



Obama meets with nation's governors

Watch Now: [Live on CNN.com](#) »

updated 1 hour, 31 minutes ago

MIXX SHARE EMAIL SAVE PRINT

New center offers warmer welcome to Capitol tourists

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- U.S. Capitol Visitor Center, built under the Capitol grounds, opens Tuesday
- Center aims to cut outdoor waits for tours, offer more educational experience
- Center features exhibits, restaurant
- Construction went \$356 million over budget

[Next Article in Travel](#) »

From Jill Dougherty
CNN

TEXT SIZE - +

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- The days of having nothing but an idle outdoor wait ahead of a U.S. Capitol tour appear to be over.



The underground visitor center, seen here under construction, has skylights allowing views of the Capitol.

The \$621 million underground U.S. Capitol Visitor Center, which opens Tuesday following six years of construction, features exhibits, orientation theaters and a restaurant. It offers Capitol guests a more comfortable and educational experience, according to the office of the Capitol architect.

The facility, built under the Capitol's east grounds to make it unobtrusive, presents historic artifacts from across the country and teaches guests about the House of Representatives and the Senate. Admission is free.

[Capitol](#) tours will now begin and end at the center, which the government hopes will cut down on long outdoor waits.

"Over the years, as interest in the Capitol has increased, people have been standing outside in the extreme heat, cold and humidity waiting to get into this building," said Stephen Ayers, the acting architect of the Capitol.

People still will have to pass through a security screening before entering the center. But once inside, they'll have things to do before their tour.

In the center's exhibition hall, visitors can touch an 11-foot model of the Capitol's dome. The facility's skylights offer striking views of the 215-year-old building above.

Don't Miss

- [U.S. Capitol Visitor Center's Web site](#)

The three-level center takes up 580,000 square feet, roughly three quarters the size of the Capitol. The construction was \$356 million over budget, partly because Congress redesigned the facility while it was being built and upgraded security plans for the center after the

September 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

But Ayers said the money was well spent.

"This is monumental architecture and monumental public space, and a place that's built for generations," Ayers said.

The government encourages visitors to book tours in advance, either on the center's Web site or through their congressman's office.

However, a limited number of same-day passes will be available at the Capitol Visitor Center, according to the center's Web site.

The number of visitors to the Capitol rose from 1 million in 1970 to more than 3 million in 2000, according to the architect's office. The yearly number dipped after the September 11, 2001, attacks, but it has rebounded to nearly 3 million, the office's Web site says. [E-mail to a friend](#) | [Mixx it](#) | [Share](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

Most Popular

STORIES		
Most Viewed	Most Emailed	Top Searches
1	Man arrested in Hudson slayings	

All About [U.S. Capitol](#)

Ads by Google

Looking For a Vacation?

Consider a Cruise With Norwegian Cruise Line- As Low As \$99/Person!

www.NCL.com

Heating Washington Dc

For Friendly and Qualified Home Heating Service, Call Us Today.

BensAcMd.net

The U.S. Capitol

Home of our nation's Senators & Congressmen.Souvenirs for all ages.

www.capitolshoppingmall.com

EMAIL SAVE PRINT

► From the Blogs: Controversy, commentary, and debate

Top News



Israel buries victims of Mumbai attacks



Thai protesters cheer as court ousts PM

- 2 [Priest's Cambodia warnings ignored](#)
- 3 [India renews demand for militants](#)
- 4 [Medic didn't report Burress wound](#)
- 5 [Brown: Answer the press' questions](#)
- 6 [Israel buries victims of Mumbai attacks](#)
- 7 [Birmingham mayor arrested](#)
- 8 [Thai protesters to end siege](#)
- 9 [Plant's closure fuels uncertainty](#)
- 10 [Do you have 'Tivo guilt'?](#)

more most popular »

▶ VIDEOS

▶ TOPICS

Flight

From	To
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Leave	Return
mm/dd/yy	mm/dd/yy

anytime

anytime

Travelers (Up to 8)

1

Last Minute Deals »

SEARCH

ADVERTISEMENT

We Recommend

Stories you may be interested in based on past browsing

[World leaders condemn horrific attacks in Mumbai](#)

[Injured boy doesn't know attacks in India killed relatives](#)

[Gunfire heard at two Mumbai hotels](#)

[Mumbai attacks: Help lines](#)

[Freed sailors: Pirates are animals](#)

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [Politics](#) | [Crime](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Health](#) | [Tech](#) | [Travel](#) | [Living](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Time.com](#)

[Tools & Widgets](#) | [Podcasts](#) | [Blogs](#) | [CNN Mobile](#) | [My Profile](#) | [E-mail Alerts](#) | [CNN Radio](#) | [CNN Shop](#) | [Site Map](#)

POWERED BY Google

SEARCH

© 2008 Cable News Network. Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[CNN en Español](#) | [Arabic](#) | [Japanese](#) | [Korean](#) | [Turkish](#)

[Terms of service](#) | [Privacy guidelines](#) | [Advertise with us](#) | [About us](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Help](#)

[International Edition](#) | [CNN TV](#) | [CNN International](#) | [Headline News](#) | [Transcripts](#)