

INTRODUCTION

Our goal with this guidebook is to provide accurate, timely information as well as insight into a past that is sometimes mysterious, often surprising and always intriguing. The term “Living History,” as we use it, refers to places and experiences which immerse us in history, making real through direct exposure what otherwise can only be imagined through books, lectures, museums and films. A substantial portion of our recommended travel destinations are National Parks, National Monuments or State Historic Sites. Six have been designated as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. Many others are privately operated attractions, made exceptional because of the hard work and commitment of proud, dedicated Americans.

Our Selection Criteria

America's Living History - The Early Years covers a long span of time – from the development of widely varied Indian cultures, to the discovery and domination of our land by European powers, and finally to the emergence of an independent nation. It ends for the most part in the early 1840s, before the concept of Manifest Destiny extended America's reach from the Atlantic to the Pacific. To help you experience whatever part of that heritage interests you most, we have compiled a set of recommendations based on the following criteria:

1. The destinations are as historically accurate and complete as possible, based on archaeological findings and historic records. Attention has been given to not only the buildings, furnishings and personal items but also the gardens, farm fields and livestock.
2. Where possible, the sites have history-based activities, re-enactments and other special events. Staff members typically include individuals in period clothing who share information through third-person discussions or first-person portrayals.
3. They show many aspects of early life – community, household, agriculture, arts and crafts, business, public affairs and military actions. Every effort is made to replicate historical reality in fun and interesting ways.
4. The historical atmosphere is superior. Excluded are amusement parks and sites that have not properly

restored or maintained their properties. Conventional museums also have been excluded because they display their collections out of context with real-life use. However, we could not resist “museum plus” destinations, whose exceptional exhibits include creative re-creations and historic buildings.

5. Our focus is on pre-1840 destinations. For the sake of completeness, though, a few exceptions have been made. Most notable is 'Iolani Palace in Hawai'i, which was occupied during the late 1800s at the turning point in Native Hawaiian history. To exclude it would be to leave untold an important part of the Hawaiian story.

6. The majority of recommended sites are substantial enough to be the primary destination in a particular locale. However, most are within close proximity to other popular tourist attractions.

7. In a few instances, such as listings of the California missions and the Shaker villages, we have included all of the visitable sites for the benefit of readers who are interested in completeness. Those that we believe to be the best of the group are featured attractions.

Historical Perspective

Each chapter of this book opens with a summary overview of relevant historical information. In addition, we have sidebars on special-interest subjects throughout the book. Because of their brevity, these sections are necessarily incomplete. Our intent is not to teach history but to enhance your travel experience. You can learn much more at the destinations themselves, simply by asking questions. Living History interpreters at the featured sites tend to be well trained. They welcome the opportunity to share their extensive knowledge and talk about their hands-on understanding of America's past.

Choosing Your Travel Itinerary

Our list of historical sites is sizable. Even with our strict selection criteria, *America's Living History - The Early Years* recommends 300 destinations that provide exciting contact with America's early heritage. To help you make travel choices, we have organized them by region following this introduction and by field of interest within each chapter.

Please keep in mind that things change. Hours of operation may vary; visitor attractions may be under renovation or expansion; their offerings may change;

and places may even have closed since the publication of this book. We provide phone numbers and website addresses to help ensure that you have access to the most up-to-date tourist information. However, sometimes even these change; so we recommend doing an Internet search rather than assume that a particular destination is no longer in operation.

Ideal Times to Visit

Most attractions are open from Memorial Day through Labor Day; many are open longer; national parks are usually open year-round. (See site descriptions for specifics.) Interpretive events typically are scheduled for mornings and early afternoons during the summer and less frequently during other seasons. Furthermore, weekends tend to include more interpretive programs than weekdays. So if you want to experience the widest range of Living History or are traveling with children, you probably will prefer summer weekends.

Because of our own penchant for talking with interpreters, we tend to prefer weekday visits when these people may have more time to chat. A potential distraction is the presence of school classes during morning hours, especially in springtime. In some cases, afternoon visits are more satisfying. You might want to call ahead before making this choice for yourself.

Some sites have food and beverage concessions. A few (such as Plimoth Plantation and Colonial

Williamsburg) have restaurants that are history-inspired. We recommend that you check in advance if this is important to you, and plan accordingly.

Begin Your Discovery

Before exploring individual chapters, take a moment to review the summary timeline on pages 24-25. It will help you place key sites and events in context with their

times. It may also surprise you. What is happening in America today is a striking reflection of all that has come before. Ours is a country built by people caught up in the quest for a better world, no matter what the cost. Whether out of choice or by force, our ancestors uprooted their lives, leaving behind friends, family and everything familiar to start over in a strange new land. In contrast to the pattern of history in most other nations, America's development is a story of discovery, exploration and migration; of escape from old civilizations and old ways of thinking; of the search for economic advancement, religious independence and personal fulfillment. It is also the story of lessons learned “the hard way” and great progress made in spite of serious challenges.

Whether history is a life-long passion for you or a new-found pleasure, we hope this book will excite your imagination and stimulate new travel adventures.

timeline on pages 24-25 will help you place key sites and events in context

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We have not attempted to cite the many authorities and historical resources drawn upon during the creation of this guidebook. The list is voluminous. Suffice it to say that our research was extensive and included our own observations while visiting each of the featured destinations during recent years.

We do, however, wish to say “thanks” again to the historians, managers and communications professionals at the sites themselves. Featured travel destinations were asked to review our content for accuracy and completeness. There was no obligation or cost to them – we simply wanted to ensure that everything was fairly stated and up-to-date. They were very helpful. A few even provided photographs when needed. (We have credited them beside the pictures.)

We were delighted to learn through these contacts that several sites had grown even more enjoyable since our visit. Key among them were Historic Jamestowne, Jamestown Settlement and George Washington's Mount Vernon home, which added major new offerings that coincided with the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, Virginia – mid-May 1607, the sentimental “birth” of America. This fact provides an important reminder: Never fall into the trap of saying “I've already been there.” Change is inevitable, and the best sites typically get better and better.

CONTACT US

We welcome comments and suggestions. Please feel free to email us at redcorralpub@aol.com or send us a letter c/o Red Corral Publishing, 505-1 South Highway 49, #240, Jackson, CA 95642. Thanks for your interest!

making real through direct exposure what otherwise can only be imagined