

Overview of Washington DC

Its location handpicked by George Washington for its position between the South and the North, Washington D.C. is the patriotic and political heart of America. With its low-profile skyline, the capital is a city of green parks and open spaces, grand buildings, historic landmarks and marbled museums. Just beyond the celebrated monuments are quirky neighbourhoods supporting a thriving cultural scene with scores of top-notch restaurants, shops and evening entertainment.

Shortly after the capital district was created in 1791, French architect Pierre L'Enfant was commissioned to plan the town out of a wilderness. As he pegged out streets 150ft (45m) wide and one grand avenue 400ft (122m) wide and a mile (1.6km) long, the local landowners thought he'd gone mad as was wasting valuable land that could be used for farming. But his forward thinking paid off as L'Enfant's layout of the city can still be clearly seen and navigated logically.

After politics, tourism is the capital's main industry. It plays host to millions of people annually who come to explore famous sights such as the US Capitol, the stately White House, the Lincoln Memorial and the soaring Washington Monument. The most well-known sights are located along the National Mall, a green park stretching from the US Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial on the Potomac River, which includes several memorials to great US Presidents of the past, as well as the outstanding museums of the Smithsonian Institute. Almost all major attractions are free.

Besides political sights, Washington is also a city of unique neighbourhoods, each with its own character and culture. The most celebrated of these is historic Georgetown, with elegant colonial houses, boutiques, classy restaurants and a lively nightlife. One of the most colourful neighbourhoods is the Bohemian district of Adams-Morgan with an assortment of eclectic stores, while the arty suburb of Dupont Circle is an affluent business and residential area with excellent restaurants, art galleries and shops that make up the centre of D.C.'s gay community.

Key Facts

Language:

English is the most common language spoken but Spanish is often heard in the south-western states.

Passport/Visa:

It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. A visa is required for short visits unless travellers qualify for entry under the Visa Waiver Program. The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) enables citizens of certain countries to travel to the US for a stay of up to 90 days without a visa. Visitors under the VWP need to register online three days before travel and have an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA). This allows the US government to screen all visitors before travel. Visitors entering the country under the VWP must have a machine-readable passport (MRP) that has a barcode on the photo page. Travellers under the VWP must have passports that include biometrics if they wish to enter the country without a visa, which means that passports must contain unique personal data such as fingerprints or iris details. All passports must contain a digital photo image in order to travel visa-free. All visitors to the USA have a photograph and two fingerprints taken by an inkless scanner on arrival, including those travelling visa-free under the VWP. As part of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), all travellers travelling between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, and the Caribbean region are required to present a passport or other valid travel document to enter or re-enter the United States. If departing from the USA, a valid passport is required by immigration authorities. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Currency:

The official currency is the US Dollar (USD), which is divided into 100 cents. Only major banks exchange foreign currency. ATMs are widespread and credit cards are widely accepted. Banking hours are Monday to Friday 9am to 3pm.

Electricity:

Electrical current is 120 volts, 60Hz. Plugs are mainly the type with two flat pins, though three-pin plugs (two flat parallel pins and a rounded pin) are also widely used. European appliances without dual-voltage capabilities will require an adapter.

Travel to Washington DC

Climate for Washington DC

Washington DC has a humid subtropical climate, and the nation's capital experiences four distinct seasons. Summers are usually hot and humid, while winters are chilly and damp. The hottest months of the year are usually July and August, with average high temperatures of about 80°F to 88°F (26°C to 31°C). Thunderstorms are common in the summer due to the combined heat and humidity. Winters can be very cold, often with snowstorms, and temperatures in December to February average between 28°F and 43°F (-2°C and 6°C). Spring and autumn are the mildest times of year, with high temperatures in April and October averaging comfortably around 68°F (20°C). Spring is usually the best time to travel to Washington DC, when temperatures are mild, humidity is low and the cherry blossoms are in bloom.

Health Notes when travelling to United States of America

There are no specific health risks associated with travel within the USA. Medical facilities are excellent, but expensive. Only emergencies are treated without prior payment and treatment can be refused without evidence of insurance or proof of funds. Good medical insurance is essential. Visitors must be fully vaccinated with the primary series of an accepted COVID-19 vaccine to travel to the United States by plane if they are non-U.S. citizens.

Safety Notes when travelling to United States of America

Travel within the United States is generally trouble-free, though travellers should be aware that the US shares with the rest of the world, an increased threat from terrorist incidents. Security has been heightened, particularly at airports. Restrictions on hand luggage apply and travellers are advised to check on the latest situation with airlines in advance. Travellers should also be alert to the dangers of car and street crime in cities and should use common sense and take basic precautions. Hurricanes are common between June and November, putting the southern USA, including the Gulf Coast and the eastern US at risk. There is a risk of wildfires in many dry areas in the US, particularly on the West Coast from March to November.

Customs in United States of America

Laws vary from state to state, including speed limit, fines and punishment. The age at which alcohol may be legally bought and consumed is 21 years.

Duty Free in United States of America

Travellers to the United States who are returning residents of the country do not have to pay duty on articles purchased abroad to the value of \$800 provided their stay was longer than 48 hours and their duty-free allowance was not used in the 30-day period prior. For passengers arriving from Samoa, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands, a duty-free allowance of \$1,600 is allowed. The following items are included in this: 50 cigarettes and 10 cigars and 150 millilitres (5 fl. oz.) of alcoholic beverages or 150 millilitres (5 fl. oz.) of perfume containing alcohol. Restrictions may apply to goods from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Burma (Myanmar), Angola, Liberia and Sudan. It is prohibited to import Cuban cigars from any country.

