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The Philadelphia Inquirer

News

Independence National Historical Park reopening with restrictions

Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell Center will reopen Monday, though capacity will be limited.



A posted COVID-19 sign in Independence National Historical Park in September. Park buildings are reopening to a limited number of visitors Monday.

YONG KIM / Staff Photographer

By Maddie Hanna

Published Dec 31, 2020

Independence National Historical Park will reopen its buildings Monday, though the number of visitors inside will be limited amid the pandemic.

Among the buildings opening daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.:

- The park's Visitors Center, which will admit up to 150 people
- Independence Hall, with up to nine visitors admitted every 15 minutes
- The Liberty Bell Center, with a 20-person capacity
- Old City Hall and Congress Hall, each with a nine-person limit

"We will operate with the same modifications we applied in September for tours and visitor services, to keep numbers within city guidelines," said Cynthia MacLeod, the park's

superintendent. She said the park will use other protective measures, including markers for social distancing and “clear protective shields at public contact stations.”

The reopening Monday comes as Philadelphia is expected to allow some activities, including museums and gyms, to reopen, though city activities deemed higher-risk — like indoor dining — remain [banned through Jan. 15](#).

The National Park Service said it is monitoring public health guidelines at the federal, state, and local levels in reopening park buildings. Among the buildings at Independence National Historical Park, the Second Bank and Free Quaker Meeting House will reopen as staffing permits.

Other local facilities will remain closed, the park service said. Among them are the “Great Essentials” exhibit in the West Wing of Independence Hall; the Benjamin Franklin Museum and print shop; the Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial; and the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site.



Independence National Historical Park Reopening Some Buildings Monday As Philadelphia Lifts Restrictions On Museums

By [CBS3 Staff](#) January 2, 2021 at 8:37 am



PHILADELPHIA (CBS) — Parts of Independence National Historical Park, including the Liberty Bell will reopen on Monday. You can also go inside Independence Hall and the Independence Visitors Center, now that Philadelphia is lifting restrictions on museums.

But attendance is still limited because of the pandemic.



Independence National Historical Park Buildings Reopened

Published January 4, 2021 • Updated on January 4, 2021 at 9:25 am



PHILADELPHIA (NBC) — A lot of COVID-19 restrictions are now being lifted in Pennsylvania. We are seeing a big week ahead for local museums as they welcome guests back.

You can finally visit parts of Independence Mall, for instance. That is including the Independence Visitor Center and Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell Center, Old City Hall and Congress Hall. And in one more day, for The Franklin Institute.

On Friday, the Academy of Natural Sciences at Drexel and The Barnes open at 10:00 a.m.



Independence Hall Reopening

Published January 4, 2021 • Updated on January 4, 2021 at 3:58pm



PHILADELPHIA (6ABC) — The National Park Service is increasing access to Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell starting today. The move is in conjunction with Philadelphia's guidelines on reopening museums.

The Independence Visitor Center at Sixth and Market Streets can hold 150 visitors at a time, the Liberty Bell Center has a 20-person capacity, Independence Hall accepts groups of nine people every 15 minutes.

The same restrictions from before are still in place. Masks are required and there is still a limit on the number of people allowed inside, at one time.



Independence Visitor Center to Re-Open Today

Posted Jan 4, 2021 4:33am



PHILADELPHIA (FOX29) -- Historic landmarks in Philadelphia are reopening today.

The Liberty Cell Center and Independence Hall are welcoming visitors again starting this morning. Both landmarks closed back in November, in accordance with the City's "Safer At Home" guidelines.

Other indoor sites that are opening today include the Independence Visitor Center, Old City Hall, and Congress Hall.



Independence Hall and Liberty Bell reopen after COVID shutdown

Capacity restrictions mean a better view, so if you haven't been for a while, it might be worth a trip.



MARK HENNINGER / IMAGIC DIGITAL



Danya Henninger

Jan. 03, 2021, 2:00 p.m.

