



# RED STAR LINE MUSEUM

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE,  
— ONE DREAM —



## **A JOURNEY FOR LIFE**

Dear

This teaching material will provide you with some inspiration for preparing your visit and guiding your pupils.

### **PREPARING YOUR VISIT**

Book your visit by e-mail to [rsl\\_balie@stad.antwerpen.be](mailto:rsl_balie@stad.antwerpen.be)

Do you prefer a guided tour? Experience Antwerp will gladly assist you. Call them at + 32 3 205 56 05 or book online on [www.experienceantwerp.be](http://www.experienceantwerp.be).

### **UPON ARRIVAL**

Kindly report to the reception desk.

You will receive wristbands for the entire group.

All the students and supervisors are required to wear this wristband around their wrist.

Request the key to a group locker. Store coats, backpacks and umbrellas.

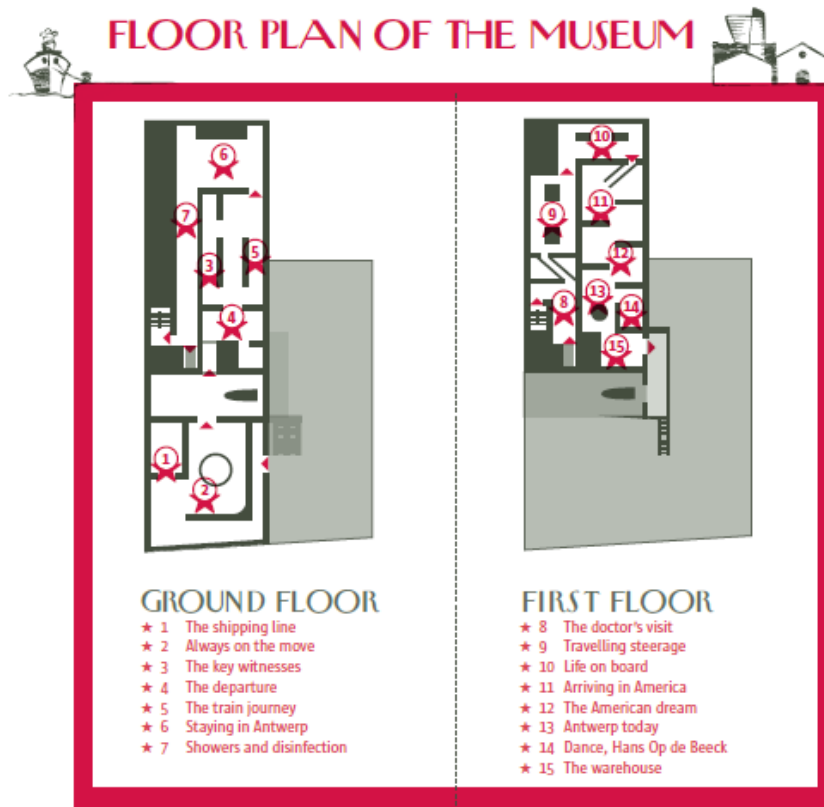
Remind the students that eating and drinking is prohibited in the museum galleries.

No flash photography is permitted. Ask everyone to mute his or her cell phone or other devices.

Once in the galleries, kindly note that visitors may not touch the items on display, including the suitcases. Obviously, this does not apply to the multimedia displays.

Our museum guards hold the museum very dear. Kindly take to heart any comments they make.

## THE MUSEUM VISIT



### Stop 1: migrants in the building

Take the students to the **first museum gallery**.  
Stop in front of the large photo of the migrants.

Ask the students to look at the photo. Ask them where they think this photo was taken. Point out the gate in and behind the photo to the students. Tell them this about the photo:

"One hundred years ago, these people stood here, in this exact place. They are migrants. They probably came from far away. From Poland, Russia or Ukraine. They had a dream. They wanted to travel to America. That is why they had sold all their possessions and put everything they owned in large wicker baskets, suitcases and bags. These people were about to travel to America on board of a Red Star Line ship. However, before they could leave, they were checked in these buildings. First, their luggage was disinfected. It was placed in an autoclave or large steam sterilising machine to purge the bacteria, viruses and lice. Then the people who wanted to leave had to shower for almost an hour. They had to take off their clothes, which were also disinfected. Only then could they see a medical officer. Once he gave them a clean bill of health, they could board the ship and leave."

These checks all took place in these buildings. These were the buildings of the Red Star Line. Nowadays this is a museum. Here we will learn more about the experiences of these adults and children on their journey.

Involve the students in the story by asking them a few questions:

Who or whose family has already moved? From where to where? Can you describe this experience?

