

INTRODUCING WASHINGTON, DC



Corinthian pillars of the majestic Capitol Columns Garden, United States National Arboretum (p109)

RIK GERHARTER

In 1968, U and 13th Sts NW were burning. Thousands of African Americans protested Dr Martin Luther King Jr's assassination during the worst race riots in Washington, DC's history.

Forty years later, in November 2008, anarchy ruled the same address. But this time white and brown mixed with black. If folks were crying, it was for joy; if they were making a ruckus, it was from all the hugging, singing and dancing: Barack Obama, the new president of the United States, had carried Washington, DC by 92.9%.

U St was unrecognizable from 1968. The ghetto was gone. Now, black- and white-owned businesses competed to give locals the best of the American urban experience. The U St Corridor, including Columbia Heights, Petworth, Shaw and other once-neglected neighborhoods, was a flag bearer for the new Washington, DC. So while they celebrated everywhere in this town, the party was poignant here, a place that grew from riot's heart into revitalized neighborhood. If Obama, the mixed-race wunderkind, was *someone* Washingtonians loved, U St was *somewhere* Washington could be: also multiracial, also an unlikely success story, also enamored with Hope and Change.

Still: cities aren't built by single places, people or strokes of history. The celebrations that accompanied that evening broke out over Barack, but they couldn't have occurred without 40 years of hard work and occasional heartache, four decades of the evolution of this town from bureaucracy surrounded by ghetto into one of the most diverse, vibrant metropolises in America.

WASHINGTON, DC LIFE

Washington, DC is undergoing the largest changes, in terms of demographics and development, of its recent history. Once roughly 73% black, that number is now around 56%, yet at the same time the remaining African American population is better educated and more prosperous than ever before. African

Americans are no longer necessarily leaving town as the District grows, and the District is growing – new high-end condos and their accompanying arts, eateries and nightlife are appearing in parts of Washington that were once boring at best, blight at worst.

The American government, for good or ill, is a larger entity than it has ever been, and as such it has attracted a surfeit of talent from around the world to this, its home base. At the same time, the government of Washington, DC has been trying to integrate that growth into the city itself, to create partnerships and a capital that is also a community. The effort is enormous; its failure would be heartbreaking, and its potential for success is exciting in a very raw way. What Washington, DC will become remains to be seen, and travelers, long a backbone of the capital economy, will have a loud voice in the direction this town chooses to take.

This is not the Washington, DC you've heard of. It is not just the monuments and the museums, or the White House, or the 'hood. It is a city where the lines between all of the above have blurred, a town where class and race, once abstract Berlin Walls that kept the District as divided as any concrete partition, are crumbling. It's a complicated, controversial, easily stereotyped gem that contains within it every facet of the American experiment: immigrants, politicians, community organizers, students, gangsters, journalists, volunteers, soldiers, our soil and our soul.

'Washington, DC contains within it every facet of the American experiment'

JEAN-PIERRE ESCOURRET



Unmistakably DC: a luminous Capitol building (p77) presiding over Pennsylvania Ave

THE AUTHORS

Adam Karlin



Adam Karlin was born in Washington, DC and raised two hours south of the city in Southern Maryland, where the Potomac and Patuxent rivers spill into the Chesapeake Bay. Besides field trips, he never properly explored

the capital until he started covering crime and politics in nearby Prince George's County – this following a period of (still simmering) wanderlust, when he worked as a journalist and editor in every inhabited continent on Earth. Lonely Planet has generously helped him continue his expeditions, and he has worked on roughly 20 Lonely Planet guidebooks. In the midst of all this, Adam is also a local boy, and DC and the DC metro region always feel international enough, yet comfortably cozy, to be something like home.

ADAM'S TOP DC DAY

This is hard, as there are so many different ways to enjoy DC. Do I want a museum kind of day? An episode of epicurean excess? Choices, choices. Regardless, let's assume it's summer, when the days are hot and the nights are silky humid in that perfect mid-Atlantic way.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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I'll start the morning on Capitol Hill with a slug of coffee and some breakfast in Eastern Market (p152), then head over to the Library of Congress (p80) to check out whatever excellent special exhibition it's got on. Then I wander up to the Smithsonian American Art Museum (p90), where I can easily pass a day lost in contemplation. Being in a cerebral mood, I'll roll up to U St, where I sit and write in *Busboys & Poets* (p164). When the day reaches that right point and the summer sunset burnishes the District lavender and the air feels like a kiss, I meet up with friends for drinks and dinner at either next-door Eatonville (p164) or nearby Cork Wine Bar (p163). If we've got a good edge going, we might head up to Marvin (p184) for an alfresco drink, or to Columbia Heights to get ripped in the Raven (p182) or Red Derby (p183). Depending on the mood of the group (do we wanna dance or hit the links?), we either stumble over to Wonderland (p183) or catch a cab to the H Street Country Club (p175) for some sloshed minigolf. I should probably go home now. But before I do, I want to see my Washington from the hill on 14th St NW that Cardozo High School sits on. From here, the city spills under me like stars, and the jazz in its soul erupts like steam from the sidewalks.

