



nileGUIDE

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



terren in Virginia

Kid Friendly Washington: Family Fun in the Federal City

Washington DC, 5 Days

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Guide Description









AUTHOR NOTE: Washington offers everything a vacationing family could want: monuments, museums, parks, performances, and much more. You'd need a month to take advantage of all of the kid-friendly attractions and activities in DC; this guide provides a five-day itinerary of the must-sees and must-dos for a traveling family.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife





Day 1 - Washington DC

DAY NOTE: If you're traveling with children, the last thing you want to do is lug suitcases back and forth; better to stay in one central place and plan your daily itinerary from there. The Marriott Key Bridge is good for families in that it's central without being too chaotically urban. If the weather is nice, you can cross the Key Bridge and wander into Georgetown; if not, the Rosslyn Metro is just a few blocks away. Familiarize yourself with the dozens of DC landmarks and monuments by hopping on the DC Tourmobile. The Tourmobile provides a great way for you and your family to check out all of DC's best-known landmarks without exhausting yourselves by walking too much. Hop on and off at various points of interest as much as you want; your ticket lasts all day. The Lincoln Memorial allows you to soak up views of the Mall; if you're feeling up to it, you can walk down the Memorial stairs and along the Reflecting Pool. Kids will get a kick out of the odd and wonderful creatures in the National Aquarium. Though it's not as impressive as its Baltimore cousin, the National Aquarium in Washington still provides a great opportunity for kids to marvel at the myriad assortment of fish, reptiles and amphibians that it houses. And its central location makes it an itinerary item to plan. Finish off your day with Tex-Mex at Austin Grill; it's the perfect place for families – loud enough to allow for the inevitable temper tantrum or two, without being *too* chaotic. The food is plentiful, and there's a kids' menu as well.

| | |
|---|---|
|  | Marriott Key Bridge Enjoy the central location of this hotel, located along the Potomac River. |
|  | Georgetown Washington's oldest neighborhood |
|  | Tourmobile Sightseeing Tours with all-day reboarding |
|  | Lincoln Memorial An inspiring and symbolic landmark, with a sweeping view of the Reflecting Pool and Washington Monument. |
|  | National Aquarium Water Creatures |
|  | Austin Grill Casual Tex-Mex dining |

Day 2 - Washington DC

DAY NOTE: No trip to DC is complete without a museum visit or two, and there are many museums that will appeal to both kids and parents. DC Ducks will give you another hassle-free chance to see the city's biggest attractions - is there anything cooler to kids than the idea of a bus that can travel on both land and water? It's a fun and quirky way to travel, using restored World War II-era vehicles that tour everywhere from Union Station to the Potomac River. Afterwards, you can check out both man-made and natural marvels at the National Air and Space Museum. This museum is comprised of two separate facilities in separate locations. If your kids are really interested in air and spacecraft, then it's worth driving out to the Museum's much larger facility in Dulles, the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center. If not, then the Smithsonian facility on the Mall has some fascinating objects on display, including the Wright Flyer. At the Museum of Natural History, also on the Mall, you can explore the wonders of nature (including the famous Hope Diamond). Admission is free; you can save your money for tickets to the Museum's IMAX Theater, which shows both commercial films and documentaries in 3-D. Try Cheesecake Factory for dinner. This popular restaurant chain doesn't take reservations, so it's best to get there a little on the early side in the evening to avoid waiting. Try to save room for one of the dozen of varieties of cheesecake – no mean feat, considering how large the portions are!

| | |
|---|---|
|  | DC Ducks See DC on land and on sea with this quirky tour company. |
|  | National Air and Space Museum High flying exploration fun with your feet on the ground |
|  | National Museum of Natural History Explore every aspect of nature - and gape at the Hope Diamond - at one of the Smithsonian's most famous galleries. |
|  | Cheesecake Factory More than cheesecake |

Day 3 - Washington DC

DAY NOTE: Switch your focus and head for the great outdoors. The Billy Goat trail is one of the country's best known hiking trails, with great views of the Potomac River. Depending on your children's ages and your desired exertion level, you will love the gorgeous views that this rugged four-mile hike provides. Be advised that this is a somewhat strenuous hike – if your kids are very young or you'd rather not break a sweat, head to Georgetown and hit the Capital Crescent Trail instead, where the paths are completely flat. Also situated along the river is

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Glen Echo Park, a leafy suburban retreat that offers loads of fun activities and picnic spots. This little gem isn't even well known among many Washingtonians, probably due to its location. It's a bit out of the way, and you need a car to get there, but it's worth the trip. The former amusement park only has one working ride (a carousel), but there are plenty of other diversions for kids and adults alike, including a puppet theater. Consider stopping by the pub at the Irish Inn at Glen Echo ([http:// www.irishusa.com](http://www.irishusa.com)) for a bite to eat afterward.



Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park

Runs from Georgetown to Cumberland, Maryland.



Capital Crescent Trail

This well-maintained trail, one of the most popular in the area, connects the suburbs and Northwest DC and stretches over 10 miles.



Glen Echo Park

A family arts center

Day 4 - Washington DC

DAY NOTE: For a nice combination of wildlife and learning, start with a trip to the National Zoo. The Zoo is a must-see for families; it's centrally located and beautifully landscaped – an idyllic retreat in the middle of the city. It's also free, and home to lots of family-friendly events, especially during the summer months. Follow this up with a visit to the nearby National Geographic Museum at Founders Hall. You're not too far from the White House, so wander past and wave hello to the President. The venerable building on 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue definitely merits a walk-by. Tours of the House itself are tricky to organize; you need to have at least 10 people in your group and submit a request months in advance through your State's Congress member (phew!). Old Glory BBQ in Georgetown is a fun and laid back dining option – and you can grab ice cream at Ben & Jerry's or Haagen Daz afterwards.



National Zoological Park

A great family experience



National Geographic Museum at Explorers Hall

Explore the world at this iconic organization's headquarters.



The White House

Visit the home of the US President; limited tours available



Old Glory Barbecue

Finger lickin' good

Day 5 - Washington DC

DAY NOTE: The guide's only truly "out of town" visit is to the natural wonder of Luray Caverns. It's hard not to be awed by the Caverns' unusual grandeur, no matter what your age. You'll need a car to get to Luray, which is about 90 miles outside of Washington, but it's worth the trip. The Caverns are fascinating and provide an up-close look at awe-inspiring stalactites and glimmering pools. Afterwards, head out and lose yourselves (literally) in the labyrinthine Garden Maze. Pack a lunch, or eat in the Cavern's café. If you're not too tired after a day in Luray, consider attending a game or concert at Verizon Center. Even if you don't attend a specific event in this multifaceted sports and entertainment complex, you and your family can check out the huge Discovery Channel Store or have dinner at the huge Velocity Grill.



Luray Caverns

The largest caverns on the east coast are wondrous and worth a visit.



Verizon Center

DC's premier sports and entertainment arena, in busy Penn Quarter.

Day 1 - Washington DC

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contact:
tel: +1 703 524-6400
fax: +1 703 524 8964
<http://www.marriott.com>

location:
1401 Lee Hwy
Arlington VA 22209

1 Marriott Key Bridge

DESCRIPTION: Located along the Potomac River, this hotel is a quarter-mile walk or drive across the Key Bridge to the nation's capital. Guestrooms feature high-speed Internet access, and provide free HBO and beds with plump duvets. Many face DC and the river. Hotel highlights include an indoor/outdoor pool and a rooftop steakhouse with panoramic views of Washington and the monuments. © wcities.com



contact:
tel: +1 202 789 7000 (Tourist Information)
fax: +1 202 789 7037 (Tourist Information)
<http://www.georgetowndc.com/>

location:
M Street and Wisconsin Avenue
Washington DC 20007

hours:
Call for details

2 Georgetown

DESCRIPTION: Georgetown is one of the most historically significant areas of DC. It is a great place to spend the afternoon shopping or just strolling along the tree-lined streets, looking at the expansive homes and mansions. "M" street in Georgetown is the main upscale shopping area in DC. There are numerous historical sights mixed throughout the area, including the Old Stone House on M street, the oldest building in DC, and Dumbarton Oaks, where the United Nations was outlined in 1944. Georgetown is also one of DC's best places for eating, drinking, and nightlife. Local favorites include such places as Mr. Smiths, a piano bar, J. Pauls, and Old Glory Bar-B-Que. The Georgetown Waterfront is also a popular place to spend the afternoon. The restaurants that line the Potomac make for a great venue for drinks, although the food is better a couple of blocks north on M street. Recently, there has also been a proliferation of new, upscale restaurants in Georgetown including Hook and Mendocino Grille & Wine Bar. © NileGuide



