

AN Exquisite Visit

No matter who you are or how much (or little) you know about the Church, visitors' centers and historic sites provide a marvelous opportunity to learn more.

By Richard M. Romney
Church Magazines

My 17-year-old daughter, Charlotte, and I were already going to San Diego, California, for a lacrosse tournament when she surprised me with a question: “While we’re there, could we visit that Mormon Battalion place?”

“Sure,” I answered, glad for her interest. Since we were driving, it wouldn’t take much to adjust our itinerary.

A few days later, when the tournament was over, we arrived at the Mormon Battalion Historic Site early in the evening. A sister missionary, a native of Hong Kong, served as the guide for our small group that included two tourists from the Philippines who had walked in from the street, a man interested in history who had traveled from Louisiana to California just to explore the

site, one less-active member who lived nearby, and my daughter and me.

As our tour began, right away we were immersed in the experience of the Mormon Battalion. What my daughter called “some really cool tech” allowed us to interact with the characters and learn their stories in a fun way that none of us were expecting. We witnessed over and over again that their actions were based on their faith in Jesus Christ.

We also saw historic artifacts. My daughter even got to put on a pack and pick up equipment identical to what battalion members would have used. We gained new appreciation for the weight they carried for 2,000 miles (3,200 km). At the end of our tour, we were invited to have our photo taken as honorary members of the battalion.

Afterward, various members of our group lingered. Some shared their email addresses or phone numbers so that they could remain in contact with our sister missionary guide, and the couple from the Philippines asked if they could discuss some specific questions they had before leaving. Then our guide visited with us and helped us to locate the nearest meetinghouse so that we could attend church the next day. Our visit was, in every sense, a pleasant experience. To this day my daughter speaks of it as one of the highlights of the trip.





AT A GLANCE

Church visitors' centers and historic sites:

- Receive millions of visitors each year.
- Are staffed by more than 1,200 full-time missionaries, including young sisters, senior sisters, and senior couples.
- Find tens of thousands of new investigators that local missionaries begin teaching throughout the world every year.
- Occasionally feature traveling exhibits that move between the visitors' centers and historic sites. For example, one exhibit features original paintings depicting prophets from various dispensations.
- Host concerts, activities, and other special events throughout the year.
- Welcome families and serve as great locations for parents to teach children about the gospel and Church history.
- Provide a friendly environment where less-active members can feel the Spirit, rediscover Church history, and be reminded of the joy of membership and activity in the Lord's Church.
- Offer warm and inviting settings where members can bring friends, neighbors, and business colleagues to learn more about the gospel and the Restoration.

Family Opportunities

Over the years, visitors' centers and historic sites have provided many opportunities for our family. While staying with family members, we have

Panning for gold (left) is one of the many family-friendly activities available at the Mormon Battalion Historic Site (above). Other exhibits use technological innovations to show how, throughout their journey, battalion members relied on faith in Jesus Christ.

toured visitors' centers at temples in St. George, Utah; Mesa, Arizona; and Idaho Falls, Idaho. On vacation we have been to the Mormon Battalion site and to Cove Fort in southern Utah. We have also visited Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, many times for family home evening.

More than once, a visit has prompted a discussion about temple marriage,

Many exhibits allow visitors to have experiences that bring Church history to life.

how to be a member missionary, or preparing for full-time missionary service. My sons and daughters have gone to centers and sites for youth activities, firesides, and dates. Years ago, while on a business trip, I was able to visit the Smith Family Farm Historic Site in Palmyra, New York, and ponder what I would have done as a teenager witnessing a “war of words and tumult of opinions” (Joseph Smith—History 1:10).

A relative in California reports that the Los Angeles Temple Visitors’ Center has served as a place of guidance for friends and family members, active or less active, who for one reason or another needed to restore or strengthen their faith. And, of course, these special places have regularly provided all of us with a welcoming environment where we can introduce friends, neighbors, business associates, and out-of-town guests to our beliefs without any pressure.