Contributing Author

REGIS ST. LOUIS



An avid news junkie and admirer of all things strange and political, Regis was destined for a long and tumultuous relationship with that elusive spirit of Washington, DC. No matter the season, he finds the city of grand design and big ideas (if sometimes small-minded bureaucrats) a fascinating place to roam.

He has written over two dozen guides for Lonely Planet, and his articles have appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* among other publications. He lives in New York City.

GETTING STARTED

Washington, DC offers ample rewards to the traveler with a well-planned itinerary. Catching a lively festival, booking seats at one of DC's world-class theaters, and reserving that elegant room with a view are just a few things to keep in mind when planning the big DC trip. A well-planned itinerary will also help you maximize your time, though do leave some room for unscheduled exploring of the city's many captivating streets.

Washington, DC can be an expensive city to visit, though free museums, affordable dining options and inexpensive transport on the Metro help lessen the blow to your budget.

WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit DC is generally autumn (September to October), when the summer crowds have dissipated along with the scorching heat. Spring (April to May), which brings flowering blossoms and clear blue skies, is also a fine time to visit, though it's one of the busiest times in DC. Summer is even busier, when tourists arrive in droves, and the days can be exceptionally hot and humid, especially in July and August. If you plan to travel then, plan your outings to take advantage of the cooler mornings and late afternoons, heading inside to much-needed air-conditioning (museums and other sites) during the midday heat.

Winter can be unpredictable with crisp clear afternoons followed by days of gray, frigid weather when no one cares much for venturing outdoors. Although the temperatures hover in the mid 40s (6°C to 8°C), the city does receive occasional snowstorms – and even a mild dusting of snow can bring the city to a halt. For average temperatures and rainfall, see [p241](#).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The biggest party in town is the quadrennial Inauguration Day, where millions celebrate (and millions more gnash their teeth) as the incoming President assumes (or re-assumes) high office. For those who'd rather not wait until 2013, Washington throws a year-round line-up of festivals and parades, including the famous Cherry Blossom Festival, the massive multicultural Smithsonian Folklife Festival and the concert- and fireworks-filled Independence Day when the nation celebrates its birthday.

On federal holidays, banks, schools, government offices and some attractions close; transportation runs on a Sunday schedule. For a list of public holidays, see [p243](#).

For more on events and festivals, check out the [Washington Post](#) (www.washingtonpost.com),

[Washington City Paper](#) (www.washingtoncitypaper.com), washington.dc.eventguide.com and [Cultural Tourism DC](#) (www.culturaltourismdc.org).

January

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR'S BIRTHDAY

The legacy of one of America's greats lives on each year at concerts, films and the recitation of King's famous 'I have a dream' speech on the Lincoln Memorial ([p55](#)) steps. His birthday is commemorated on the third Monday in January and the weekend just prior. A highlight is the children's concert 'Sweet Honey in the Rock', staged by the [Washington Performing Arts Society](#) (www.wpas.org).

February

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

www.smithsonianeducation.org

The Smithsonian museums organize an impressive array of special events and cultural programs. Gallery walks, photography exhibitions, plays and other events happen throughout the month.

CHINESE NEW YEAR

www.chinatownchamber.us

Bringing a bit of fire to the cold winter is the annual Chinatown parade, which lights up the neighborhood with dancing dragons and firecrackers. The parade (scheduled around the lunar calendar – meaning it sometimes falls in late January) happens around H and I Sts between 6th and 8th Sts.

WASHINGTON DC INTERNATIONAL WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

[☎ 800-343-1174](tel:800-343-1174); www.wine-expos.com/wine/dc

Local and celebrity chefs gather at this Epicurean gathering amid the winter

gloom. Expect an eclectic range of global fare, mouthwatering wines from all corners of the globe and demonstrations by celebrated chefs.