Travellers to the United States who are non-residents do not have to pay duty on the following items: 50 cigars or 200 cigarettes and gifts to the value of \$100 provided their stay in the USA is not less than 72 hours and that the allowance has not been used in the preceding six-month period.

Prohibited items for residents and non-residents include meat or meat products, poultry, narcotics, absinthe, plants, seeds, vegetables, fruits, soil, live insects and other living plants or animal pests. Fish is prohibited unless it carries disease-free certification. Wildlife and animals and their by-products carry restrictions. Dairy products and eggs from specified countries are not allowed. Firearms and ammunition are not allowed without the necessary license and permit.

Doing Business in United States of America

In such a large country, filled with so many diverse groups, business practices may differ according to each state, however rarely to any large degree. The East Coast is traditionally more formal than the West Coast, though in states such as California, dress code and conservative appearance are as common as they would be in New York. Punctuality is important throughout the country and it is considered rude to be late for a meeting. Gift-giving is uncommon as it may be construed as bribery. Appropriate titles (Mr, Mrs, Ms) are used upon introduction and until otherwise stated. Americans favour politeness and greetings of 'Hello' and 'How are you?' are often expressed with sincerity. Business hours may vary in each state, but an 8am start and 5pm finish Monday to Friday is the most common with an hour over lunch.

Status and age are not necessarily indicative of seniority, nor do they carry much weight in themselves. Those doing business in the States should be mindful of this fact; foreigners should never make assumptions about someone's position or rank. Best practice is to be respectful to all parties. That said, the US upholds a hierarchal business structure, in which 'the boss' is the ultimate decision-maker. Senior leaders have the power of the last word, and can go against the grain just as easily as they can follow popular opinion. Foreigners should concentrate on winning over this individual, even if the greater group seems unsupportive. Americans value a direct style of communication. In this fast-paced, consumer culture 'time is money', and small-talk is viewed as unnecessary and wasteful. It's best for foreigners to get to the point quickly, speak about issues in a frank and open manner, and to avoid taking offence if someone questions or challenges them outright.

Communication in United States of America

The international country dialling code for the United States is +1. Mobile networks cover most of the country, especially all urban areas, and WiFi is widely available.

Tipping in United States of America

A 15 percent tip is expected by taxi drivers, bartenders, hairdressers and waiters, but travellers shouldn't tip in fast-food or self-service restaurants. In expensive restaurants or for large parties, the tip should be 20 percent of the bill. It is normal to tip staff such as valets and porters in hotels; this is discretionary, although a minimum of \$5 is expected. Most services are customarily tipped if the service is good.

Passport/Visa Note

It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. A visa is required for short visits unless travellers qualify for entry under the Visa Waiver Program.

The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) enables citizens of certain countries to travel to the US for a stay of up to 90 days without a visa. Visitors under the VWP need to register online three days before travel and have an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA). This allows the US government to screen all visitors before travel. Visitors entering the country under the VWP must have a machine-readable passport (MRP) that has a barcode on the photo page. Travellers under the VWP must have passports that include biometrics if they wish to enter the country without a visa, which means that passports must contain unique personal data such as fingerprints or iris details. All passports must contain a digital photo image in order to travel visa-free. All visitors to the USA have a photograph and two fingerprints taken by an inkless scanner on arrival, including those travelling visa-free under the VWP.

As part of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), all travellers travelling between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, and the Caribbean region are required to present a passport or other valid travel document to enter or re-enter the United States. If departing from the USA, a valid passport is required by immigration authorities. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Airports in Washington DC

Baltimore-Washington International (BWI)

Baltimore-Washington International Airport

www.bwiairport.com

Location: Washington DC The airport is situated 9 miles (14km) south of Baltimore and 32 miles (51km) north of Washington DC.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from March to November).

Contacts: Tel: +1 410 859 7111

Getting to the city: The Amtrak train station has trains going to both central Baltimore and Washington DC; the BWI Marshall Station offers free and frequent shuttle services between the station and terminal, with a shuttle operating every 25 minutes. Both MARC and Amtrak run trains to Union Station in DC. A light rail service goes from the airport to Baltimore costing US\$1.60. Taxis are available outside of baggage claims and cost about \$25 to Baltimore and \$63 to Washington DC. Public buses include Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Bus Service, which serves the greater Washington area. There are also various bus shuttle services to both cities, some dropping off at the central hotels. App-based ride services such as Uber and Lyft are available.

Car rental: A car rental facility is linked to the airport terminals by a free shuttle service, which leaves from the lower level terminal every ten minutes. Car rental companies include Alamo, Avis, Budget, Dollar, Enterprise, Hertz, National, Next Car, Payless, and Thrifty.

Airport Taxis: Taxis are available from the lower level of the main terminal. The only taxi service that is authorised by the airport is BWI Airport Taxi. Taxis charge upwards of \$60 for the 30 to 60 minute drive into the city; credit cards are accepted.

Facilities: There are ATMs, bureaux de change and postal services throughout the terminal, as well as WiFi. Facilities for the disabled are good. Other facilities include restaurants, bars, shops, a duty-free, a business service centre and information help desk.

Parking: The Hourly Garage is in front of the terminal and costs \$4 per hour and \$22 per day. The daily garage is connected to the terminal by shuttle buses and costs \$12 per day. Long-term parking costs \$8 a day.

