

Discover our Shared Heritage

The National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places, in partnership with the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO) and a number of public and private partners, Heritage Areas, and communities throughout the country, has developed a series of print and Web travel itineraries called *Discover Our Shared Heritage*. The itineraries help travelers plan trips that link a variety of registered historic places, from national parks, to National Historic Landmarks, to state and locally significant historic places. The tours include national parks in the geographic area covered by each itinerary. The online itineraries are posted on the National Register's web site <www.cr.nps.gov/nr>, which also contains an invitation to and instructions on how communities and organizations can become partners with the National Register in developing additional itineraries in this growing series.

The itineraries include essays providing historic contextual information, interactive maps, a description of each place's significance in history, photographs, information on public accessibility, and links to state historic preservation offices, state tourism bureaus, and local sites which pro-

vide additional sources of information. Internet travelers can view the itineraries online and print out copies of the maps, photographs, and property descriptions for visits to sites open to the public.

The itineraries are tours of properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The purposes of the program are to promote heritage tourism to further the public's understanding and appreciation of our nation's historic places, to link national parks to related historic sites, and to assist in preserving these irreplaceable historic resources.

Heritage tourism, in which visitors seek a historic or educational experience, is a rapidly expanding sector of the nation's travel industry. A recent survey by the Travel Industry Association of America noted that one-third of U.S. adult travelers, or 65.9 million people, reported taking a trip based on historic or cultural interest in the past year. Heritage tourism is used by communities nationwide to promote visitation and economic development.

The itineraries follow a standard format and each conveys significant amounts of information about history and historic places to the traveling public and people simply interested in history. They include a series of brief essays providing historic contextual information, and if the sponsoring partner chooses, an essay on the role of the sponsor in preserving the area's historic places. The itinerary, *Journey Through Hallowed Ground* (featuring historic places in the Virginia Piedmont), provides essays on the history of the Piedmont, the Civil War experience in the area, and an overview of the efforts by the itinerary's co-sponsor, Scenic America, to preserve the Piedmont. The *Kingston, New York* itinerary includes essays on the history of Dutch colonization, the American Revolution in Kingston, the importance of transportation, and the role of Kingston as a New York Urban Cultural Park. This last essay describes the important partnership between the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and 22 New York communities, and describes the economic development, heritage tourism, and revitalization

The Mary McLeod Bethune Council House in Washington, DC, is featured in the itinerary for our Nation's capital. Photo by Jack E. Boucher, HABS.



programs which are fostered by the urban cultural park concept.

In addition to providing overall historic contextual information, the itineraries include information on each historic place included on the tour. The itineraries emphasize that each historic place has its own interesting story to tell and describes each property's importance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture. The documentation for the property write-ups is taken from the National Register registration form for each listed property and is written in a tone for the general visitor. Every property description is accompanied by current color photographs and sometimes historic photographs (if available). At the end of the property write-ups the visitor is informed how to locate the historic place, and is given details on public accessibility, hours of operation, and (where applicable) telephone numbers or addresses of how to find out more about the historic property.

The itineraries make full use of the Internet's capabilities. Each itinerary includes fully interactive maps. The visitors can view the area covered by the itinerary and the geographic relationship between the historic properties, and then plan a tour which meets their traveling needs. With a simple click of the cursor on a dot on the map you are taken to the property write-up with its detailed explanation of the place's importance and guidance on how to locate it. You can then simply click on the "Next" button and move sequentially through all of the historic places. Or you can go to the "List of Sites" page and click on a specific place. At the bottom of each page you can access the historic essays.

An important feature of each itinerary is the "Learn More" section which includes not only a bibliography of books on the history of the area, but also Internet links to web sites maintained by state historic preservation offices, state tourism bureaus, and local sites (such as chambers of commerce) which provide additional sources of information, such as recommendations for hotels and restaurants in the area. From this page the itinerary can link to web pages of any appropriate organization involved in the area's historic preservation, heritage tourism, or overall economic development. These linkages form a two-way traffic pattern for visitors to discover the featured areas. For instance, a visitor to the *Central Vermont* itinerary can move easily to the National Register's web site, to web sites of the central

Vermont chambers of commerce, the State Department of Tourism, the State Archives, the State Division of Historic Preservation, the Vermont Historical Society, the Vermont Heritage Network, the Green Mountain Club, the Vermont Archeological Society, the Historic Preservation Program of the University of Vermont, and other Internet sites.

To date, there are 20 itineraries online, providing information on nearly 900 historic properties. The National Register's web site Travel page (which includes all of the itineraries) receives approximately 375,000 hits (about 25,000 visitors) per week (or over 19.5 million hits by over 1,274,000 visitors yearly); and these numbers are steadily increasing. The available online itineraries are both geographic and historic theme-based. As part of the Department of the Interior's strategy to help revitalize urban areas by promoting public awareness of history and encouraging tourists to visit historic urban areas, the series includes tours of historic properties in Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Seattle, Charleston, South Carolina, and Washington, DC. An itinerary of historic places in Atlanta, Georgia, is currently being prepared by Georgia State University graduate school student Yen M. Tang. Itineraries are also available for the smaller communities of Kingston, New York; Pipestone, Minnesota; Cumberland, Maryland; the Amana Colonies, Iowa; and Ashland, Oregon. Regional itineraries include Central Vermont, the Virginia Piedmont, along the Georgia-Florida Coast, the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, and Southeastern Louisiana. Itineraries of places grouped by historic themes include sites associated with the Underground Railroad, properties related to Women's History in Massachusetts and New York, and places important in the Civil Rights Movement.

We encourage the public to log onto the National Register's web page, tour the itineraries, and consider proposing an itinerary to be included in this partnership program which fosters community pride, engenders a preservation ethic, helps communities use heritage tourism for economic development, encourages and stimulates efforts to preserve historic places, and illustrates our shared history and culture.

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