

# 400 Years Forward

## African American Heritage Tour

Take a road trip to Hampton, Virginia and experience historic museums, fort, and sites that illustrate the perseverance of the human spirit. In 2019, Hampton, Virginia commemorated the 400th anniversary of the first African landing in English North America. Now, you can experience Hampton's rich African American heritage sites on the 400 Years Forward tour.

### Day 1

Arrive in Hampton and visit [Fort Monroe National Monument](#). It was on this site in 1619 at Old Point Comfort that “twenty and odd” Africans first arrived on Virginia soil. More than two centuries later in May 1861, Major General Benjamin Butler accepted three runaway slaves under the declaration that they were “contraband of war” and would therefore not be returned to their owners. As news of this extraordinary development spread, Fort Monroe quickly earned the nickname “Freedom’s Fortress.”

From the beautiful natural landscape and rich historic past, come visit to see all that Fort Monroe has to offer.

- [Fort Monroe Visitor and Education Center](#)  
30 Ingalls Rd, Fort Monroe, VA 23651

Start your tour of historic Fort Monroe at the Fort Monroe Visitor and Education Center. The Center is designed to welcome and orient visitors and provide interpretive exhibits, research, and archival resources. The Center tells the stories of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to English North America in 1619 and the culmination of 242 years of slavery as the first contrabands came to Fort Monroe to receive their emancipation. Visit the First Africans in Virginia Marker, the site in 1619, the first ship carrying “20 and odd” enslaved Africans arrived at Point Comfort in Virginia, where Fort Monroe is today.

- [Casemate Museum](#)  
20 Bernard Rd, Hampton, VA 23651

Fort Monroe, the largest stone fort ever built in the United States, was completed in 1834. Within the walls of the fort is the Casemate Museum, which chronicles the military history of Fort Monroe. The museum features the room where Jefferson Davis was held briefly as a prisoner following the American Civil War, highlights the 1861 “Contraband of War” decision that granted three enslaved men, and thousands who followed, sanctuary at Fort Monroe, earning it the nickname “Freedom’s Fortress.”

- **[First African Marker](#)**

The first Africans in English North America arrived here at Old Point Comfort in August 1619 aboard the ship, White Lion. The Africans brought with them their languages, cultures, and traditions that along with their presence would forever change the course of the United States.

- **[Walking Tour of Fort Monroe](#)**

Leisurely explore 21 unique sites full of history, architecture, and nature on a self-guided tour of Fort Monroe. Beginning at the Casemate Museum, you’ll make your way to stops like Quarters No. 1, where President Abraham Lincoln stayed for four nights as he and others planned the attack on Norfolk during the American Civil War; to the Water Battery, which housed 42 cannons as part of the fort’s defenses.

## **Day 2**

Visit the **[Hampton History Museum](#)** (120 Old Hampton Ln). Even as the history of Hampton is aligned with major events in American history, so too is the city’s history intertwined with the story of African Americans in this country. From the Seventeenth Century Gallery with its commentary on the coming of the first Africans to Virginia in 1619 through the descriptions of black sailors on merchant ships and the bravery of the slave Cesar Tarrant in Virginia’s Revolutionary War Navy, each gallery addresses the contributions of African Americans to Hampton history.

Continue your tour with a visit to the **[Emancipation Oak](#)** (100 East Queen Steet) on Hampton University's waterfront campus. A living symbol of freedom

for African Americans and a National Historic Landmark, the expansive Emancipation Oak is located at the entrance to Hampton University. The Emancipation Oak is said to be the site of the first Southern reading of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. At 98 feet in diameter and designated as one of the "Ten Great Trees of the World" by the National Geographic Society, it continues to be an inspiration.

Discover [Aberdeen Gardens](#) (55 and 57 N. Mary Peake Blvd), a historic neighborhood built for and by African Americans in 1935 as part of F.D.R.'s New Deal Settlement. The Aberdeen Gardens Historic Museum Museum preserves the neighborhood's rich heritage and honors the original residents. Out of the 55 New Deal communities proposed and constructed at the time, Aberdeen Gardens was the only Resettlement Administration community for Blacks in Virginia. The iconic neighborhood is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.

*Due to Covid-19, attractions may be experiencing different operating days and hours. Please check local listings before visiting.*

### Dining Suggestions

- [Mango Mangeaux: A Simply Panache Bistro](#)
- [Bowman's Soul N the Wall](#)
- [Kente's](#)
- [Got Fish? Seafood](#)

### Lodging Suggestions

- [Simply Panache Place: Boutique Hotel](#)
- [Magnolia House Inn](#)