OUR CITY FILM FEST

www.yachad-dc.org/OurCityFilmFestival.shtml

This film fest admirably focuses on showing the works of local talent.

DC FASHION WEEK

www.dcfashionweek.org

Held in February and September, this week-long event often brings an eclectic array of emerging talent and lesser-known international designers to the fore – a recent line-up included designers from Nigeria, Iran and Pakistan. Most shows are open to the public, though some require ticket admission.

March

ST PATRICK'S DAY

www.dcstpatparade.com

Dancers, bagpipers, marching bands and assorted merrymakers share the Irish love along Constitution Ave NW (from 7th to 17th Sts) at this big annual event. The parade is held on a Sunday, either on or preceding March 17.

ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FEST

☎ 202-342-2564; www.wjff.org

This film fest attracts both documentaries and feature films.

SMITHSONIAN KITE FESTIVAL

☎ 202-633-3030; www.kitefestival.org

On the last Saturday of March, the skies near the Washington Monument (p55) come alive with colors as kite lovers fill the mall. There are a number of awards ('beauty in the air,' 'best kite-maker,' 'best tricks' etc) that add to the excitement. This usually kicks off the Cherry Blossom Festival.

NATIONAL CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

☎ 877-442-5666; www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org

The grandest of Washington's annual events, the Cherry Blossom Festival in late March and early April celebrates spring's arrival with hundreds of performances and

special exhibitions, plus boat rides in the Tidal Basin, evening walks by lantern light, cultural fairs and a parade. Aside from the gorgeous blossoms themselves, the highlight is undoubtedly the [Japanese Street Festival](http://www.sakuramatsuri.org) (www.sakuramatsuri.org), where kimono-clad dancers, taiko drummers, martial-arts masters and dozens of food vendors draw big crowds. The two-week event also commemorates the gift of 3000 cherry trees by Tokyo's Mayor Yukio Ozaki in 1912 to the city of Washington. Today over 750,000 people attend the festival.

CHERRY BLOSSOM 10-MILE RUN

☎ 301-320-3350; www.cherryblossom.org

If you prefer your blossoms rushing past in a riot of pinks and whites, sign up for the 10-mile run held during the festival. The race loops around the Tidal Basin and along the Potomac, and winners receive cash prizes. There's also a 3-mile (5km) run/walk and a 1km children's run. Registration begins in December (and fills up quickly for the 12,000 spots).

April

WHITE HOUSE EASTER EGG ROLL

1600 Pennsylvania Ave

A White House tradition since 1878, the Easter Egg Roll attracts some 30,000 families from across the US for storytelling, games, music and dance. The big event (aside from hearing the President read a fairy tale to three- to six-year-olds) is the massive egg hunt, featuring 13,000 hard-boiled eggs. It's held on the South Lawn.

SMITHSONIAN CRAFT SHOW

☎ 888-832-9554; www.smithsoniancraftshow.org; 1st fl, Smithsonian Castle, 1000 Jefferson Dr SW; admission \$15

In mid- to late April, some 120 American craft makers display works in categories that include basketry, ceramics, furniture, glass, jewelry, mixed media, paper, wearable art and wood. The juried show features both new and established artists, and all works are for sale.

SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHDAY

☎ 202-544-7077; www.folger.edu; 201 E Capitol St

On the nearest Sunday to April 23, the Folger Shakespeare Library & Theatre (p82) celebrates the Bard's birthday (nearly 450

years ago) with jugglers, jesters, music, singing, dancing and free birthday cake. It's particularly popular among families.

FILMFEST DC

☎ 202-724-5782; www.filmfestdc.org

Featuring over 70 films from across the globe, DC's FilmFest showcases new and avant-garde cinema at venues around the city. In addition to film screenings, there are guest appearances by directors and other special events. Filmfest is held over 10 days from mid- to late April.

May

PASSPORT DC

www.passportdc.org

One of Washington's newest and more innovative festivals, Passport DC is a chance to peer inside some of the city's grandest and least-visited gems, when many embassies throw open their doors to the public for two weeks in early May. Expect music, crafts, dancing and cuisine from each country hosting.

GAY BLACK PRIDE

☎ 202-737-5767

The nation's largest annual Gay Black Pride celebration takes place on the Memorial Day weekend and draws some 100,000 participants from across the country. Don't miss it if you're in town during this lovely spring season.