With COVID safety measures in place, the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall begin welcoming guests Monday as the city's ban on museum visits expires.

If you've been looking for things to do and haven't been for a while, it might be worth a trip. Judging from a tour before the historic destinations shut down Nov. 20, the restrictions won't really take away from your visit — in fact, they'll probably let you get a better view.

Overall, the coronavirus was rough on Philadelphia tourism, for obvious reasons. About a third as many fewer people traveled to the region last year versus 2019, [spending half as much money](#), according to the Business Journal. A big part of the drop can be chalked up to canceled conventions and business meetings, which nearly vanished.

But some leisure travel still happened, which was obvious to anyone walking around the city. From mid-May onward, after the pandemic's first scary peak subsided, a day didn't pass without folks lined up to take a pic at the Rocky statue, and Old City streets had plenty of masked and distanced wanderers.

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Summer and fall are the most popular times to visit the birthplace of the United States, according to Independence National Historical Park spokesperson Leslie Obleschuk.

That held true this year. In September there was an hour-long line at Independence Hall and a wait of several hours to get into the Liberty Bell Center.

When the bell site reopens Jan. 4, you can expect fewer lines, but there might still be a wait, because only 20 people are allowed inside at any one time. That means that when you do get in, you have a better chance at a closeup of the famous cracked ringer. Pre-pandemic, up to 400 people would crowd into the space at once, per Obleschuk.

At Independence Hall — which non-Philadelphians might not realize they recognize from [the back of the \\$100 bill](#) — tour groups are being kept to just nine people, compared to groups of 65 in the before times. You'll go through a security scan as you wait in line, then be admitted every quarter-hour. Both venues are [open daily 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.](#), no tickets required.

Here's some of what you'll see and learn at the building where both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were signed.



The east-facing clock at Independence Hall MARK HENNINGER / IMAGIC DIGITAL

If you do end up waiting in the courtyard, you'll be treated to some of the best views of the site, which opened in 1753 as the Pennsylvania State House after more than 25 years under construction.



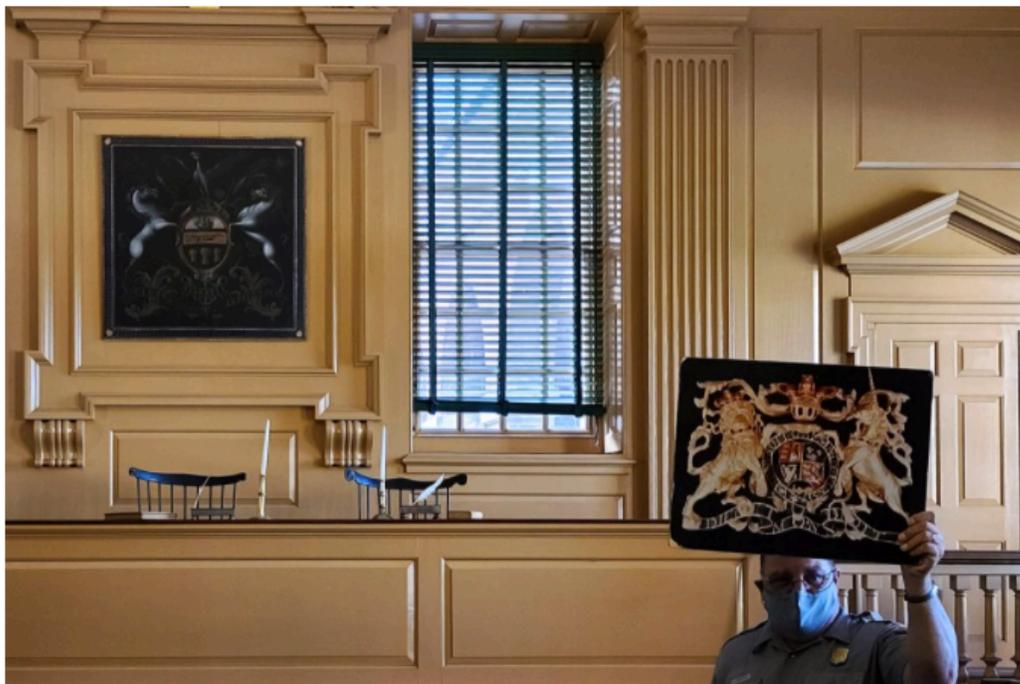
The Assembly Room at Independence Hall MARK HENNINGER / IMAGIC DIGITAL

The most storied space in the whole building has to be the Assembly Room, which is where both famous documents were signed.



