

Best things to do in DC: An Art Aficionado's Guide to must-see Galleries

Washington DC, 2 Days

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: There are so many possible tourist activities in Washington that it may seem a little overwhelming to try to create an agenda, especially if you only have a few days. Better, perhaps, to focus your itinerary on one particular activity type, so as to make the most of your exposure to it. If art is your thing, then DC won't disappoint you. From huge museums to locally owned galleries, the Nation's Capital offers an abundance of opportunities for visual stimulation. There are a few "biggies" in the DC museum that are absolutely not to be missed; they are interspersed here with some smaller, more specialized galleries, so as to give a sense of variety.



Day 1 - Washington DC

DAY NOTE: Start your day with a bang by checking out the National Gallery of Art. It's the mother of all of DC's art galleries, and boasts a breathtaking assortment of works ranging from premedieval painting to modern sculpture. You can lose yourself in the exquisite permanent collections, or check out the traveling exhibitions, which change every several months. Leave yourself at least half a day to take in all that it has to offer, and tour the gardens surrounding it (weather permitting). Then make your way over to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture garden for vour modern art fix. Matisse. Giacometti. Calder. Warhol - thev're all here, and presented with a refreshing lack of pretention. The Freer and Sackler Galleries are better known for their Asian and Near Eastern art collection, but they also boast an impressive collection of American works, including James McNeil Whistler's famous Peacock Gallery. If you're looking to soak up as much of DC's arts scene as possible, you'll probably want to stay in a hotel that's visually appealing as well. Hotel Monaco, a boutique hotel located in the landmark Tariff Building, has style to spare. The hotel's Poste Restaurant has decent food and a great happy hour scene. Head back there for dinner and to recharge your batteries for another art-tastic day.

National Gallery of Art

The premier art museum in the Nation's Capital, the National Gallery houses an extensive art collection from the world's most famous artists



Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden

Modern Gallery with 19th- and 20th-century artworks



Freer Gallery of Art

Part of the Smithsonian, this gallery specializes in Asian art.



Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

Experience one of the world's foremost collections of Asian art, from ancient to contemporary works.



Posta

Kobe beef steak tartare and more



Hotel Monaco

Enjoy elegance and splendor at this four-star boutique hotel in the middle of bustling Chinatown.

Day 2 - Washington DC

DAY NOTE: Head over to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, a stone's throw from the White House. The Corcoran is not only a gallery, but a fine arts school as well. So it produces up-and-coming

artists as well as showcasing more established ones. And if you're a member of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Reciprocal Program, your admission here is free. Afterwards, check out the National Museum of Women in the Arts Since making its collections public in 1987, NMWA has made a mission of showcasing and celebrating the achievements of women in the arts, spanning nearly 500 years. The works provide a fascinating insight into the lives female artists lived throughout the centuries, including the obstacles they faced. Finally, wind your way up to The Kreeger Museum . Located in a leafy and quiet residential neighborhood, the Kreeger Museum possesses a dazzling array of works from the 19th and 20th centuries. It is with no exaggeration that this lovely gallery defines itself as "the jewel on Foxhall". One minor drawback: the Museum isn't Metro accessible; you'll probably want to drive, as even the nearest bus stop is about half a mile away. If you have time and aren't too tired, stop by Dumbarton Oaks and then walk over to the charming upstairs wine bar at Bistrot Lepic for dinner.



Corcoran Gallery of Art

Washington's first art museum boasts an impressive collection of works by established and up-and-coming artists.



National Museum of Women in the Arts

One of the world's foremost galleries celebrating the accomplishments of female artists.



Kreeger Museum

A Notable Collection



Dumbarton Oaks

This Georgetown mansion is home to an impressive art museum and lovely gardens.



Bistrot Lepic & Wine Bar

Contemporary French cuisine and a sophisticated upstairs wine bar



Day 1 - Washington DC

QUICK NOTE

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contact:

tel: +1 202 737 4215 fax: +1 202 842 6948 http://www.nga.gov/

location:

Constitution Avenue Northwest Washington DC 20565

hours

M-Sa 10a-5p, Su 11a-6p



National Gallery of Art

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

The National Gallery's two gift shops are ideal for finding unique mementos, books, jewelry, and toys.