ROLLING THUNDER RIDE FOR FREEDOM

☎ 908-369-5439; www.rollingthunder1.com

The Harley Davidson contingent of Vietnam vets commemorates Memorial Day (last Monday of May) with a ride along the National Mall to draw attention to the POWs and MIAs who were left behind. The ride begins at the Pentagon and ends at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (p56) and draws nearly one million spectators and participants.

June

CAPITAL JAZZ FEST

☎ 301-780-9300; www.capitaljazz.com; Merriweather Post Pavilion, Columbia, Maryland; 1-/3-day pass \$40/140

On one weekend in early June, Jazz Fest comes to the capital – or at least near it.

Held 28 miles northeast of DC, the event features big-name and up-and-coming stars playing jazz and soul on two stages. The Hilton Columbia Hotel hosts the after-hours party.

CAPITAL PRIDE

☎ 202-719-5304; www.capitalpride.org

Some 250,000 descend on the nation's capital for the city's festive gay pride holiday. The parade along Pennsylvania Ave to the Mall is the focal point, although there are also film screenings and performances, plus many bars and clubs host special events. It's held in early to mid-June.

DANCE AFRICA DC FESTIVAL

☎ 202-269-1600; www.danceplace.org; Dance Place, 3225 8th St NE

This festival showcases traditional African dance along with dance from the African diaspora. Held at Dance Place (p192), the festival has ticketed indoor shows, free outdoor performances, tasty street food and an African-style marketplace. It's held in mid-June.

LAWYERS HAVE HEART 10KM RACE

☎ 703-248-1713; www.runlhh.org

Lawyers help the American Heart Association raise money by sweating it out and running a 10km loop around Georgetown's Washington Harbor (p192). The race, which is also popular with nonbarrister types, attracts thousands of runners each year and has raised nearly \$6 million. It is held in early June.

SMITHSONIAN FOLKIFE FESTIVAL

☎ 202-633-6440; www.festival.si.edu

For 10 days before Independence Day, this extravaganza celebrates international and US cultures on the Mall in front of the Smithsonian Castle (p62). The fest features folk music, dance, crafts, storytelling and ethnic fare, and it highlights a diverse mix of countries each year.

BARBECUE BATTLE

☎ 301-860-0630; www.bbqdc.com; Pennsylvania Ave, btwn 9th & 14th Sts; admission \$10

The must-see event for all barbecue lovers takes place in late June and features independent teams and restaurateurs competing

for \$40,000 in prizes for serving up the best barbecue. In addition to tender ribs, chicken and sausage, you'll find live bands, cooking demonstrations, celebrity chefs and kiddie toys.

DC CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL

www.dccaribbeanfestival.org

On the last weekend in June, 300,000 people show up for island revelry on Georgia Ave. The highlights are live bands, food vendors, craft stalls and a brilliantly colorful parade (between Missouri Ave and Barry Pl).

July & August

INDEPENDENCE DAY

July 4

July 4 commemorates the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Huge crowds gather on the National Mall to watch marching bands parade along Constitution Ave, attend the Smithsonian Folklife Festival (opposite) and listen to the Declaration read from the steps of the National Archives (p89). Nightfall brings a concert on the steps of the Capitol (performed by the National Symphony Orchestra) followed by the grand finale, the nation's largest fireworks show. Keep in mind that the crowds are huge – some 800,000 at last count.

VIRGIN FESTIVAL

The biggest show around is the annual Virgin Festival (that's the Richard Branson-type, not some Roman temple ceremony), held every August in Merriweather Post Pavilion in Columbia, MD, 30 miles north-east of the city. In 2009 the line-up featured

the Flaming Lips, Red Hot Chili Peppers and The Killers.

SCREEN ON THE GREEN

In summer, one of DC's favorite traditions is this movie festival. Held Monday nights at sundown between mid-July and mid-August, it features a different Hollywood classic each week in the National Sculpture Garden (p61).

DC RESTAURANT WEEK

www.washington.org/restaurantwk

Held in late August, DC Restaurant Week features over 170 of the capital's best restaurants offering three-course lunches (for around \$21) and dinners (around \$36). This is a great way to experience Washington's fine-dining scene at excellent prices.

September

KENNEDY CENTER OPEN HOUSE ARTS FESTIVAL

☎ 202-467-4600, 800-444-1324; www.kennedy-center.org

In early to mid-September, the Kennedy Center kicks off its new season with this all-day arts festival. Each year the Center showcases a different region and its cultural heritage, staging music, dance, theater, performance art and more. In 2009, the theme was circus and street performers, complete with acrobats, a 'musical instrument petting zoo,' an Afro-Funk orchestra and storytelling. Geared to all ages, the Arts Festival is popular with families.

