

INTRODUCTION

The White House serves both as home and office for the president, but almost all chief executives have taken the opportunity to travel during their time in office. Early presidents typically returned to their own homes, as many had farms or estates that required attention. Some presidents found relief in cottages and cabins closer to the White House or just outside of Washington, D.C., and commuted daily to the Executive Mansion. As transportation and communication advances significantly expanded the distance a president could travel and still fulfill their duties, these retreats became a mixture of work and leisure. Find out how several presidential retreats provided escapes from the White House.

CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

Shortly after John Adams moved into the still unfinished White House in November 1800, he learned he had been voted out and would only reside in the Executive Mansion for a few months. This short tenure provided no time for a retreat to his beloved Peace Field in Quincy, Massachusetts (**Image 1**). However, his successor, Thomas Jefferson, would take full advantage of the relative proximity of the White House to his own Virginia home for long vacations each summer. Jefferson's Monticello, in the mountains near Charlottesville, was only a few days' travel by horse from Washington, D.C. The home was designed by Jefferson himself, who considered it a crowning personal achievement.



Image 2

Perpetually under construction, Monticello was not fully completed until 1809 when Jefferson left office (**Image 2**).

It was tenth President John Tyler who set the precedent for using government-owned properties for presidential retreats. After Tyler's marriage to Julia Gardiner in 1844, the couple honeymooned at Fort Monroe in Virginia. They enjoyed the privacy and comfort of the military base for a month

before returning to the White House. Then in 1851, the U.S. government purchased land in Washington, D.C., just a few miles northeast of the White House, as a home for retired and disabled veterans. This property, the Soldiers' Home, was first used by President James Buchanan (**Image 3**).

The Soldiers' Home is best known for Abraham Lincoln's time there during the Civil War. Though the residential neighborhood surrounding this property now bustles with restaurants and shops, in the nineteenth century it provided a quiet, rural retreat. During the last three summers of Lincoln's presidency, the family packed up the residential quarters of the White House and moved uptown to a cottage on the grounds of the Soldiers' Home (**Image 4**). This cottage, situated on a hill, provided a panoramic view of the capital, as well as an escape from the clamor of the Executive Mansion. Lincoln commuted to the White House each day by horse or carriage. While staying at Soldiers' Home in the summer of 1862, he became convinced that abolishing slavery was essential to preserving the Union and began drafting the Emancipation Proclamation.

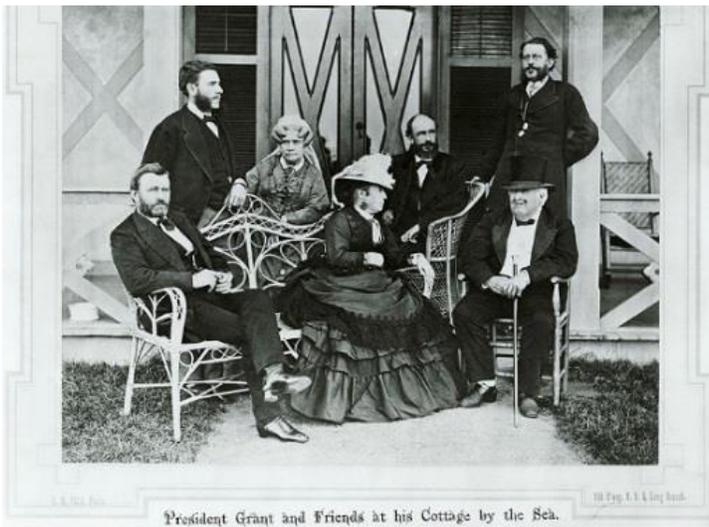


Image 5

From Union general to president, Ulysses S. Grant and his family had summered at Long Branch, New Jersey, before he took office, but his visits as president helped transform the fashionable resort town into a premier destination. Grant's twenty-eight-room house provided room for executive staff and secretaries, and the president frequently conducted business from his chair on the veranda (**Image 5**). However, members of Congress were displeased by Grant's lengthy

vacations. In 1876, they questioned the validity of actions taken outside the capital, citing the 1790 Residence Act that established Washington, D.C., as the seat of the federal government. Grant

ultimately prevailed by demonstrating just how much work could be accomplished while away from the capital and outlining a history of presidential vacations. This victory freed 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.

It should come as no surprise that the longest-serving president was also the one to take the most vacations. Franklin D. Roosevelt, a longtime lover of the sea, was especially fond of cruising the Atlantic coast. When the Second World War put an end to these trips, Roosevelt satisfied himself with visits to his home at Hyde Park, New York; his retreat at Warm Springs, Georgia (**Image 6**); and a secret compound in the mountains of western Maryland. Known today as Camp David, Roosevelt originally named the mountain hideaway Shangri-La after the mythical Tibetan sanctuary in a popular novel. Even though he saw important visitors and made key wartime decisions there, Roosevelt considered Shangri-La a place for relaxation and retreat (**Image 7**).

Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency marked a shift for Roosevelt's Shangri-La. Not only did Eisenhower find the name a bit fancy, but he also wanted to signal that the retreat was a secure place to meet with advisors and foreign leaders without the visibility and pressure of a White House meeting. He renamed the compound Camp David, in honor of his grandson, and entertained his family as well as visiting dignitaries (**Image 8**). Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev visited Camp David at the end of a cross-country tour in 1959 and was pleased to have been welcomed to the president's private retreat (**Image 9**). This trip, and the goodwill that it fostered, provided a brief warming in U.S.-Soviet relations.

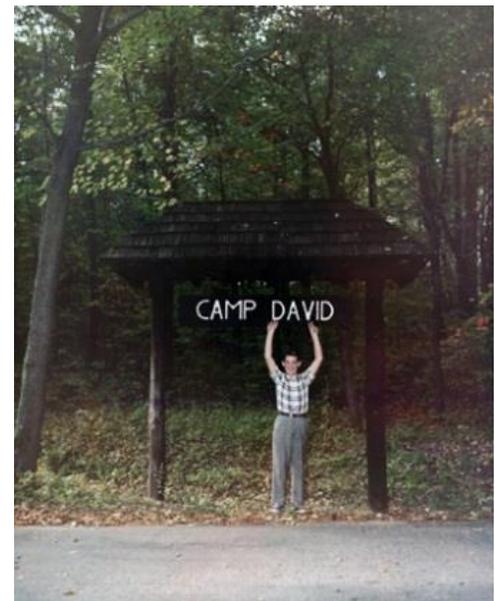


Image 8

PRESIDENTS' RETREATS



Camp David continued to be used by many other twentieth and twenty-first century presidents. Another notable visit to Camp David occurred during Jimmy Carter's term. In 1978, Carter hosted Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat for secret negotiations that would later be known as the Camp David Accords (**Image 10**). These negotiations marked an important foreign policy achievement for Carter and would earn Begin and al-Sadat a shared Nobel Peace Prize. 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 (**Image 11**).

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		https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dc-3a2f-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99
2	Thomas Jefferson's Monticello home, Charlottesville, Virginia	Between 1980 and 2006	Carol M. Highsmith	Library of Congress		https://www.loc.gov/item/2011635124/
3	Soldiers' Home, Washington, D.C.	Ca. 1863	Charles Mangus	Library of Congress		https://www.loc.gov/item/95504582/
4	President Lincoln's cottage at Soldiers' Home	2010	Carol M. Highsmith	Library of Congress		https://www.loc.gov/item/2010642160/
5	President Grant and Friends at His Cottage by the Sea	1872	G.W. Pach	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Ulysses%20S%20Grant/6417.tif.info
6	Franklin D. Roosevelt Swims in Warm Springs	1929	Unknown	National Archives and Records Administration		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/6575.tif.info

PRESIDENTS' RETREATS



7	Roosevelt and Churchill Fishing at Shangri-La	1943	Unknown	Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Franklin%20D%20Roosevelt/1112148.tif/info
8	David Eisenhower at the entrance to Camp David	1960	Unknown	U.S. Navy, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home		https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/media/3010
9	President Eisenhower and Nikita Khrushchev meet at Camp David	1959	Unknown	U.S. Navy, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home		https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/media/3005
10	The Carters Lunch with Israeli Prime Minister and Egyptian President	1979	Unknown	Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Jimmy%20Carter/2636.tif/info
11	President Truman with Press in Key West	Ca. 1950	Unknown	U.S. Navy; Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Harry%20S%20Truman/1112147.tif/info



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Podcast: *The 1600 Sessions: Life at Camp David* from the White House Historical Association. [Listen here.](#)
- Podcast: *The 1600 Sessions: Recipes from the President's Ranch* from the White House Historical Association. [Listen 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.](#)
- Collection: Presidential Retreat from White House Historical Association website. [Click here.](#)
- Resource: *Camp David* from the National Archives. [Explore here.](#)
- Primary Source: "President Harding's Voyage of Understanding, Hutchinson, Kansas, Side B" on White House Historical Association's Digital Library. [Click here.](#)



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

For Younger Learners

- Imagine you are the president and it is time for a “vacation” to Camp David – this means finding a way to relax while still getting work done! Check out the associated *Anywhere Activity: Camp David Scrapbook* and get crafty creating a scrapbook of a presidential retreat to Camp David!
- If you were the president and wanted to take a vacation, where would you go? Use pencil and paper to create a plan of what your ideal presidential retreat would look like – and don’t forget, you still need to get important presidential work done!

For Older Learners

- 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 these major developments in transportation and communication.
- It is important that the President of the United States stay on a regimented schedule. What do you think the president does on vacation? Create a trip itinerary outlining a day of a presidential retreat.
- Presidential vacations are not always work-free. Many people feel as if the President of the United States should not take frequent vacations. Do you think the president should be able to take frequent vacations? Discuss the pros and cons of presidential vacations with classmates or your family.
- 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.