Departure Tax: None.

Dulles International (IAD)

Washington Dulles International Airport

www.flydulles.com

Location: The airport is situated 26 miles (42km) west of Washington DC.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from March to November).

Contacts: Tel: +1 703 572 2700

Getting to the city: The Washington Fly Silver Line Express Bus provides a direct link to the airport, operating every 20 minutes to the Metro Silver Line station, with a fare of around \$5. The coach service tickets can be bought at arrivals door 4 in the main terminal. A bus service is available at the station for transport to areas not serviced by Metrorail.

Car rental: Car rental companies include Advantage, Alamo, Avis, Budget, Dollar, Enterprise, Hertz, National and Thrifty.

Airport Taxis: Taxis are also available all day and night from the lower level of the main terminal. The only taxi service authorised to serve the airport is Washington Flyer. Taxis charge around \$68 for the 30 to 60 minute drive into the city; you may pay by credit card. Ride-hailing apps are available.

Facilities: There are ATMs and foreign exchange services available. Other facilities include a multitude of restaurants, bars, shops and duty-free shopping, business services, tourist information, and hotel reservations.

Parking: Hourly parking at Washington Dulles International Airport is available in the parking garage adjacent to the terminal building and starts at \$6 per hour, going up to \$30 per day. Daily parking garages 1 and 2 are cheaper and are connected to the terminal by shuttle buses available at curb 2D and 2F.

Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA)

Ronald Reagan Washington Airport

www.flyreagan.com

Location: Washington DC Three miles (4.8 km) south of Washington DC.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from March to November).

Contacts: Tel: +1 (703) 417 8000

Transfer between terminals: A shuttle service is available throughout the airport to various terminals and parking. There are walkways between the terminals that allow passengers to walk between concourses without re-clearing security.

Getting to the city: The airport has a Metrorail station connected to the concourse level of Terminals B and C which offers connecting service to downtown Washington DC. Metrobus provides service to Washington DC on weekend mornings when the Metro isn't operating. There are several shuttle companies that offer door-to-door service within the city.

Car rental: There are several car hire companies with offices at Ronald Reagan Washington Airport, including Alamo, Avis, Budget, Hertz, Dollar, Thrifty, Payless, and Enterprise. Rental car counters are located on the first floor in the Terminal Garage A.

Airport Taxis: There are taxi stands located near the baggage claim exits of each terminal. The taxis are metred and charge additional fees per person and bag.

Facilities: The airport has ATMs, charging stations for computers and cell phones, foreign exchange offices, a chapel, post office, a spa, and a number of shops and restaurants within the terminal. There is also a USO Lounge available for American military personnel. There is complimentary wireless internet access throughout the airport.

Parking: Parking at DCA costs \$6 per hour in the terminal parking lots and \$25 per day. The Economy parking has no hourly rate, but cost \$17 per day. Shuttles are available to transport passengers from the parking lots to the terminals.

Washington DC

Washington D.C. is a city unlike any other, with its green open spaces, historic marble landmarks and world-famous museums. Exploring this cosmopolitan city is a joy in and of itself, its eccentric neighbourhoods supporting a thriving cultural scene with scores of top-notch restaurants, shops and evening entertainment. The US capital is an international hub of power and diplomacy, commanding the political centre stage for one of the most powerful nations in the world and representing all the democratic ideals that the country takes pride in.

The city also hosts millions of tourists annually who come to explore famous sights such as the domed US Capitol, the stately White House, Lincoln Memorial and the soaring Washington Monument. The most well-known sights are located along the National Mall, a green park stretching from the US Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial on the Potomac River, and include several memorials to great US presidents of the past, as well as the outstanding museums of the Smithsonian Institute. As an added bonus, almost all major attractions in the city are free.

Besides political and historical sights, Washington is a city of interesting neighbourhoods, each with its own character and culture. The most famous of these is historic Georgetown, with elegant colonial houses, boutiques, fancy restaurants and a lively nightlife. One of the most colourful neighbourhoods is the bohemian district of Adams-Morgan with an assortment of eclectic shops, while the arty suburb of Dupont Circle is an affluent business and residential area, with excellent restaurants, art galleries and stores that forms the centre of D.C.'s gay community.

Getting around in Washington DC

Getting around Washington DC is relatively easy as most attractions are within walking distance of one another and the streets are fairly easy to navigate. The city is laid out in a circle around the White House, with 'spokes' radiating out from it. Washington DC has an excellent public transport system that includes buses and the Metrorail subway, which has stations at or near almost every tourist attraction. The system operates until midnight. The efficient Metrorail subway system provides services throughout the city, and to the Virginia and Maryland suburbs, and is used by means of a computerised fare card.

The extensive Metrobus network fills in the gaps, but is more complex to use and is slower due to heavy traffic; bus transfers are free and valid for two hours from boarding. Bus, train, or combined one-day passes are available. Although most visitors to Washington DC arrive by car, it is often easier to use public transport as traffic is heavy, and parking in the city is difficult and expensive. Taxis are a good way of getting around for short distances and they are cheaper than most other major cities in the US; Lyft and Uber are also available.

Nightlife in Washington DC

Atlas District is arguably DC's trendiest bar and club scene. Other popular areas include the Adams-Morgan neighbourhood, Dupont Circle along Connecticut Avenue, the Penn Quarter and historic Georgetown. The city's hippest nightlife can be found in these areas, with just about everything on offer, including dance clubs, jazz and rock bars and pubs. The best place to go for gay clubs is Dupont Circle.

