

## A GUIDE TO LOWEST AIRFARES

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## THE HIGH SEAS

The weeks just before Christmas traditionally are the slowest in the travel industry. Many cruise companies publish their lowest rates of the year during the period.

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## HARPERS FERRY

# The place where John Brown's dream began

By Bridget McQuate  
For The Patriot-News

A guerrilla army secretly occupies a farm house waiting for guns and the right moment. The goal: to gather and arm a band of freedom fighters to operate throughout the forested mountain tops, recruiting the oppressed to join them in a fight for the country's soul.

The scene may seem more like today's Central America than West Virginia in 1859. But that's where it happened and the cause was very American: to rid the country of slavery in the name of God.

This dream belonged to John Brown, a white man who devoted the last years of his life to abolishing slavery. The time was shortly before the Civil War broke out. The place was Harpers Ferry, Va. (now part of West Virginia), where John Brown's final crusade started and ended in three bloody days.

After his small army's attempt to raid the federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry, John Brown was captured, tried and

hung a month later in nearby Charles Town.

The three-day standoff between Brown's 21-man "army of liberation" demanded the attention of the nation and aroused praise as well as condemnation from the impassioned and divided interests that would soon provoke the Civil War. Brown had hoped that slaves would hear of the raid and rise up to fight alongside him. He also thought his army would be in and out of Harpers Ferry and on its way up the mountains to begin the revolutionary trek before any major resistance had formed.

He had misjudged nearly everyone. No slaves turned out to fight by his side. But hundreds of local militia and federal troops did arrive to diffuse the threat.

John Brown and his raiders had captured about 40 hostages and ended up trapped with them inside the Harpers Ferry fire engine house surrounded by townspeople and local militia. Several raiders and townspeople were shot before the siege ended, including two of John Brown's sons who lay mortally wounded and writhing in pain on the engine house floor.

Finally, U.S. troops under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee and Lieutenant J.E.B. Stuart arrived to put an end to the stalemate. Brown rejected the army's request to surrender and J.E.B. Stuart gave the signal to

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# Exercise mind, body in historic W.Va. town

By Bridget McQuate  
For The Patriot-News

Harpers Ferry sits on a finger of land that points to the intersection of the Shenandoah and Potomac rivers.

Its strategic location on this river junction paved the way for the town's importance as a hub connecting west-bound and south-bound trade routes. Rising abruptly from both sides of the rivers are densely forested mountain ranges — the Blue Ridge Mountains heading into Virginia and South Mountain in Maryland. Today, there's

a constant flurry of outdoor activity in and around Harpers Ferry. Rafting, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, mountain climbing, bicycling, fishing and camping are available for those who want to exercise more than historical brain cells and browsing shoes.

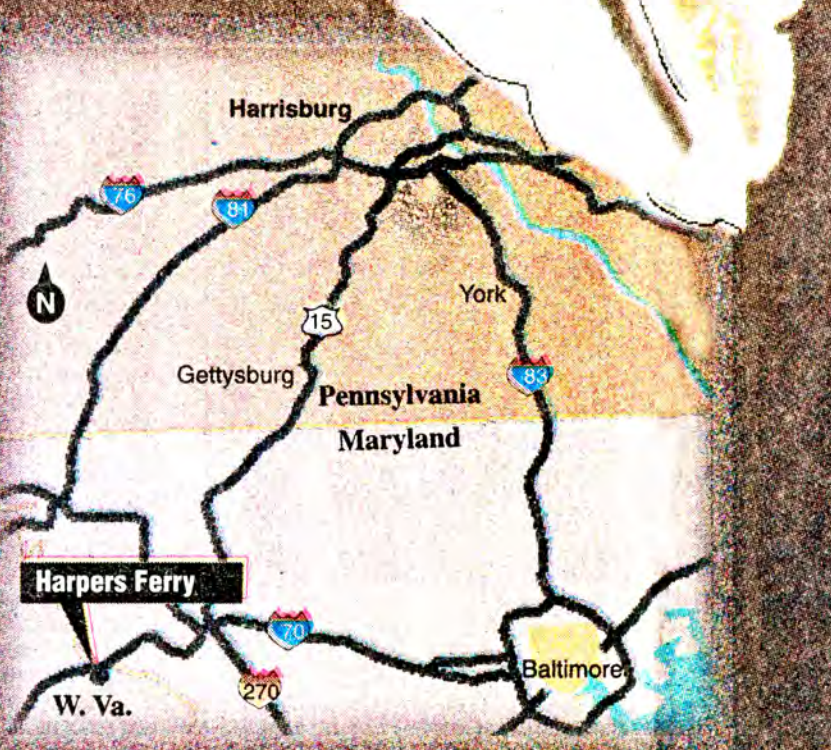
Along Harpers Ferry's cobblestone Shenandoah Street, the old Stagecoach Inn has been turned into an Information Center where rangers greet visitors warmly, eager to answer questions about their town.

