

CIVIL WAR SESQUICENTENNIAL 2011 – 2015
Anniversary, Commemoration, Education and Reflection Tour Sites & Themes
THE GROUP TOUR COMPANY

What many consider to be the central event in American History, the Civil War, has an anniversary right around the corner. This April marks 150 years ago since the first shots of the war were fired at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina and April 2015, will mark 150 years after the surrender of Confederate General Robert E. Lee to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia. In between there are stories to be told, compelling characters to meet, museum exhibits to examine and landscapes to visit where battles determined the fate of a nation – a total war that claimed the highest number of casualties of all American Wars.

The Group Tour Company offers tailored programs to make your tour unique with custom itineraries; up-to-date information on area resources; enthusiastic guides that will instruct, explain and enlighten your tour participants; and comfortable accommodations and transportation. Here are some themes for your consideration:

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Classic

If you have never visited a Civil War battlefield, it was years ago, or you just want to be there for the anniversary, the following is a good start –

- **Harpers Ferry**, West Virginia, 1859 – long simmering tensions explode as abolitionist John Brown and his followers raid the Federal Arsenal in hopes of leading a slave rebellion.
- Depending on whether one was raised north or south, it is either **Bull Run or Manassas**, Virginia – the first battle of the war ruins the afternoon picnic excursion of some nineteenth century Washingtonians and gives immortality and a nickname to an eccentric professor turned general, Stonewall Jackson.
- **Antietam**, Maryland, September 17, 1862 – the deadliest day in all of American history. Lee is repulsed in his first invasion of the north and Lincoln decides to issue an Emancipation Proclamation and leads a divided nation toward ending slavery. Unwind a few miles from the battlefield in Sharpsburg with some seriously good ice cream.
- **Gettysburg**, July 1863 – the largest battle ever fought on the North American continent with names that resonate through the years – Cemetery Hill, Devil’s Den, Little Round Top and Pickett’s Charge. In November Lincoln delivers the most famous speech in American History and defines the war’s purpose for all time. A twentieth century general and later president, Eisenhower, retires to the only home he ever owned and one to visit today.

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Vital

The Western Theatre gives each side problems, but winning battles here is key to outcome –

- **Shiloh**, Tennessee, April 1862 – this carnage shocks the nation. Grant is less than stellar, yet stays to fight and win. A man many considered the South’s ablest general bled to death of his wounds. An obscure Union general comes to the rescue.
- **Vicksburg**, Mississippi, May-July 1863 – the Union lays siege and finally gets a Fourth of July victory! Some consider this to be the turning point of the war because the last holdout on the Mississippi falls and the Confederacy is split in two.
- Variety can be good – throw in Elvis’ Graceland or the quintessential antebellum town, Natchez – to stop any clamors of too many battlefields!

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Unexpected

Often overshadowed by the eastern battles, was this the campaign that won the war? –

- **Stones River**, Tennessee, New Years 1863 – without this victory Lincoln states, “the nation could scarcely have lived over,” yet the battle and its Northern General, William Rosecrans, remain largely unknown to this day.
- **Chickamauga**, Georgia and **Chattanooga**, Tennessee, September and November 1863 – in this difficult and varied terrain Confederate victory becomes Union revenge, turning the “Gateway to the Lower South” into the base for the march to Atlanta.
- **Atlanta**, Georgia, July 1864 – William Sherman’s victory gives Lincoln an electoral boast for his reelection and a setting for perhaps the most famous of all Hollywood movies. One hundred fifty years ago residents would have much preferred that Sherman’s “March to the Sea” had “Gone with the Wind” instead of rampaging their land!
- **Nashville**, Tennessee, December 1864 – the most complete victory of the war is won by the undeservedly forgotten George Henry Thomas with brave assistance of eight black regiments. Four Confederate generals are killed in the last major fight in the western theatre.

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Epic

The Eastern Theatre of Lee, Jackson, and Grant is the story of triumph and defeat –

- **Fredericksburg**, Virginia, December 1862 – the boyhood hometown of George Washington suffers the greatest destruction of any town during the war. It was at this Confederate victory that Lee says, “It is well that war is so terrible – we would grow too fond of it!” Founded in 1728 Fredericksburg contains many colonial history sites including the homes of George’s mother and sister.
- **Chancellorsville**, Virginia, May 1863 – Lee’s greatest victory as he divides his army twice in front of a larger foe. The Confederate victory is soured when Stonewall Jackson is mortally wounded by friendly fire. Lee sends his dying general a message, “he has lost his left arm but I my right.”
- **Wilderness and Spotsylvania**, Virginia, May 1864 – the original killing fields. Grant loses as many men as Lee has in his entire army, but does not retreat!
- **Cold Harbor**, June 1864 – Grant’s costly mistake.
- **Petersburg**, the long siege is broken by the Union and with it **Richmond**, Virginia, April 1865 – falls leaving the Confederacy grasping for air. This area is rich in interpretive sites – the Virginia State Capitol, the White House and Museum of the Confederacy, Monument Avenue and the American Civil War Center.
- **Appomattox**, Virginia, April 9, 1865 – the great national tragedy ends. Lee surrenders to Grant. The defeated given generous terms of surrender by the victor begin the process of reunification, one proud army to another. Not too far is the National D-Day Memorial and another story of conviction, courage and sacrifice.