DESCRIPTION: The National Gallery of Art guides Washingtonians and visitors through the world of art all day, every day (except Christmas and New Year's Day). The National Gallery consists of the West Building (opened in 1941), the East Building (1978) and the 6.1-acre Sculpture Garden adjacent to the West Building (1999). Don't be daunted by the size, the National Gallery has prepared "Highlights" guides for half-hour and one-hour visits. Scores of guided tours are scheduled throughout each day (too many to list here), gallery talks and lectures are held throughout the month. Free Sunday concerts take place in the West Building, usually starting at 6:30 but check ahead. The East Building Auditorium hosts original format film screenings every Saturday and Sunday (plus a few weekdays) free of charge (first come first served) with doors opening thirty minutes before each show. To the delight of locals and visitors, the Sculpture Garden ice rink is open mid-November through mid-March! It's about the only activity that is not free, but at \$7 for adults and \$6 for seniors, students and kids (skate rental \$3), it's a lot of fun for a little money. Aside from all this, visitors can still walk in off the street and look at art the old fashioned way, by wandering through the galleries at leisure. Located on the National Mall, forget about parking. The Archives-Navy Memorial-Penn Quarter (Green/Yellow lines) Metrorail station is only a block away. © NileGuide





contact:

tel: +1 202 633 1000 / +1 202

357 1729

fax: +1 202 786 2682 http://www.hirshhorn.si.edu/

location:

Independence Avenue and 7th Street South West Washington DC 20576

hours:

Museum: 10:30a, noon & 1p M-F, noon, 1p & 2p Sa-Su



Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

The Sculpture Garden provides a quiet refuge from the hustle of museum-going.

DESCRIPTION: The Smithsonian Institution's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden invites everyone in to explore modern and contemporary art. Gordon Bunshaft designed the Hirshhorn building itself as a "functional sculpture." Elevated above manicured sculpture grounds, the four-story hollow cylinder encircles a 60-foot fountain visible from every interior window. Since each floor is a large ring, navigating the museum is very intuitive; you progress through the curved galleries and end up exactly where you began then proceed to the next floor. The Hirshhorn continuously seeks and acquires important works by current artists, hosts traveling exhibits, and features installations with the artists on hand for discussion. Meet at the information desk on Fridays at 12:30 pm for gallery talks by visiting curators, professors and artists. Thursdays offer a mix of contemporary films and meet-the-artist events in the Ring Auditorium. Every few months brings the Hirshhorn After Hours where art and nightlife come together with DJs, artists, cocktails and dancing. Check website or visit the information desk for current schedule. After Hours events are \$10 advance, \$12 at the door, but most other events are free, including films. Guides are available at anytime for a 30-minute tour so ask at front desk. Forget about parking. L'Enfant Plaza is the closest Metro station (blue/gree/orange/red lines). This station is large and can be confusing - take the Maryland Ave & 7th St SW exit, follow 7th street away from the station to Independence Ave and you'll see the Hirshhorn. © NileGuide



contact:

tel: +1 202 633 4880 fax: +1 202 357 4911 http://www.asia.si.edu/

location:

1050 Independence Avenue Washington DC 20576

hours:

Daily 10a-5:30p



Freer Gallery of Art

DESCRIPTION: Charles Lang Freer, a collector of Asian and American art from the 19th and early 20th centuries, gave the nation 9,000 of these works for his namesake gallery's 1923 opening. Freer's original interest was American art, but his good friend James McNeill Whistler encouraged him to collect Asian works as well. Eventually the latter became predominant. Freer's gift included funds to construct a museum and an endowment to add to the Asian collection, which now numbers more than 26,000 objects and spans 6,000 years. It includes Chinese and Japanese sculpture, lacquer, metalwork, and ceramics; early Christian illuminated manuscripts; Iranian manuscripts, metalwork, and miniatures; ancient Near Eastern metalware; and South Asian sculpture and paintings. The Freer is mostly about Asian art, but it also displays some of the more than 1,200 American works (the world's largest collection) by Whistler. Most remarkable and always on view is the famous Harmony in Blue and Gold, the Peacock Room. Originally a dining room designed for the London mansion of F. R. Leyland, the Peacock Room displayed a Whistler painting called The Princess from the Land of Porcelain. But after his painting was installed, Whistler was dissatisfied with the room as a setting for his work. When Leyland was away from home, Whistler painted





over the very expensive leather interior and embellished it with paintings of golden peacock feathers. Not surprisingly, a rift ensued between Whistler and Leyland. After Leyland's death, Freer purchased the room, painting and all, and had it shipped to his home in Detroit. It is now permanently installed here. Other American painters represented in the collections are Thomas Wilmer Dewing, Dwight William Tryon, Abbott Handerson Thayer, John Singer Sargent, and Childe Hassam. You could spend a happy 1 to 2 hours here. The Freer Gallery is an oasis on the Mall, especially if you arrive here after visiting its voluminous and crowded sisters, the Natural History and Air and Space museums. Housed in a grand granite-and-marble building that evokes the Italian Renaissance, the pristine Freer has lovely sky-lit galleries. The main exhibit floor galleries encircle a beautiful landscaped courtyard, complete with loggia and central fountain. If the weather's right, it's a pleasure to sit out here and take a break from touring. An underground exhibit space connects the Freer to the neighboring Sackler Gallery, and both museums share the Meyer Auditorium, which is used for free chamber music concerts, dance performances. Asian feature films, and other programs. Inquire about these, as well as children's activities and free tours given daily, at the information desk. © Frommer's

contact:

tel: +1 202 633 4880 fax: +1 202 357 4911 http://www.asia.si.edu/

location:

