

# Valley Forge National Historical Park: The Complete Guide

By Marla Cimini for Trip Savvy



[Valley Forge National Historical Park](#), located just outside of Philadelphia, is home to a number of significant and fascinating sites. The destination played a major role in America’s Revolutionary War, as it was the home base for General George Washington and the Continental Army during their legendary winter encampment from 1777 to 1778. With more than 3,500 acres of sprawling fields, rolling hills and wooded areas, this park attracts visitors year-round.

## History and Background

Known for its key role in the Revolutionary War, Valley Forge National Historical Park became Pennsylvania's first state park in 1976 when the state “gifted” the park to the country in celebration of the bicentennial. This specific

site was selected for the encampment by George Washington due to its strategic position to the British army that was located in Philadelphia. There were over 12,000 troops in the encampment during that notoriously harsh winter of 1777, and the army suffered horribly from sickness and the cold.

However, the encampment was considered a major turning point in the war, as the time was used for strategic military training, which eventually resulted in a major victory for the Continental army.



## What to See and Do in the Park

History buffs are thrilled to see and experience the actual location where

General George Washington and his troops were based during the Revolutionary War. But it's not just about history, here. There are over 26

miles of trails, so you can walk, hike, pedal a bike, or even ride a horse around certain areas of the park.

Some highlights of the park include:

**Visitor's Center:** Your first stop should be the visitor center where you can find a general introduction to the park and obtain trail maps, brochures, and other key information. You can also view the short film, "Valley Forge: A Winter Encampment" that provides an overview of the park's history as it pertains to the Revolutionary War.

**Tours and Talks:** Park rangers offer an array of walking tours and lectures throughout the park. These times vary, depending on the season, so be sure to check out the website for details if you wish to attend one of these fascinating and information-filled talks.

**George Washington's Headquarters:** Visitors can tour the home that was used by Washington during the Revolutionary War. At the time, this two-story mill house belonged to Isaac Potts and Washington transformed it into his headquarters. It officially became part of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1905.

**Recreated Cabins and Structures:** The park features a number of reconstructed log cabins and similar structures that were used by the soldiers during the encampment. There are also several historical buildings that are still standing and visitors can admire them from the outside, as they have not been refurbished.

Washington Memorial Chapel: This Episcopal church is perched at the top of the hill in the center of the park. The adjacent National Patriots Bell Tower is home to the Daughters of the American Revolution Patriot Rolls that lists everyone who served in the war.



## How to Visit

There are many ways to visit Valley Forge National Historical Park, as it offers a number of interesting and organized tours, including self-guided, private, and group. You can stop by for a quick solo power walk around the park's many paved pathways; admire a historical monument, or spend hours on a driving tour with multiple lookout points.

These are several ways you can tour the park:

- **Encampment Driving Tour:** This self-guided tour leads visitors through a 10-mile route through the park, with nine stops that each feature fascinating history. This picturesque tour guides visitors past the major historical monuments and significant sites throughout the park. The entire experience takes between 20 minutes and several hours, depending on how often (and how long) you stop along the way. The park provides a map and there are marked signs along the trail.
- **Cell Phone Tour:** If you wish to be truly on your own, just can simply download the “tour directory” on your smartphone and/or call a special phone number to learn all about the park: 484-396-1018. You can also find a paper tour directory at the Visitor Center.
- **Trolley Tours:** The park offers a number of Trolley Tours that take groups of visitors around the park. Lead by a professional guide, these 90-minute tours offer a great opportunity to sit back and enjoy the park without the need to drive your own car. Check out the website for a complete list of dates and times for the trolley tours throughout the year. Trolley tours require a reservation and a fee.
- **Bike Tours:** If you’re up for some exercise, you can rent a bicycle and tour the park on your own—or you can arrange for a group or private bicycle tours. Just visit the Bike Rental Shop at the Visitor Center for details.

- Private Tours: If you plan in advance, you can arrange a private tour of the park with a professional guide. This requires an advance reservation and the website offers details about how to arrange this.

## Where to Stay Nearby

Only 15 miles from the city center, Valley Forge National Park is an easy [day trip from Philadelphia](#). So you don't need to move to another hotel if you already have a place to stay in Philly. However, if you are visiting the area specifically to see Valley Forge National Park and wish to stay close by, two local hotels are [Tru by Hilton Audubon Valley Forge](#); and [Hampton Inn and Suites Valley Forge / Oaks](#).