



Background: A History of Presidential Summer Vacations

June 4, 2019 (Washington, D.C.) — Since the creation of the American presidency, the country's leaders and their families have taken summer vacations away from the White House. We have compiled the below list of trips and retreats in light of this seasonal topic.

- During the summers of 1862, 1863, and 1864, President Abraham Lincoln and his family resided at the [Soldiers' Home](#), approximately three miles north of the White House. The cool breezes and relatively isolated location provided much needed relief from wartime Washington. While the president was in residence, the home was protected by the soldiers of Company K of the 150th Pennsylvania Infantry. President James Buchanan was the first to use the Soldiers' Home as a presidential retreat. Use of this location by presidents continued off and on until the early 1880s.
- As the nineteenth century progressed, transportation and communication advancements permitted the president to travel greater distances while remaining informed on developing situations and crises. Ulysses S. Grant favored his family home at [Long Branch, New Jersey](#). While staying at his seaside cottage, Grant often drove his team of horses along the beach.
- After their White House wedding on June 2, 1886, President Grover Cleveland and First Lady Frances Cleveland honeymooned at Deer Park, Maryland.
- Theodore and Edith Roosevelt, along with their six children, retreated to Sagamore Hill in Oyster Bay, New York. The Roosevelts also traveled to their cabin Pine Knot near Charlottesville, Virginia.
- The Tafts rented two homes, Stetson Hall and Parramatta, both in Beverly, Massachusetts, to escape the sweltering summers of Washington D.C. Taft also installed a Sleeping Porch on the roof of the White House to catch some of the cooler winds in the city.

- In 1927, President Calvin Coolidge vacationed in the [Black Hills of South Dakota](#), even posing for photographers dressed in western garb. He was made an honorary member of the Sioux Tribe and was given the name Wanblee Tokaha (“Leading Eagle”). He also spoke briefly at the dedication of Mount Rushmore on August 10, 1927.
- 100 miles from Washington, in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, [Camp Rapidan](#) served President Herbert Hoover and First Lady Lou Henry Hoover as a rustic retreat during his administration. By September 1929, power lines had been connected to provide electricity and telephone service. Air mail and drainage facilities were installed for the convenience of President Hoover, his family, and guests. Today Camp Rapidan is located within Shenandoah National Park.
- President Harry S. Truman liked to relax at the [Little White House](#) in Key West, Florida. The press frequently reported on the president’s fondness for short-sleeved tropical shirts; some even embraced the style, wearing similar shirts at the president’s press conferences. The president’s activities included daily walks, reading, swimming, and occasionally fishing.
- Since 1942, [Camp David](#), near Thurmont, Maryland has served as a presidential retreat. In May 1943, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill visited the compound, known at the time as Shangri-La. According to Press Secretary James Haggerty, President Dwight D. Eisenhower renamed the retreat Camp David after his grandson and father, both named David. David was also the president’s middle name.
- President John F. Kennedy was drawn to the sea for his summer retreats, including trips to the family home at Hyannis Port on Cape Cod. An avid fan of American history, Kennedy also took frequent trips to [Civil War battlefields](#) as a way to retreat from Washington while also indulging his personal interests.
- President Lyndon Johnson and his family enjoyed time at the LBJ Ranch along the Pedernales River outside Austin, Texas. First Lady “Lady Bird” Johnson called it “our heart’s home.”
- [Presidential Yachts](#) have also served as floating retreats over the years, though with the rise in air travel, trips upon the “floating White House” have largely become a thing of the past. In one notable trip, [President Harry Truman](#) planned to take a cruise up the New England coast. Half way through the trip, Truman felt besieged by the press and visitors from shore who were eager to spot him. He ordered the captain to sail to

Bermuda—putting physical distance between himself and the stresses of the presidency.

More recent presidents have generally followed the tradition of taking vacations to their personal homes or family compounds, such as Ronald Reagan's "[Ranch in the Sky](#)." These retreats, wired to receive instantaneous communications, are equipped with Secret Service agents and state-of-the-art security systems, serving as smaller versions of the White House.

For more information, visit [whitehousehistory.org](#) or read *Away from the White House*, a book published by the White House Historical Association that details presidential escapes, retreats and vacations.

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About The White House Historical Association

First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy envisioned a restored White House that conveyed a sense of history through its decorative and fine arts. In 1961, the White House Historical Association was established to support her vision to preserve and share the Executive Mansion's legacy for generations to come. Supported entirely by private resources, the Association's mission is to assist in the preservation of the state and public rooms, fund acquisitions for the White House permanent collection, and educate the public on the history of the White House. Since its founding, the White House Historical Association has contributed more than \$50 million in fulfillment of its mission. To learn more about the White House Historical Association, please visit [www.whitehousehistory.org](#).

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