1050 Independence Ave. SW Washington DC 20553

hours:

Daily 10a-5:30p



Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

DESCRIPTION: Asian art is the focus of this museum and the neighboring Freer (together, they form the National Museum of Asian Art in the United States). The Sackler opened in 1987, thanks to Arthur M. Sackler's gift of 1,000 priceless works. Since then, the museum has received 11th- to 19th-century Persian and Indian paintings, manuscripts, calligraphies, miniatures, bookbindings from the collection of Henri Vever, and art collector Robert O. Muller's entire collection of 4,000 Japanese prints and archival materials. Your visit begins in the entrance pavilion, where a series of rotating installations, collectively titled "Perspectives," showcases the works of contemporary artists from Asia and the Asian Diaspora. The Sackler is preparing you to appreciate the less familiar aspects of Asian art and culture. The Sackler's permanent collection displays Khmer ceramics; ancient Chinese jades, bronzes, paintings, and lacquerware; 20th-century Japanese ceramics and works on paper; ancient Near Eastern works in silver, gold, bronze, and clay; stone and bronze sculptures from South and Southeast Asia; and a sumptuous graphic arts inventory covering a century of work by Japanese master printmakers. Supplementing the permanent collection are traveling exhibitions from major cultural institutions in Asia, Europe, and the United States. In the past, these have included such wide-ranging areas as 15th-century Persian art and culture, photographs of Asia, and art highlighting personal devotion in India. A visit here is an education in not just Asian decorative arts, but also in antiquities. To learn more, arrive in time for a highlights tour, offered at 12:15pm most days except Wednesday. Also enlightening, and more fun, are the public programs that both the Sackler and the Freer Gallery frequently stage, such as performances of contemporary Asian music,





tea ceremony demonstrations, and Iranian film screenings. All are free, but you might need tickets; for details, call the main information number or check out the website. Allow at least an hour to tour the Sackler. The Sackler is part of a museum complex that houses the National Museum of African Art and the S. Dillon Ripley Center. It shares its staff and research facilities with the adjacent Freer Gallery, to which it is connected via an underground exhibition space. © Frommer's

contact:

tel: 1 202 783 6060 fax: 1 202 783 4222 www.postebrasserie.com

location:

555 8th Street NW Washington DC 20073

hours:

Breakfast: Monday -Friday: 7:00am - 10:00am Brunch: Saturday-Sunday 8:00am-3:00pm Lunch: Monday - Friday: 11:30am - 2:30pm Dinner: Monday -Thursday: 5:00pm - 10:00pm: Dinner: Friday and Saturday: 5:00pm - 10:30pm Dinner: Sunday: 5:00 - 9:00pm Special Bar Menu: Weekday: 2:00pm - 5:30pm Fri-Sat: 11:30am - Midnight Enclosed courtyard is first come, first served, weather permitting. Reservations are not taken for outside seating



Poste

DESCRIPTION: This lovely brasserie lies within one of Washington's coolest hotels, the Monaco. You find its separate entrance via an arched carriageway that leads to a stone-paved courtyard, where the restaurant sets up tables in warm weather. Inside, past a small bar-lounge, is the dining area, which includes an exhibition kitchen, banquettes, and a quieter back room. Poste chef Robert Weland has established himself well, settling into a pleasant culinary groove that wins praise from local critics and diners. Weland uses seasonal local ingredients to create modern American fare heavily influenced by traditional French cuisine. At lunch that means a croque-monsieur is made with Virginia ham and Gruyère on brioche; at dinner, your selections may include French onion soup, herbed fresh ricotta ravioli, red wine-braised rabbit, steak frites, and cassoulet. Desserts, too, blend French and American tastes; try the chocolate pot de crème (custard), which lists chili (!) as an ingredient. A wine list of 100 California and French bottles offers nearly 30 wines by the glass. © Frommer's

contact:

tel: +1 202 628 7177 fax: +1 202 628 7277 http://www.monaco-dc.com/

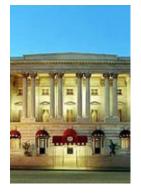
location:

7th Street Downtown Washington DC 20004



Hotel Monaco

DESCRIPTION: Hotel Monaco in Washington DC, located in the historic Tariff Building, used to be one of the city's most prominent historical landmarks. In the old days, this lovely four-star hotel was the General Post Office's building, also known as the Tariff building. Refurbished in 2002, the hotel boasts spacious, well-equipped rooms that are perfect for any weary and discerning traveler. Designed by Robert Mills, architect of the Washington Monument, this building was completed in 1842 as the first all-marble building in the city. © wcities.com