I believe that one reason our family loves to go to visitors’ centers and historic sites is that the sisters and senior couples who serve there are, through their example and kindness, extending the same tender invitation, given in the scriptures, to “come unto Christ” (Jacob 1:7; Omni 1:26; Moroni 10:32; D&C 20:59; see also Matthew 11:28; *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* [2004], 1.)

Missionary Opportunities

In fact, this invitation blesses both visitors and missionaries.

“I love it here,” says Sister Marianne Orndal of Manchester, England, who admits she was surprised to receive her call to the Utah Salt Lake City Temple Square Mission. She says that sisters who serve at visitors’ centers are constantly helping and teaching, whether it is to bolster the testimony of a member or to



WHAT'S NEW?

The Church regularly releases new films and opens new exhibits at visitors' centers. To learn about new exhibits, films, and special events in your area, "like" the Facebook page for the site you're interested in.

Recently Released Films

- *Meet the Mormons* (in English and Spanish)
- *What Is a Prophet?* (four visitors' centers)
- *God's Plan for Families* (in five additional languages this year)
- *Growth of the Church* (Peter Whitmer Farm)
- *The Nativity* and *He Is the Gift* (Christmas films)
- *Because of Him* and *He Is Risen* (Easter films)

Soon-to-Be-Released Films

- New feature films at the Priesthood Restoration Site (under development) and the Peter Whitmer Farm
- New films for Christmas and Easter

New Exhibits

- "Following Christ through the Book of Mormon" (seven visitors' centers so far)
- A large display on the "History of the Church in Mexico" (Mexico City Temple Visitors' Center)
- A cutaway model of the temple and a children's area at the Washington D.C. Temple Visitors' Center
- "Kids' Corner" (Peter Whitmer Log Home)
- "8 Stories," narratives from the lives of full-time missionaries (Los Angeles Temple Visitors' Center and Temple Square)

Pageants

- Alternating every other night with the Nauvoo Pageant, the British Pageant that enjoyed so much success in the United Kingdom is now also presented at Nauvoo, Illinois.

Pageants, films, exhibits, special events—there's a lot to see and do at visitors' centers and historic sites. Families can enjoy wholesome entertainment while they learn the gospel together. Exhibits, films, and live performances share the joy and peace that Latter-day Saints find through righteous living.



Strengthening faith and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ—that's what visitors' centers and historic sites are all about.

explain Joseph Smith's life to someone who has never heard his name before.

On a typical day at the Laie Hawaii Temple Visitors' Center, "there will be 60 to 70 guests here at a time," says Sister Lana Cavalcante from Fortaleza, Brazil. "We could be greeting a couple from India at the temple exhibit one minute, turn around and teach a Korean man at the Book of Mormon exhibit, then go outside to take a family from New York on a tour of the temple grounds. It's a privilege to share our testimonies with people from all over the world."

In addition, sisters at visitors' centers spend two or three hours daily sharing the gospel online with guests who have expressed an interest to learn more. After going on a tour at a center, missionaries invite guests to continue to learn by meeting with local missionaries. Visitors' center missionaries then continue to teach interested

With the help of sister missionaries, children at the Mexico City Temple Visitors' Center (below) explore exhibits developed especially for young visitors. Centers and sites also provide opportunities for family home evenings, youth activities, firesides, and dates.



CENTERED ON SHARING

Tens of thousands who are now members of the Church first learned about the Restoration of the gospel at a visitors' center or historic site. Many others had their faith strengthened or restored there. Here are some examples.