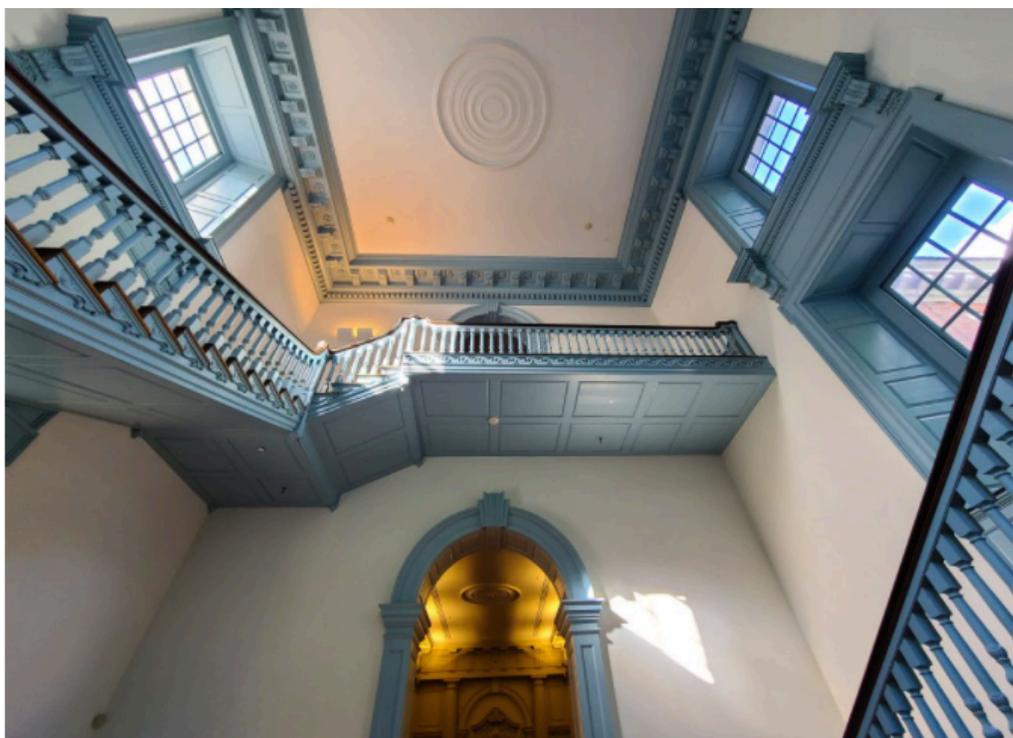
Desks in the Assembly Room MARK HENNINGER / IMAGIC DIGITAL

Each desk is outfitted with appropriate props, including a quill and inkstand, a staff, and a smoking pipe.



MARK HENNINGER / IMAGIC DIGITAL

On July 8, 1776, the revolutionary militia stormed the room and tore down British King George III's coat of arms, which the ranger holds in the photo above.



The interior of Independence Hall MARK HENNINGER / IMAGIC DIGITAL

Originally designed by Edmund Woolley and Andrew Hamilton, the building was renovated several times. The current interior is a replica built by the National Park Service.



JANUARY 04, 2021

Philly museums begin reopening after city eases COVID-19 restrictions

Independence National Historical Park resumed indoor operations Monday; other cultural institutions to reopen later this week

BY PAT RALPH *PhillyVoice Staff*

MUSEUMS [Coronavirus](#)



M. EDLOW/VISIT PHILADELPHIA™ Independence Hall and other indoor sites at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia have reopened to visitors.

Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell Center welcomed visitors Monday for the first time since November as Philadelphia's COVID-19 restrictions relaxed.

Several other indoor sites at Independence National Historical Park, including Independence Visitor Center, Old City Hall and Congress Hall, also reopened to the public.

Additionally, many museums are set to reopen later this month.

The Franklin Institute will reopen Wednesday, while the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, the Barnes Foundation, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Penn Museum and the Museum of the American Revolution will resume operations Friday. The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts will reopen Jan. 21.

Eastern State Penitentiary will open back up in March. The Rodin Museum will resume business sometime this spring. An exact date has not been announced.

The National Constitution Center will remain closed until further notice due to the public health crisis.

When returning to the museums, visitors will be required to follow several COVID-19 health and safety guidelines, such as wearing face masks and practicing social distancing.

Museums were [shut down in November for the remainder of 2020](#) due to COVID-19 restrictions implemented by Philly officials in response to a spike in coronavirus cases.

City officials [announced late last month](#) that museums could resume operations as soon as Jan. 4.

"With the advent of a new year, we are grateful for the opportunity to welcome our visitors once again," leaders from six cultural institutions — the Academy of Natural Sciences, Barnes Foundation, Museum of Art, Eastern State Penitentiary, Rodin Museum and Academy of Fine Arts — said in a joint [statement](#).

"Despite the continued challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the resilience of the cultural sector shines through and cultural experiences remain essential to the well-being of the human spirit, providing inspiration, enrichment and rejuvenation. Undoubtedly, the role of Philadelphia's museums and cultural organizations will be a critical one in the region's recovery."



Delaware Valley Tourism Industry Hoping To Bounce Back After Taking Big Hit In 2020 Due To Pandemic

By [Matt Petrillo](#) January 4, 2021 at 6:28 pm



PHILADELPHIA (CBS) — The Delaware Valley is hoping to build back tourism in 2021 after taking a big hit last year because of the pandemic. Tourism officials in Philadelphia say many attractions are working to make a big comeback.

Parts of Independence National Historical Park, like the Liberty Bell and Congress Hall, reopened Monday. **Victoria Valentine is visiting from Utah.**

"We're very happy to know that everything was gonna be open for us," Valentine said.

Attractions like museums were closed in Philly for several weeks because of COVID restrictions. But now people are being welcomed back.

Matt Fink and his fiancé planned a day trip here from Marlton, Burlington County. "We're gonna check out Independence Hall and walk around and maybe grab a cheesesteak," Fink said.

The tourism agency Visit Philadelphia says visitation to our region was down by as much as 40% in 2020. But it's hoping for a big comeback.

"The quickest thing that people can do to be a part of our region's recovery is to be a tourist in your own hometown," said Jeff Guaracino with Visit Philadelphia.

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There is a lot to look forward to this year in the Delaware Valley. Four new hotels are expected to open in Philadelphia, like Element by Westin and The W, both in Center City.

“We’ve got a wonderful rooftop pool that’s heated for year-round use, also features cabanas and a fire pit,” said W Hotel Philadelphia General Manager Ed Baten.

Visit Philadelphia also launched a new initiative that highlights more than 130 Black- and Brown-owned businesses, like Star Fusion Express in West Philadelphia.

“I’m so grateful for them doing something like this. A lot of times restaurants in our community don’t get a lot of attention,” said Darlene Jones with Star Fusion Express.

Star Fusion Express opened in June, during the pandemic, but says visitors from many parts of the country have since visited.



No protests or rallies in Philadelphia on Biden-Harris Inauguration Day

Michael D'Onofrio Tribune Staff Writer Jan 20, 2021



Independence Hall was cordoned off and patrolled by law enforcement on Wednesday in the lead-up to the inauguration of Joe Biden. PHILADELPHIA TRIBUNE PHOTO/MICHAEL D'ONOFRIO

A beefed up police presence was visible in Center City and elsewhere on Wednesday for the inauguration of Joe Biden in Washington, D.C.