Day 2 - Washington DC

QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: Head over to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, a stone's throw from the White House. The Corcoran is not only a gallery, but a fine arts school as well. So it produces up-and-coming artists as well as showcasing more established ones. And if you're a member of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Reciprocal Program, your admission here is free. Afterwards, check out the National Museum of Women in the Arts Since making its collections public in 1987, NMWA has made a mission of showcasing and celebrating the achievements of women in the arts, spanning nearly 500 years. The works provide a fascinating insight into the lives female artists lived throughout the centuries, including the obstacles they faced. Finally, wind your way up to The Kreeger Museum . Located in a leafy and quiet residential neighborhood, the Kreeger Museum possesses a dazzling array of works from the 19th and 20th centuries. It is with no exaggeration that this lovely gallery defines itself as "the jewel on Foxhall". One minor drawback: the Museum isn't Metro accessible; you'll probably want to drive, as even the nearest bus stop is about half a mile away. If you have time and aren't too tired, stop by Dumbarton Oaks and then walk over to the charming upstairs wine bar at Bistrot Lepic for dinner.

contact:

tel: +1 202 639 1700 fax: +1 202 639 1785 http://www.corcoran.org

location:

500 17th St. NW Washington DC 20240

hours:

10a-5p W-Su, until 9p Th



Corcoran Gallery of Art

DESCRIPTION: The first art museum in Washington, the Corcoran Gallery, founded by Washington philanthropist William Wilson Corcoran in 1869, focuses on American Art. The rotating main collection includes a variety of American art spanning from older pieces to modern works by Nevelson, Warhol, and Rothko. The building of the Corcoran is in itself impressive, and its convenient location between the White House, the National Mall, and many of the national monuments make it an easily accessible museum for locals and tourists alike. Also home to a school of art, the Corcoran Gallery is well-known for its wide variety of rotating exhibitions. For the most up to date information, see http://www.corcoran.org/exhibitions/index.htm. © NileGuide



contact:

tel: +1 202 783 5000 / +1 800 222 7270 http://www.nmwa.org/

location:

1250 New York Ave. NW Washington DC 20533

hours:

M-Sa 10a-5p; Su Noon-5p



National Museum of Women in the Arts

DESCRIPTION: This museum marked its 20th anniversary in 2007, its stunning collection still the foremost museum in the world dedicated to celebrating "the contribution of women to the history of art." Founders Wilhelmina and Wallace Holladay, who donated the core of the permanent collection -- more than 250 works by women from the 16th to the 20th century -- became interested in women's art in the 1960s. After discovering that no women were included in H. W. Janson's History of Art, a standard text (which did not address this oversight until 1986!), the Holladays began collecting art by women, and the concept of a women's art museum soon evolved. Since its opening, the collection has grown to more than 3,000 works by more than 800 artists, including Rosa Bonheur, Frida Kahlo, Helen Frankenthaler, Barbara Hepworth, Georgia O'Keeffe, Camille Claudel, Lila Cabot Perry, Mary Cassatt, Elaine de Kooning, Käthe Kollwitz, and many other lesser-known artists from earlier centuries. You will discover here, for instance,





that the famed Peale family of 19th-century portrait painters included a talented sister, Sarah Miriam Peale. The collection is complemented by an ongoing series of changing exhibits. You should allow an hour for touring. The museum is housed in a magnificent Renaissance Revival landmark building designed in 1907 as a Masonic temple by noted architect Waddy Wood. Its sweeping marble staircase and splendid interior make it a popular choice for wedding receptions. Lunch (weekdays only) in the Mezzanine Café (tel. 202/628-1068), and you'll be surrounded by works from the museum's permanent collection. © Frommer's

contact:

tel: +1 202 338 3552 fax: +1 202 337 3051 http://www.kreegermuseum.o

rg/

location:

2401 Foxhall Road North West Washington DC 20007

hours:

Tours: Tu-Sa 10:30a & 1:30p



Kreeger Museum

DESCRIPTION: Set among the fashionable Foxhall Road estates in upper northwest Washington, the former residence of Carmen and David Kreeger holds a marvelous collection of 19th and 20th century art. Artists such as Picasso, Van Gogh, Kandinsky and Rodin are represented, among other luminaries. A fine collection of African art is also housed here. The Kreeger Museum requires some advance planning to visit since reservations are required to join the docent-led tours, but the effort is well worth it. © wcities.com



contact:

tel: +1 202 342 3200 http://www.doaks.org/

location:

3101 R Street Northwest Washington DC 20007

hours:

