

## INTRODUCTION

Although the White House serves as the president's home and office, almost every chief executive has taken the opportunity to travel during their time in office. While early presidents often returned to their own homes—as many had farms or estates that required attention—others escaped to cottages and cabins closer to the White House or just outside of Washington, D.C. As advances in transportation and communication significantly expanded the distance a president could travel and still fulfill their duties, retreats became a mixture of work and leisure. Discover how and where several presidents retreated to and worked outside the White House.

## CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

Shortly after President John Adams moved into the unfinished White House in November 1800, he lost reelection and realized he would only live in the building for a few months. Adams' short tenure prevented him from enjoying a retreat to his beloved Peace Field in Quincy, Massachusetts. Refer to **Image 1**, in the chart below, to see photographs of the Adams Mansion in Massachusetts in 1787 and 1822. His successor, President Thomas Jefferson, took full advantage of the White House's relative



*Image 2. President Thomas Jefferson's Monticello home in Charlottesville, Virginia (ca. 1980-2006).*

proximity to his home in Virginia. President Jefferson took long summer vacations at his Monticello home located in the mountains near Charlottesville. Monticello was only a few days' travel by horse from Washington, D.C. and was designed by Jefferson himself. President Jefferson took great pride in his craftsmanship and fully completed Monticello when he left office in 1809. View **Image 2**, above, to see a modern photograph of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello home. In the modern era, some presidents continue to make use of private homes as escapes from Washington and the White House. Presidents

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Lyndon B. Johnson and George W. Bush both traveled to their respective ranches in Texas, and President Ronald Reagan did the same at his ranch in California. Presidents Harry S. Truman and Donald J. Trump avoided the cold Washington winters at their own sunny personal retreats in southern Florida.

President John Tyler, however, set the precedent of journeying to government-owned properties for presidential retreats. Following their wedding, President Tyler and First Lady Julia Gardiner honeymooned at Fort Monroe in Virginia in 1844. The couple enjoyed the privacy and comfort of the military base for a month before returning to the White House. In 1851, the U.S. government purchased land a few miles northeast of the White House as a home for retired and disabled veterans. This property—known as Soldiers' Home—was first used by President James Buchanan. **Image 3**, in the chart below, features a photograph of Soldiers' Home around 1863.

Although the neighborhood surrounding Soldiers' Home now bustles with restaurants and shops, it provided a quiet rural retreat for President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. President Lincoln and his family packed up the residential quarters of the White House and moved to a cottage adjacent to Soldiers' Home during the last three summers of his presidency. While President Lincoln commuted to the White House each day by horse or carriage, the cottage—situated on a hill—provided a panoramic view of the capital and an escape from the clamor of Washington, D.C. In the summer of 1862, President Lincoln drafted the Emancipation Proclamation at Soldiers' Home. **Image 4**, in the chart below, pictures President Lincoln's Cottage at Soldiers' Home in 2010.

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*Image 5. President Grant, First Lady Julia Dent Grant, and friends at the New Jersey cottage in 1872.*

President Ulysses S. Grant and his family spent summers in Long Branch, New Jersey before he took office, but his visits as president transformed the fashionable resort town into a premier destination. President Grant's 28-room house provided sufficient space for executive staff and the president frequently conducted business from his chair on the veranda. **Image 5**, to the left, is a photograph of President Ulysses S. Grant, First Lady Julia Dent Grant, and others at the cottage in New

Jersey in 1872. Members of Congress, however, did not approve of President Grant's lengthy vacations that took him away from the capital city. In 1876, Congress went so far as to question the validity of presidential actions taken outside of Washington, D.C. and cited the 1790 Residence Act—the act that officially established Washington, D.C. as the seat of the federal government—as evidence. President Grant ultimately prevailed by outlining the long history of presidential vacations and demonstrating that work could be accomplished away from the White House. This victory allowed future presidents to travel as they saw fit—as long as their absence from the White House did not interfere with the fulfillment of presidential duties.