Sasha "Alex" Mokrohuz moved from Ukraine to the United States three years ago. He entered the Washington D.C. Temple Visitors' Center out of curiosity and was given a tour by one of the senior missionaries. Invited to return, he came back one week later. Sister missionaries began teaching him. "He would meet with us at the visitors' center," explains Sister Paige Kohler. "He told us that he felt 'warm' whenever he talked with us there. He believed in Jesus Christ and was intrigued by the Holy Ghost, so we encouraged him to read and pray about the Book of Mormon." A few days later they received a Facebook message from Alex: "I got my answer. I want to be baptized." When the local missionaries proposed a baptismal date, he requested that the date be moved up. As a new Latter-day Saint, Alex continues to attend church every week. He just received the Aaronic Priesthood and is contemplating a full-time mission.

In Washington, D.C. (below), visitors can see a cutaway scale model of the temple. Missionaries use technology (below right) to stay in touch with those who express interest in knowing more. They help them to find missionaries and meetinghouses where they live and to continue learning about the gospel.



Richard Bourne was a less-active member living in Seaside, Oregon. He noticed how happy his wife was each time she returned from serving in the Portland Temple. One time he made the two-hour drive to the temple with her and then sat in the car. On another, later trip, the new Portland Temple Visitors' Center was open, and he decided to wait there instead. He viewed all of the exhibits, then told a senior missionary, "If the spirit in the temple is anything like the spirit I feel in the visitors' center, I should speak with the bishop and do what I need to do to be in the temple with my wife." He has since received his endowment, been sealed to his wife, and served as a member of an elders quorum presidency. The Bournes now live in the state of Washington.



Rachel Magaoay from Honolulu, Hawaii, was in college in California when she visited a friend in Utah. Her friend took her to Temple Square. "We watched *The Testaments of One Fold and One Shepherd*," she says. "I was filled with joy as I remembered who my Savior is." Back in California, she requested that missionaries teach her more. Later, in Hawaii, she continued learning about the gospel and was baptized and confirmed. When she decided to serve a full-time mission, she was called to Temple Square. "As I invited others to come unto Christ," she says, "I continued to feel the same spirit I felt when my friend took me to the visitors' center and the Holy Ghost bore witness to me."

RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF HARDEN EYRING, RICHARD BOURNE, AND RACHEL MAGAOAY



Visitors' centers and historic sites can help bring you and others closer to the Savior.

guests after they leave, via email, social media, mormon.org chat, or other appropriate means.

“We see miracles in the lives of people we meet through the visitors' center,” says Sister Alexandria Finau of Rancho Cucamonga, California, who serves in the center at the Mesa Arizona Temple. “After they leave the center we continue to help them online by inviting them to read the Book of Mormon, pray, and attend church. We provide support as local missionaries teach them. I personally have made friendships that will last a lifetime—friends who have been



