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TRAVELER

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AMERICA'S LIGHTHOUSES

*have stood for
centuries*

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2021



Beloved
BEACONS

Big Sable Point Lighthouse in Ludington, Michigan, is one of the oldest continuously working lighthouses in the state.

By ToddandBradreed.com

LIGHTHOUSES STAND GUARD FOR CENTURIES

BY ELIZA MYERS

Sometimes a light saves the day — or night, as it were. Single beams of light have saved untold numbers of sailors looking for safe passage through choppy waters and rocky coasts. The lifesaving effect of lighthouses eventually became a symbol of hope, not just for sailors lost in a storm but also for regular people trying to get through a frequently dark and confusing world.

Today, we could all use a little light in our lives. Groups can visit historic lighthouses across the country to admire their beauty and learn about their fascinating history.

Though some have temporarily halted tours due to the COVID-19 pandemic, lighthouse staff expect to open access to these national treasures as soon as possible.

At these iconic American lighthouses, groups come for the views and leave feeling inspired.

PORTLAND HEAD LIGHT

CAPE ELIZABETH, MAINE

On Christmas Eve 1886, a ship struck the ledge at the Portland Head Light in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. The lighthouse's keeper and a few volunteers rigged an ordinary ladder to use as a gangplank between the shore and the ledge the ship was heeled against. The entire crew managed to climb across safely. It was a Christmas miracle.

Groups can hear this compelling story on their visit to the Portland Head Light. The 1791 lighthouse is so recognizable that many groups pose for photos in front of the Maine landmark. One of the most photographed lighthouses in the world, it stands surrounded by the dramatic coastline of Casco Bay, historic buildings and 90-acre Fort Williams Park. Groups can tour the site on their own and rent a picnic shelter for a group lunch.

Inside the Museum at the Portland Head Light, groups can see the 1891 former keeper's house and exhibits on the history of the lighthouse. Models depict changes made to the lighthouse from the original structure commissioned by George Washington to its modern appearance.

Groups can shop for lighthouse- and Maine-related gifts at the site's gift shop. Though Maine's oldest lighthouse doesn't frequently allow visitors to climb its 80-foot tower, groups can book a Casco Bay boat tour to see the white, conical lighthouse from sea.

VISITPORTLAND.COM

TYBEE LIGHT STATION AND MUSEUM

TYBEE ISLAND, GEORGIA

Gen. James Oglethorpe, governor of the 13th colony, ordered the building of the Tybee Light Station on Tybee Island, Georgia, in 1732. Since its original construction, the lighthouse has guided mariners safely into the Savannah River.

The Tybee Light Station is known as one of America's most intact historic lighthouse sites because it has retained all of its original support buildings. Rebuilt several times, the current 1916 lighthouse stands 145 feet tall. Groups can climb 178 steps for panoramic views of Tybee Island and massive ships sailing the Atlantic Ocean.

Georgia's oldest and tallest lighthouse welcomes groups to its five-acre site with self-guided tours. Staff are stationed throughout the grounds to answer any questions. Admission to the lighthouse also includes the Head Keeper's Cottage, the Second Assistant Keeper's Cottage and the Summer Kitchen.

The keeper's cottages give a sense of the lives of those who kept the lighthouse functional all those years. A 15-minute video in the Second Assistant Keeper's Cottage lays out the lighthouse's history for a quick overview.

The lighthouse ticket also allows access to the Tybee Island Museum, located across the street. The museum covers 400 years of the island's past with exhibits on the history of Tybee's Euchee tribe, Tybee's Golden Era and Fort Screven.

Groups can end their visits with a stop at the lighthouse's gift shop for souvenirs and other related items.

VISITTYBEE.COM

BIG SABLE POINT LIGHTHOUSE

LUDINGTON, MICHIGAN

In 1986, the Big Sable Point Lighthouse in Ludington, Michigan, seemed doomed to wash out to sea. The state and federal government abandoned it when the lake's water level came within four feet of the tower. The 1940s-era seawall stood under water, and many outbuildings had washed into the lake.

Local citizens banded together to install a new seawall and renovate the property. The group formed the Big Sable Point Lighthouse Keepers Association, which continues to manage the property, as well as three other historic Michigan lighthouses.

Groups can learn how the second-tallest lighthouse on the east-



Cape Lookout Lighthouse

Courtesy Crystal Coast TDA



Tybee Light Station and Museum

Courtesy Visit Tybee



Pigeon Point Lighthouse

Courtesy San Mateo County/Silicon Valley CVB



Portland Head Light

Courtesy Visit Portland

ern shore of Michigan was saved on a visit to the black-and-white-striped lighthouse. One of the oldest continuously working lights in the state, the lighthouse lies within Ludington State Park. To reach the lighthouse, groups can walk the one-way trail or arrange for special bus access.