Who has experienced migration first-hand? Can you describe this experience?  
Who has had to say farewell to someone or something? How did this make you feel?

### **Stop 2: the shipping company**

Take the students to the ship model of the Vaderland ([gallery 1 on the floor plan](#)).

Start by telling the students something about the shipping company:

"This ship is the first ever Red Star Line ship. It is called the Vaderland. The Red Star Line was a shipping company. It was established by Americans and Antwerpens. The ships sailed from Antwerp to America and back for almost sixty years. Its main ports of call were Philadelphia and New York. The ships transported people and cargo. Most passengers travelled in steerage. This was cheap but the accommodation was very basic. In total, almost two million people sailed across the ocean from Antwerp on board a Red Star Line ship. All these ships departed from this quay, along the Scheldt.

This particular ship, the Vaderland, left Antwerp for Philadelphia on 20 January 1873. The journey was terrible. Normally the ship was supposed to reach Philadelphia in twelve days. There was such a terrible storm en route, however, that they ran out of coal. The ship was forced to stop in a Canadian port for more coal. Finally, the ship arrived in Philadelphia, after almost one month. That is where the 107 immigrants disembarked. They had spent most of the time below deck (*the black line on the model*). One of the 107 passengers was sent back for health reasons.

### **Stop 3: always on the move**

Give the students some time to watch the film in the globe ([gallery 2 on the floor plan](#))

Tell the students that people have been on the move for centuries, from the very first steps man took in Africa to the present day.

### **Stop 4: a museum-full of stories**

Walk towards [gallery 3](#), the key witnesses.

Take a moment to look around in this hall full of photos.

Tell the students that all these people travelled to the other side of the world on board of a Red Star Line ship. Don't forget to mention that the museum has collected the stories of these and many more passengers and shares them with the public here.

### **Stop 5: the key witnesses**

Take the group to the display case of the Moel family ([gallery 3](#)).

Tell them the story of the Moel family:

In the winter of 1921, nine-year old Ita Moel was living in Lyubar, a village in the Russian Empire, in present-day Ukraine, with her brothers. Her grandmother had died unexpectedly. Their mother Chaja had been living in Warsaw for quite some time. Their father, who had been living in the United States for several years, arranged tickets for his family through a Polish travel agent. One cold day, a big sleigh suddenly stopped in front of their door. Ita and her brothers were told to put on the warmest things they had. They embarked on a long and gruelling trip to Warsaw, where their mother was waiting for them.

There the family tried to obtain visas. During the physical examination in Warsaw, the doctor noticed that Ita and one of her brothers had trachoma, an infectious eye disease. A long and painful treatment ensued, which involved the scraping of the eyeball and the inner eyelid.

Once Ita and her brother were given a clean bill of health, the family travelled to Antwerp by train. They were given permission to embark on the Lapland, without medical or administrative objections. Once they arrived in Ellis Island, the physicians discovered traces of the infection in Ita's eyes. She was separated from her family and prevented from entering the United States. Her mother was forced to make a heart-breaking choice: should she return to Antwerp with all of her children or only send back her daughter for treatment? She chose the latter option.

Ita returned to Antwerp all on her own. There she received assistance from the Jewish aid organisation, Ezra. She lived in Hotel Jaffa, which provided accommodation to migrants. Her trachoma was treated. After a year, there no longer seemed to be any traces of the disease. Ita left for New York on the Belgenland. She was sent back again for health reasons.

Once back in Antwerp, Ezra stepped in again to take care of her. Ita was completely dependent on the organisation. She spent some time living in Hotel Jaffa. The hotel was often busy, dirty and full of strange characters. Not exactly a good place to live for a young girl on her own. Ita also had to move regularly.

She learnt Dutch and French, as well as English during her long treatment and stay in Antwerp. She even took piano lessons for a while. She made many friends in the hotel where she lived, including other children who were waiting to join their family in the United States, just like her. Ita became good friends with Toba, another girl in the same situation. They regularly wrote to each other. The despair of the two girls is palpable in one of their letters:

*"Dear friend, you write that one day you hope to be reunited with your parents, are you just writing this for the sake of it, or is this true? (...)*

*I have visited the head physician on several occasions and sometimes they tell me I can go home and other times they say I'm still sick. Now I don't believe anything they say anymore. I always had the courage to continue but now I no longer do."*

In the summer of 1927, Ita was given a clean bill of health again. By then, she was fourteen years old and had been living in Antwerp for five years. At the time, the final American examination no longer took place in Ellis Island but in the departure port. Ita fearfully waited for the American medical officer's verdict in Antwerp. To her great joy, she was given the green light to leave. Ita knew that the next crossing would not end at the gates of New York.

