

# The President Will See You Now

by Penny Musco, **AARP**, October 21, 2016



## **Spend a day in the president's shoes**

Do presidential races drive you nuts? To tune out the madness and delve into the daily lives of those who have performed the toughest job in the world, consider taking a road trip to one or more of the 13 presidential libraries and museums highlighted here. We've even thrown in a couple of extras: one that celebrates first ladies and another that honors second fiddles.



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## **Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum**

### **West Branch, Iowa**

**Herbert Hoover** was the hapless commander in chief who dragged us into the Depression, right? His library and museum in West Branch, Iowa, doesn't shy away from that judgment, but it also vividly tells the rest of the story: The staunch Quaker and former mining engineer went from hero to zero and back again, organizing food relief for European refugees in the wake of two world wars. Next door is the National Park Service's Herbert Hoover National Historic Site.



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## **Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum**

### **Hyde Park, New York**

Period radio broadcasts in two Fireside Chat Rooms will transport you back to the 1930s and '40s, when **Franklin D. Roosevelt** steered the nation out of its economic coma — and into global combat. To test your knowledge of World War II, take the trivia quiz in a re-creation of FDR's secret Map Room. The 1936 Ford Phaeton on display was specially adapted for the polio-stricken president. Also on the grounds is Roosevelt's home, administered by the Park Service, while two miles away stands wife Eleanor's Val-Kill Cottage — the only national park site dedicated to an individual first lady.



Getty Images

## **Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum and Boyhood Home**

### **Abilene, Kansas**

Which president won an Emmy? Give yourself a gold star if you guessed the man who wore five of them on his Army uniform in World War

II: **Dwight D. Eisenhower**. Bestowed upon our 34th president in 1956 for his pioneering use of television, the Emmy statue stands beside the script of Ike's final presidential address, which warned the nation of an insidious "military-industrial complex." A typical American living room and interactive displays capture the affluence and anxiety of the 1950s. The exhibit "WWII Remembered," continuing through December, features an Enigma cipher machine.



John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

## **John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum**

### **Boston, Massachusetts**

A moon rock and *Freedom 7* — the first manned space capsule — attest to the primacy of the space race in **John F. Kennedy's** administration. The library and museum also detail the future president's struggle to survive when his PT boat was cut in two by a Japanese destroyer in 1943; you can even examine the coconut on which JFK carved a rescue message. Got PR chops? Slip behind the pressroom lectern and field the actual questions once lobbed at Kennedy by reporters.

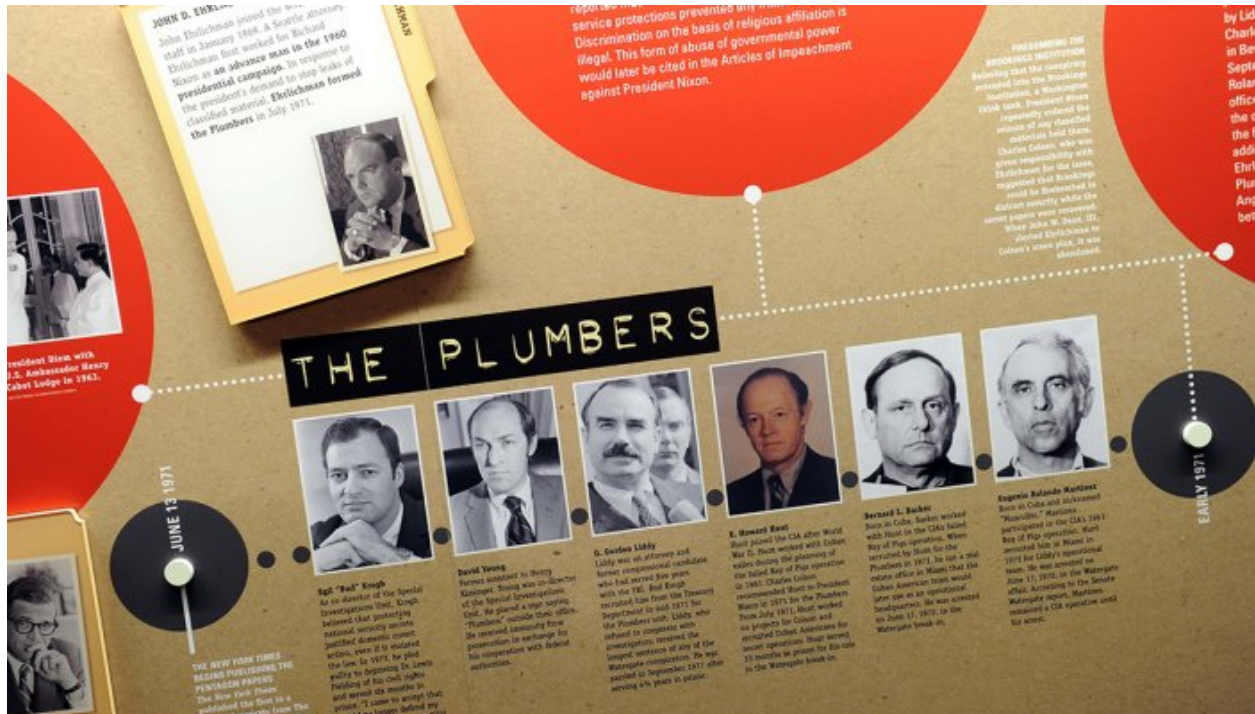


Kevin Smith/LBJ Library

## **Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum**

### **Austin, Texas**

It's unlikely he would have used this word, but **Lyndon B. Johnson** was a world-class raconteur. That explains the life-size animatronic LBJ that stands against a backdrop of political cartoons here, spinning some of the tales and jokes he told during his administration. Other galleries spotlight the fateful day of Nov. 22, 1963, and Johnson's landmark Great Society legislation. You can listen in on hours of recorded phone calls — Johnson recorded 9,000 of them on five phone lines — and stroll through artwork by Frederick Remington, Winslow Homer and even Dr. Seuss.