As snow briefly fell, there were no gatherings or protests around City Hall or Independence Mall.

Packs of Philadelphia police on bicycles patrolled around 1400 John F. Kennedy Boulevard and city offices in the area.

Access was permitted to the Municipal Services Building but the perimeter was cordoned off with police bicycle racks. A few police could be seen in cruisers and on foot around City Hall, too.

The seat of Philadelphia's government was otherwise quiet as temperatures dipped into the 30s. Few people were seen milling around Dilworth Park and Love Park.

Independence National Historical Park buildings were closed for the day. Park Rangers were seen stationed inside the Liberty Bell Center and there was an uptick in park police elsewhere on the grounds. Independence Hall was cordoned off along Chestnut Street.

City and federal law enforcement were in a **heightened posture** and sharing resources leading up to the inauguration.

Last week Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw pledged that all hands would be on deck to protect the city from any threats of violence or civil unrest.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation set up a command post in the city to gather intelligence and coordinate with law enforcement partners on possible threats to government buildings and communities.

The inauguration of Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris comes two weeks after a violent attack and insurrection on the U.S. Capitol, where former President Donald Trump supporters stormed the building. The attack left five dead, including a Capitol Police officer.

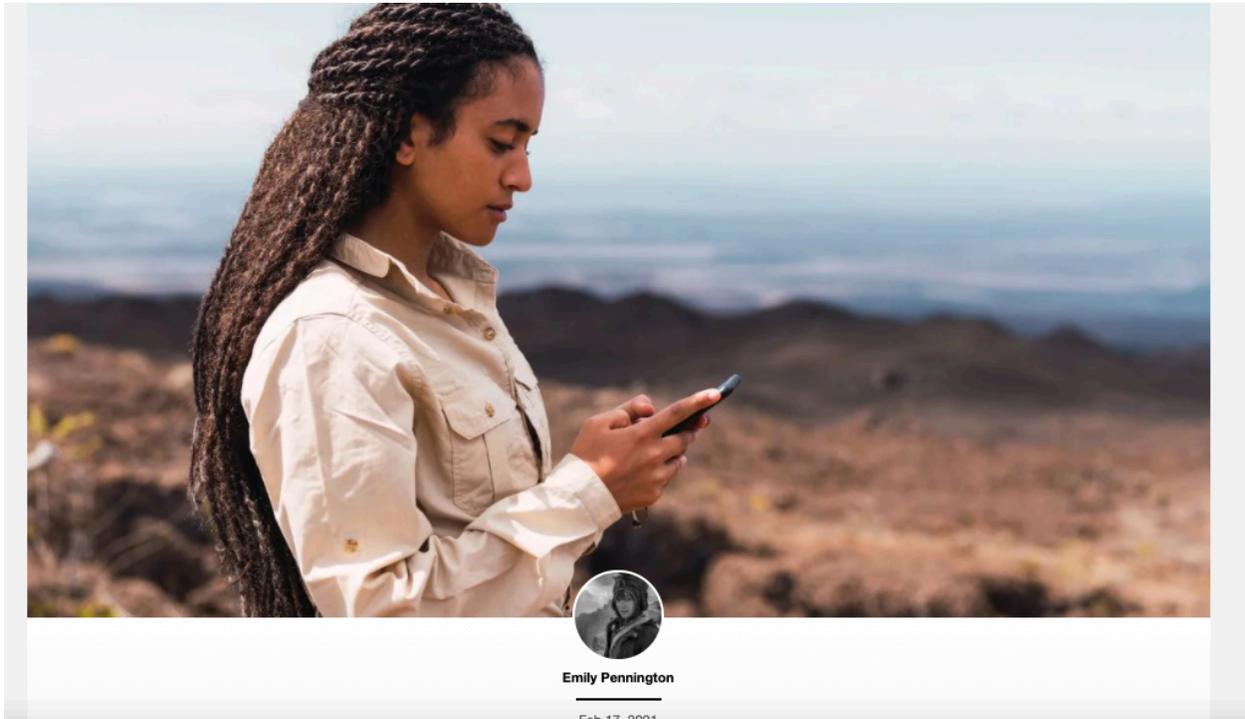
The FBI warned of armed protests in all 50 state capitals and Washington, D.C., leading up to Biden's inauguration.