FIESTA DC

☎ 202-232-4393; www.fiestadc.org; 14th St NW btwn Spring & Columbia Rds, Columbia Heights

One of the main events of Hispanic Heritage Month (which runs mid-September to mid-October), this Latino parade features colorful floats, world music, twirling dancers, pounding drum corps, craft stalls and, perhaps most importantly, Latin American food. The parade is held on the last Sunday in September in Columbia Heights (Map pp106-7).

DC FASHION WEEK

www.dcfashionweek.org

Held twice a year, DC Fashion Week hosts a lineup of runway shows, networking

SUMMER IN THE CITY

Summer nights are sultry and set aside for concerts, most of which are free. Events run from Memorial Day to the Labor Day weekend (late May to early September).

- **National Zoological Park** (p116) Free concerts every Thursday evening.
- **Jazz in the Garden** Every summer from 7pm, in the National Sculpture Garden (p61).
- **Military Music** The marine corps, air force, army and navy bands perform at 8pm most week-nights on the steps of the Capitol on alternating days in summer.

parties and the occasional free outdoor event when international fashionistas descend on the capital. Check the website for the dates and times. It's also held in February (p13).

DC BLUES FESTIVAL

☎ 301-322-4808; www.dcb Blues.org

In late August or early September, the all-volunteer DC Blues Society sponsors a free, day-long festival of top local blues acts at Rock Creek Park's Carter Barron Amphitheater (p190).

DCSHORTS

☎ 202-393-4266; <http://dcshorts.com>

This film fest is a great collection of short films from across the world.

ADAMS MORGAN FESTIVAL

www.adamsmorganandayfestival.com; 18th St NW btwn Columbia & Florida Sts

DC's biggest (and longest-running) neighborhood festival takes over 18th St NW on the weekend after Labor Day with live bands (playing jazz, funk, rock and world music) on two stages, craft stalls, a cultural stage (featuring poetry, theater and dance) and those all-important food vendors.

October

TASTE OF GEORGETOWN

www.tasteofgeorgetown.com

Thirty of Georgetown's best restaurants get experimental, innovative and, best of all, affordable. Wine pairings and live music enhance the value of this early to mid-October event.

REEL AFFIRMATIONS

☎ 202-986-1119; www.reelaffirmations.org

The best of new gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender films the world over can be viewed at this fest in mid-October. The festival also runs late-night camp films, lively parties and a women's filmmaker brunch.

MARINE CORPS MARATHON

☎ 800-786-8762; www.marinemarathon.com

Known as the people's marathon, this popular road race takes in some of DC's iconic scenery. The course winds along the

Potomac, takes in Georgetown, the entire length of the Mall, the Tidal Basin and Arlington Cemetery. It's held on the last Sunday in October.

HIGH HEEL DRAG RACE

17th St NW, btwn Church & Q Sts

Traditionally held on the Tuesday before Halloween (October 31), the High Heel Drag Race brings revelers out in droves to fête this riotously fun event in the gay district. Outrageously dressed divas strut their stuff before large crowds, then line up for a no-holds-barred sprint down 17th St. An informal block party, with more colorful mayhem, ensues. The race starts at 9pm, but show up by 6pm or 7pm to get a prime viewing spot.

November & December

WASHINGTON JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

☎ 202-777-3248; www.wjff.org

In late November/early December, this festival explores and celebrates contemporary Jewish-American themes.

NATIONAL CHRISTMAS TREE & MENORAH LIGHTING

www.nps.gov/whho/national_christmas_tree_program.htm

In early December, the president brings on the holiday cheer by switching on the lights to the national Christmas Tree. The president does the honors for the National Menorah as well – also held in December. Live bands and choral groups play holiday music, which adds to the all-round good cheer. It all happens on the Ellipse (p67), the expansive park located on the south side of the White House. Apply for free tickets two months in advance; otherwise you'll be watching proceedings through the fence.

COSTS & MONEY

Washington, DC is in the middle of the pack when it comes to cost-of-living indexes among big American cities. You'll spend less traveling and staying in DC than you would in New York City, San Francisco, LA and even Chicago. That said, the city can still set you back a fair bit unless you're actively economizing.

