

Cuts reduce daily number of Arizona Memorial tours

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By William Cole



Museums that operate in orbit around the USS Arizona Memorial are hoping federal sequestration funding cuts don't have a ripple effect on their nonprofit businesses.

The National Park Service, which oversees the Arizona Memorial, cut back Wednesday on its daily boat tours to the memorial, with the last memorial visit program now starting at 1 p.m. instead of 3 p.m., said Eileen Martinez, chief of interpretation for the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument.

That means eight fewer tours and up to 1,200 fewer people.

The visitor center is closing at 4:30 p.m. instead of 5 p.m.

Following the cutbacks, the neighboring Battleship Missouri Memorial, Pacific Aviation Museum Pearl Harbor, and USS Bowfin Submarine Museum and Park emphasized that they will operate as usual.

"Unfortunately, the USS Arizona Memorial will see a reduction in visiting hours," said Mike Carr, president and chief operating officer of the "Mighty Mo." "However, this provides a great opportunity for guests to gain the full Pearl Harbor experience by visiting the Arizona early and using the rest of the day to explore the other historic sites."

Officials at the other museums also hope it will be business as usual.

"People hear the (Arizona Memorial) boats have stopped, when in fact the boats have stopped for a couple hours a day. That's it," said Anne Murata, director of marketing for the Pacific Aviation Museum.

Murata added that "we're putting signage in place and getting (information) up on our sites so that everyone is informed. We're doing email marketing so that all of our tour agents and all the concierges and all our customers all know what's going on."

Other effects, direct and indirect, of federal government sequestration budget cuts are expected to be felt in Hawaii.

The Transportation Security Administration said this week that as sequestration takes effect, air travelers can expect to see lines and wait times at security checkpoints increase as reductions to overtime and the inability to fill vacant positions begin to occur.

The Federal Aviation Administration said 135 air traffic controllers, plus 44 supervisors, managers and support staff in Hawaii, are expected to be furloughed one day every two weeks for the rest of the fiscal year.

Martinez, of the National Park Service, said, "Due to the sequestration budget cuts, we have been unable to fill key positions in visitor services, so that has resulted in the reduction of our tours."

The Arizona Memorial visitor center, a one-stop shop for tickets to all the historic sites, opens at 7 a.m., with the first memorial visit program at 8 a.m.

People who made online reservations for the late-afternoon times that are no longer available are being contacted, Martinez said. On Wednesday and Thursday, walk-in tickets for memorial visits were gone by 10 a.m., she said.

The Arizona Memorial is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the state, with about 1.5 million visitors annually.

Martinez recommends making an advance reservation for the movie and boat tour to the memorial at www.recreation.gov.

The memorial was planning to fill about five positions, but sequestration has demanded money-saving efforts, Martinez said.

“We chose to delay the hiring of key positions,” she said. “So that’s how we’re making up the money.”

Due to the staffing limitations, Martinez said, the Park Service can no longer accommodate school performances on the grounds.

Even with the Arizona Memorial cuts, access to the Bowfin, Pacific Aviation Museum and Missouri will not be affected, the Park Service said.

“The people that are on Ford Island (visiting the Missouri or Pacific Aviation Museum) can come back after 4:30. The bathrooms are still open, and they can pick up their bags and it’s all outside of our fence,” Martinez said.

The Battleship Missouri Memorial is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Bowfin Submarine Museum’s hours are 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and the Pacific Aviation Museum is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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