

# Hallowed ground of Gettysburg

As America's bloodiest battle nears its 150th anniversary, witness the sacrifice of soldiers, cacophony of cannon fire, and bucolic beauty of the countryside

By **Larry Weisman** for USA TODAY

**IN 1913, MORE THAN 50,000 VETERANS OF THE CIVIL** War, from the Union side and the Confederacy, held a reunion at the Gettysburg National Military Park to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the bloodiest battle in American history. Next year marks the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg and of President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Crowds of 30,000 are not unusual for the annual battle re-enactment, but the special anniversary in 2013

promises to draw extra attention to the pivotal confrontation in the Civil War. "The Gettysburg community knew we were bigger than just three days in July of 2013, so we decided that our commemoration was going to match the national anniversary of the Civil War, [from] April 2011 to April 2015," says

Carl Whitehill of the Gettysburg Convention & Visitors Bureau.

That's one reason Gettysburg is a great "go to now" destination. See the landmarks and monuments. Drink in the history in the warm summer air. Feel the ground shake under the feet of the re-enactors. And do it before the 2013 rush.

PHOTO BY PAUL WITT

## Enjoy the ride

Gettysburg is wonderfully accessible and a popular place for day-trippers on the East Coast with its proximity to Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Harrisburg.

Drive in through neighboring Lancaster County, often thought of as Dutch Amish country, where old world ways still prevail and the horse and buggy remain the mode of transport. Come down from the north and there's Hershey Park, a popular amusement attraction with rides and the aroma of chocolate (Hershey's, of course) perfuming the air.

Toss a tent in the car if you like camping, or stay in cabins at places like Drummer Boy Camping Resort (it also hosts RVs). Gettysburg can be a heavily scripted trip or a "Hey, let's go" jaunt.

## Sense the history

The Battle of Gettysburg was essentially the midpoint of the Civil War, as well as the turning point. When the war was over, more than 620,000 soldiers had lost their lives. At Gettysburg alone, the warring sides counted roughly 45,000 casualties.

The Union forces not only defeated Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, they ended his incursion into the North, and Lee retreated to Virginia. Four months after the battle, Lincoln spoke at the dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery, suggesting the world would "little note, nor long remember what we say here."

The battlefield covers about 6,000 acres, with 1,300 monuments and markers. It is not, however, the site of the re-enactments. Those take place on local farm fields outside of town. There's bleacher seating (at an extra charge), but many spectators take in the faux combat on their own beach chairs or blankets.



General G.K. Warren Monument on Little Round Top



## Set your sights

Start this time trip with the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitors Center. It offers 12 museum galleries dedicated to town and Civil War history and the fully restored cyclorama (painting in the round) that commemorates Pickett's Charge. The oil painting, which dates to 1884, measures 359 feet by 27 feet, making it the largest painting in the United States.


"It was the Imax of its day," says park ranger Katie Lawhon of the National Park Service at the Gettysburg National Military Park. Admission to the museum and visitors center is \$12.50 for adults, which includes children 13 and up.

Licensed battlefield guides are available for tours by car or bus. There also are self-guided auto tours. Bus tours cost \$30 for adults and \$18 for kids. Don't be shy about walking or riding on horseback (several facilities offer horse tours).

## Venture beyond

To the north and west of the town are 20,000 acres of apple orchards. There's a wine and fruit trail, farmers markets, crafts, festivals, and boutiques.

The Explore & More Children's Museum (717-337-9151; [exploreandmore.com](http://exploreandmore.com)) is wonderful for little ones ages 3 to 8, with art rooms and opportunities to try on colonial garb. Kids are particularly fascinated by the giant bubble maker.

For adults, perhaps the International Museum of Spiritual Investigations (717-398-2026; [museumofspirits.com](http://museumofspirits.com)) might be more intriguing. It's said that Gettysburg is one of the world's most haunted places, and the museum staff thrives on leading ghost hunts. 



## TRIP PLANNER



### GET THERE.

This southern Pennsylvania town is 60 miles northwest of Baltimore, 85 miles north of Washington, 142 miles west of Philadelphia, and 185 miles southeast of Pittsburgh. It's easily accessible via highways. Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI) offers the greatest choice of flights.



### STAY. The Lodges at Gettysburg

offer luxury amid antiques. The Lodges sit on 63 acres overlooking the battlegrounds. The main lodge is built of stone and wood and has a wonderful view of Hunter Lake, which is stocked with game fish. The private lodges have kitchenettes, fireplaces, air conditioning, and porches. 685 Camp Gettysburg Road, Gettysburg, Pa.; 717-642-2500



### EAT. The Pub & Restaurant

is located on Gettysburg Square. The original structure was lost

to a fire in 2001, but the place was rebuilt along the same lines and reopened in 2002. There's excellent pizza, 12 types of burgers, and an extensive sandwich list (with a standout panini that features grilled ham, capicola, hard salami, and provolone cheese). The Pub & Restaurant features a different cheesecake each week. 20-22 Lincoln Square, Gettysburg, Pa.; 717-334-7100

Immerse yourself in more history with a stop at the charming **Dobbin House Tavern**, a building that dates to 1776. Its Springhouse Tavern is casual and homey, and it has two fireplaces. There's also a more formal setting in the Alexander Dobbin Dining Rooms. 89 Steinwehr Ave. (business Route 15 south), Gettysburg; 717-334-2100



### PLAN. Gettysburg's attractions are open

year-round, but spring and summer truly bustle with activity. Most folks come for the history, but

they can also have a fun time at the Apple Blossom Festival, held in May, or the Bluegrass Festival in August. It's hottest in July, with an average high of 86. August is a tad cooler at 85. June is idyllic at 81, but June also is the rainiest month.



### DON'T MISS. The

annual Civil War re-enactment is in July. As many as 15,000 re-enactors and 30,000 spectators participate in or watch two battles each day. Battles feature cavalry, artillery, and infantry.

Dedication Day ceremonies on Nov. 19 at the Soldiers' National Cemetery this year celebrate the 149th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

The third annual Gettysburg Vintage Base Ball Fest on July 21-22 features 14 teams taking part in the national pastime under the rules—and with the same uniforms and equipment—of 1864.