On 1 July, Ita boarded the ship that would take her to the United States forever. She joined her parents and brothers in Huntington, West Virginia. There she went to school and worked in her father's clothes shop. She changed her name to Edith.

In the framework of the Ellis Island Oral History project her brother Morris shared the story of his family's journey and the misery his sister had to endure.

*"She told me that she had quite a tough time there. She moved from place to place. The Jewish organisations arranged this but it wasn't... it wasn't such a pleasant experience. It felt as if she was dragged from here to there and back. It really wasn't a fun life. She made a lot of friends who were the same age. Boys and girls. She wrote letters to them. Even when some of them had already gone back to the United States."*

In the film Morris Moel, who was 100 years old at the time, shared his family history.

Ask the students what would push them to leave everything behind and start anew somewhere else. Ask them what could be the consequences of this decision.

### Stop 6: the departure

Take the students to the travel agency ([gallery 4 on the floor plan](#)).

Explain that there are various reasons for leaving. Then and now. The main reason for leaving in the era of the Red Star Line was poverty. A ticket was quite expensive however. It took a labourer 75 days of work to earn enough to buy one. Families often left in phases. Men would leave first to check out the country and establish themselves. Then, their wife and/or children would follow, sometimes many years later.

Migrants often bought an all-in ticket, which included the train journey to Antwerp, a hotel and a ticket for the ship.

Point out the ticket in the display case.

It also took the migrants a long time to get to their destination. Use **the app** to show how long the journey took. Discuss the duration of the journey from Warsaw to New York.

### Stop 7: the train

Take the students to the train ([gallery 5 on the floor plan](#)). Stop in front of the large photo.

Ask the students what they see.

Point to the luggage. Ask the students what they would bring.

Explain that two million migrants left from Antwerp. Most of them came from Eastern Europe. They chose to travel to Antwerp because it was easy to get here by train.

The migrants sat at the back of the train, and were separated from the other travellers. There was no heating, the seats were hard. The train journey could take several days. There were several checks en route. The migrants and their luggage would also be disinfected at various stations.

Give the students some time to listen to the stories.

### Stop 8: arriving in Antwerp

Take the students to Antwerp ([gallery 6 on the floor plan](#)).

Ask the students if they know the station. Ask them what impression the station makes on them.

Tell them that the migrants would walk through Antwerp. In 1913, during the shipping company's heyday, about 4,000 migrants a week arrived in Antwerp's Central Station. The neighbourhood around Central Station was very upscale at the time. There were many restaurants, stores with window displays full of luxury products. Most migrants were completely overwhelmed and did not know where to look first.

A representative of the shipping company would be waiting for them at the station. He would take the migrants to the hotel. The shipping company did this to protect customers against swindlers.

Point out the photo of Hotel Frankfurt. Reinhold Liao stayed in this hotel.  
Share his story:

On 11 August 1887, Reinhold Libau bade farewell to his wife and children in the village of Leulitz, in Saxony, in Eastern Germany. He left for America to buy a farm and he had no idea when he would see his family again. During the journey, he kept a detailed journal, recording his impressions, the key events, as well as noting down the prices of food.

Reinhold purchased his ticket in Leipzig and left for Antwerp by train. An employee of Stadt Frankfurt, a hotel in Antwerp, was waiting for him and other migrants in Central Station. He showed the employee the card with the name of the hotel, which he received from the migration officer in Leipzig.

Reinhold spent one night in the German-language hotel in the station neighbourhood. There were other German migrants there, as well as migrants from Bohemia and Poland. Many of them were Jewish. There were also children of all ages in the hotel. The owner helped them arrange the last formalities before their departure with the Red Star Line the next morning.

*"We gave our host our tickets, which he then took to the nearby headquarters of the Red Star Line to be stamped and where the coupon for the American train trip was detached. Later that evening, we got the tickets back, along with our voucher for the train trip in America and a boarding pass for admittance to the ship."*

That evening Reinhold ate soup with macaroni, pot roast with prunes and white and whole-wheat bread in the hotel. After dinner, Reinhold decided to explore the city. The Stadt Frankfurt Hotel was located in the heart of the station neighbourhood. There were several amenities for the migrants and for other travellers here: restaurants with terraces on the sidewalk, cheap shops and street peddlers who tried to sell migrants blankets and snacks for on board the boat. The city made quite an impression on Reinhold.

