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## 100 Years Abroad

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## 100 Years Abroad

### U.S. Presidents On the World Stage

By Brian Flanagan

One-hundred years ago this month, just days after the 1906 midterm election preserved a Republican majority in Congress, President Theodore Roosevelt and First Lady Edith Roosevelt headed south for Panama on board the *U.S.S. Louisiana*. Not for the first time in his presidential career, Roosevelt was breaking new ground.

Never, since George Washington took the oath of office, had a sitting president traveled outside the United States. But then Roosevelt, "never the stickler for tradition"<sup>[1]</sup> according to historian H. W. Brands, decided it was high time he check up on his favorite pet project -- the Panama Canal.



Disembarking on the Isthmus, the president immediately set about settling the *important* business of canal construction:

*"Let me see your yams," Roosevelt said, firing off monosyllables like a repeater rifle. "Here is a yam that does not look right to me."* <sup>[2]</sup>

After settling this problem to his satisfaction, President Roosevelt continued his inspection of the sight and posed for photographs that captured the imagination of the American people back home. Roosevelt was just the first president to travel abroad; many would follow.

#### U.S. Presidents on the World Stage

Since 1906, eighteen U.S. presidents have taken 243 trips abroad -- throughout the western hemisphere, to Europe, to Africa, and to Asia.<sup>[3]</sup> They have demonstrated the beneficence and bellicosity of the United States, helped design post-war settlements, negotiated and signed treaties, and inspired foreign peoples with memorable words. Perhaps most significantly, they have signified the expansion and evolution of American interests.

In 1918-19, President Woodrow Wilson was the first to travel to Europe, visiting France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Vatican City, and Belgium in the wake of World War I. In 1928, President Herbert Hoover was the first to take extended tours of Central and South America -- visiting Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. And during his twelve years in office, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first to visit parts of Africa and Asia, including three trips to Egypt and one to Iran to meet with British Prime Minister Churchill, Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and Soviet Premier Stalin during the Second World War.

According to data gathered from the U.S. State Department, Bill Clinton was the best traveled of all presidents. During his two terms in office, he visited 75 different countries. All told, President Clinton was abroad more than 130 days, or nearly 5% of his presidency.

Europe has been host to the most presidents. With the exception of Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover, every president since Wilson has paid a visit to the continent -- the UK alone has hosted 12 presidents for 54 state visits. France, Italy, Mexico, and Canada are other popular destinations for U.S. presidents.

#### Greatest Hits

1. *Wilson's tour of Europe*: In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson became the third president to travel outside the U.S. when he personally led the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference that ended World War I. In Paris, he fought for a vision of the post-war world outlined in his "Fourteen Points" speech. "At the heart of Wilson's vision was the League of Nations," wrote historian Margaret MacMillan, "to provide the collective security that, in a well-run civil society, was provided by the government, its laws, its courts and its police."<sup>[4]</sup> Wilson hoped to discredit balance of power diplomacy, promote democratic "self-determination" among nations, and avoid indemnities paid by the war's losers.

2. *FDR in the midst of war*: Between August 1941 and February 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt attended nine conferences abroad with other world leaders in Argentina, Casablanca, Quebec, Cairo, Tehran, Malta, and Yalta. During these trips, Roosevelt conferred with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin, and Turkish President Ismet Inonu. The conferences resulted in the Atlantic Charter, the Declaration of the United Nations, the 3-Power Declaration, the *Crimea Communique*, and numerous war strategies and battle plans, including discussions of the D-Day invasion of Normandy.

3. *Eisenhower goes to Korea*: During his 1952 presidential campaign, Dwight D. Eisenhower promised that if elected, "I shall go to Korea." He kept his promise in December 1952 when he traveled to Korea to restart stalled peace talks and end the Korean War. The Armistice signed at Panmunjom divided North and South Korea with a demilitarized zone at the 38th parallel.

4. *Kennedy and Reagan in Berlin*: In June of 1963, President John F. Kennedy traveled to Berlin, where the Soviet-backed East German leader had erected a wall dividing East Germany from West. The president boosted West German morale, expressing U.S. solidarity with their people and support for their freedom from the Soviet bloc: "All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words *Tch bin ein Berliner*." Twenty-four years later, President Ronald Reagan famously challenged Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev to "Tear down this wall" as a symbol of a free Germany. Two and a half years later, as the Soviet Union crumbled, the Berlin Wall fell.

5. *Nixon in China*: President Richard Nixon became the first president to visit China in February, 1972, when he made stops in Beijing, Hangzhou, and Shanghai, and met with Chairman Mao Tse-tung and Premier Chou En-Lai. At the conclusion of Nixon's visit, the U.S. and Chinese governments issued the *Shanghai Communique*, which promised to "broaden scientific, cultural, and trade contacts,"<sup>[5]</sup> between the two nations.

[1] H.W. Brands, *TR: The Last Romantic* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 584.

[2] Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), p. 468.

[3] Statistical information available at the U.S. State Department's website, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/trvl/pres/>

[4] Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919* (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 13.

[5] William A. DeGregorio, *The Complete Book of U.S. Presidents* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2002), p. 596. Originally published on 11/06/2006