contact:
tel: +1 202 554 5100
<http://www.tourmobile.com/>

location:
1000 Ohio Drive Southwest
Washington DC 20024

hours:
Call for details

3 Tourmobile Sightseeing

DESCRIPTION: Authorized by the National Park Service, Tourmobile Sightseeing covers the major landmarks in the capital- everything from the U.S. Capitol to Arlington National Cemetery. The company also offers several customized tours that cover other historic landmarks in the region, including Mount Vernon and the home of Frederick Douglass in Anacostia. The company serves more than two million riders each year. © wcities.com



contact:
tel: +1 202 426 6841
<http://www.nps.gov/linc/index.htm>

location:
900 Ohio Drive Southwest
Washington DC 20024

hours:
24 hrs

4 Lincoln Memorial

DESCRIPTION: A stunning tribute to the 16th president of the United States, this memorial sits at the western end of the reflecting pool and the national mall. This famous memorial is featured on both the penny and the back of the five dollar bill. The Lincoln Memorial is also the historic site of the famous March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his "I have a dream" speech. A true must visit for any trip to Washington, DC. Inside the temple-like structure you will find a 19-foot tall statue of Lincoln seated, with a number of memorable speeches inscribed in the walls that surround him. © NileGuide



contact:
tel: +1 202 482 2825
fax: +1 202 482 4946
<http://www.nationalaquarium.com/>

location:
14th Street
Washington DC 20230

hours:
M-Su 9a-5p

5 National Aquarium

DESCRIPTION: The oldest aquarium in the country has an unlikely home in the basement of the Department of Commerce. The dark concrete space seems to cater to the preferences of the fish with its cool atmosphere. The 70 tanks of various sizes hold many species, including those native to this country. Piranhas, alligators and sea turtles are among the other popular creatures to observe. © wcities.com



contact:
tel: 1 202 337 8080
fax: 1 202 337 2067
<http://www.austingrill.com/>

location:
2404 Wisconsin Avenue
North West
Washington DC 20007

hours:
11:30a-10:30p M, 11:30a-11p
Tu-Th, 11:30a-midnight F,

6 Austin Grill

DESCRIPTION: Those in the know flock to this jaunty little restaurant to kick back with friends and enjoy some of the most delicious Tex-Mex food in the area. If you are drinking, be sure to order a margarita. This tasty treat is served up plain, with strawberries or "Swirled" - a delicious mix of plain and strawberry. The Austin Grill is a family-friendly place. It offers a complete children's menu. © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Austin Grill

Day 1 - continued...

11a-midnight Sa, 11a-10:30p
Su

Day 2 - Washington DC

QUICK NOTE

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contact:
tel: +1 800 213 2474
<http://www.dcducks.com/>

location:
Union Station
Washington DC 20018

hours:
Call for details

1 DC Ducks

DESCRIPTION: This tour operator offers an unusual and memorable way to see D.C. by land and water, without changing vehicle. Passengers board authentic, fully restored 1942 Ducks, amphibious military personnel carriers. The land tour begins at Union Station and includes the National Mall, the monuments and the Smithsonian museums before the Duck splashes into the Potomac River. A scenic river cruise follows, with the 90-minute tour ending at Gravelly Point beneath the flight path of landing planes at National Airport. © wcities.com



contact:
tel: +1 202 633 1000
<http://www.nasm.si.edu/museum/>

location:
6th Street and Independence
Avenue Southwest
Washington DC 20576

hours:
Daily 10a-5:30p

2 National Air and Space Museum

DESCRIPTION: Located on the National Mall a few blocks from the Capitol Building, the National Air and Space Museum appeals to all ages. See the Wright 1903 Flyer, the Apollo 11 command module Columbia, and a lunar rock sample which visitors can touch. Children delight in the many hands-on demonstrations while IMAX Theater presentations and flight simulators engage the whole family. Fascinated with space? Explore the universe at the Albert Einstein Planetarium! Whether you visit for one hour or five, the large solarium-style food court makes this a convenient mid-day museum stop. Free admission. There is no museum parking, but public lots are within a few blocks (rates vary). Metro stations nearby: L'Enfant Plaza (blue/orange and yellow/green lines) and Smithsonian (blue/orange lines). © NileGuide



contact:

tel: +1 202 633 1000 / +1 202 357 1729

fax: +1 202 768 2778

<http://www.mnh.si.edu/>

location:

10th Street and Constitution Avenue, Northwest
Washington DC 20560

hours:

Daily 10a-5:30p

3

National Museum of Natural History

DESCRIPTION: This gallery is a wonderland for kids and adults alike - it has everything from dinosaur skeletons to diamonds and insect zoos. Kids are especially big fans of the Discovery Room, which encourages their participation in the form of touching and smelling various exhibits. The museum also boasts an IMAX theater, so be sure to check the schedule and see what's playing.