Arlington Row is a more laidback area that attracts crowds of all ages, where excellent live music is the order of the day. If a comedy show is what visitors are after, they should check out the Warner Theatre to see who's on stage. If visitors can't decide what they want, the Boomerang Bus stops at half a dozen venues, giving tourists a chance to sample some of the best of Washington DC's nightlife.

Washington DC also has a first-rate performing arts scene, presided over by the renowned Kennedy Center. On any given night there is a wide variety of performances, both local and international, ranging from Shakespeare, opera and ballet to jazz, rock bands, and Broadway shows.

Dining in Washington DC

The city's many politicians and their expense accounts ensure that Washington DC has some fantastic dining options to suit every budget and taste. From glamorous upmarket restaurants dripping with style, to roadside stalls and eateries, this city offers many kinds of cuisine for many different budgets.

Fresh seafood, crab, oysters and rockfish are among the most popular choices on restaurant menus, with special emphasis on dishes made with locally caught crabs, such as crab cakes, blue crabs, crab legs, crab soup and even crab chips, potato chips unique to Washington DC. A popular spice is Old Bay, which is locally made and used to season just about everything from peaches to popcorn.

Most restaurants are centred around the Midtown, downtown and Penn Quarter areas with the very upmarket eateries close to Capitol Hill and frequented by businessmen and businesswomen. Dupont Circle and the West End are also great areas for restaurants. A tip of about 15 percent is expected in restaurants and it is customary to make reservations before dining out.

1789 Restaurant — \$\$\$

American

Located in an 18th-century townhouse, the antique setting combined with the food makes 1789 a premiere dining experience. Its menu is contemporary and seasonal, enhanced by the fresh regional ingredients, along with excellent wine pairings. There is also a good-value pre-theatre menu available, as well as an after hours menu. Reservations essential. Open for dinner nightly.

1226 36th Street NW
Washington DC, United States of America

www.1789restaurant.com

Zaytinya — \$\$\$

Greek

Zaytinya is one of Washington DC's top restaurants, Greek or otherwise. Travellers with adventurous palates can dig into mezze delicacies like goat flatbread, crispy veal sweetbreads and grilled octopus, while vegetarians will find plenty to choose from. There is a reduced-price lunch menu offering sandwiches, salads and shawarmas, and even a brunch menu available until 2.30pm.

701 Ninth Street NW, Edison Place
Washington DC, United States of America

www.zaytinya.com

Belga Café — \$\$

Belgian

For Belgian cuisine at its very best, look no further than Belga Café. This stylish eatery with tasteful décor is a favourite in Washington DC with locals and out-of-towners alike. Sample its delicious four cheese croquettes or the Lotte mit Jenever, bacon-wrapped monkfish fillet with Jenever beurre blanc. Open Monday to Friday for lunch and dinner. Saturday and Sunday brunch and dinner only.

514, 8th Street, SE
Washington DC, United States of America

www.belgacafe.com

Bombay Club — \$\$\$

Indian

A favourite dining spot for the Clintons when Bill was in office, Bombay Club is known for its gorgeous setting and regional, gourmet Indian cuisine. Dishes range from fiery green chilli chicken and tandoori dishes, to rogan josh, biryanis, dals and lobster malabar. The Sunday champagne brunch is popular. Lunch Monday to Friday, dinner daily. Reservations essential.

815 Connecticut Avenue NW (Downtown)
Washington DC, United States of America

www.bombayclubdc.com

Capital Grille — \$\$\$\$

Steakhouse

If you're in the mood for a steak, there's no better place to go in Washington DC than the aptly-named Capital Grille. The elegant mahogany-panelled dining room creates the perfect backdrop for the restaurant's famous dry-aged steaks and fresh seafood, accompanied by an extensive wine list with thousands of choices.

601 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington DC, United States of America

www.thecapitalgrille.com

Fogo de Chao — \$\$\$\$

Brazilian

Carnivores will be in heaven at Fogo de Chao, Washington DC's top Brazilian restaurant. Waitrons deliver skewers of meat while you tuck into the signature churrascarias beef. The name means 'ground fire' and refers to the gaucho method of roasting meat. Unfortunately, vegetarians will have to content themselves with the salad bar and vegetable sides.

1101 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington DC, United States of America

www.fogodechao.com.br

Birch and Barley — \$\$

American

Birch and Barley is loved by both locals and tourists for its delicious comfort food, like pan-seared rainbow trout, honey-glazed duck breast and their special bratwurst burger. The brunch menu is equally tasty with offerings that include waffles, French toast and sticky buns, with 555 varieties of beer for drinks. Brunch is served on weekends, dinner daily, but the restaurant is closed on Mondays.

1337 14th Street NW
Washington DC, United States of America

www.birchandbarley.com

Shopping in Washington DC

Shopping in Washington DC almost competes with politics for attention. The USA's capital offers everything from trendy boutiques and shopping malls, to 24-hour bookshops and renowned farmer's markets. Visitors to Washington DC will walk (or fly) away with their bags full!

