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Meet the Presidents

June 20, 2020



By Penny Musco

Explore the lives of those who've already achieved our nation's highest office. Here are a few road-trip worthy stops to consider.



Monticello

Thomas Jefferson | Monticello

Charlottesville, Virginia's [Monticello](#) is a World Heritage site, museum and research institute. Above all, though, it was the beloved home of our third president, Thomas Jefferson. Allow at least three-and-a-half hours to see it all through a variety of ticket options (kids under 12 are admitted free). Daily guided walking tours, highlighting the slave experience at Monticello and the gardens and grounds, are included with admission. Make time to stroll the handicapped-accessible Monticello Trail, a winding four-mile path through hardwood forest. Jefferson himself appears — in the form of an historical actor/interpreter — most Tuesdays-Saturdays.



James K Polk State Historic Site

James K. Polk | State Historic Site & Home and Museum

Our eleventh head of state may rank among the more obscure, but a visit to the President [James K. Polk State Historic site](#) in Pineville, North Carolina, reminds visitors he was the first “dark horse” winner, beating out the expected contenders for the Democratic nomination. Polk promoted expansionism, settling the Oregon Territory boundary dispute with Canada, and waging war over California. Tours take in reconstructed buildings set on 21 of the 105 acres originally owned by Polk’s father. Exhibits expand on his childhood, his rise in politics and the Mexican-American War. The site hosts an annual celebration of Polk’s birthday in early November. You can also explore his home in Columbia, Tennessee. The [President James K. Polk Home and Museum](#) contains the country’s largest collection of Polk artifacts.



Jimmy Carter Presidential Library & Museum

Jimmy Carter | Jimmy Carter Presidential Library & Museum

Four Commanders-in-Chief have collected the Nobel Peace Prize, and one of the medals is at the [Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum](#) in Atlanta, Georgia, (the other winners are Wilson, Obama and Theodore Roosevelt, in case you were wondering). Read up on the Camp David Accords, then walk through a typical day in the life of the leader of the free world. Finally, circle the globe with Carter and his wife Rosalynn in their later work advancing human rights.



The Boyhood Home of President Woodrow Wilson

Woodrow Wilson | The Boyhood Home

President No. 28 spent the tumultuous years of 1860-70 in Augusta, Georgia, in the manse owned by the Presbyterian church where his father ministered. Guided tours of the boyhood [Home of President Woodrow Wilson](#) are conducted Thursday-Saturday. Be sure to note the window where young “Tom” etched his name.

The Wilsons subsequently moved to Columbia, South Carolina, when his father became a professor at the city’s theological seminary. [The Museum of Reconstruction](#) at the Woodrow Wilson Family Home tells not only about Wilson’s teen years, but of the entire post-Civil War period. Purchase tickets for this site individually or in a package with up to three other historic houses.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt | Little White House

Southwest of Atlanta is Roosevelt’s [Little White House](#), a state historic site in Warm Springs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt bought a home here the year before he took office, hoping the 88-degree waters would cure his polio. It’s also where he died during his fourth term. FDR’s experiences in this small town influenced many of the programs he developed during the Great Depression.

Displays include the house and his 1938 Ford convertible, complete with hand controls. His legendary Fireside Chats, intended to reassure the American public during his administration’s hard times, play over a vintage radio.

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