

Capitol Tours

WELCOME TO THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL

Your visit to the historic U.S. Capitol begins in the Capitol Visitor Center (CVC). The largest addition ever built in the Capitol's 215-year history, the Capitol Visitor Center is located underground on the east side of the U.S. Capitol so as not to detract from the appearance of the Capitol and the grounds designed in 1874 by the premier landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted.

With its welcoming spaces and skylight views of the Capitol dome, the Visitor Center is here for you. The Capitol is home to the U.S. Congress which includes two legislative bodies, the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Through films, interactive exhibits, and a tour, you will learn about how both the Senate and the House works, the history of the Congress and the Capitol building, and how citizens can participate in this extraordinary experiment called representative democracy.

LOCATION AND HOURS

The Capitol Visitor Center, which is the new main entrance to the U.S. Capitol, is located underground below the East Plaza, between Constitution and Independence Avenues, directly across from the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress Jefferson Building. Visitors may enter from the First Street sidewalk on the East side of the Capitol. [View map of Capitol Complex and Capitol Visitor Center entrance.](#)

Visitors: The Visitor Center is open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday. It is closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and Inauguration Day. While you do not need passes or tickets to enter the Capitol Visitors Center or view Exhibition Hall, you do need passes to tour the main Capitol building.

GUIDED TOURS OF THE CAPITOL

Guided tours of the Capitol begin at the Orientation Theaters on the lower level of the Capitol Visitor Center. "Out of Many, One," a 13-minute film, illustrates how this country established a new form of government, highlights the vital role that Congress plays in the daily lives of Americans, and introduces you to the building that houses the U.S. Congress. While you do not need passes or tickets to enter the Capitol Visitors Center and view Exhibition Hall, you do need passes to watch the 13-minute film followed by a tour of the main Capitol building.

Tours are free, but tour passes are required.

Tour hours: 8:45 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., Monday - Saturday

Advance Passes: Tours may be booked in advance online at <http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/>. **Please plan to arrive before the time on your ticket to allow time to go through security and to pick-up your theatre pass(es), which are the beginning of each tour.** Check-in will go more smoothly if you bring the confirmation letter that is generated once you reserve your passes at the link provided in this paragraph. You may book a tour up to three months in advance. One can also cancel or modify one's reservation by clicking on the above link.

Same-Day Passes: A limited number of passes are available each day at the tour kiosks on the East and West Fronts of the Capitol or at the Information Desks in Emancipation Hall on the lower level of the Visitor Center.

Peak-Season: It is most difficult to book a tour of the Capitol March through early August.

Booking a tour three months in advance is recommended although not always necessary depending on the time of year.

WATCHING CONGRESS IN SESSION

Hours: The Senate and House Galleries are open to visitors whenever either body is in session. In addition, the House Gallery is open 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday - Friday, when the House is not in session. The Senate Gallery is closed during the Senate's district work period.

Passes: Passes are required to enter either gallery at any time. The Gallery is effectively the balcony in either the Senate or House Chamber that overlooks the Floor where Member voting and debate occurs.

Constituents of the Fifth District of Maryland may obtain House Gallery passes from my office in 1705 Longworth House Office Building. [View and print directions to Congressman Steny Hoyer's personal office](#), where you may pick up Gallery Passes. If you do not live in the Fifth District, [find your Representative here](#).

Senate Gallery passes are available from the Washington, DC offices of your Senators, in this case being [Senator Barbara Mikulski](#) and [Senator Ben Cardin](#) if you live in the state of Maryland. If you do not live in Maryland, [click here](#) to find the Senators representing your state.

Gallery passes are available for international visitors at the House and Senate Appointment Desks on the upper level. Ask a CVC Visitor Assistant wearing a red vest to direct you.