© NileGuide



contact:

tel: 1 202 364 0500

<http://www.thecheesecakefactory.com/>

location:

5345 Wisconsin Avenue NW
Washington DC 20015

hours:

Mon/Tues/Wed/Thurs: 11:30a - 11:30p; Fri/Sat: 11:30a - 12:30a; Sun: 10a - 11p;

4

Cheesecake Factory

DESCRIPTION: The Cheesecake Factory is surely the place to go when craving a rich and delectable slice of the mouth-watering dessert, but this restaurant offers much more. Serving appetizers, lunch, dinner, late night dining, Sunday Brunch, and a full bar, the Factory is a great choice for a casual dining experience. Everyone will find something to their liking with over 200 menu selections of pizza, pasta, seafood, steaks, salads, sandwiches, burgers, and more. Be sure to save room for one of the 50 delicious cheesecakes and desserts. © wcities.com



citysearch

Day 3 - Washington DC

QUICK NOTE

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contact:
tel: 804-462-5030
www.state.va.us/~dcr/parks/bellisle.htm

location:
P.O. Box 4
Sharpsburg MD 21782

1 Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park

DESCRIPTION: Hiking is probably the most popular recreation enjoyed along the towpath's 184.5-mile stretch. Additional side trails are available at Great Falls including Gold Mine trail, River trail, and the nationally known Billy Goat Trail. There is a handicapped accessible walkway from the towpath to an overlook of the Great Falls of the Potomac. There is also a trail over the top of the Paw Paw Tunnel. Trail guides are available at Georgetown, Great Falls Tavern, Williamsport, and Hancock Visitor Centers, Western Maryland Station Center, Antietam National Battlefield Park, or by calling the Parks and History Association. Maps, books, and other publications highlighting the canal's recreations are sold at the various visitor centers. The National Park Service offers interpretive tours seasonally. Hiking and biking opportunities run the full length of the canal. Horseback riding is permitted from Swains Lock to Cumberland, Maryland. Canoeing, boating and fishing opportunities vary based upon location of canal. Family campgrounds, group campgrounds, and primitive sites are offered at designated areas along the trail. Picnicking is permitted anywhere, however, campfires are prohibited outside designated areas. Swimming is not allowed.

contact:
<http://www.cctrail.org/>

location:
Water Street Northwest
Washington DC 20009

hours:
Dawn-dusk

2 Capital Crescent Trail

DESCRIPTION: The Capital Crescent Trail is a pleasant 11-mile trail that runs through northwest Washington. During the work week, bike commuters use this trail as their link between the northwest suburbs and DC. On weekends, the trail is crowded with rollerbladers and bicyclists. It begins in Georgetown on Water Street. Follow the trail and you will find views of the lovely Potomac River and some of DC's finer neighborhoods, there is even a quick trip through the Columbia Country Club. Most of the trail is asphalt. © wcities.com



contact:

tel: +1 301 492 6229
fax: +1 301 492 5384 / +1 301
634 2260
<http://www.glenechopark.org/>

location:

7300 MacArthur Boulevard
Glen Echo MD 20812

3 Glen Echo Park

DESCRIPTION: This former amusement park changed its focus from thrilling rides to artistic amusements, many of them directed at families. A beautiful hand-carved carousel is the only ride still operating in the park, now administered by the National Park Service. Visitors will find plenty of entertainment, from performances at the Puppet Company Playhouse to children's stories at the Adventure Theatre. Dances—swing, square-dancing and the waltz among others; are held at the Spanish Ballroom. © wcities.com



photo courtesy Glen Echo Park

Day 4 - Washington DC

QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: For a nice combination of wildlife and learning, start with a trip to the National Zoo. The Zoo is a must-see for families; it's centrally located and beautifully landscaped – an idyllic retreat in the middle of the city. It's also free, and home to lots of family-friendly events, especially during the summer months. Follow this up with a visit to the nearby National Geographic Museum at Founders Hall. You're not too far from the White House, so wander past and wave hello to the President. The venerable building on 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue definitely merits a walk-by. Tours of the House itself are tricky to organize; you need to have at least 10 people in your group and submit a request months in advance through your State's Congress member (pew!). Old Glory BBQ in Georgetown is a fun and laid back dining option – and you can grab ice cream at Ben & Jerry's or Haagen Daz afterwards.

contact:
tel: 202.633.4800
fax: +1 202 225 3393
<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/>

location:
3001 Connecticut Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. DC 20008

hours:
Winter: 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.;
Spring - Fall: 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.