AFP/Getty Images

## Nixon Presidential Library and Museum

Yorba Linda, California

Extensively overhauled before reopening in October 2016, the **Richard M. Nixon** library offers a gratifying balance of the good (China), the bad (Vietnam) and the ugly (Watergate) that characterized the 37th President's two disruptive — and ultimately disrupted — terms of office. The Lincoln Sitting Room, where Nixon made many of his crucial decisions, has been replicated on site, as have the East Room and Oval Office. Outside, tour Nixon's childhood home and climb aboard *Army One* — the restored Sikorsky helicopter that ferried Nixon into exile from the White House lawn on the August 1974 day he resigned.



Courtesy Gerald Ford Presidential Library & Museum

## **Gerald R. Ford Museum**

### **Grand Rapids, Michigan**

Nixon's downfall paved the way for **Gerald R. Ford**, which explains why the burglary tools used in the Watergate break-in are on display here.

Reopened in June after a months-long refurbishment, the Ford Museum now features an interactive simulation of the young Navy lieutenant's ordeal when a typhoon hit his ship in World War II. A far more poignant artifact is the staircase scaled by thousands to reach the U.S. Embassy's helipad as Saigon fell in April 1975.





Courtesy Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum

## **Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum**

### **Atlanta, Georgia**

Once you have ogled the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to **Jimmy Carter** in 2002 for his efforts “to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts,” you can examine the photos taken by a presumably more bellicose Carter during his 10 years in the U.S. Navy. Or walk through 24 hours in the life of a president, read about the 1978 Camp David Accords or — thanks to an interactive map — tag along with the Carters as they advocate for health and human rights around the globe.



MLAOPEOPLE/ALAMY

## **Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum**

### **Simi Valley, California**

Purple mountain majesties and shining seas, wouldn't you know it, greet visitors to the stunningly situated **Ronald Reagan** Library. Step inside for a tour of both a retired Air Force One jet and a Marine One helicopter. Then try your hand at some of the media channels the Great Communicator mastered before getting into politics: Call a Chicago Cubs game, introduce a TV program or — courtesy of green-screen technology — costar in a movie with the Gipper. From Oct. 22 through April 16, 2017, check out Marty McFly's hoverboard, R2D2 and virtual-reality games in an exhibit on how pop culture influences technology.



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## **George Bush Presidential Library and Museum**

### **College Station, Texas**

Interactivity is the watchword here. To walk a mile in the president's shoes, have your picture taken behind his desk in the Oval Office. Then put yourself through a mock White House Situation Room crisis as you review the events leading to the first Iraq War. Not realistic enough for you? A flight simulator invites you to land an Avenger torpedo bomber on an aircraft carrier, as **George Bush** did during World War II. Other exhibits honor his stints as chairman of the Republican National Committee and director of the CIA.



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## **William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum**

### **Little Rock, Arkansas**

Set within a 30-acre park along the Arkansas River, the **William J. Clinton** Library encourages visitors to take a seat at the conference table of the Cabinet Room and learn about the office of president through touch-screen displays. Nearby, a video screen replays humorous bits from White House Correspondents' Association dinners, including Clinton's "Final Days" send-up. And given Bubba's status as our first boomer president, no one should be surprised to learn that Beatlemania is coming: More than 400 pieces of Fab Four memorabilia will be on display here through April 2, 2017.



EPA/ALAMY

## **George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum**

### **Dallas, Texas**

Lest we forget the bitterly contested presidential election of Nov. 7, 2000, the **George W. Bush** library recaps it in detail. The site also pulls back the curtain on Dubya's thinking as the momentous events of 9/11, Iraq, Hurricane Katrina and the bank bailout unfolded; a time-lapse scenario bids you to compare his decisions with those you might have made. Video displays and physical artifacts — including a twisted girder from the toppled World Trade Center — present poignant reminders of Sept. 11. If it all gets too much, head for the hills: A one-mile hiking trail winds through the surrounding terrain.



## **National First Ladies' Library**

### **Canton, Ohio**

But enough about the men — what about the White House women? They receive their due at this unusual National Historic Site, which belongs to the Park Service but is managed by the National First Ladies' Library. The two-part complex dedicates itself to the achievements of females behind the throne. Beginning Nov. 17 and running through Sept. 15, 2017, “Grand Entrance: Inaugural Pomp and Couture” focuses on how first ladies prepare for the spotlight. And you can always amble down the street to visit the family home of Ida Saxton McKinley, wife of President William McKinley.



Courtesy Quayle Vice Presidential Learning Center

## The Quayle Vice Presidential Learning Center

### Huntington, Indiana

The vice presidency, Theodore Roosevelt remarked, “is not a steppingstone to anything except oblivion.” Of the 47 men who have held the nation’s second-highest post, an astonishing 14 — Roosevelt among them — managed to sidestep that obscurity by becoming president. Their stories and artifacts are enshrined in this quirky but fascinating facility, originally conceived as a gallery to house the vice presidential papers of **James Danforth Quayle** (1989-1993). The vice president best known for his bad spelling (“potatoe,” anyone?) successfully lobbied for the collection to be expanded to honor all who have served as “second to one.”