Some of the best shopping opportunities are in Georgetown, one of the country's oldest neighbourhoods, home to up-scale designer boutiques, or The Shops at Georgetown Park, containing designer labels such as Ann Taylor, Polo, and Ralph Lauren. The Georgetown Flea Market is good for antiques, jewellery, books, rugs, toys, and linens. Dupont Circle, also an attractive historic neighbourhood, has designer boutiques such as Betsy Fisher and vintage shops such as Secondi, as well as a good farmer's market. The Adams Morgan area, previously somewhat dilapidated, now contains a number of eclectic independent shops and boutiques. Penn Quarter is also a good shopping neighbourhood, particularly for antiques, art, home décor, and collectibles.

On Pennsylvania Avenue, the White House Visitor Center and Political America sell authentic and reproduction campaign buttons, signed photos, letters, and other American memorabilia, which make wonderful patriotic souvenirs. The National Mall has great gift shops and museum stores, and is the best place to find popular Washington DC souvenirs such as miniature replicas of the White House and various monuments. The National Archives Gift Shop also offers reproductions of the Declaration of Independence and other famous documents.

Shoppers should keep in mind that a non-refundable sales tax is charged, but not included on the sticker price of items. Tax is added at the register in Washington DC shops, so prices will be a bit higher than first expected.

Climate in Washington DC

While the city of Washington DC's humid subtropical climate has distinct seasons, with extreme variations between summer and winter, the weather is also known to be unpredictable. Summers (June to August) tend to be very hot and humid with average highs of 88F (31C); the conditions exacerbated in the heart of the city by all the concrete and steel. Autumn and spring are the best seasons to visit, when days are chilly but bright and clear; although sudden rain or snowfalls are possible. In winter (December to February) the city is subject to heavy snowfalls, averaging 17 inches (43cm) a year, and sudden arctic blasts or frozen rainstorms, with average low temperatures in winter around 27F (-3C).

Sightseeing in Washington DC

The bustling and exciting city of Washington DC contains a multitude of must-see attractions, including the iconic statues, buildings and museums that have become synonymous with the capital and have made regular appearances in TV shows and movies.

The National Mall, lined with important landmarks, museums, and monuments, is the best place to start. Iconic attractions along this stately stretch include the Washington Monument, the White House, the Capitol Building and the Lincoln Memorial, all musts for history and politics buffs.

Another world-renowned site in this area is the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, a thought provoking and hugely worthwhile exhibition. Culture lovers will enjoy the National Gallery of Art and kids of all ages will love the International Spy Museum. Another popular attraction on any tour of Washington DC is a drive along Embassy Row.

On sunny days, the National Zoo is a great kids activity in Washington DC, with rare giant pandas making a visit particularly memorable. The city's many parks and gardens are also great for running off excess energy and enjoying the beautiful weather in spring and autumn. Children will love the cotton-candy pink Cherry Blossom trees in the Tidal Basin each April.

Visitors intent on lots of sightseeing should purchase the Washington DC Explorer Pass, which entitles the bearer to admission to many of the top Washington DC attractions at reduced rates. However, many of the best things to see in Washington DC, including the Smithsonian Museums, the National Archives and Ford's Theatre are free to the public, making sightseeing in Washington DC a very affordable activity.

Washington DC Attractions

National Mall

Extending for more than two miles (3km), from the US Capitol to the Potomac River, the tree-lined grassy strip known as the National Mall is the central hub for tourists in Washington DC. It's home to the tapering Washington Monument; the Lincoln, Roosevelt and Jefferson Memorials; the Capitol Building; the White House; the museums of the Smithsonian Institution; and the National Gallery of Art. The Mall is at the heart of the city's social life, it being a site for many celebrations and festivals, as well as joggers, picnickers, food vendors and strollers. The Tidal Basin, a beautiful lake famous for the blossoming Japanese cherry trees in spring, lies to the south.

Website: www.nps.gov/nama

US Capitol

Sitting atop Capitol Hill with its giant white dome visible from all over the city, the Capitol Building is probably the most prominent landmark in Washington DC. The heart of the US government, it contains the Senate, the House of Representatives, the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress. Statues of important historical figures fill its halls while paintings and frescoes decorate the rotunda, depicting 400 years of American history. The enormous circular space capped by the 180-foot (55m) high dome is the hub of the Capitol, with a symbolic fresco masterpiece at its centre.

Website: www.visitthecapitol.gov

White House

The residence and headquarters of the President of the United States since 1800, the White House sits at the edge of the National Mall. The palatial building has undergone numerous alterations under each incumbent, such as the exercise pool for Roosevelt's polio affliction, Jacqueline Kennedy's famous Rose Garden and the glitzy additions of a hot tub and humidor for Clinton. Tours visit several rooms on the Ground and State Floors, including the Oval Office, the State Dining Room and the East Room, the publicised scene of presidential receptions and other social events. American citizens can book these tours through their Member of Congress and foreigners must book through their embassy in Washington DC.

Website: www.whitehouse.gov

Washington Monument

In recognition of his leadership in the fight for American independence, the Washington Monument was built to commemorate the first president of the United States, George Washington. The tallest structure in the city, the gleaming white obelisk offers 360-degree views of some of the most famous sights in the world, including the White House, the Capitol Building and the Lincoln Memorial. The monument, a 555-foot (169m) marble spire, stood uncompleted for 37 years and a change in the colour of stone halfway up marks the two building phases. Climbing its steps is prohibited but a free elevator conveys visitors to the gallery that provides unparalleled views of Washington DC and across the Potomac River.