DINING AND GIFT SHOPS

Restaurant (Lower Level): Freshly made soups, salads, specialty entrees, pizza, sandwiches, desserts, and beverages reflect the diverse bounty of America. **Hours: 7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m., Monday - Saturday.**

Gift Shops (Upper Level): A unique selection of merchandise inspired by the Capitol's art and architectural treasures, fun and educational gifts, books, jewelry, and exciting custom-designed products make excellent souvenirs. **Hours: 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday - Saturday.**

EXHIBITION HALL (LOWER LEVEL)

Here you can explore the only exhibition in the country dedicated to telling the story of Congress and the construction of the U.S. Capitol. Exhibit highlights include rarely seen historic documents from the National Archives and the Library of Congress, artifacts from around the country, interactives, and an 11-foot-tall touchable model of the Capitol dome. You may also watch the action on the floors of both chambers of Congress at the House and Senate theaters when Congress is in session. Numerous interactive stations allow you to discover more about Congress, its Members, and the Capitol. **Hours: 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday - Saturday.**

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS ACCESS

Visitors have direct access from the Capitol Visitor Center to the historic Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress, one of the nation's great treasures, via the Library of Congress Tunnel. The entrance to the tunnel is located on the upper level of the Visitor Center near the House Appointment Desk. For information regarding public tours of the Library of Congress, please [click here](#).

VISITOR TIPS

Bring a print-out of your confirmation if you have booked your tour in advance. Please Also Bring the [map showing the entrance to the Capitol Visitors Center](#).

Please read below, the list of items prohibited in the United States Capitol including the Visitors Center.

Please plan on arriving at the CVC at least 15 minutes before the time on your pass if you have an advanced reservation.

The easiest way to get to the Capitol is via the Metro subway. The closest Metro stops are Union Station on the red line and Capitol South on the blue/orange line. [To plan a trip via Metro, please click here](#). The closest available public parking lot is in Union Station. Street parking is very limited.

All areas of the Visitor Center are smoke free.

Strollers and Baby Changing: Strollers are permitted in the Visitor Center and baby-changing stations are available in each family restroom.

Public Telephones and ATMs: These are located outside each Gift Shop.

Foreign Languages: Visitors may request listening devices for foreign-language versions of the films and the exhibition at the Information Desks located in Emancipation Hall.

Visitors with Disabilities: Visitors may request wheelchairs from Capitol Visitor Center staff wearing red vests, at a Coat Check, or at one of the Information Desks in Emancipation Hall. Sign-language interpreting for tours is available when booked in advance. Listening devices with audio description of the films and exhibition are available at the Information Desks. All films have open captioning.

Service Animals: Service animals are allowed in the Visitor Center and the Capitol.

RESPECTING CAPITOL ART

During your visit, help preserve the Capitol's statues and other works of art. Enjoy looking at the art and statues, but do not touch them - each touch does some damage.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Before entering the Capitol Visitor Center, all visitors are screened by a magnetometer and all items that are permitted inside the building are screened by an x-ray device. The following items are strictly prohibited:

- **Any bag larger than 14" wide x 13" high x 4" deep**
- Aerosol containers
- Any pointed object (i.e., knitting needles, letter openers, etc. Note: pens and pencils are permitted.)
- Cans and bottles
- Electric stun guns, martial arts weapons or devices
- Food or beverages of any kind
- Guns, replica guns, ammunition, and fireworks
- Knives of any size
- Mace and pepper spray
- Non-aerosol spray (prescriptions for medical needs are permitted)

- Razors and box cutters

The following are allowed in the Capitol Visitor Center and the Capitol, but not in the Senate and House Galleries:

- Battery-operated electronic devices (Medical devices are permitted.)
- Cameras
- Creams, lotions, or perfumes
- Strollers
- Video recorders or any type of recording device

IN THE EVENT OF AN EVACUATION AT THE CAPITOL VISITOR CENTER:

- Proceed to the nearest exit - exit up stairs
- All emergency exits at the Visitor Center are located on the Upper Level
- Follow direction of U.S. Capitol Police
- If assistance is needed, seek U.S. Capitol Police help

OTHER PLACES TO VISIT THAT IMMEDIATELY SURROUND THE CAPITOL:

(Please note that having an advanced registration for a Capitol Tour does not mean one also has reserved a tour for any of the places listed below. The list of buildings below is simply meant as a suggestion of other places to visit before or after one visits the Capitol, or if one is unable to get a tour the Capitol. There is plenty to do in Washington, D.C.!)

- [The United States Botanic Garden](#)
- [Voice of America Studio Tours](#)
- [Smithsonian Museum of the Native American and American Indian](#)
- [The National Gallery of Art](#)
- [Sewall-Belmont Home and Museum](#)
- [Folger Shakespeare Library](#) (exhibits, workshops, and theatre)
- [The Supreme Court](#)
- [The Library of Congress Tours](#)
- [Library of Congress Schedule of Events](#): see a movie, hear a concert, sit-in on a historical lecture, take a class, or view a historical or cultural exhibit.