Museum: 2p-5p Tu-Su, Gardens: 2p-5p M-Su Nov-Mar, 2p-6p M-Su Apr-Oct



Dumbarton Oaks

DESCRIPTION: From El Greco's "The Visitation" to Byzantine and pre-Columbian artworks, jewelry and mosaics, this restored mansion is filled with elegant treasures. Built in 1801, the estate achieved its height of glory in the wealthy 1920s when it served as the high-society showpiece of Robert Bliss and his heiress wife, Mildred. The gardens occupy 10 acres above Georgetown and include terraced lawns, winding footpaths and elaborate fountains. © wcities.com



contact:

tel: 1 202 333 0111 fax: 1 202 333 2209 www.bistrotlepic.com

location:

1736 Wisconsin Ave NW Washington DC 20007

hours:

Main Dining Room/Kitchen: Brunch:Saturday & Sunday 11am - 3pm; Lunch:Monday to Friday: 11:30am - 2:30pm;



Bistrot Lepic & Wine Bar

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

The Bistro's chef, Bruno Fortin, is one of DC's most respected chefs.

DESCRIPTION: Bistrot Lepic is little in size, but big in atmosphere. While the downstairs is a bit more formal, with classic French cuisine and a cozy feel, the upstairs wine bar is lively, funky and lounge-y, with a full menu and views out onto the street. The wine list includes over 500 fine wines, and the staff is extremely knowledgeable about them. There is an additional room for private parties.



Jenn Larsen, Flickr



Day 2 - continued...

Dinner:Sunday & Monday: 5:30pm - 9:30pm, Tuesday -Thursday: 5:30pm - 10:00pm, Friday & Saturday: 5:30pm - 10:30pm; Wine Bar: Daily: 5:30pm to 12:00am

© NileGuide



Washington DC Snapshot

Local Info

Politics have helped to shape Washington, but they don't define it. It's the nation's capital, and arguably one of the most powerful places in the world, yet DC is often overlooked in favor of seemingly more glamorous US cities. But scratch the ostensibly dry surface and you'll find a city far more diverse than one might think; not surprising, considering that all of the embassies and consulates are here. It's impossible to list Washington's must-see sights in a paragraph, but certain places simply cannot be missed. The Smithsonian Institution, with its myriad museums and galleries, provides something of interest for every visitor, from the arts to aerospace engineering and everything in between. Beyond the majesty of the National Mall, plenty of lesser-known DC institutions lie a bit off the beaten track. Washington's music scene has long been lauded for its originality(everything from go-go funk to hardcore punk has heavy DC roots; Fort Reno's outdoor concerts are a summer tradition). Changing administrations make for prevalent transience(it's actually quite difficult to find many people in DC who are born-and-bred natives), yet there are certain venerable city establishments likeBen's Chili Bowl, where Presidents have been known to dine - that stand the test of time. And Washington continues to grow and evolve - visitors can sample exquisite Ethiopian cuisine in the city's revitalizedU Street Corridor neighborhood, wander through small, privately owned art galleries inDupont Circle, or sip ale at Columbia Height's new Commonwealth Pub. One of the many things that DC has in its favor is that it's a very walkable town, so visitors can fill their days with activities in several different neighborhoods without traveling unreasonable distances. And Washington is imminently family-friendly, with plenty of events and activities that will please kids of all ages.

© NileGuide

History

Native American settlements existed in current-day Washington DC for thousands of years before the area was first explored by Europeans in the early 1600s; the Potomac River, on which the city is located, derived its name from an Algonquin tribe.
While the Native Americans were initially accommodating to the arriving Colonists, relations became strained due to land

accommodating to the arriving Colonists, relations became strained due to land ownership disputes, and most members of the DC-area tribes eventually sought refuge further afield.

It was not until 1790, with the signing of the Residence Act, that the states of Maryland and Virginia officially ceded the 10-mile square of land(including Alexandria, Virginia) on which DC was to be built. Pierre L'Enfant, a French-born architect, was commissioned to develop a plan for the new city; though L'Enfant was eventually de-commissioned and his plans superseded by the updated engravings of Andrew Ellicott, his is the name most commonly associated with the original planning of Washington.

The 19th century was one of great change in Washington- from the burning of the city by the British during the War of 1812, to Alexandria's"retrocession" from the District and return to Virginia in the mid-century, to the Civil War and Reconstruction. Slavery was abolished in Washington almost a full year before President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 This paved the way for the growth of a vibrant African-American community in Washington, the benefits of which have played an integral part in shaping the city's cultural and political history.

The last hundred years have witnessed DC's establishment as one of the most powerful cities in the world. It was also one of the foremost cities in the American Civil Rights movement. Washington public schools were the first to integrate in the mid-1950s: the National Mall was the site of Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic 1963"I have a dream" speech. When King was assassinated in 1968, riots erupted in Washington, among other places; theU Street Corridor in particular was a scene of massive unrest. Forty years later, crowds gathered in this same neighborhood- near U and 14th Streets, NW- in a spontaneous, peaceful celebration of the election of America's first African-American President.

