

# exploring

our world

LILLY LONGSHORE

## Wheeling Through Williamsburg

When it comes to travel and U.S. history, it's hard to top a trip to Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, and just because the town is 400 years old doesn't mean it's not accessible.

Older towns in general can be tricky when vacationers rely on a wheelchair. But there is plenty to

Williamsburg is like stepping back to the days of Washington and Jefferson.

### Rolling Back in Time

Entering the town through the main visitor center pathway is a long but picturesque roll beside a running brook, past an old farm site and through a city park.

No vehicles are permitted on the town streets, only horse-drawn car-

accessibility brochure is available. It outlines which buildings are wheelchair accessible and provides clear directions for finding the Americans with Disabilities Act entrances.

### Trades on Display

The Public Hospital, the Wallace Decorative Art Museum and the Rockefeller Folk Art Museum are housed in the same large building. There is easy access with wide aisles between displays. The elevators are reasonably sized.

A large exhibit of pianos and harpsichords made by the town's cabinetmakers emphasizes the changes in the instruments' shapes and sounds over the centuries.

A room filled with creatively designed weather vanes and whirlygigs might bring to mind the iconic red barn. One whirlygig looked like a woman churning butter as the wind rotated the wheel.

The local blacksmith still provides metal straps for the town cooper (a person who makes or repairs barrels). Visitors can watch as the town



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The colonial Capitol at Williamsburg features a wheelchair lift to the first floor.

see and do in Williamsburg that is accessible. It's clear that reasonable thought was given to disabled access throughout this historic town. Slightly over half of the buildings open to the public are wheelchair friendly.

Williamsburg is the site of our nation's first colonial capital. It was here that our founding fathers made the decision to fight for American independence.

Today, with folks in colonial costumes, sounds of fifes and drums in the air, and the smell of wood fires and gunpowder adrift, visiting historic

riages. What a thrill it is to be in the middle of a bustling colonial town, complete with workers dressed in the attire of that day, talking and working as if it is still the 1700s!

Eighty-eight buildings have been rebuilt on original foundations at this 300-acre site. The public can visit 46 of them. The oldest structure, the jail, dates back to 1607.

The sidewalks are made of brick and are bumpy, so some visitors opt to roll in the smoother streets. At the Public Hospital's visitors desk, an



An apprentice cooper at work.

cooper forms casks and containers for the local cook. His skill is impressive as he crafts a cask using wooden staves that fit so tightly together that water can't seep through.

Nineteen trades are still practiced in Williamsburg. Each trade shop supplies the town with tools and wares much like it was done in days of old.

### George Sat Here

Two blocks away from the cooper on Nassau Street sits Bruton Parish Church, the first Anglican church in the nation.

The interior revealed family benches boxed in by short wooden walls instead of rows of open pews, as is common today. The family enclosures are labeled with names including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry.

The box structures allowed the colonial forefathers to warm these smaller spaces with hot coals from home during the cold winters. The church is still active today as an Episcopal church, and the public is invited to attend services and observe choir practices.



The courtroom inside the Williamsburg Capitol building.

### The Revolution Starts

The Capitol is a marvelous, solid structure. A lift provides wheelchair access to the first floor only. This area includes the courtroom on one end and executive chambers on the other end of a long, open breezeway.

“It was in this very room that the decision to fight for American independence was made,” the tour guide tells the group. It’s inspiring to see the chambers where such a key decision in American history was made.

Down the road from the Capitol is Charlton’s Coffeehouse. The manager was in full character, discussing the gossip of the day as he showed two available party rooms that were routinely rented out during early American times.

All guests are offered a cup of colonial-style coffee, tea or cocoa. The cocoa is poured from a “chocolate pot” made by the local blacksmith.

Williamsburg is full of history, entertainment and sometimes both of them combined. Even with a multi-day ticket (three days, \$49.95), it’s hard to take in everything.

For more information, visit [colonialwilliamsburg.com](http://colonialwilliamsburg.com). ■



George Washington was among those to attend the Bruton Parish Church.