1 National Zoological Park

DESCRIPTION: Located in the heart of DC, the Smithsonian National Zoological Park (National Zoo) is the famous home of the Giant Pandas (Tian Tian, Mei Xiang, and Tai Shan). Recognized as one of the premier zoological research institutions in the United States, the National Zoo, which is free, attracts 2 million visitors per year. In addition to the Pandas, the Zoo includes a number of other well-loved animal attractions including Asian Elephants, orangutans, cheetahs, tiger cubs, seals, and penguins. There is also a petting zoo. In addition to the animals, the Zoo is a large, open park, and offers picnic tables and numerous other family-friendly diversions on the weekends. © NileGuide



contact:
tel: +1 202 857 7588
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/explorer/index.html>

location:
17th and M Street North West
Washington DC 20036

hours:
9a-5p M-Sa, 10a-5p Su

2 National Geographic Museum at Explorers Hall

DESCRIPTION: Regularly changing special exhibits, speakers and films exploring the many wonders of our planet feature at this soaring building, situated downtown. After visiting the exhibits, stroll through the gift shop, which sells National Geographic Society's videos, books and educational games. Admission is free and you can organize a group tour in advance. © wcities.com



contact:
tel: +1 202 456 2121 / +1 202 456 1111
fax: +1 202 456 2461
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/>

location:
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. DC 20502

3 The White House

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
Plan ahead; tours may need reservations months in advance. Tours later in the day are more likely to get behind the scenes.



hours:

Call for details

DESCRIPTION: It takes planning to tour the White House, but it's worth it! They are arranged through Congress. It is easy, contact your Member of Congress (done through your Member's website) one to six months prior to your visit to DC to request a tour. Tours are free but space is limited. The prohibited items makes airport security look lax and no storage facilities are available, so plan accordingly. Seasonal tours and events are not arranged through Congress – spring and fall garden tours (October and April), White House Easter Egg Roll, and lighting of the National Christmas Tree (early December). Tickets for these events are free but you'll have to stand in line to get them. They are distributed at the Ellipse Visitor Pavilion (15th and E Street NW). See website for dates and ticket details. For the planning-challenged, the White House Visitor Center brings the White House to your fingertips. It's open seven days a week from 7:30 am – 4:00 pm. Unlike the White House tour, the visitor center does not prohibit strollers, cameras, make-up items, pens, backpacks or purses. Take public transit, parking is scarce. © NileGuide

contact:

tel: 1 202 337 3406
www.oldglorybbq.com

location:

3139 M St. N.W.
Washington DC 20007

hours:

11:30a-2a M-Th, 11:30a-3a
F-Sa, 11a-2a Su, Brunch:
11a-3p Su

4 Old Glory Barbecue

DESCRIPTION: Raised wooden booths flank one side of the restaurant; an imposing, old-fashioned dark-wood bar with saddle-seat stools extends down the other. Background music is recorded swing music during the day, more mainstream music into the night. Old Glory boasts the city's "largest selection of single-barrel and boutique bourbons" and a rooftop deck with outdoor seating and views of Georgetown. After 9pm or so, the two-story restaurant becomes packed with the hard-drinkin' young and restless. In early evening, though, Old Glory is prime for anyone -- singles, families, or an older crowd -- although it's almost always noisy. Come for the messy, tangy, delicious spareribs; hickory-smoked chicken; tender, smoked beef brisket; or marinated, wood-fired shrimp. Six sauces are on the table, the spiciest being the vinegar-based East Carolina and Lexington. The complimentary corn muffins and biscuits; side dishes of collard greens, succotash, and potato salad; and desserts like apple crisp and coconut cherry cobbler all hit the spot. © Frommer's