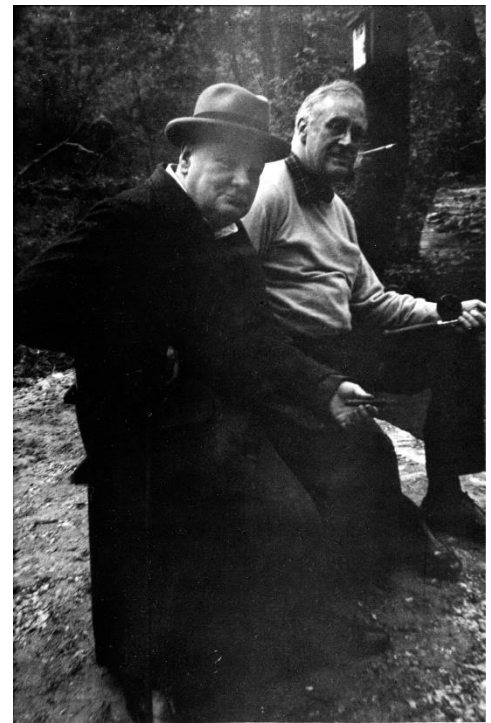
The longest serving president, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was also the one to take the most vacations. President Roosevelt was a longtime lover of the sea—especially fond of cruising the Atlantic coast. When the outbreak of World War II put an end to these trips, President Roosevelt visited his home in Hyde Park, New York; his retreat at Warm Springs, Georgia; and a secret compound in the mountains of Maryland. **Image 6**, in the chart below, is a photograph of President Franklin D. Roosevelt swimming in a pool at Warm Springs, Georgia in 1929. The compound in the mountains of Maryland is known today as “Camp David,” but President Roosevelt originally named the mountain

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hideaway “Shangri-La” after a mythical Tibetan sanctuary in a popular novel. President Roosevelt considered Shangri-La a place for relaxation and retreat, even though he often saw important visitors and made key wartime decisions during his stays. Refer to **Image 7**, below, to see a photograph of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill fishing in a stream at Shangri-La, later known as “Camp David,” in 1943.

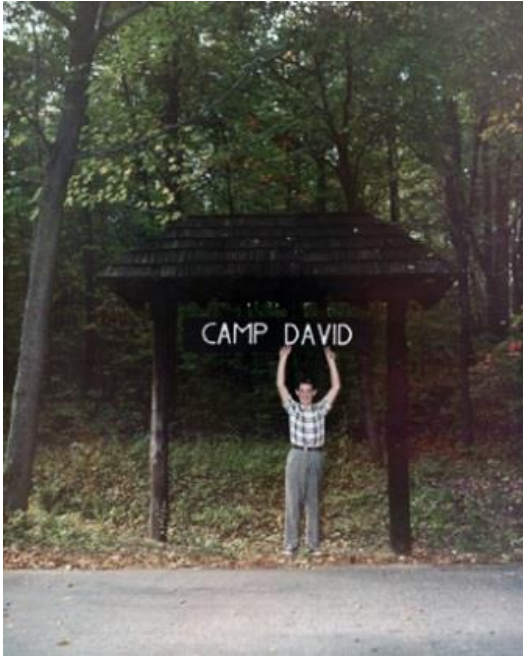
President Dwight D. Eisenhower, however, wanted Roosevelt’s Shangri-La to be a welcoming and secure location to meet with advisors and foreign leaders without the visibility and pressures of the White House. President Eisenhower renamed the compound “Camp David” in honor of his grandson. See President Eisenhower’s grandson, David, posing in front of the “Camp David” entrance in 1960 in **Image 8** below. President Eisenhower entertained both his family and visiting dignitaries. In 1959, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev visited Camp David at the end of a cross-country tour and greatly enjoyed his time at the president’s private retreat. This trip fostered goodwill between the superpowers and provided a brief moment of eased relations between the United States and the Soviet Union amidst Cold War tensions. View **Image 9**, in the chart below, to see a photograph of President Dwight Eisenhower and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev meeting at Camp David in 1959.



*Image 7. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill fishing in a stream at Shangri-La in 1943.*

Camp David continues to serve as a private retreat today. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter hosted secret negotiations between Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat at Camp David. Known as the Camp David Accords, these negotiations marked an important foreign policy achievement for President Carter and earned Begin and al-Sadat a shared

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*Image 8. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's grandson, David, standing outside the Camp David entrance in 1960.*

Nobel Peace Prize. **Image 10**, in the chart below, is a photograph of President Jimmy Carter at a luncheon in the President's Dining Room taken in March 1979—minutes before the signing of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Camp David and other presidential retreats are reminders that the duties of the presidency endure even when chief executives are away from the White House. View **Image 11**, in the chart below, to see a photograph of President Harry Truman with members of the Press in Key West, Florida around 1950.