Considering the amount of attention that DC receives every four years during election time, it's quite surprising that Washingtonians themselves were only granted the right to vote in Presidential

elections in the mid-1960s. Washington is not a state, nor is it part of a state; it's a free-standing federal territory, under complete jurisdiction of Congress.

Unsurprisingly, this perceived lack of governing control is cause for much controversy. District residents still lament the lack of Senatorial representation, and the argument for"Home Rule" and distancing from Congressional control has been debated for years.

© NileGuide

Hotel Insights

There are hundreds of hotels, inns, B&Bs, and other types of accommodation in and around Washington. Any number of these places will suit just about any traveler's needs; since Washington is a thoroughly manageable city(many of the main neighborhoods are walkable and/ or accessible by bus or Metro), staying in the most central location isn'ttoo big of a concern. Instead, you can focus on finding a hotel that suits your personal style.

Hip and trendy Visitors who like being in the middle of the action have several different hotel options at their disposal. There are lots of funky boutique hotels in Dupont Circle, likeHotel Rouge or theTopaz Hotel; if Georgetown is more your scene, tryHotel Monticello.

Family-friendly Convenience is probably at the top of the list of hotel criteria for families traveling with children. In this instance, it might make more sense to choose a location that's a little less chaotic; hotels in nearbyArlington, Virginia or Bethesda, Maryland offer easy access to the center of Washington while also allowing for a slightly quieter(and likely less expensive) home base.

Old School The big-name hotels downtown, like theSt. Regis or theRenaissance Mayflower, are the best bet for a classic, glamorous hotel experience.

A few blocks north, the stately Watergate Hotel benefits from a super-central location in addition to its famous historical connotations. Smaller inns like theLatham Hotel in Georgetown, theHenley Park Hotel near the Verizon Center, or theHay-Adams near the White House provide more intimate(but equally sophisticated) settings.



Washington DC Snapshot continued

Star spotting Those hoping to see a famous face will have the most luck atThe Ritz Carlton in Georgetown. Hollywood types often bunk there when they're in town for special events. On a more local note, politicians can often be seen in and around theOmni Shoreham in Woodley Park- notable also because of its proximity to Adams Morgan.

On the Cheap For many, vacation accommodations don't need to be more than a nice, clean place to crash after a long day of sightseeing and exploring.

Thankfully, it's not too difficult to find perfectly adequate, cheap lodging in Washington. TheQuincy is centrally located in Foggy Bottom, and its prices are tough to beat. If you don't mind sharing your room with other travelers, check out some of DC's hostels, such as the Gallery Inn.

© NileGuide

Restaurants Insights

Washington has always had a lively dining scene, but a recent, steady influx of exciting new restaurants has forced some of the old standbys to take notice and stop resting on their laurels. As specific neighborhoods change and grow, so do their culinary offerings. As a result, areas that were virtually bereft of dining options as little as ten years ago are now crammed with restaurants and cafes catering to all tastes and budgets.

Many of DC's traditionally fancy restaurants are located downtown, presumably because they cater to the lawyers, politicians, and various other movers and shakers who work around there. Stalwarts likeOld Ebbitt Grill andThe Prime Rib are still solid establishments; they've been joined by stylish newer spots likeCafe Atlantico andThe Source, Wolfgang Puck's gorgeous bistro in the Newseum building. Rasika is consistently included among the top Indian restaurants in the city. AndObelisk has been known to host a political dignitary or two, given its closeness to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Adams Morgan offers wide-ranging and eclectic food choices befitting its funky atmosphere. Among the many options are Ethiopian, South American, and even Cajun restaurants. You can dine on the cheap atMixtec, gorge on delicious vegetarian food at Amsterdam Falafelshop(bonus:

they're open late on weekends!), or sip whiskey at Bourbon. The neighborhood's main thoroughfare provides lots of lazy Sunday brunch options as well.

The revitalized U Street Corridor is constantly adding new culinary feathers in its cap. And patrons benefit from the neighborhood's dense concentration of outstanding restaurants- with so many choices, everyone is bound to find something to satisfy his or her appetite.

Eatonville serves funky Southern cooking; Cork has a great wine list and tasty small plates to balance it.

Dupont Circle is a perennial dining favorite, and nearby Logan Circle is fast becoming a go-to restaurant destination as well. Dupont is host to Komi, arguably one of the most spectacular restaurants in the city; appealing and less expensive options like Circa, Zorba's and Pizzeria Paradiso abound as well. In Logan, stop by Posto for traditional Florentine fare in a modern atmosphere. Just down the road, Rice serves up Asian-inspired food that both vegetarians and meat-eaters can enjoy.

