

WELCOME

TO WASHINGTON DC

Founded in 1791 as the capital of the United States, Washington D.C. is at the center of both national and world politics. Landmarks such as the White House, Jefferson Memorial, Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial draw thousands of tourists each year and underscore the importance of Washington's political past and present. D.C. is also a dynamic city, famous for world-class dining, entertainment and culture. Tourists should take time to stroll through the charming shops, restaurants and cafés in historic Georgetown. Or, browse along the artsy streets of Dupont Circle. The impressive Smithsonian museums are a must for everyone, and the Vietnam and Holocaust memorials serve as poignant reminders of the tragedy of war. If time allows, take a boat ride up the Potomac to George Washington's Mount Vernon. As for seasonal activities, Washington is always hopping with year-round festivals and events.

George Washington himself chose the location for the city that bears his name, and which serves as the seat of government for the United States of America. Over the course of 200 years, Washington, D.C. has grown with the nation, and it now represents the very best of America. From its majestic monuments to its incomparable museums, from the Mall to the steps of the Capitol, Washington offers visitors one-of-a-kind attractions.

The majestic Capitol building stands at the center of the city, allowing unobstructed views of the city's most famous attractions. The giant open space of the Mall is marked off by the various museums of the Smithsonian Institution, the largest cluster of museums in the world. The National Air and Space Museum celebrates the nation's achievements in flight and space exploration, from the Wright brothers first biplane to the Apollo moon mission and beyond. Visitors also line up for the Natural History museum to learn about the sciences and to view the famous Hope Diamond. The Smithsonian Institution also includes the world-famous Sackler, Freer and Hirshhorn galleries. Art lovers should also appreciate the nearby National Portrait Gallery and National Museum of American Art.

Looking past the mall, the Washington monument stands 505 feet above the city. It was the tallest man made structure in America from its completion until the early 1900's. Behind this monument is the reflecting pool and the trio of memorials dedicated to remembering President Lincoln and the wounded and killed of the Vietnam and Korean conflicts. New to the area of the tidal basin, and facing the Jefferson Memorial, a memorial to Franklin Roosevelt lies on the Potomac River. Not far from there, the new National Holocaust Museum hosts millions of visitors each year.

The offices of the various government agencies take up most of the space of the city, and most offer free tours to the public. The White House also offers free tours to the public, and the lines can sometimes stretch around the block to visit "the people's house." Just outside of the city, the National Zoo houses thousands of animals on 163 acres of park. Among its residents are two giant pandas given to the United States as gifts from the People's Republic of China. Across the river in Arlington, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier stands amidst the somber majesty of Arlington National Cemetery, where John and Robert Kennedy are also buried.

Washington has many other distractions from politics. Washington's theatre life is thriving; it is second only to New York in number of theatre seats. The National Symphony and other musical companies play full schedules. As a temporary home to diplomats from around the world, Washington's restaurant offerings are the finest and most diverse around. The beauty and grandeur of the nation's capital continue to captivate the millions of American and foreign tourists who visit Washington, D.C. each year.

Weather

The weather forecast remains fairly constant throughout the summer – hot, hazy and humid with a chance of afternoon thunderstorms. If you must come during that time, dress accordingly, move slowly and carry bottled water. Better still, if you have a choice, come in April-May or September-October and experience the best possible weather.

To see the famed cherry blossoms along the Tidal Basin, get here around mid-March and hang around. No one knows exactly when the little buds might burst. Those who wait until May probably will miss out. But take heart. The spring high school senior trips won't start pouring in until early June. When that happens, you have to catch glimpses of the nation's capital from vantage points between the lines of motor coaches and gum-popping scholars. Expect hot and sticky summers, throngs in spring, slush in winter and ideal conditions -- political, cultural and meteorological -- during autumn.

Metrorail

The slick subway system designed by the late Harry Weese, puts its passengers fairly close to most of the main sights. City buses draw even closer. Taxis, many of which look old enough for the Smithsonian, take you right to the door. Public and private fare systems tend to be more complicated than a federal funding bill. Generally speaking, the farther you go, the more you pay. But the rates do usually make sense. Tour buses, such as the Tourmobile, allow passengers to get on and off at major attractions all day for a flat fee.