*"Together with a few other passengers, I took a walk in the city, which seemed to be a large city. There were nice large buildings, wide streets, streetcars, electric lighting and a permanent massive circus and lively traffic, large and striking shop windows and many restaurants. The latter had chairs and tables on the sidewalks, in front of the windows for outdoor service. The pedestrians had to go into the street to get by."*

After his walk, Reinhold returned to the hotel.

*"I was led to the fourth floor for sleeping. The bedroom contained three large metal beds with springs and feather mattresses and cotton blankets and I had a good sleep in one of these. Three other colleagues shared the two other beds. All the hand luggage was stored in a covered courtyard."*

At 4 a.m. Reinhold got up and prepared his departure. In the hotel's breakfast room there was plenty of white and whole-wheat bread available as well as butter, coffee, milk and sugar. Together with the other guests - about one hundred of them by his estimate - he walked to the port.

*"Before 7 a.m. we reached the steamship Belgenland. An immense crowd was gathered here, consisting of many hundreds of migrants, but also many merchants and the curious who had followed us. Several wagons drove by, heavily laden with straw mattresses. Dockworkers brought them to the ship. They were meant for us passengers in steerage. Then they boarded the first-class or cabin passengers. They would occupy the upper structure on this deck. Then we, the steerage passengers, were allowed on board. Now the pushing started again because everyone wanted to be first, and the yelling, the pushing and the screaming seemed endless, and the children suffered the most."*

Once on board the Belgenland I, Reinhold looked back one last time at Rijnkaai, at Antwerp, at Europe, with a sense of nostalgia.

*"Hundreds of spectators on land were waving hats and handkerchiefs and calling, and soon they faded from view. I have to admit that I was overcome by nostalgia in that instant; when I thought of my loved ones at home, my eyes filled with uncontrollable tears. Would I ever see them again?"*

Reinhold Libau arrived safely in the United States. In spite of some setbacks, he managed to buy a farm. Two months later, he returned to Leulitz to pick up his family. The entire family migrated to the United States.

You can see Reinhold Libau's diary at the end of the exhibition.

When the time had come for embarkation, a representative of the shipping company picked up the migrants at their respective hotels. They then walked through the city to the port in a long procession. In **the painting** a man, he is wearing a cap with a red star, leads the procession across Nassau Bridge, near the MAS museum today, to the buildings where we are now.

The anxious wait started in these buildings. Here the decision was made whether a migrant could leave.

### **Stop 9 showering and disinfecting**

Take the students to the showers (**gallery 7 on the floor plan**).

Show them **the outline of the showers** on the floor. Here were the women's showers. The men's showers were on the other side. The migrants had to shower before they could leave. They had to spend an hour in the shower. The water was 38°C. For many of them, it was their first shower ever. Their clothes were disinfected while they were showering. After an hour, they were handed a bag with their clothes in it, which was marked "Cleaned and disinfected by Red Star Line".

Sometimes the migrants also had to rub themselves with benzene and hot vinegar. It was said to purge lice and fleas.

Let the group smell these odours.

Explain that the migrants would walk up the staircase after their showers, to where the medical office was sitting. He would decide whether a migrant could leave.

### **Stop 10: the doctor's visit**

Walk up the staircase with the students to the medical office (**gallery 8 on the floor plan**). Emphasise that many migrants walked up these stairs. It was a very tense experience because upstairs they would hear whether they could board the ship.

Point out the photo of the waiting room. Explain that the medical officer would check many migrants every day. The American Government required this. They only wanted to let in



healthy people. Until World War I, the examination was very short. Then it became longer. On average, it would last 20 minutes but in some cases, it could take up to 90 minutes.

The photos show the examination for lice and trachoma, the illness from which Ita Moel suffered. Trachoma was an infectious eye disease, which could result in blindness. People with trachoma were always detained.

In addition to the medical examination by the medical officer, the documents of the migrants were also checked here. They had to answer a long list of questions.

### Stop 10: the crossing in steerage

Take your group to the deck of the ship ([gallery 9 on the floor plan](#)).

Show them the girl on the deck in steerage and point out the elegant women on the first-class deck. Explain that there were great differences on board between the rich people in first class and the poor people in steerage. Tell them the first-class deck was really higher than the steerage deck.

The passengers in steerage slept well below deck. They could only go out weather permitting. Initially they slept in large dorms, just above the cargo. Over time, the conditions improved. Smaller dorms were built, for men, women and families. Afterwards cabins for four and even two passengers were added.

The journey would take ten to twelve days. Use **the app** to show how many people there were on board the ship.

Ask the students how they would spend ten days on board a ship. Emphasise that there was no TV, computers or phones in the days of the Red Star Line.