Georgetown's moneyed streets are home to posh restaurants like the venerable1789 and chicCitronelle. Newer restaurants likeAgraria, which specializes in organic and locally grown food, are a nice addition to the Waterfront.

Depending on where you are in Capitol Hill, there are some great restaurant choices worth exploring. In Southeast, check out Montmarte or Park Cafe for a romantic meal or Good Stuff Eatery for heavenly burgers. On the Southwest Waterfront, the Mandarin Oriental Hotel offers both swankyCityZen and laid-back Sou'Wester.

In Northeast, head to Union Pub to watch college football or sip a beer on the outdoor patio.

DC's top restaurants aren't limited to within the city limits. In the Maryland and Virginia suburbs, there's a huge array of great eateries from which to choose. The area's diverse demographics are reflected in its vast array of cuisines(everything from Vietnamese to Afghan to Austrian).

TryVermilion in Old Town Alexandria, or Cafe Asia in the Rosslyn section of Arlington. Further afield, restaurants likeL'Auberge Chez Francois andThe Inn at Little Washington are great"special event" locations(though your wallet will feel a lot lighter after dining there).

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Nightlife Insights

Everyone has an opinion when it comes to the "perfect night out". A few quiet drinks somewhere off the beaten track, perhaps? Clubbing until the daylight hours? Getting a dose of culture at the theater? All of these things are on offer in Washington- you just need to know where to look.

New York might be known as"the city that never sleeps", but clubbers can indulge their inner insomniacs in DC as well, at one-named clubs like Policy, Ultra, Fur and Glow- all of which offer R&B, house, hip hop, salsa, trance and other dance-worthy music. Patrons need to dress to impress, and call in advance to reserve a table with bottle service (in order to people-watch in style).

For those craving something a little more low-key, there are many bars, pubs and lounges to suit their mood. Swanky hotels likeThe Ritz Carlton in Georgetown offer appropriately chic cocktail lounges. Or stop by Russia House near Dupont Circle to drink(strong) vodka martinis and chat with the eclectic clientele. RFD, in Chinatown, has one of the largest beer selections in the city; Dr. Granville Moore's, in the Atlas District, offers great Belgian ales.

There's an active theater and dance community here; depending on the show, it's not too difficult to secure a ticket to see a performance atArena Stage, Woolly Mammoth, the Shakespeare Theatre, or the Kennedy Center (to name a very few).

Washington has dozens of live music venues, ranging from intimate nightclubs to large stadiums. Nightclub 9:30 is a DC institution, as is theBlack Cat; both places skew a bit more heavily toward indie, punk and alternative music, although pop acts have been known to play there as well. Bigger-name acts tend to play atVerizon Center,Nissan Pavilion, orWolf Trap. In the summertime, visitors bring a picnic to some of these places and camp out on the lawn while listening to the music.

For a family-friendly evening alternative, the Kennedy Center's Family Theater always has great performances geared for kids of all ages. If the weather is nice, book a family walk through Washington Walks; kids will learn cool facts about the



Washington DC Snapshot continued

city(and get a little exercise as well). Or catch a movie at one of the several IMAX movie theaters in the area, including one on Independence Avenue on the Mall.

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Things to Do Insights

extended periods.

As befitting a diverse place, Washington offers different activities for different tastes. And while seasonally varied, DC weather is not overly extreme; it gets very hot in the summer and quite cold in the winter, but neither end of the weather spectrum

is so severe that it forces people inside for

You probably already know that DC is full of tourist-worthy attractions. Those planning to do the whole sightseeing shebang won't run out of things on their itinerary. Indeed, many of the world's iconic statues, monuments and museums reside in the Nation's Capital and its surrounding areas.

Spend a few hours in quiet reflection at Arlington Cemetery or the various war memorials (Korea, Vietnam, World War II and more) on the Mall. Catch a glimpse of the building that inspired the Watergate scandal.

Take your pick of one of theSmithsonian Institution's many different galleries, or visit some of the lesser-known museums(why not check out theOctagon Museum, for example?). And of course, no first-time visit to Washington is complete without a photo or two of theWhite House; seeing more of the President's residence, however, requires a fair bit of planning in advance.

People who like the great outdoorslove Washington- it's loaded with parks, trails, and gardens, most of which are open to the public. Walking along the quiet, tree-lined paths ofRock Creek Park, you might just forget that you're in the middle of a vibrant city. Wander down from Georgetown's crowded streets to the C&O Canal, which is perfect for jogging, cycling, or strolling with the family. The National Zoo is easily accessible by metro, and always a crowdpleaser(check the zoo's website to find out about special events, which take place fairly frequently throughout the year). If you have a car, drive out to Glen Echo Park in Maryland and enjoy family-friendly entertainment like puppet shows and story telling, or head down to the United States Arboretum to truly immerse yourself in nature.