215-893-5782, mdonofrio@phillytrib.com

Outside

The National Park Service Launched a Brand-New App

Forget visiting the app store every time you visit a national park. This new, free release provides all kinds of maps, must-hike trails, food recommendations, and more for all of its 423 units.



Throughout the pandemic, we'll keep publishing news to help you navigate the state of travel today ([like whether travel insurance covers the coronavirus](#)), as well as stories about places for you to put on your bucket list once it's safe to start going more far-flung.

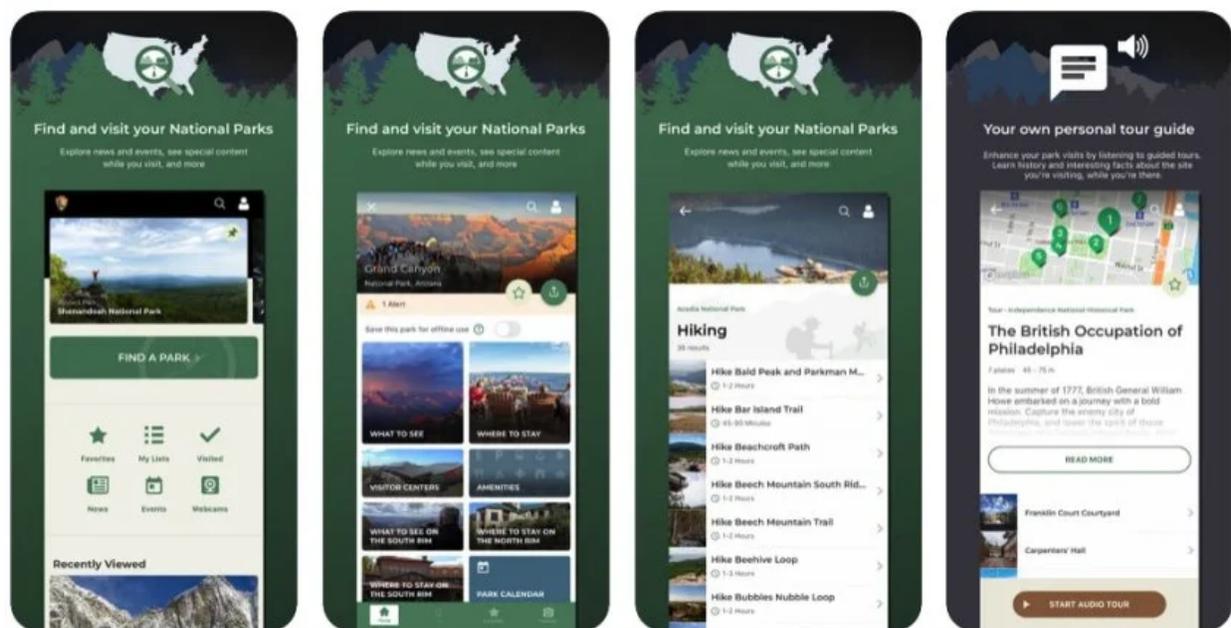
This month the National Park Service quietly launched a new mobile app that is sure to be a game changer. The product, simply titled [National Park Service](#), is available for free on Android and Apple and boasts a staggering number of features, like accessibility information, lodging reservations, hike suggestions, audio tours, restaurant hours, and, perhaps most important, maps available to download for offline use.