The Office of the Provost, who enforced military rule during the war, was restored in its original building as an exhibit. Tourists can walk through the master armorer's 19th-century living room next to an exhibit on the importance of the armory to the economic development of Harpers Ferry.

Another house displays an exhibit on one of the first schools in the nation dedicated to black education. The school closed in

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The decision in 1963 to turn the town into the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park was the first step toward the goal of reincarnating a ghost town.





# More than history offered

## Rafting and hiking are options

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1955 but one of its buildings still sits on the hill above the old Harpers Ferry cemetery. Many other 18th and 19th century brick and stone buildings were converted into museums, including the John Brown wax museum, and cafes and antique shops.

Probably the most compelling reminder of the town's history is the actual engine house where the John Brown standoff took place. A ranger leading the John Brown walking tour (one of a series of free tours available) travels the length of Shenandoah Street, stopping at various sites while recounting the dramatic tale of the raid. The tour ends in front of the engine house with a vivid description of Brown, with his long white beard and burning gray eyes, standing up to the impatient federal troops outside. Walking inside the engine house, there's a temptation to look for blood stains on the floor as if the battle had happened only yesterday.

But despite Harpers Ferry's second birth, some of its most intriguing sights are those left in their states of destruction as eerie evidence of the cruelty of war and the elements. The armory, Harpers Ferry's biggest business from 1801 to 1861, was burned down by Union soldiers during the Civil War to keep its guns out of Confederate hands. The area where the massive series of armory buildings stood along the river has been reclaimed by trees and vegetation over which the B&O railroad tracks run. The foundations of one of the destroyed buildings can still be seen near the engine house.

A ranger explains on another guided tour that digging beneath the foundation would uncover hundreds of twisted and mangled metal gun handles that melted in the armory blaze.

Another source of the town's prosperity had been the passage of the C&O Canal that was intended to connect trade routes from eastern cities to west-bound rivers. The canal became a victim of raging floodwaters in the late 1800s. Its stone-block ruins still line the river across from the town as testament to the canal's laborious construction. The tow-path next to the canal where mules pulled the boats has been turned into a 184-mile-long bike and walking path stretching from Cumberland, Md., to Georgetown.

Two of Harpers Ferry's bridges were completely swept away by the force of floodwaters. Only their topless, gray-stone supports survived as vegetation-covered islands at the river junction. The people of Harper's Ferry saved one of the two surviving railroad bridges by parking rail cars across its length to weigh it down just before the angry waters crested over its span.

Crossing this bridge into Maryland, you can see one of America's first billboards — a Mennen's Toilet Powder sign painted on the sheer, black rock face directly across from Harpers Ferry. Local legend has it that the wife of the man who painted the sign took out a \$500 insurance policy on him just before he started the job. It had been her task to help hold him upside down from a rock shelf above as he worked. Just as he completed the sign, she accidentally lost her grip and sent him tumbling down the cliff to his death.

Visitors with healthy hearts and legs can climb the steep trail to Maryland Heights, the peak above the old toilet powder sign, for an aerial view of Harpers Ferry, viewing both rivers on either side of the town and the beginning of the Blue Ridge chain to the left.

White-water rafting expeditions provide yet another interesting perspective of the town. The six-person inflatable rubber rafts are launched in the Shenandoah River in West Virginia, then pass



Bridget McQuate/For The Patriot-News

SCENIC — Hikers who climb the steep trail to Maryland Heights get this view of Harpers Ferry.

### If you go:

#### • How to get there:

Harpers Ferry is a 90-minute drive from Harrisburg. Take 81 south to Route 9 south to Charles Town. From there, take 340 East to Harpers Ferry.

#### • Where to stay:

Just outside of Harpers Ferry are the moderately priced Comfort Inn (304-535-6391) and the Cliffside Inn (304-535-6302). Nearby Charles Town has more restaurants and stores than Harpers Ferry and has two moderately priced hotels, Towne House (304-725-8441) and Turf (304-725-2081). The more expensive Hillbrook Inn is a romantic cottage with antique furniture and a garden (304-725-4223). The Harpers Ferry Camp Resort is one block west of the town (304-535-6895).

#### • White Water Rafting:

River Riders (the one with the comedian guides) is \$40 on Saturday and \$35 every other day with trips leaving at 8:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. (304-535-2663). Blue Ridge Outfitters is \$45 and leaves at 9:30 a.m. and 2:15 p.m. (304-725-3444). In dressing for rafting, assume you'll get completely soaked. Bring clothes for afterward. Waterproof cameras and waterproof sun block are good ideas.

#### • Harpers Ferry National Park:

The Harper's Ferry Visitors Center charges \$5 per car and \$3 for walk-ins. Open daily, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (304-535-6223). The Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce has information about local happenings and accommodations (304-725-2055).