Website: www.nps.gov/wamo

Lincoln Memorial

The grandiose Lincoln Memorial is a tribute to the 16th US president, who preserved the Union during the Civil War and ended slavery. In the centre of this temple is a huge marble statue of Abraham Lincoln, staring out over the Reflecting Pools towards the Washington Monument and Capitol Hill. Carved in the walls of the memorial chamber around the statue are inscriptions of two of his most famous speeches, the Gettysburg Address and his Second Inaugural Address. The memorial is the site of numerous demonstrations committed to justice, most notably the Civil Rights March in 1963 when Martin Luther King delivered his classic speech.

Website: www.nps.gov/linc

Federal Bureau of Investigation

The FBI Experience, a self-guided tour, is open to the public and explores the Bureau's past and present. The tour takes visitors through crime laboratories and past displays of thousands of confiscated weapons and illegal items seized during narcotics operations. There are exhibits on crime fighting techniques and counterintelligence operations, as well as terrorism, agent training and famous cases. Due to security reasons, the tours are only available to US citizens and tours must be booked at least four weeks in advance with FBI clearance needed to enter the building. Those in search of espionage history should rather go to the nearby International Spy Museum.

Website: www.fbi.gov

International Spy Museum

The International Spy Museum features the largest collection of publicly displayed international espionage artefacts in the world. It is the result of years of planning and advice by former officials of the CIA, FBI and KGB. Interactive exhibits cover the history of spying and espionage techniques during the 20th and 21st centuries. There is also a section dealing with high-tech gadgets such as bugs and tiny cameras, with interactive stations exploring disguises, code breaking and threat analysis. There are several interactive exhibits such as safe and code-cracking, escape rooms and polygraph tests, experiences which are combined with special effects and live action. The museum complex includes a restaurant, spy-theme cafe and shop.

Website: www.spymuseum.org

Smithsonian Institution

Nicknamed the nation's attic, the Smithsonian Institution is one of the world's finest research centres, with 17 of its museums and a zoo located in Washington DC. The museums contain collections of historical importance on almost every subject. They include the National Air and Space Museum, packed with full-size space and aircraft, including the Wright brothers' plane; the Natural History Museum, with the Hope Diamond and the world's largest stuffed blue whale; and the American History Museum, displaying the original Kermit the Frog. Others include the Freer and Sackler Galleries of Asian Art, the African Art Museum, the National Museum of the American Indian, the Arts and Industries Building, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and the National Portrait Gallery. The Smithsonian Museums are a fantastic attraction for families in Washington DC, and a wallet-friendly one as admission is free.

Website: www.si.edu

National Gallery of Art

Two buildings, the West and East Wings, make up the visually stunning National Gallery of Art that is the most popular art museum in North America. Together they house one of the world's leading collections of Western paintings, prints, photographs, graphics, and sculptures from the Middle Ages to the 21st century. Walking from the West Wing to the East provides a near chronological display of European art. The West Wing, the original building, is a marble architectural work of art with a domed rotunda over a fountain, housing most of the permanent collection. The one hundred or so collection galleries display modern and contemporary art with masterpieces by famous artists arranged by nationality, including what is considered to be the finest Renaissance collection outside of Italy, as well as an outstanding Impressionist collection. The gallery's newer addition is the ultramodern East Wing, composed of two glass-walled triangles, and is devoted to 20th-century paintings and sculptures. The National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden is a large park outside the museum, which features a huge central fountain with some of the museum's permanent collection of sculptures on display.

Website: www.nga.gov

US Holocaust Memorial Museum

The United States Memorial Museum is a memorial to the millions of Jews murdered by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945. There are three floors, starting with the occupation of Poland, then the Holocaust and finally the after effects of the war and liberation of the camps. While the exhibits convey the scale of the genocide through voice recordings, personal belongings of victims and Nazi propaganda, the Hall of Remembrance remains a quiet place of reflection, filled with dozens of burning candles lit in memory of the victims. The permanent exhibition's graphic content can be disturbing and is not recommended for children under 11 years of age.

Website: www.ushmm.org

Ford's Theatre

On April 14th, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated while watching a performance at Ford's Theatre in Washington DC. He was shot by an actor named John Wilkes Booth who sympathised with the Confederates in the ongoing Civil War. Today, Ford's Theatre is both an active performance venue and historical site, with the Ford's Theatre Museum containing artefacts related to the assassination, including the Derringer pistol Booth used. Across from the theatre is the Petersen House, which is where President Lincoln finally died early the next morning. Tours are limited to groups of 20 people at a time so should be booked in advance to avoid disappointment.

Website: www.fordstheatre.org

National Archives

While looking at historical papers may sound dull compared to some of Washington DC's more light-hearted museums, the National Archives is one of the most popular attractions in the city, housing priceless documents from US history, including the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Constitution, the Emancipation Proclamation and even the 1297 version of the Magna Carta. All these documents are displayed to the public in the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom, along with other collections of photography and historical memorabilia. Apart from the historic documents, the impressive building itself makes a visit to the National Archives worthwhile.

Website: www.archives.gov/nae/visit/

Washington National Cathedral

One of the largest cathedrals in the US, the Washington National Cathedral, also known as the Cathedral Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, is a magnificent Gothic Revival structure standing 301 feet (91m) tall. The interior is just as grand, with the long, narrow sanctuary framed by buttresses, chancels, transepts and beautiful stained-glass windows. The most famous of these is the Space Window, which contains a piece of moon rock brought back by Neil Armstrong from the Apollo 11 mission. The cathedral is the final resting place of noted figures such as Helen Keller, President Woodrow Wilson and Admiral George Dewey.