If the goal for the Park Service is to offer visitors a one-stop shop where they can glean news, alerts, and trail recommendations for all of its 423 units, then this app is already crushing it.

Though the app is technically still a work in progress, the beta version currently available is incredible. Users are greeted with stunning photos of some of the most visited national parks. Then you have the option to find a unit by mapping to your current location, searching a specific state, or typing a park name into the search bar. From there you can tailor your home page by pinning favorite parks to the top,

checking off previously visited old haunts, or creating a new list of sites and activities for an upcoming road trip.

Want to go on a guided audio tour of the *Star Wars* filming locations within [Death Valley](#)? Download park data for offline use, begin at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center, on the California side of the park, and follow the driving directions on the app’s map to blast off to [Tatooine](#). Looking for the best spot to check out the [active eruption on Kilauea](#)? Flip through the recommended options and learn about the goddess Pele and [Hawaii Volcanoes](#) history as you decide where to take in the show. It’s like having a ranger in your pocket at all times.



Access maps, bookmark trails, see park alerts, and more (Photo: NPS/App Store)

The app is full of quirker features, too, like taking a “belfie” (a selfie in front of the Liberty Bell at Philadelphia’s Independence National Historic Park), detailed images of every single park passport stamp and where to get them, and the ability to create and send a custom, virtual postcard, with up to four recent photos and a park stamp in the corner.

By far the most impactful part of the new app is how much it streamlines the visitor experience. In the past, travelers had to get individual apps for each park, which were often clunky or failed to download quickly enough due to spotty reception in rural areas. With the new National Park Service app, it’s a download-once-and-go experience, perfect for last-minute hikes, essential information, advice, and alerts on things like road closures. You can even book campgrounds and search for nearby food options.

Of course, the app isn’t perfect—yet. Destinations like Mammoth Cave, in Kentucky, don’t have cave tours uploaded at the moment, and [Yosemite](#), in California, only lists two hikes under Things to Do. A Park Service spokesperson said that at this time it’s focusing on finalizing content and testing features, noting that “parks are continuously adding content to their sections of the app, so always check back to see if favorite parks have added more info.”

[ANDROID IOS](#)

TRAVEL+
LEISURE

The National Park Service's New App Makes Planning a Visit Easier Than Ever

The app will feature all 423 National Park Service units, eliminating the need to download individual apps for each park.

BY JESSICA POITEVIEN FEBRUARY 22, 2021



It seems like everything comes with [an app](#) these days, and now, the National Park Service (NPS) is no different. Designed to make planning a visit to any of the 423 NPS units easier than ever before, the new app — appropriately named National Park Service — features accessibility information, lodging reservations, [hike suggestions](#), audio tours, restaurant hours, downloadable maps, and more.

According to [Outside](#), a NPS spokesperson said, "Parks are continuously adding content to their sections of the app, so always check back to see if favorite parks have added more info."

The recently released app is still in its beta version, but anyone is free to download it and start utilizing its many features. Users can personalize their homepage with [favorite parks](#), take an audio tour of *Star Wars* filming locations in Death Valley, learn about the geographic history of volcanoes, and much more.

Best of all, this app acts as a one-stop shop for everything national park enthusiasts need to know about all of the NPS units. Now, instead of having to download a separate app for each park, this new version offers all the necessary information, including updated news alerts, in one place.

The app also has several features that are just as fun as they are functional. For visitors who collect national park passport stamps, the app has detailed photos of each one, along with information on where to get them. App users can also create and send a custom virtual postcard, with up to four recent photos and a park stamp in the corner. Ever heard of a "belfie?" It's a selfie with the Liberty Bell at Philadelphia's Independence National Historical Park, and the National Park Service app will help you take one.

Of course, there's still much room for improvement. Destinations like Mammoth Cave in Kentucky don't have cave tours uploaded yet, and Yosemite in California only lists two hikes under Things to Do. According to *Outside*, a NPS spokesperson said that at this time, it's focusing on finalizing content and testing features.

The app is available on both Android and Apple devices.