

# 5 Trips to Make Memorial Day More Memorable



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By Shawn McEvoy

So your family finds itself with a three-day weekend coming up. You want to do something fun, but also feel like you should, you know, actually appreciate the significance of what the Memorial Day holiday really entails. Well, why not do both?

Our country's National Park Service operates 129 National Memorials in locations all around our great land, many of which are not only near you, but near the kind of attractions the whole family can enjoy. Today we'll take a look at five of these locations simply as a way to get your creative juices flowing. By no means do we intend to be exhaustive, nor does our exclusion of other memorials, historical sites, battlefields or cemeteries mean they aren't equally worthy of a visit! Our goal here is to help you consider what's nearby, what you want to "memorialize" this year, what lessons might be learned at each stop, and how else you might combine fun and reflection as a family!

Let's journey from west to east today, and begin our tour in California...





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## The Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial

*Concord, CA*

### What It Commemorates

- The largest domestic loss of life during World War II (320 sailors and civilians), July 17, 1944
- Ships being loaded with ammunition and bombs exploded
- Most of the lives lost were of African-American descent
- The tragedy played an important role in the eventual desegregation of the U.S. Navy

### Travel-Time Talking Points

- The horrors of war are not limited to far-away battlefields; accidents can and do occur, so we must not take life for granted
- Soldiers and sailors who die at home are no less deserving of our respect and honor than those killed in action
- Racism has no place anywhere, especially not among those fighting for the same cause of freedom

### Follow-Up Fun Spots

- You're in Northern California, so the opportunities are everywhere! Yosemite Park or Napa Valley not your thing? Port Chicago is near Oakland, so all the opportunities of the Bay Area await:
- Alcatraz
- Muir Woods
- Fisherman's Wharf



# CHAMIZAL NATIONAL MEMORIAL



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## The Chamizal National Memorial

*El Paso, TX*

### What It Commemorates

- The peaceful resolution of the Chamizal Dispute
- The boundary between the U.S. and Mexico was in question due to a course change in the Rio Grande
- The cooperation of neighboring countries to allocate river waters, provide for flood control, and sanitation

### Follow-Up Fun Spots

- National Border Patrol Museum
- Plaza Theatre
- (And some of the best Mexican food you'll find this side of the border!)

### Travel-Time Talking Points

- Death and tragedy are not the only things worth "memorializing." It is also fitting to remember times when skirmishes were amicably prevented through international cooperation
- We are to love our neighbors individually; does the same commandment apply to countries? What does that look like?
- While we can be thankful the U.S. and Mexico have a border without war or dispute, it is not always peaceful. What are some issues involving the border or immigration, and what do you think should be done about them?





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# **The Jefferson National Expansion Memorial and Museum of Westward Expansion**

*St. Louis, MO*

## **What It Commemorates**

- Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase
- The explorers, pioneers and settlers of the American West; it's located near the starting point of the Lewis and Clark expedition; the Gateway Arch is its definitive icon
- The first civil government west of the Mississippi
- And even the debate over slavery raised by the Dred Scott case

## **Travel-Time Talking Points**

- What does it mean today to be a pioneer? To "strike out into new territory"? Are "expansion" and "dominion" biblical concepts?
- What are some downsides of colonization, exploration and expansion? Does the good outweigh the bad? Why or why not? What are we actually "memorializing" here?
- Do you see any ways the East and West of our country are different to this day due to the east-to-west expansion of (primarily) European culture?

## **Follow-Up Fun Spots**

- (Aside from riding the elevator to the top of the Arch, of course)...
- See the St. Louis Cardinals play ball with the greatest fans in baseball (and this coming from a Dodger fan)
- Six Flags St. Louis
- The Magic House Children's Museum





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## Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial

*Put-in-Bay, OH*

### What It Commemorates

- The Battle of Lake Erie, September 10, 1813, one of the biggest naval battles of The War of 1812
- Nine U.S. vessels led by Commodore Oliver Perry defeated and captured six British ships, allowing U.S. forces to recover Detroit
- Lasting peace between Great Britain, Canada, and the United States

### Follow-Up Fun Spots

- Okay, this one is obvious. Nearby Sandusky, Ohio is home to one of the largest collections of roller coasters in the world, Cedar Point Park. If you haven't heard of it, ask your kids. Chances are they are dying to visit!
- Ghostly Manor Thrill Center
- Great Wolf Lodge

### Travel-Time Talking Points

- The site's Memorial Column is "the world's most massive Doric column," and it was constructed "to inculcate the lessons of international peace by arbitration and disarmament." What can we learn from these lessons? Is peace always achievable through such means? Why or why not?
- This site simultaneously remembers those who fought in war, and the peace that followed. Does the standing peace between England, Canada and the U.S. give you hope that peace can be won through war, or do you think it is an exception?
- Three American and three British officers are buried together beneath the monument. Is this a fitting way to honor those who fought and died in battle, or does it strike you as odd? Why?





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## The National World War II Memorial (and SO Many Others)

*Washington, D.C.*

In D.C., you basically have your pick. I live 100 miles away and have visited several times, and the only memorials I've managed to see properly are World War II (gorgeous, by the way), Vietnam Veterans (the wall is sobering), the Washington Monument, and the Lincoln Memorial. And of course, Arlington Cemetery (witness the Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns sometime) and the Holocaust Museum.

I haven't even made it to the Franklin Delano Roosevelt, George Mason, Korean War Veterans, LBJ Memorial Grove, Martin Luther King Jr., Theodore Roosevelt Island, or Thomas Jefferson. So maybe it's time to take another trip of my own! The history, talking points, lessons, questions and somber silences are as unlimited as your imagination in these places. Consider the sacrifices of "the greatest generation" during World War II, for instance, or the weight on President Lincoln's shoulders as he tried to hold a fractured country together. You could take an entire week to see all the sites and learn all the lessons of our Nation's Capital.

### Follow-Up Fun Spots

- Six Flags America
- The Museum of the Bible
- National Zoo
- The International Spy Museum

A lot of things have happened on this continent since the first landing at Jamestown in 1607. Our history here did not begin with us, and our freedoms did not come without sacrifice. This Memorial Day weekend, get your family out of the backyard and into the lessons of the past. While you're at it, have a little fun in the present and do some thinking about our future.