and the identity of its people. Every Canadian should visit Vimy Ridge and Juno Beach at least once in their lives. I think it is very important for John and Phil to make sure that the sacrifices of Canadian men and boys in both wars is not forgotten and there is no better way to do that than visiting them in their final European resting places.

Phil put his acting skills to great use, as the trip historian and re-enactor. Before almost every place we visited Phil would provide us with detailed background information that would make the visit more meaningful. While at the sites Phil would often provide personal stories of individual heroism that made the places come alive.

2. The nightly debriefings – I've been on lots of tours with professional travel guides who disappear the moment the group is checked into the hotel and the day's 'official' activities are over. Not so John and Phil. Like me and many others on Liberation Tours, they like to have a drink or two after the day's exploration are over. Some of the best times on the tour were these sessions in the hotel bar that often led to dinner together afterward with some of the group. So, if you're worried about landing with a bunch of teetotalers, then these are the guys for you.

Liberation Tours is for Canadians

3. Canadians are very easy to travel with – Anyone who has done any amount of traveling on organized tours knows that people from various countries tend to have definite things in common that can make them unpleasant travel companions. I won't name names, but some of the adjectives that come to mind are loud, obnoxious, always late, profoundly ignorant, smelly, boorish, overly demanding and slovenly. Oh, and my personal pet peeve – super cheap. If the Liberation Tour' 2015 tour demonstrated one thing it was that when push comes to shove Canadians can fight with the best of them, but we don't do the pushing and shoving until we are forced to.

On this trip the group was uniformly ready on time, polite and friendly with each other, quite well informed and definitely interested in the things we were seeing and learning. It was a pleasure traveling with them.

4. The little extras – How many trips have you been on where you get nicked and dined for one thing after another? No so with Liberation Tours, in fact, the opposite. There were numerous instances where we were provided free of charge with something extra that was not listed on the itinerary.

5. The food – Speaking of lunches, those that were provided were uniformly excellent. It started the very first day in Paris with the best onion soup I've ever tasted and was repeated in Normandy, northern France, Belgium and Holland. The meals invariably featured local cuisine at places that overflowed with history and local colour. Good wine was provide *gratis* at each meal. At one place they brought out a cake especially baked for our tour and it was delicious.

6. The transmitter doohickeys – We were all provided with these. Their purpose was to allow John or Phil to talk without the necessity of the entire group gathering around them to hear what they were saying. With these devices we could be up to 50 yards away and hear clearly what was being said. I know these are used by other companies, but I didn't see a lot of the groups on other tours with them on.

Liberation Tours Driver and Guide

7. Pieter the bus driver – We had a Belgian bus driver named Pieter who was terrific. He had an absolutely uncanny ability to get us to events before the crowds of other buses arrived and even better get us away when they were finished. This was demonstrated to perfection at the last event, the parade in Wageningen where there had to be thousands of people trying to get on one of the hundreds of buses that had brought them there. Somehow Pieter got our bus to the front of the line and with the combination of John's leadership and our entire group's ability to stay together we were on and out of there in ten minutes. I saw later on the news that night that there was a huge traffic jam with others stuck for hours. Pieter also arranged for a private driver (his ex-mother-in-law) for Alison and I to visit her uncle's grave outside Calais.

8. Mark, the Trafalgar man – On this occasion Liberation Tours used the services of Trafalgar to provide the coach, driver and European guide for the duration of the tour. The guide was Mark, a British expat living in France who knew every place we visited like the back of his hand. He was invaluable in recommending good restaurants, places to buy wine and beer, local attractions and getting us to the front of the line at the Bayeux Tapestry. He also made sure that hotel arrivals and departures went off like clockwork. I've never been on a tour where it took so little time to get checked into your room. That left more time for indulging in reason #2.

9. The anti-Bob Uecker treatment – Many readers will remember the series of beer commercials where former baseball player Bob Uecker upon being given free tickets to a game would comment "I must be in the front row" as he was escorted to the worst seat in the stadium. Well with Liberation Tours it was the opposite. We had front row seats for the Wageningen parade and nearly so at the Groesbeek and Holten ceremonies. At Holten the group was the only one that shared the same restaurant as the Prime Minister's party with the result my sister managed a photo with the PM.

10. The cost – The hotels we stayed at were uniformly good or better. The included meals were excellent. We had the services of four individuals throughout the trip. While there are some tours I saw that were cheaper I would be hard pressed to think they could provide the value that Liberation Tours did for us.

I could perhaps add an 11th reason, but that is yet to come – the chance to travel with John and Phil again, which will definitely happen. We are now booked for Italy in 2016.

I hope my readers have enjoyed this series and will follow me on my next adventures.