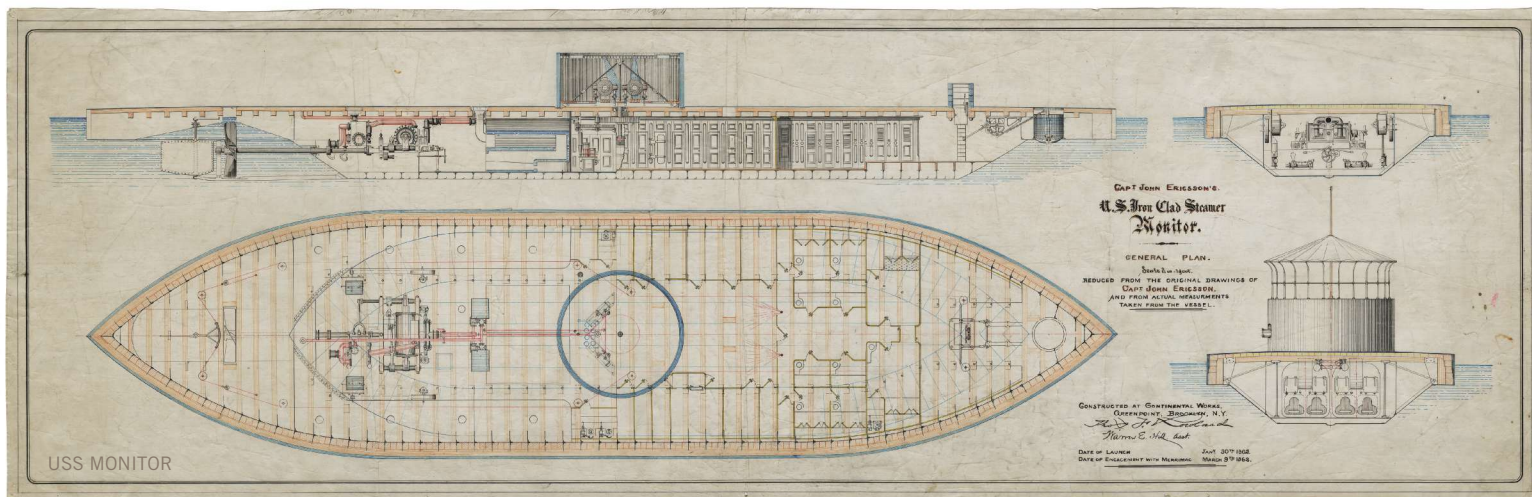


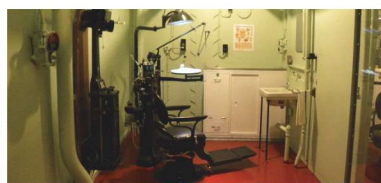
DECKS OF DISTINCTION

HISTORIC SHIPS ARE BASTIONS OF PRIDE

BY KRISTY ALPERT



USS MISSOURI



USS ALABAMA



SS MILWAUKEE



USS CONSTITUTION

From towering bridges built atop gigantic hulls to layers of metal so thick they were thought to defy the laws of buoyancy, historic ships have long left visitors awe-stricken with a sense of wonder.

Even English poet John Masefield was moved enough by the power wielded by these great vessels of the past to write these lines: "I touch my country's mind, I come to grips/With half her purpose, thinking of these ships.../They mark our passage as a race of men./Earth will not see such ships as those again."

Much more than former captains of the sea or retired maidens of maritime, historic vessels around the country are still serving their nation and crews proudly by preserving vital pieces of history while offering exceptional group tour experiences. So take your crew to see some of these historic ships peacefully laying anchor across the United States.

USS MONITOR Newport News, Virginia

Built by the U.S. Navy as a response to the Confederacy's USS Virginia during the Civil War in 1862, the ironclad not only played a part in changing the face of naval warfare but has also drawn tourists in waves since its inception because of its unconventional design.

"Newspaper reporters called her a 'cheese box on a raft,'" said Anna Holloway, curator of the USS Monitor Center. "She's this little, odd-looking thing no one thought could float who became the absolute hope of the Union in a few short hours, proving herself to be this can-do, scrappy thing that symbolized Yankee ingenuity."

The Monitor was rushed to completion in 118 days in hopes of steaming down to Virginia to destroy the Confederate ship before launch. Instead, the two met in combat on March 9, 1862, in Hampton Roads, marking the first instance of two ironclad warships fighting in battle.

Today, the remains of the USS Monitor rest on the ocean floor off Cape Hatteras, where the ship sank in a storm on Dec. 31, 1862. The Monitor is America's first national marine sanctuary and is accessible to group divers with advanced certifications.

For those preferring to stay on land, the Mariners' Museum offers guided tours of its 20,000-square-foot exhibit, stunning views of the battlefield on the conservation deck and behind-the-scenes tours of the world's largest marine metal-conservation lab, where workers are restoring pieces of the ship salvaged from the ocean floor.

— WWW.MONITOR.NOAA.GOV —

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USS MISSOURI

Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

Serving more than five decades in three separate wars, the USS Missouri (BB-63) secured its place in history as the site of Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allied Forces on Sept. 2, 1945, ending World War II. Famous for being the last battleship ever built, the Iowa-class battleship is also a star on the silver screen, with film appearances dating back to before its final decommissioning in 1992. Its list of credits includes Cher's "If I Could Turn Back Time" music video, as well as films such as "Under Siege," "Pearl Harbor," "Hawaii Five-O" and "Battleship."