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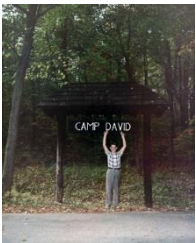



## IMAGES

*Click on web link to access online and for larger viewing*

Source	Title	Date	Created By	Courtesy Of	Thumbnail	Web Link
1	Adams Mansion as it was in 1787 when bought by John Adams; Adams Mansion as it was in 1822	1929	Unknown	New York Public Library		<a href="https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dc-3a2f-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99">https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dc-3a2f-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99</a>
2	Thomas Jefferson's Monticello home, Charlottesville, Virginia	Between 1980 and 2006	Carol M. Highsmith	Library of Congress		<a href="https://www.loc.gov/item/2011635124/">https://www.loc.gov/item/2011635124/</a>
3	Soldiers' Home, Washington, D.C.	Ca. 1863	Charles Mangus	Library of Congress		<a href="https://www.loc.gov/item/95504582/">https://www.loc.gov/item/95504582/</a>
4	President Lincoln's cottage at Soldiers' Home	2010	Carol M. Highsmith	Library of Congress		<a href="https://www.loc.gov/item/2010642160/">https://www.loc.gov/item/2010642160/</a>
5	President Grant and Friends at His Cottage by the Sea	1872	G.W. Pach	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Ulysses%20S%20Grant/6417.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Ulysses%20S%20Grant/6417.tif.info</a>
6	Franklin D. Roosevelt Swims in Warm Springs	1929	Unknown	National Archives and Records Administration		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/6575.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/6575.tif.info</a>

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7	Roosevelt and Churchill Fishing at Shangri-La	1943	Unknown	Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/1112148.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/1112148.tif.info</a>
8	David Eisenhower at the entrance to Camp David	1960	Unknown	U.S. Navy, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home		<a href="https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/67-388-1">67-388-1  Eisenhower Presidential Library (eisenhowerlibrary.gov)</a>
9	DDE and Nikita Khrushchev meet at Camp David	1959	Unknown	U.S. Navy, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home		<a href="https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/67-309-2">67-309-2  Eisenhower Presidential Library (eisenhowerlibrary.gov)</a>
10	The Carters Lunch with Israeli Prime Minister and Egyptian President	1979	Unknown	Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Jimmy%20Carter/2636.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Jimmy%20Carter/2636.tif.info</a>
11	President Truman with Press in Key West	Ca. 1950	Unknown	U.S. Navy; Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Harry%20S%20Truman/1112147.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Harry%20S%20Truman/1112147.tif.info</a>



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Collection: “Presidential Retreats” by the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)
- Newspaper: Article from *New York Tribune*, “Where Members of President Taft’s Official Family Will Spend the Hot Weeks of Summer” from June 6, 1909. [Click here.](#)
- Podcast: “The White House 1600 Sessions: Life at Camp David” by the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)
- Text: “President Harding’s Voyage of Understanding, Hutchinson, Kansas, Side B” on White House Historical Association’s Digital Library. [Click here.](#)

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

### For all learners:

- It is important that the President of the United States stays on a regimented schedule. What do you think the president does on vacation? Create a trip itinerary outlining a day of a presidential retreat.

### For older learners:

- When Congress cited the Residence Act in their criticism of President Grant, he responded with a scathing essay. [Click here](#) to read his response. Do you think he makes an adequate case for presidential travel? Write a brief essay to explain your thinking.
- The president’s job is never done—even when they are on vacation. What technological advancements have made it easier for presidents to perform their duties when away from the White House? Create a timeline of major developments in transportation and communication and write how they impacted presidential travel.

### For younger learners:



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- Make your own Camp David scrapbook with the White House Historical Association's "Camp David Scrapbook" Anywhere Activity! [Click here.](#)
- Although presidents usually work while on vacation, many Americans feel that the President of the United States should not take frequent vacations. Do you think the president should be able to take vacations often? Write a letter to the President of the United States explaining your opinion on presidential retreats.