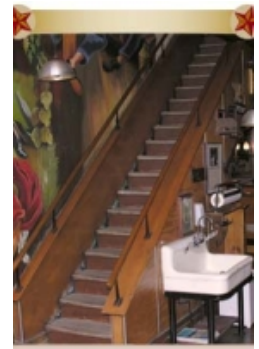


Photo Courtesy of Old Glory BBQ

Day 5 - Washington DC

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contact:
tel: +1 540 743 6551
<http://www.luraycaverns.com/>

location:
970 US Highway 211
Luray VA 22835

hours:
9a-7p mid-Jun through Labor Day, 9a-6p daily mid-Mar through mid-Jun & Labor Day through Oct. 9-4 , 9-5 Sa-Su

1 Luray Caverns

DESCRIPTION: Four hundred million years in the making, Luray Caverns is one of the most spectacular sights in the eastern United States. Underground chambers, ranging from 30 to 140 feet high, display natural formations of columns, draperies and pools of water. Brick walkways lead visitors through different chambers, each with a wonder of its own. The Cathedral Room has a "Stalactite Organ," the largest natural musical instrument in the world. Guided tours are available every 20 minutes and last about one hour. © wcities.com

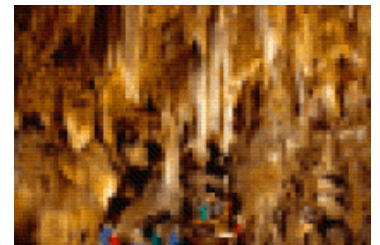


Photo courtesy of Luray Caverns

contact:
tel: +1 202 628 3200 / +1 202 661 5000
fax: +1 202 661 5083
<http://www.verizoncenter.com/>

location:
601 F Street Northwest
Washington DC 20004

hours:
Vary by event

2 Verizon Center

DESCRIPTION: The layout of this beautiful building reflects the recent trend of sporting arena as mini community; within the complex is the multi-level Velocity Grill, serving drinks and live entertainment before, during, and after events. In addition, the Discovery Channel and Modell's Sporting Goods have large stores here. The 20,000-seat stadium is home to several teams: the NBA's Wizards, the Mystics of the Women's National Basketball Association and the NHL's Washington Capitals. The Georgetown University men's basketball team also plays here. © wcities.com



Verizon Center

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 – like Ben'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 revitalized U Street Corridor neighborhood, wander through small, privately owned art galleries in Dupont Circle, or sip ale at Columbia Heights' 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.

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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 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; the U 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.

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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't too 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, like Hotel Rouge or the Topaz Hotel; if Georgetown is more your scene, try Hotel 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 nearby Arlington, 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 the St. Regis or the Renaissance 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 the Latham Hotel in Georgetown, the Henley Park Hotel near the Verizon Center, or the Hay-Adams near the White House provide more intimate (but equally sophisticated) settings.

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Star spotting Those hoping to see a famous face will have the most luck at The 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 the Omni 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. The Quincy 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.

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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 like Old Ebbitt Grill and The Prime Rib are still solid establishments; they've been joined by stylish newer spots like Cafe Atlantico and The Source, Wolfgang Puck's gorgeous bistro in the Newseum building. Rasika is consistently included among the top Indian restaurants in the city. And Obelisk 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 at Mixtec, 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 venerable 1789 and chic Citronelle. Newer restaurants like Agraria, 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 Montmartre or Park Cafe for a romantic meal or Good Stuff Eatery for heavenly burgers. On the Southwest Waterfront, the Mandarin Oriental Hotel offers both swanky CityZen 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).

Try Vermilion in Old Town Alexandria, or Cafe Asia in the Rosslyn section of Arlington. Further afield, restaurants like L'Auberge Chez Francois and The 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 like The 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 at Arena 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 the Black 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 at Verizon Center, Nissan Pavilion, or Wolf 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

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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

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 extended periods.

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

People who like the great outdoors love Washington - it's loaded with parks, trails, and gardens, most of which are open to the public. Walking along the quiet, tree-lined paths of Rock 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 crowd-pleaser (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 like Central Michel Richard to up-and-comers like Founding 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 favorite Nutcracker 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.com>
Amtrak - 1-800-872-7245, <http://www.amtrak.com>
MARC - 1-800-325-7245, <http://www.mtmaryland.com>
Greyhound - 1-800-231-2222, <http://www.greyhound.com>
Peter

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

Ronald Reagan National Airport- 703-417-8600, <http://www.mwaa.com/national>
Dulles International Airport- 703-417-8600, <http://www.metwashairports.com/dulles>
Baltimore-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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