Website: cathedral.org

Kennedy Center

One of the most prestigious performing arts centres in the US, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is also its busiest, hosting roughly 2,000 performances each year for an audience totalling nearly two million people in its eight separate performance halls. It is home to the National Symphony Orchestra, and has commissioned hundreds of new works in various disciplines, including theatre, dance and jazz and folk music. Each year five artists or groups are awarded the Kennedy Center Honors for lifetime contribution to American culture and the performing arts in a gala ceremony televised nationally. There are a number of interesting tour options for those who don't have the time or money to take in a performance.

Website: www.kennedy-center.org

National Zoo

The Smithsonian National Zoological Park, commonly known as the National Zoo, is a wonderful attraction for families on holiday in Washington DC. As part of the Smithsonian Institution, the zoo has no entry fee and offers visitors the chance to explore 163 acres (66ha) of habitats containing more than 1,800 animals, a fifth of which are endangered. The star attractions of the zoo are definitely the giant pandas while other popular exhibits include the Great Ape House, Elephant Trails, Lion-Tiger Hill, Cheetah Conservation Station and Seals and Sea Lions.

Website: nationalzoo.si.edu

Events in Washington DC

National Cherry Blossom Festival

Saturday March 20, 2021 to Saturday April 10, 2021 (20 Mar - 13 Apr 2020)

Where: Tidal Basin

One of Washington D.C.'s most famous events is the annual National Cherry Blossom Festival celebrating the arrival of spring. Visitors flock to the city to admire the beautiful pink and white blossoms which surround the Tidal Basin, the original gift of 3,000 cherry trees to the city from the people of Japan in 1912 as a symbol of friendship between the two countries. Festivities show off both Japanese and Washingtonian culture, as well as a fireworks display. The parade is the festival's biggest event, with spectacular floats, marching bands, costumed dance groups and giant helium balloons. A Japanese street festival after the parade exhibits the traditions, arts and food of Japan.

<http://www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org>

Smithsonian Folklife Festival

Wednesday June 24, 2020 to Sunday July 05, 2020 (TBC)

Where: National Mall

The Folklife Festival is a unique Washington D.C. tradition and is the largest annual cultural event in the city. It's a living cultural exhibition that celebrates the heritage of different states, regions and international communities, and includes music and dance performances, craft demonstrations, storytelling, exhibits, workshops and traditional cooking demonstrations. Festival-goers should be prepared to spend plenty of time outdoors in the hottest part of the year, but visiting the air-conditioned Smithsonian Museums is a good way to cool off and further indulge all cultural impulses. Check out the official website listed below for more details.

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

National Independence Day Celebration

Saturday July 04, 2020 (4 July annually)

Where: National Mall

One of the largest Fourth of July celebrations in the country, the capital puts on a grand show to celebrate the nation's birthday. The city celebrates the day with the state's biggest and most impressive annual parade, music concerts, an evening performance by the National Symphony Orchestra on the steps of the Capitol building and one of the country's largest fireworks displays. There are also arts and crafts activities on offer. The official website listed below includes all necessary details for planning attendance to the festival. As one would expect, there is no better place in the US to indulge in an extravaganza of patriotism than Washington D.C. on the Fourth of July.

<http://www.july4thparade.com>

Airports in Washington DC

Baltimore-Washington International (BWI)

Baltimore-Washington International Airport

<http://www.bwiairport.com>

Location: Washington DC The airport is situated 9 miles (14km) south of Baltimore and 32 miles (51km) north of Washington DC.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from March to November).

Contacts: Tel: +1 410 859 7111

Getting to the city: The Amtrak train station has trains going to both central Baltimore and Washington DC; the BWI Marshall Station offers free and frequent shuttle services between the station and terminal, with a shuttle operating every 25 minutes. Both MARC and Amtrak run trains to Union Station in DC. A light rail service goes from the airport to Baltimore costing US\$1.60. Taxis are available outside of baggage claims and cost about \$25 to Baltimore and \$63 to Washington DC. Public buses include Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Bus Service, which serves the greater Washington area. There are also various bus shuttle services to both cities, some dropping off at the central hotels. App-based ride services such as Uber and Lyft are available.

Car rental: A car rental facility is linked to the airport terminals by a free shuttle service, which leaves from the lower level terminal every ten minutes. Car rental companies include Alamo, Avis, Budget, Dollar, Enterprise, Hertz, National, Next Car, Payless, and Thrifty.

Airport Taxis: Taxis are available from the lower level of the main terminal. The only taxi service that is authorised by the airport is BWI Airport Taxi. Taxis charge upwards of \$60 for the 30 to 60 minute drive into the city; credit cards are accepted.

Facilities: There are ATMs, bureaux de change and postal services throughout the terminal, as well as WiFi. Facilities for the disabled are good. Other facilities include restaurants, bars, shops, a duty-free, a business service centre and information help desk.

Parking: The Hourly Garage is in front of the terminal and costs \$4 per hour and \$22 per day. The daily garage is connected to the terminal by shuttle buses and costs \$12 per day. Long-term parking costs \$8 a day.

Departure Tax: None.

Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA)

Ronald Reagan Washington Airport

<http://www.flyreagan.com>

Location: Washington DC Three miles (4.8 km) south of Washington DC.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from March to November).