Once at the site, visitors start by viewing historic pictures of the lighthouse. A video room shows a historic video about the Big Sable Point Lighthouse and its properties. A volunteer talks to the group about the artifacts on display before directing guests to the tower.

Those who wish to climb the 112-foot tower can admire spectacular views of Lake Michigan and Ludington State Park. A gift shop inside the original keeper's quarters helps support the lighthouse's ongoing preservation.

Ludington State Park offers guests more views with hiking trails, a canoe route, and beaches with calm waters and sandy shores.

PURELUDINGTON.COM

MARBLEHEAD LIGHTHOUSE

MARBLEHEAD, OHIO

Each night, Benajah Wolcott, a Revolutionary War veteran, would light the wicks of 13 oil lamps in the Marblehead Lighthouse in Marble-

head, Ohio. He continued this nightly ritual until his death in 1832 when his wife, Rachel, took over his duties and became the Great Lakes' first female lighthouse keeper.

Groups can learn more about early life as a lighthouse keeper at the Marblehead Lighthouse, the oldest lighthouse in continuous operation on the Great Lakes. Built in 1822, the lighthouse is part of the nine-acre Marblehead Lighthouse State Park.

Groups can climb the tower's 77 stairs for views of Lake Erie, Kelleys Island, South Bass Island and Cedar Point. The on-site Keeper's House Museum tells the history of the lighthouse with artifacts, historic photos and the last used Fresnel lens. The museum sits inside the 1880 keeper's house, which replaced the original 1821 house.

Groups can opt for a guided tour in the summer. After the tour, guests can shop for lighthouse-themed items at the gift shop.

A replica of the 1876 U.S. Lifesaving Station was constructed in 2016. Groups can explore this museum to discover the difficulties involved in rescuing Lake Erie sailors. One exhibit showcases a restored 27-foot Coast Guard rescue boat.

The lighthouse history continues 2.7 miles west of the site at the Wolcott House, which served as the original keeper's house. Costumed guides give tours of the historic home.

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CAPE LOOKOUT LIGHTHOUSE

HARKERS ISLAND, NORTH CAROLINA

The image of the black-and-white-checked Cape Lookout Lighthouse in Harkers Island, North Carolina, appears everywhere on the Crystal Coast, from business logos to lawn lighthouse replicas. The beloved lighthouse can only be reached by ferry, which doesn't stop visitors eager to see the impressive structure.

North Carolina's Crystal Coast is an 85-mile stretch of coastline that extends from Cape Lookout National Seashore southwestward to the New River. Cape Lookout National Seashore includes three underdeveloped barrier islands, including Harkers Island.

Passengers enjoy the three-mile ferry ride as part of the experience by keeping an eye out for dolphins, bald eagles, sea turtles and beach-loving wild horses.

Once on the island, groups visit the Keepers' Quarters Museum on the first floor of the 1873 keeper's house. Exhibits and a film chronicle the lighthouse keepers of the past and shipwreck rescues.

Groups can climb the lighthouse's 207 steps to the viewing level to look across the island and over the surrounding ocean. Once back outside, an island boardwalk accesses the ocean beach for shelling and beachcombing.

The Harkers Island Visitor Center contains artifacts and displays on the Cape Lookout National Seashore.

CRYSTALCOASTNC.ORG

PIGEON POINT LIGHTHOUSE

PESCADERO, CALIFORNIA

In 1852, the commercial vessel Carrier Pigeon launched on its maiden voyage from Boston. It wasn't until it reached San Mateo County, California, that the ship ran into trouble. The area's rocky coast sank the Carrier Pigeon. The wreck became so well known that the subsequent lighthouse built on the same spot in 1872 was named Pigeon Point Lighthouse.

To aid sailors navigating the central California coastal area, the lighthouse was outfitted with a 16-foot-tall lens. The original Fresnel lens is no longer in use, but guests can see the 2,000-pound light on display in the site's Fog Signal Building. The building displays information on the lighthouse's evolving fixtures, from a five-wick lard oil lamp to its current automated LED beacon.

Half-hour guided walks around the lighthouse grounds explain the history of the lighthouse. Tours also visit the keeper's office and the oil bunker for more artifacts and exhibits on the lighthouse.

Though the lighthouse tower is now closed, the grounds offer gorgeous views of the jagged coastline with constantly crashing waves. Standing 115 feet high, the Pigeon Point Lighthouse is one of the tallest lighthouses in the country. The lighthouse is easily spotted from the scenic Highway 1 coastal route.

Groups can also explore the town of Pescadero, with stops at historic Duarte's Restaurant, the Arcangeli Grocery Company and Harley Farms Goat Dairy.

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Courtesy Light Erie Shores and Islands

