

SUN TRAVEL

WHAT TO TAKE: What to leave at home

When it comes to packing for a trip, Canadians have their priorities in order. Passport? Check. Travel insurance? Check. Smartphone? Maybe. A new survey from Hotels.com, reveals our 10 travel must-haves from swimwear to deodorant: canoe.ca/alwayspack.

England remembers

World War I centenary kicks off four years of commemoration

ROBIN ROBINSON
Toronto Sun

Europe is in a reflective and somewhat sombre mood this year with hundreds of ceremonies, events, exhibits taking place to mark the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I and historic milestones of the four-year conflict.

Britain alone has earmarked some \$200-million to commemorate the WWI centenary and its pivotal events over the next four years.

While on my radar, the “Great War” has always seemed far removed from modern life in Canada. My grandparents were still children when young men the world over answered the call to arms. And although my grandmother’s older brother fought, was injured, returned to his beloved Newfoundland but later died of complications from his injuries, he passed away decades before I was born.

So an invitation to join a commemorative press trip and tour the revamped First World War Galleries at London’s Imperial War Museum made me wonder how a war that occurred before most adults on the planet were even alive could have relevance today. And what interest could it hold for our wired offspring?

Then I reconsidered.

The current state of world events — armed conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Israel, Gaza, Afghanistan, the Ukraine and more — reminded me that, except for brief periods in the past 100 years, the world has lurched from war to war. Millions of soldiers and civilians have died or been maimed, millions more displaced.

And much of the horror has played out on TV, the web and



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM PHOTO

Visitors to the Imperial War Museum check out a timeline table, one of many interactive displays in the new First World War Galleries. The London museum recently reopened to the public after a major renovation.

social media. So unlike earlier generations, today’s young people see war as it happens — bombs exploding, buildings collapsing and people dying — in real time.

The naive dream of world peace, so optimistically espoused by my generation, has proven to be no more than a series of ephemeral respites between more wars.

And if there are lessons to be learned from past wars, we have yet to learn them. Perhaps looking back will one day help us move forward. Here are a few places in England where visitors can do that:

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

After a major renovation, London’s Imperial War Museum reopened in July.

The new permanent First World War Galleries now tell a

comprehensive story of WWI from beginning to end — how it was started, fought and won, the lives of soldiers on the front lines and civilians on the home front, and the war’s impact on the world.

The 14 areas dedicated to WWI include 1,300 artefacts from the museum’s vast collection — everything from weapons, shell fragments, a Sopwith Camel fighter plane and a Mark V tank — to recruitment posters from Britain and the Commonwealth, vintage photographs, diaries and letters. Many items are on display for the first time.

Particularly atmospheric is the recreated “trench,” equipped with lighting and sound effects that hint at the “drudgery, discomfort, danger” endured by the troops.

While there is no section

dedicated to Canada’s participation — some 600,000 Canadian men and women served as soldiers, nurses, chaplains and more — objects relating to our country’s role are interspersed throughout.

■ See iwm.org.uk.

BRITISH LIBRARY

A special exhibit, *Enduring War: Grief, Grit and Humour* continues through Oct. 12 at the British Library. Items in this collection tell the personal stories of war through letters and Christmas cards written to and from the front, editorial cartoons and commentary of the time, propaganda, trench journals and magazines full of dark humour, which were created to buoy soldiers’ spirits.

Artefacts include a letter written by Sherlock Holme’s creator Sir Arthur Conan to

his mother. In it, the author expresses concern for his eldest son, who is fighting at the front (although badly wounded, the young Conan Doyle survived the war but died of influenza in 1918).

The exhibition closes with numerous expressions of grief over lives lost during the war (an estimated 16 million perished). A soldier’s last letter home before he goes into battle is particularly poignant. It’s displayed alongside manuscripts and musical scores — Wilfred Owen’s *Anthem For A Doomed Youth*, Vaughan Williams’ *A Pastoral Symphony* and Laurence Binyon’s poem *For The Fallen*.

■ The British Library has a new WWI website that links to 500-plus historical sources across Europe. See bl.uk and bl.uk/world-war-one.

TREASURE HOUSES

Many of England’s “great houses” rose to the challenge of supporting the war effort. Some even transformed their estates into hospitals for wounded soldiers.

These include stately Blenheim Palace (childhood home of future prime minister Winston Churchill, who served in WWI and lost several close family members), Highclere Castle (filming location for the lavish period drama *Downton Abbey*), and Cliveden (the Astor family home and wartime base of a Canadian Red Cross hospital).

All of these magnificent properties open to the public for tours. In addition, the Historic Houses Association has an online heritage trail that tells more about England’s great houses in wartime.

■ See blenheimpalace.com, highclerecastle.co.uk, nation-attrust.org.uk/cliveden and hha.org.uk.

NEED TO KNOW — LONDON

■ For details WWI commemorative events, see 1914.org.

■ For travel information, see visitengland.com.

■ London hotels are notoriously expensive but newcomer Z Hotels has well-located and well-priced properties (Soho, Victoria, Piccadilly). I stayed at Z Piccadilly, where the rooms are very small but well-designed and super-clean. Rates from about \$145 per night — a bargain for central London. See thezhotels.com.

■ London’s Visitor Oyster Card provides discounts on transit, shopping, food and more. See tfl.gov.uk/travel-information/visiting-london.

✉ robin.robinson@sunmedia.ca

🐦 @RobinSUNroams

JOIN OUR TRAVEL
SOCIAL SCENE

HOW WE ROLL: Each Wednesday, we ask readers a different question about their trips. This week we want to know about your cruising style. Game of Thrones shore excursion? Sailaway with KISS or the Backstreet Boys? What do you look for in a cruise? Tell us at facebook.com/torontosun or Tweet #TOSunTravel.