Contacts: Tel: +1 (703) 417 8000

Transfer between terminals: A shuttle service is available throughout the airport to various terminals and parking. There are walkways between the terminals that allow passengers to walk between concourses without re-clearing security.

Getting to the city: The airport has a Metrorail station connected to the concourse level of Terminals B and C which offers connecting service to downtown Washington DC. Metrobus provides service to Washington DC on weekend mornings when the Metro isn't operating. There are several shuttle companies that offer door-to-door service within the city.

Car rental: There are several car hire companies with offices at Ronald Reagan Washington Airport, including Alamo, Avis, Budget, Hertz, Dollar, Thrifty, Payless, and Enterprise. Rental car counters are located on the first floor in the Terminal Garage A.

Airport Taxis: There are taxi stands located near the baggage claim exits of each terminal. The taxis are metred and charge additional fees per person and bag.

Facilities: The airport has ATMs, charging stations for computers and cell phones, foreign exchange offices, a chapel, post office, a spa, and a number of shops and restaurants within the terminal. There is also a USO Lounge available for American military personnel. There is complimentary wireless internet access throughout the airport.

Parking: Parking at DCA costs \$6 per hour in the terminal parking lots and \$25 per day. The Economy parking has no hourly rate, but cost \$17 per day. Shuttles are available to transport passengers from the parking lots to the terminals.

Currency

The official currency is the US Dollar (USD), which is divided into 100 cents. Only major banks exchange foreign currency. ATMs are widespread and credit cards are widely accepted. Banking hours are Monday to Friday 9am to 3pm.

Exchange rate for 1 USD - U.S. Dollar

0.00 BMD Bermudan Dollar	0.93 EUR Euro	0.80 GBP U.K. Pound Sterling	152.99 JPY Japanese Yen	1.37 CAD Canadian Dollar	0.91 CHF Swiss Franc
1.52 AUD Australian Dollar	39.40 UAH Ukrainian Hryvnia	443.91 KZT Kazakhstani Tenge	93,075.00 LBP Lebanese Pound	4.86 LYD Libyan Dinar	6.86 BOB Bolivian Boliviano
0.00 NPR Nepalese Rupee	0.00 OMR Omani Rial	0.00 QAR Qatari Rial	1.35 SGD Singapore Dollar	10.82 SEK Swedish Krona	0.00 TTD Trinidad Tobago Dollar
0.00 VEF Venezuelan Bolivar	58.11 DOP Dominican Peso	0.00 HRK Croatian Kuna	16.95 MXN Mexican Peso	610.53 XOF West African CFA Franc	0.00 PGK Papua New Guinean kina
0.00 BSD Bahamian Dollar	0.00 FJD Fiji Dollar	0.00 HNL Honduran Lempira	133.87 DZD Algerian Dinar	0.00 MMK Myanma Kyat	0.00 BWP Botswana Pula
3.72 PEN Peruvian Nuevo Sol	938.44 CLP Chilean Peso	386.84 AMD Armenia Dram	23.29 CZK Czech Koruna	17.63 MDL Moldova Lei	139.89 ISK Icelandic Krona
12,582.40 UZS Uzbekistan Sum	3.72 ILS Israeli New Sheqel	0.71 JOD Jordanian Dinar	0.00 KWD Kuwaiti Dinar	38.15 UYU Uruguayan Peso	0.00 MUR Mauritian Rupee
0.00 NIO Nicaraguan Córdoba	10.88 NOK Norwegian Krone	4.03 PLN Polish Zloty	3.75 SAR Saudi Riyal	0.00 LKR Sri Lanka Rupee	36.79 THB Thai Baht
3.66 AED U.A.E Dirham	5.09 BRL Brazilian Real	4.63 RON Romanian New Leu	7.81 HKD Hong Kong Dollar	610.53 XAF Central African CFA Franc	25,405.70 VND Vietnamese Dong
878.36 ARS Argentine Peso	0.00 XCD East Caribbean Dollar	0.00 GTQ Guatemalan Quetzal	10.06 MAD Moroccan Dirham	0.00 BHD Bahrain Dinar	1.00 PAB Panamanian Balboa
1.70 AZN Azerbaijan Manat	3,920.00 COP Colombian Peso	88.42 KGS Kyrgyzstan Som	362.00 HUF Hungarian Forint	10.89 TJS Tajikistan Ruble	16,073.70 IDR Indonesian Rupiah
47.95 EGP Egyptian Pound	1,358.84 KRW South Korean Won	7,456.52 PYG Paraguayan Guaraní	4.74 MYR Malaysian Ringgit	508.31 CRC Costa Rican Colón	1.67 NZD New Zealand Dollar
277.87 PKR Pakistani Rupee	91.39 RUB Russian Rouble	18.51 ZAR South African Rand	3.13 TND Tunisian Dinar	0.00 BBD Barbadian Dollar	1.82 BGN Bulgarian Lev
32.33 TRY Turkish Lira	57.28 PHP Philippine Peso	32.31 TWD New Taiwan Dollar	1,164.84 NGN Nigerian Naira	0.00 XPF CFP Franc	0.00 GHS Ghanaian Cedi
0.00 JMD Jamaican Dollar	0.00 ANG Neth. Antillean Guilder	0.00 BND Brunei Dollar	108.90 RSD Serbian Dinar	7.24 CNY Chinese Yuan	6.94 DKK Danish Krone
3.49 TMT New Turkmenistan Manat	83.42 INR Indian Rupee				