

Brianna Borghi  
11/2/16

### **Washington Monument Closes Indefinitely Due to Elevator Issues**

Washington, D.C. – Excitement vanished on Saturday morning as swarms of visitors flocked to the District’s most iconic monument, only to find a red sign with bold white lettering stating, “Monument Closed Due to Maintenance Needs,” outside the waiting area.

In late September, the National Park Service announced that the Washington Monument would be closed indefinitely due to “ongoing reliability issues” with the elevator, resulting in crowds of disappointed visitors outside the obelisk.

“We’ve been looking forward to going to the top since we first decided to make a stop in D.C.,” said Elvira Devaladez, 40, who traveled to D.C. from Los Angeles, Calif. with her husband. “We didn’t know the elevator was closed when we came.”

After three months of planning, the couple finally arrived in D.C. on Saturday for a one-day visit. They planned to visit family in Philadelphia and New York City, and made a short detour to explore the nation’s capital.

The Washington Monument was at the top of their list of destinations.

“If it was open, we’d absolutely go to the top,” Devaladez said. “We’ll definitely be back again to go up when the elevator is open.”

Elevator issues have plagued the Washington Monument since 2011 when a 5.8-magnitude earthquake struck 90 miles southwest of D.C., loosening some pieces of stone and cracking the monument’s exterior in many places.

The monument underwent \$15 million of repairs after the earthquake, but the elevator wasn’t renovated during the three-year closure. It finally reopened to the public in 2014.

Since 2014, the elevator has been closed 24 times, including four times this past summer.

According to the National Park Service, closing the monument was both a difficult decision and a “horrible inconvenience” to visitors.

Mike Litterst, a spokesperson for the National Park Service, said in a statement that the monument’s closure would be “measured in months.”

In August, the National Park Service shut down the monument for 10 days to inspect and repair the elevator. The agency determined that a nine-month closure would be necessary to fully update the elevator and control system.

The National Park Service gave no further update on the duration of the closure in the September announcement.

With 600,000 annual visitors, the monument's elevator runs nonstop from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. year-round, except on Dec. 25.

"It's unfortunate that the Washington Monument is closed to visitors as it is such a highly recommended and well-known landmark," said Camden Schwantes Arciniega, manager and tour guide of D.C. by Foot. "But I tell guests that there are so many other great things to see in D.C., and recommend alternatives, such as the Old Post Office Pavilion."

D.C. by Foot is the original "name-your-own-price" tour company in the District, offering walking, bike, bus, and photography tours to visitors that cost as much as visitors think they are worth.

Although D.C. by Foot does not currently take visitors to the top of the monument, Arciniega said he considered creating a tour that included tickets only available in advance for the monument.

"Unfortunately, the closure started at the same time as the discussion of the new tour so we decided to put the idea on hold," Arciniega said.

The tour company's website encourages visitors to try to get tickets for the monument, either by paying \$1.50 for reserved tickets or standing in line early in the morning for one of the limited number of daily free tickets.

D.C. by Foot's National Mall tour is its most popular, taking visitors on a two-hour journey through the heart of the Mall, beginning and ending at the Washington Monument.

On Saturday, visitors peered into the windows of the waiting area on the east side of the obelisk, trying to get a glimpse of what lay behind the red and white sign.

"One issue we have noticed is the lack of notification from the Park Service and the Washington Monument," Arciniega said. "There were a few tweets and some news stories, but many of our guests were not aware that the monument was closed."

The elevator used today was installed during the three-year restoration from 1998 to 2001, making it about 15 years old. The life expectancy of elevators ranges from 15 to 20 years, depending on usage.

On occasion, visitors have been stranded at the top of the monument during an elevator breakdown, forced to walk down the 897-step iron staircase, which is now only used for emergencies.

Throughout the refurbishment and possible replacement of the elevator, the Washington Monument Lodge and bookstore will remain open to visitors.

“D.C. isn't known for its skyline, but the skyline we are known for is the Washington Monument, which you can't see if you're in it!” Arciniega said.