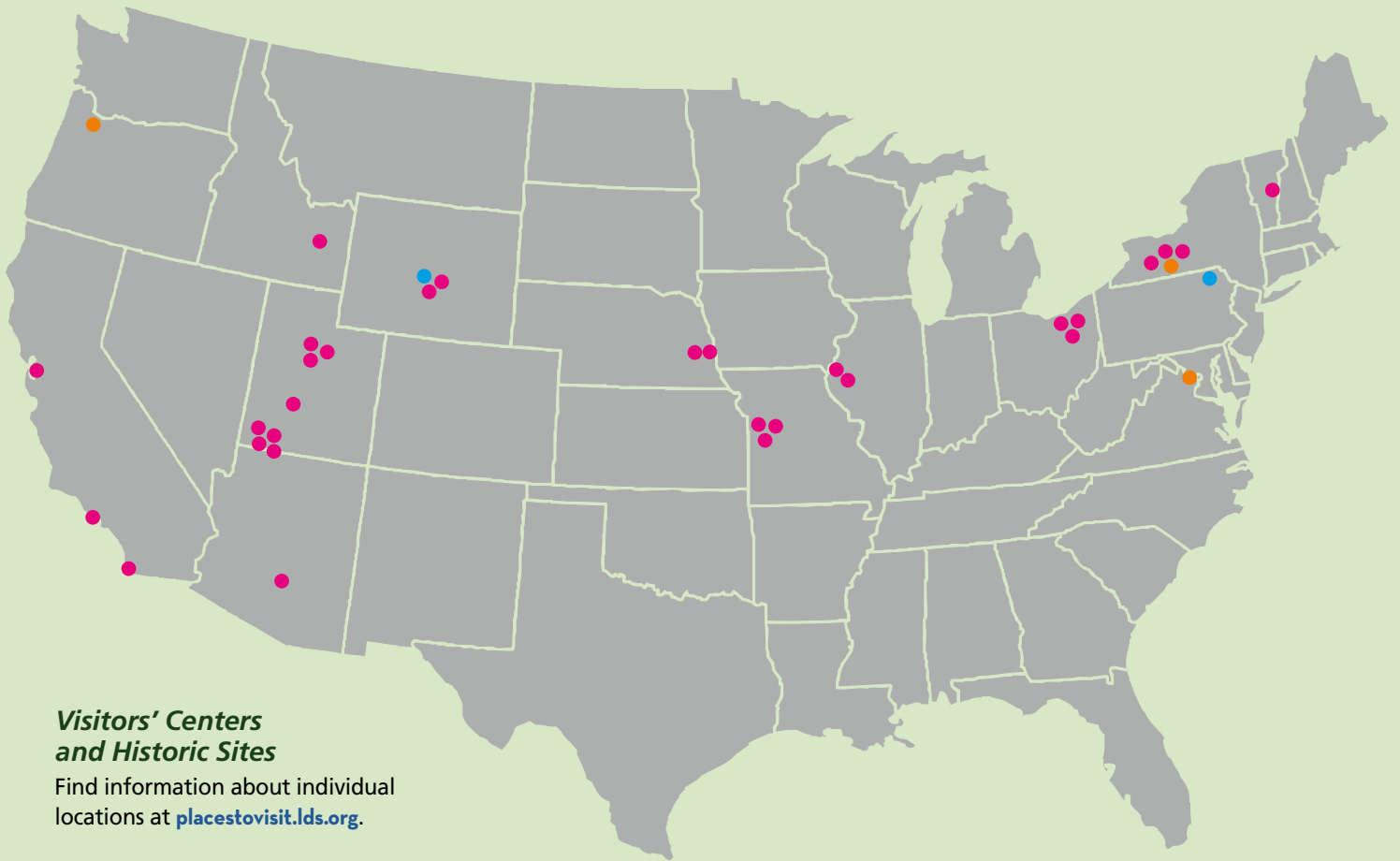
baptized, others who are preparing to enter the temple, and some who have decided to come back to church again.”

“When they are being taken care of by members and missionaries where they live, we continue to stay in touch,” says Sister Danielle Van Der Leek of Bloemfontein, South Africa, who serves at the visitors' center of the Hyde Park Chapel in London, England. “We want them to know we still care.”

Missionaries who serve at visitors' centers and historic sites are, in fact, busily engaged in the same activities that all full-time missionaries enjoy—they teach, testify, and explain the gospel “to the understanding” of those who visit (see 2 Nephi 31:3). What's more, they are blessed to serve at a special place that's been dedicated to the Lord, where the Spirit is constantly present, and where people walk in the front door and ask to know more. That's not only a great environment for full-time missionaries to share the gospel; it's an ideal place for us as members to learn how to strengthen our faith and experience the blessings of sharing it with others. ■

A child (left) feels reverence as he learns about the Savior, while (above) an exhibit about local Church history attracts visitors in Mexico City. Sites and centers offer a welcoming environment where we can renew and strengthen faith and where we can introduce others to our beliefs.





Visitors' Centers and Historic Sites

Find information about individual locations at placestovisit.lds.org.

- Sites in operation
- Sites recently opened or remodeled
- Sites under construction or announced



MAP IMAGES BY HSERUS (TOP) AND NIKITEEV_KONSTANTIN (BOTTOM)/ISTOCKTHINKSTOCK