#### • Seasonal Events:

Old Tyme Christmas, first two weekends in December.

by Harpers Ferry and end up in the Potomac River in Maryland.

The river rafting guides/comedians start their routine on the bus ride down to the river. "We're now passing the Grey Ridge mountains, West Virginia's

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## Town's history lives on

BROWN — From Page F1

storm the engine house. After a three-minute sword and gun skirmish, Brown lay stabbed and beaten on the floor among his dead and injured men.

That incident proved to be only the beginning of the troubles for Harpers Ferry, which until then had been a thriving, industrial boom town. The Civil War that followed 18 months later and devastating floods in the late 1800s caused the town to be fo-

zen in time during the era of its economic downfall.

The decision in 1963 to turn the town into the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park was the first step toward the goal of reincarnating a ghost town. The remains of Harpers Ferry were spruced up and set in motion again — resuscitated for the purpose of telling the stories of Brown's raid and the town's demise.

## Sites worth seeing near Harpers Ferry

Here are some other sites worth visiting in the Harpers Ferry area.

**Charles Town, W.Va.** Ten miles from Harper's Ferry, this town was named after George Washington's brother Charles. John Brown was jailed, tried and hanged here. You can visit a room in the courthouse where the trial took place (open Monday through Friday). Several blocks off the main street, the site of the gallows is marked next to a beautiful stone house. The Jefferson County Museum in the basement of the public library has a collection of John Brown souvenirs and other pieces of history from the area. Open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Saturday, free (304) 725-8628. Civil War buffs gather at the museum and recount intricate details from various Civil War battles. At night, catch the horse races at the Charles Town Race Track (304) 725-7001.

**Bolivar, W.Va.** This small town sits directly behind Harper's Ferry. The town named itself Bolivar in 1825 in honor of the South American liberator Simon Bolivar who was touted in those days as the father of his country, a second George Washington. You can see a bronze bust of Bolivar presented to the town by a Venezuelan ambassador in 1956. A scenic drive loops around the site of a Civil War surrender. The town was originally named Mudfort because of its strategic position during dried-mudball fights between the boys of this tiny village on the summit and the boys from Harper's Ferry, below.

**Shepherdstown, W.Va.** Twenty miles from Harpers Ferry, this charming, well-preserved town is the oldest town

in West Virginia. Along the main street, restored historic buildings house book and craft shops. An old-fashioned soda fountain has been turned into a restaurant, and an old opera house shows new movies such as "Four Weddings and a Funeral." A memorial marks the site of the first successful operation of the steamboat here by James Rumsey in 1787. The Shepherdstown Museum on the main street has exhibits portraying local history (open Saturday and Sunday, free).

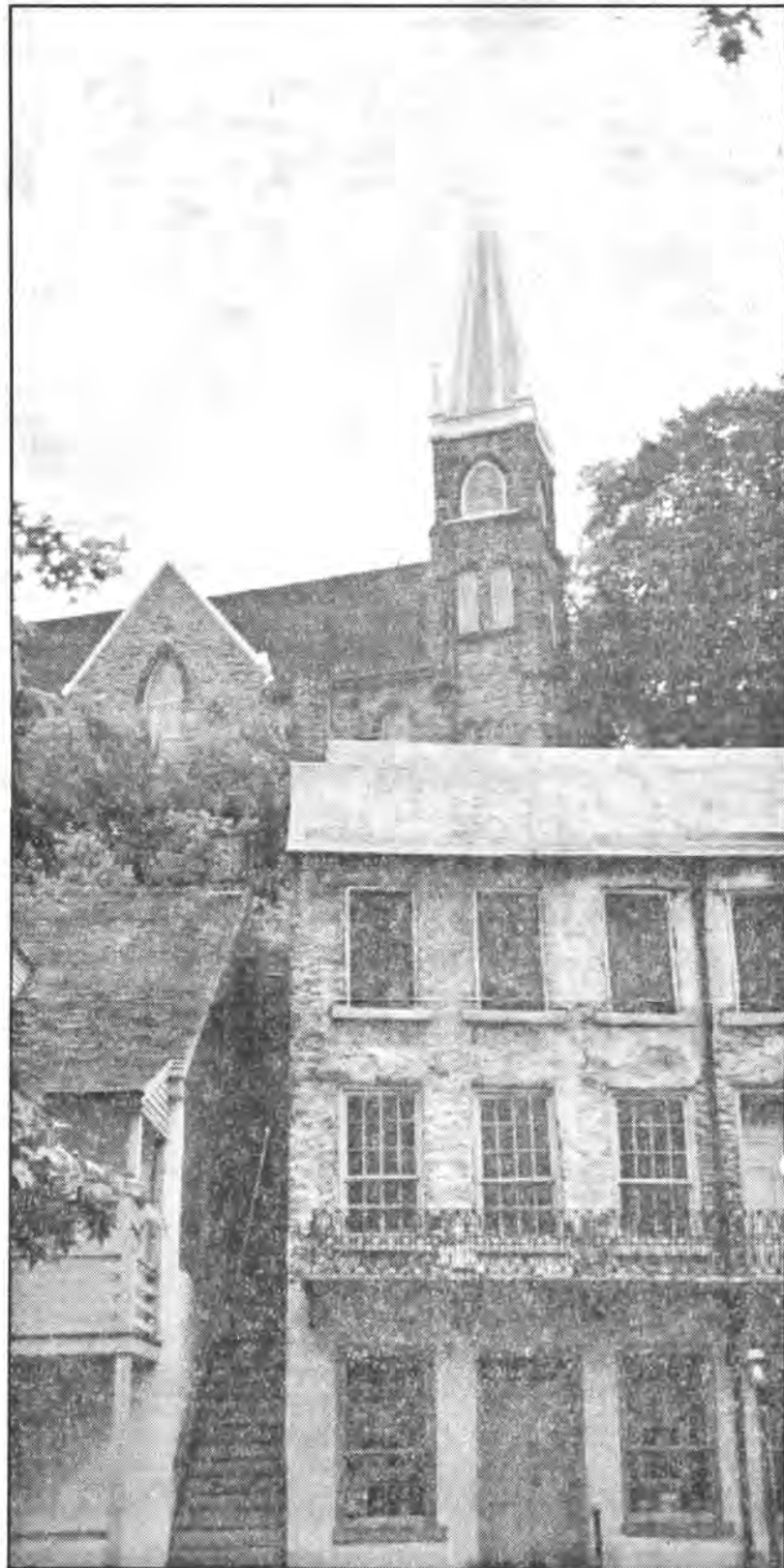
#### Kennedy Farmhouse, Md.