### Stop 11: life on board

Take the group to **the half model** of the Belgenland ([gallery 10 on the floor plan](#))

Point out the big difference between cabin class and steerage. Add that this was one of the shipping company's last ships. The conditions in steerage are significantly better than in the early years of the Red Star Line. And yet, there could be no contact between first class passengers and steerage passengers.

In addition to first class and steerage there was also a second class. Irene Bobelijn, *one of the passengers in the classroom preparation*, travelled in second class. She had a beautiful Christmas story to tell. Share Irene's story briefly:

Irene Bobelijn followed her parents to the United States at the age of six. Her father had been living and working there since 1912. After working as a farmer in Wisconsin for a few years, he settled in Moline, Illinois, along the Mississippi as a labourer. He regularly returned to Belgium. In 1925, he took Irene's mother to America with him. Three-year old Irene stayed behind with her grandparents in Sint-Amansberg. Her parents earned a good living and in 1928, they decided the time had come for their daughter to join them in Moline.

*"In 1928, my parents wanted me to leave to America. They were already there. My dad worked in the John Deere plants in Moline. He was an ironworker. And my mother, she had a really nice job there.*

*Because stars appear in iron when you cast it. And she had to hammer out the stars with a small hammer."*

In December 1928, Irene left for New York on board the Pennland. The whole family came to wave goodbye. She travelled in second class, with a governess. Her parents had arranged this. Two stewards were also asked to keep an eye out for her. Irene called them "detectives". The journey was quite an adventure for young Irene. Her governess was seasick for almost the entire journey but that did not deter Irene from exploring the ship. Many years later, she still remembered many details of life onboard.

*"The thing we all enjoyed watching, was when the cooks would throw food over the railings. Bins full of chickens. And then the flying fish would appear. These fish, they would jump up out of the water, and they would always jump up very high to catch the food."*

*"We could go anywhere we wanted. We could walk on the large deck too. But those who were staying in the hull of the ship, they weren't allowed out. They were locked up in a way, because they didn't dare to venture upstairs. Only at Christmas. I spent Christmas onboard. The whole ship was decorated. And the little Polish children were all given permission to come upstairs and celebrate Christmas with us. Not the adults, only the little ones."*

### **Stop 12: the arrival in America**

Take the students to the schedule that gives an overview of the checks in Ellis Island ([gallery 11 on the floor plan](#)). Explain that New York is the biggest arrival port in the United States. The first- and second-class passengers immediately disembarked in the port of New York. Steerage passengers from all over the world, meanwhile, were transported to Ellis Island on small boats. That is where the last check took place. This was an anxious time for all migrants. About 12 million of them passed through here from 1892 until 1924.

Migrants spent anywhere from two to five hours in Ellis Island. If they were approved, their new life in the United States could start. In total, two percent of the 12 million migrants were sent back.

### **Stop 13: the American dream**

Take the students to Irving Berlin's [piano \(gallery 12 on the floor plan\)](#).

Explain that it certainly was not easy to start a new life. Most of the immigrants had to work hard, working long days for low wages. Often they chose to live in the same place as their friends, family or acquaintances. There they could gradually adapt and continue to enjoy their own music. Newspapers were also published in their own language.

One of these immigrant neighbourhoods was the Lower East Side in New York. This is where Israel Beilin lived. He was five years old when he left Belarus with his family. They travelled to New York on a Red Star Line ship, the Rijnland. He heard a lot of music out of the open windows in the very diverse neighbourhood where he lived. He listened attentively and became a world-famous composer. He wrote songs like "White Christmas" and "There is no business like show business". His daughter donated one of his pianos to the museum.

There are many other small and great stories, which Red Star Line passengers have shared. The museum is continuously searching for these stories, as well as for stories about contemporary migrants. So maybe we can help them.

**Stop 14: Antwerp today**

Take the students to Antwerp today (gallery 13 on the floor plan).

Explain that Antwerp continues to be a city where people come and go. Today about 170 nationalities co-exist in the city.

Let the students go in search independently of the stories of contemporary migrants. If the preparatory class was given, then mention Anna's story.

**Stop 15: Het Magazijn**

Take your group to the Depot (gallery 15 on the floor plan).

Explain that this is where the museum collects all the new stories. Add that the museum finds it very interesting to hear the stories of the students.

If applicable, explain that the students will work on a story in class.

**Stop 16: the tower**

Take the students to the tower, where they can enjoy a lovely view of the port and the bend of the River Scheldt. About two million migrants left from here, in hopes of a better life.