Foodies have an ever-increasing array of cafes, restaurants and bistros from which to choose, from critical darlings likeCentral Michel Richard to up-and-comers likeFounding Farmers. The Kennedy Center is perhaps the best known performing arts center in the city, but it's by no means the only one; depending on what you're interested in seeing or hearing, there is always a theater, club or concert hall to fit the bill. Balance steamy days in July with cool performances at the city's annual Capital Fringe Festival, or watch the holiday favoriteNutcracker at The Washington Ballet.

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Travel Tips

Getting Here

Situated more or less in the middle of the east coast, Washington is accessible by pretty much any mode of transport.

For visitors traveling to DC from within the US, Canada, or Mexico, Ronald Reagan National Airport(or"National Airport", as the locals who remember its original name still call it) is the most convenient option. In addition to the standard airport transportation services(cab, Super Shuttle, rental car facilities and bus), Reagan also boasts a Metro station, making it imminently easy(and inexpensive) to travel to and from there.

International flights(and certain airline carriers like JetBlue) come through Washington Dulles International Airport. It's farther away from the center of town, and there is no direct Metro service, but the aforementioned Super Shuttle runs to and from here, and there are several bus services from which to choose, including one operated by the Washington Flyer that travels to Dulles from West Falls Church Metro station.

Baltimore-Washington International Airport is the farthest of the three airports from the center of town; travelers willing to deal with the 30+ mile commute(via a number of options, including buses, trains, cabs, and car services) might get a slightly cheaper fare here than at the other two airports.

All three airports have the prerequisite coffee chains, souvenir stores and news agents; more substantial shopping or

dining options, aside from Duty-Free, are pretty limited.

Amtrak and MARC trains run directly into Union Station, near the Capitol; Greyhound and Peter Pan share a bus terminal close by. Offshoots of these and other large bus companies(like Bolt Bus or Megabus) are generally cheap, clean and reliable; they pick up and drop off their passengers in or near the center of the city.

Finally, anyone up to the challenge of navigating the Capital Beltway(the Washington area's interstate highway, which intersects in the north and the south with I-95) will find several modes of entry into the city via car.

Once You've Arrived

Washington is surprisingly navigable. Divided into four quadrants(NW, NE, SW and SE), the city is planned on a grid(though perhaps not quite as straightforward as, say, New York's). For the most part, lettered streets run east to west, and numbered streets run north to south. The streets are crisscrossed by avenues, named after the country's 50 states. That said, you should certainly invest in a map to get your bearings and prepare yourself for some of the odd streets, alleys and parks that prove exceptions to the grid rule.

The Metro is a fantastic way to get to all of the city's major neighborhoods without the hassle of driving, parking, or spending too much money. WMATA(the overarching transit authority that includes Metrorail and Metrobuses) are generally very reliable.

Cabs are plentiful, and meter-based(a recent change from the zoned system that caused many tourist confusion and frustration).

If driving is a necessity, it's easy to rent a car in DC from any of the major rental agencies- check their individual websites for more information about rates and location. Bear in mind, though, that parking in central Washington can be pricey.

Helpful links:

WMATA- http://www.wmata.comAmtrak-1-800-872-7245,http:// www.amtrak.comMARC-1-800-325-7245,http:// www.mtamaryland.comGreyhound-1-800-231-2222,http:// www.greyhound.comPeter



Washington DC Snapshot continued

Pan- 1-800-343-9999,http://www.peterpanbus.com

Ronald Reagan National Airport-703-417-8600,http://www.mwaa.com/nationalDulles International Airport-703-417-8600, http://www.metwashairports.com/dullesBaltimore-Washington International Airport-1-800-435-9294,http://www.bwiairport.com

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Fun Facts Washington Stats:

Coordinates:38°53'42.4"N 77°02'12.0"W

Population: 591,833 Size: 68.3 sq miles Time Zone: EST(UTC-5)

Temperature averages: 35° F winter, 80° F

summer

Rainiest month(on average): May

Did You Know?

The Washington Monument is DC's largest building- it's roughly a tenth of a mile high.

The"DC" in Washington DC stands for"District of Columbia". The phrase"taxation without representation", often heard here, is based on the fact that DC, not being a state, doesn't have any representation in Congress.

Washington was ranked the#1 Most Walkable City in the U.S. by The Brookings Institution in 2007.

DC's area code is 202, but you're also likely to see area codes like 301 and 240(for nearby Maryland suburbs) and 703(for Northern Virginia).

L'Enfant Plaza, in the SW quadrant of the city, is named after Pierre L'Enfant, who is credited with creating Washington's first planned street layout in the late 18th century.

DC's current Mayor, Adrian Fenty, was the youngest person ever to assume the post(at age 36). He is also an avid runner who competes regularly in local road races.

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