This is the house where Brown, six white men and five black men hid in the attic loft preparing for the raid. Brown's daughter Ann and his daughter-in-law Martha Evelyn joined him there to give the appearance of a family situation. Brown called himself Mr. Smith while staying here for three months before the raid and preached sermons at a nearby church. The house is a short distance across the river from Harper's Ferry, and is open to the public.

#### Antietam National Battlefield, Md.

The battlefield in Sharpsburg, Md., is about 20 miles away from Harpers Ferry. Memorable images of the bloodiest day of the Civil War are evoked through the center's tours, talks, a movie and slide show. Except where monuments honor the dead, the battleground/farmland remains much as it looked that day in 1862 when 23,000 men were killed. The National Cemetery lies on a hill above downtown Sharpsburg. About 100 Sharpsburg townspeople hid out in a cave during the battle and came home to find dead and wounded soldiers on their doorsteps. Open daily (301) 432-5124.

— Bridget McQuate



For The Patriot-News/Bridget McQuate

STANDING TALL — St. Peter's Catholic Church, built in the 1830s, rises above Shenandoah Street in Harpers Ferry, W.Va. The area, only a short drive from central Pennsylvania, is steeped in history.

## Rafting offers unique view of this town

RIVERS — From Page F7

only portable mountain chain: The owner of this quarry is known for saying, "I know the quarry business is the pits, but we don't take rocks for granite," a guide explains while passing a gravel quarry.

In the mini-lesson before boarding the rafts, another guide explains, "The first thing that happens if you fall in: total wetness. Then, try to keep your feet out in front of you for the oncoming rocks. Climb up on a rock and someone will pick you up. If not, there's another trip going through tomorrow. Make sure they see you and you'll be put on the priority pick-up lists."

The trip itself is serene, adventurous and historical without being too physically challenging. The promised wetness is achieved within the first two minutes when the guides encourage the first of many water battles. Later come several Class III rapids with long stretches of lazy river in between. Rafters get a chance to "funnelate" or body surf through a rapid by jumping into it and floating through feet first (with the help of their life jackets), bumping to a stop over the smooth, slippery rocks below.

The guides (with names like Carp, Tigger and Suzy Chapstick) point out Swimmer's Rock where two of John Brown's raiders were shot to death after escaping the assault. You can also see caves in the forest by the river, squawking hawks overhead, fish flipping themselves out of the water and an occasional snake sunning itself on a rock island. During the low-water season, cannonballs from the Civil War battle of Schoolhouse Ridge can be spotted in the river bed.

Harpers Ferry is a place for serious history and serious fun. Tragic images from the past are revived, like John Brown lying on a cot in the room with saber slashes on his face and neck, waiting for his fate to be decided. Or John Brown's broken body hanging from the gallows surrounded by lines of cavalry and militia men (including the later infamous John Wilkes Booth).

And then there are Brown's last, prophetic words: "I John Brown am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood. I had, as I now think, vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed, it might be done."

# ALASKA

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