"The historical significance of the ship is second to none," said Michael A. Carr, president and chief operating officer for the Battleship Missouri Memorial in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. "Some of the highest-ranking military officers in the history of the U.S. walked on her decks, including General MacArthur, Admiral Halsey and Admiral Nimitz."

The memorial is designed to be a proud tribute to the U.S. Navy, veterans and the historic role the USS Missouri played in World War II. As part of the visitor experience, groups can walk the decks, stand on the spot where the surrender took place ending WWII, tour the wardroom and officers quarters, see how the crew lived and gain an understanding of how the Navy operated on the high seas.

— WWW.USSMISSOURI.ORG —

SS MILWAUKEE CLIPPER

Muskegon, Michigan

In 1904, a wooden passenger and package freight steamer called Juniata was built for service on the Great Lakes; in 1941 this "Queen of the Great Lakes" was stripped of its wooden superstructure and redesigned with an all-steel, fireproof exterior and renamed the SS Milwaukee Clipper.

The Clipper remains the largest "cruise ship" on the Great Lakes, although now it rests peacefully on the National Historic Landmark register in the Muskegon harbor as a museum ship.

"Our history directly affects our future," said T.J. Parker, president of Milwaukee Clipper Preservation, Inc. "The Clipper is such a wonderful part of Great Lakes and Muskegon history, and I believe the things that once made us great as a nation need to be displayed as examples of how great we can become."

Visitors will experience such areas as the dance floor, the horseshoe bar, the soda bowl, the staterooms and, of course, the very popular pilot house, where the 90-year-old Clipper Captain brings history to life (upon availability). Visitors can explore beautiful models of the ship from past to present and shop the museum store while aboard this historic vessel.

— WWW.MILWAUKEECLIPPER.COM —

USS CONSTITUTION

Boston

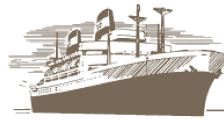
Welcoming more than 500,000 visitors per year, the USS Constitution is the world's oldest commissioned warship afloat. This mammoth ship was named by George Washington himself and defended the sea lanes against threats from 1797 to 1855.

It was during the War of 1812 that the USS Constitution earned its famous nickname, "Old Ironsides," when cannon balls from the HMS Guerriere seemingly bounced off its sides into the sea. The Constitution won the battle with the HMS Guerriere and, to date, remains Boston's only undefeated team.

"The ship's undefeated status continues to make her an inspiration to all Americans," said Adrian Bresler, vice president and CFO for the USS Constitution Museum. "The ship is open for free guided tours throughout the year, each narrated by several of USS Constitution's active-duty United States sailors. Groups can fire a cannon, furl a sail, swing in a hammock and scrub the decks just like sailors did 200 years ago."

Along with a variety of group-oriented options and activities, the museum just opened its "Old Ironsides 1812 Discovery Center," which provides interactive programs for all to enjoy.

— WWW.USSCONSTITUTIONMUSEUM.ORG —



USS IOWA

San Diego

Referred to by many as the "Ship of Presidents" due to its roster of presidential passengers, which has ranged from Franklin D. Roosevelt to George Bush, the USS Iowa, which opened to the public on July 7, has been transformed into a world-class museum perfect for group travel.

"It's the depth of history, the amazing veterans and the fact it is the last battleship in the world to be saved that draws me to the ship," said Jonathan Williams, vice president of the Pacific Battleship Center.

With more than 50 years in service, this 58,000-ton Montana-class battleship has defended the United States with its powerful guns, heavy armor and quick speed from WWII to after the Cold War.

Now that the ship is open to the public, groups can tour the entire ship on their own or with a guide; the tour includes a boxed lunch and tours of the gunnery, the wardroom, the bridges, the hatch, the decks and more. The ship is also available to rent out for events. Make sure to check out the famous FDR and captain's cabin to see the only official bathtub at sea.

— WWW.PACIFICBATTLESHIP.COM —

USS ALABAMA

Mobile, Alabama

After being commissioned on Aug. 16, 1942, the Battleship USS Alabama spent 37 months in active duty during World War II with a crew of 2,500 men. The Alabama served most of its time in the South Pacific and earned nine battle stars, shot down 22 enemy planes and joined in 10 bombardments of Japanese strongholds.

The ship is nicknamed "The Mighty A" because no lives were lost on it nor did the ship suffer any significant damage due to enemy fire. But its battle record isn't the ship's only impressive feature.

"I find it so amazing that the Alabama was virtually a floating city with everything one would need in their day-to-day lives," said Karen Conner, director of sales and marketing for the USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park. "Now the Alabama is a very accessible ship for our visitors. There are 12 levels for them to explore. They can lie in the bunks where sailors slept, get locked in the brig, man a 22mm gun, go inside a gun turret and much more."

While in the park, groups also have the opportunity to have a catered meal aboard the battleship in the Officers' Mess Hall, where they can dine using metal mess trays just like the crew of the Alabama.

— WWW.USSALABAMA.COM —