

Mike Armitage

London Blue Badge Tourist Guide

Michael John ARMITAGE

DOB 9th November 1956

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Personal

I am 64 years old, married since 1995, and have 4 children aged between 16 and 20 (there is set of twins in there). I have lived in Windsor since 1994.



Law Enforcement Career

I joined HM Customs & Excise in January 1976, after leaving school. Most of my career was spent at Heathrow airport doing anti-drugs work. During this time, I started training other Customs officers and discovered my enjoyment of teaching. I received training in tuition techniques and began teaching in the UK, both as a Course Director and a specialist trainer. I was seconded overseas for various branches of the British Government and United Nations on many occasions to undertake airport drug law enforcement courses in countries as varied as Rwanda, Bangladesh, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates and many others.

In 2006, on the formation of the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) I was asked to join, and worked for them in Central London, and later for the National Crime Agency (NCA) on their formation in 2013. In 2014 I took redundancy from the NCA, and formally retired in November 2016 on reaching 60 years of age.

From 2004 onwards in Customs, SOCA and the NCA I was security vetted to the highest level, although this lapsed as soon as I left their employment.

Guiding qualification

When I began to look beyond my Law Enforcement career, I realised that I wanted another line of work, that I could undertake on a part time basis, and that was completely different from what I had previously done. In 2007 I applied to be on the London Blue Badge Tourist Guide course run by the Institute of Tourist Guiding and was accepted onto the course starting in September 2008. The Blue Badge is the UK's highest guiding qualification. The training is detailed and comprehensive and covers all three modes of guiding - guided walks, at sites and on a moving vehicle. The course consisted of two evening lectures a week, and a full day of practical training every Saturday.

In April 2010 I passed all the exams and practical tests and became a holder of the Blue Badge for the London region. I am fully qualified to guide all the main tourist sites in London, all the districts of London and sites that are within one day's return travel from London, such as Stonehenge or Windsor.

Until June 2014, I was guiding part time while still working in law enforcement, but on leaving full time work I started guiding much more until today, when it is effectively a full-time job between March and September.

During the Coronavirus lockdown in 2020, I took and passed the basic and advanced online Virtual Guiding course run by the British Guild of Tourist Guides.

Before COVID restrictions most of my guiding were personal tours for couples and family groups at attractions in London, or special interest tours – normally WW2 themed – for small groups. I also frequently carried out personal tours of Windsor castle, as I only live a 15 minute walk away from the castle.

Military guiding and tour managing.

As soon as I started guiding, I realised that my background knowledge of the First and Second World war was more than most guides, and I started to specialise in Blitz and other 20th century warfare guided walks, along with the military Museums – primarily the Churchill War Rooms and the Imperial War Museum, Lambeth (IWM), but also RAF Museum at Hendon, Bletchley Park and HMS Belfast amongst others.

I have run regular guided walks for the Friends of the Imperial War Museum on Mayfair, Pimlico, Westminster and Windsor at War as well as Zeppelin raids and the firebomb raid on the City of London in December 1940. Some of these were so popular that the IWM friends asked me to run a second walk.

The American Institute for Foreign Study based in London have used me since 2013 to take US college students around the Churchill War Rooms, on a WW2 tour in St. Pauls Cathedral and to lecture on Churchill, and London in WW2. Both of my parents were children in London during the Second World War, and I was able to use their experiences to personalise the last lecture.

Procom Consulting based in Budapest manage Beyond Band of Brothers Tours www.beyondbandofbrothers.com European tours and have used me several times as their London and South East England guide on some of their tours. Last year I had the honour to accompany 11 US WW2 veterans around the RAF Museum and the Imperial War Museums for them.

Once I left full time employment I started doing tour managing, as well as guiding. This was and is primarily for Road Scholar www.roadscholar.org a US based company who run educational tours, mainly but not exclusively aimed at retired clientele. Since 2014 I have undertaken 6-8 tours every year, mainly in London where I guide the groups as well, and many of these involve me picking up, or taking the group to Paris on the Eurostar to meet their French tour manager. I have accompanied Road Scholar tours to Edinburgh, and Dublin as tour manager.

In June 2019 I was one of the tour leaders for Smithsonian Travels DDay 75th anniversary tour which included visits and lectures in London, taking the group on a ferry crossing from Portsmouth to Caen, and negotiating the security at the 6th June commemoration at the cemetery above Omaha Beach

In May 2018, I help to create, managed and co-guided Road Scholar's initial 8-day tour in SE England and London '*England's History & Heroism in the South East*' examining the effects of war on this country. Ranging from the Norman Conquest to the Cold War it included a battlefield walk (Hastings), Museums, site visits and lectures in meeting rooms and on the coach. I have been given some of the feedback from that tour, and a couple are quoted below:-

- 'Mike was an excellent leader guiding the group through a complex history. His knowledge of military history is extensive which he presents with skill and humor. He was able to relate to all both as a group and individually, quickly learning everyone's name and interest. I enjoyed how he supplemented the national history with stories of his family in those times.'
- 'Mike was very knowledgeable about the history of the areas that we visited, especially the war tactics, arms, etc. He was very witty and kept us all engaged.'

I led their next '*England's History & Heroism in the South East*' at the end of September 2-18.

In September 2016 I was tour manager and battlefield and London guide for the official delegation from the Pacific island of Niue who were attending the centenary commemorations of New Zealand's entry in the Battle of the Somme. I met them in Arras, guided them around the Somme battlefield, and took them to the official French/NZ commemoration on 15th September. I then returned with them on Eurostar to London where I guided them around London and took them to a further commemoration in Hornchurch, Essex before accompanying them to Heathrow for their departure.

Their delegation included a Government Minister and the head of Niue's Returned Servicemen Association. On 15th September I organised the group through the heavy French security, their dealings with New Zealand diplomats and armed forces, and a meeting with Prince Charles.

I am a member of the Imperial War Museums and the International Guild of Battlefield Guides.

Normandy WW2 sites

I am not qualified to guide the D-Day sites, but I have visited them on several occasions and know them well. In October 2016 I accompanied an US family around the US and British landing beaches and other sites. One of the family was a serving junior officer in the US Army, and the family have contacted me again to organise a tour around some of the First World War battlefields.

Internet Presence

Website www.mikearmitagetouristguide.co.uk

Personal Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/mike.armitage.50>

Guiding Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Mike-Armitage-London-Tourist-Guide-102888029779179/>

Trip Advisor https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g186338-d7322059-Reviews-Mike_Armitage_Tourist_Guide-London_England