As elsewhere in the world, the biggest expense will be for accommodations. On average, single travelers who stay in a B&B or midrange hotel, eat at least one meal a day out and take in a bit of nightlife and entertainment can expect to spend upwards of \$200 or so per day. Couples can anticipate paying a bit more – something in the daily range of \$250 and up. For those on tight budgets, there are plenty of ways to cut costs, from sleeping in a hostel to eating at low-key restaurants and limiting entertainment options.

Breaking things down a bit: midrange accommodations, including three-star hotels and B&Bs, average around \$120 to \$200 per night for a room in a central neighborhood. Going up a notch, starting around \$250, you can stay in a boutique hotel or heritage inn with obvious style and charm. At \$350 per day and up, the city's luxury hotels are at your disposal. On the low-end of the scale, it's possible to bunk in a hostel dorm bed for around \$26 per day.

Keep in mind that you'll have to pay tax on top of that which will add another 14.5% to the bill. Some places include the tax in their prices. Do inquire if you're not sure.

When it comes to eating, prices vary widely. A midrange restaurant meal with two courses and a drink will start around \$25 at lunchtime and \$35 for dinner per person – plus tax and tip (which adds another 30% or so to the bill). If you're dining at one of the city's trendier places, count on spending at least twice that amount. Those on tight budgets can economize by frequenting diners, delis and inexpensive ethnic restaurants – where you can have a meal for around \$10.

Food and lodging aside, Washington provides many ways to save money. Free federal sites and museums, along with free concerts and summer festivals make for an inexpensive way to take advantage of the city. Other good ways to experience DC without the expense are by attending gallery openings, free summertime movie screenings on the Mall (or free screenings at the Mary Pickford Theater, p194) and by keeping an eye out for free cultural events at the Smithsonian. Happy hours offer good value for eating and drinking, and many upscale restaurants have prix-fixe and pre-theater menus that are fine value.

Do browse online for accommodations specialties – [Trip Advisor](http://www.tripadvisor.com) (www.tripadvisor.com), [Orbitz](http://www.orbitz.com) (www.orbitz.com), [Expedia](http://www.expedia.com) (www.expedia.com) and their ilk

HOW MUCH?

bottle (8 oz) of mineral water in supermarket \$1.25

pint of Samuel Adams \$6

dinner for two at Zaytinya \$65

chili dog at Ben's Chili Bowl \$4

Metro ticket across town \$1.65

ticket to see the Washington Wizards \$12-60

live show at Blues Alley \$20-35

Washington Post \$0.75

Obama 'Hope' souvenir t-shirt \$18

movie ticket \$10

often have competitive rates that you won't receive just walking in off the street (or even by phoning). And, of course, online bidding sites (such as www.priceline.com and www.hotwire.com) can also save you big.

INTERNET RESOURCES

In addition to the DC-specific listings on sites like [Chowhound](http://www.chowhound.com) (www.chowhound.com), [Yelp](http://www.yelp.com) (www.yelp.com), [Daily Candy](http://www.dailycandy.com) (www.dailycandy.com) and [Craigslist](http://www.craigslist.org) (www.craigslist.org), the following are all good sites for preparing for the Washington experience:

<http://map.mapnetwork.com/destination/dc> Interactive downtown map.

www.amandamc.blogspot.com Excellent blog about the local dining scene, covering organic markets, restaurant openings, notable chefs and more.

www.artdc.org Local arts scene.

www.congressionalbadboys.com Fun Congressional scandal stories.

www.culturaltourismdc.org Events, tours and information.

www.dc.gov Local government.

www.dc.metromix.com More food and fun.

www.dcfoudfinder.org Map of farmer's markets and community gardens.

www.dclist.com A nifty blog about all-things DC, covering gossip, film openings, arts and culture, along with plenty of stuff of little interest to those outside the capital.

www.dcnites.com Nightlife.

www.dcsocialite.com Social events blog.

www.downtowndc.org Good gateway.

ADVANCE PLANNING

Those who have an aversion to strict schedules and fixed itineraries can do just fine traveling impulsively and unstructured in DC. If you have specific, must-see goals in mind, however, it's key to make advanced arrangements.

It goes without saying that you'll need to book a room in advance. The same goes for anything else that might be in high demand, from dining at a much-touted restaurant to theater tickets for an acclaimed production. For restaurant reservations, you can use the free online [OpenTable](http://www.opentable.com) (www.opentable.com) system. A good site for buying half-priced tickets to upcoming theater, dance and music performances is [TicketPlace](http://www.ticketplace.org) (www.ticketplace.org). The well-known [Ticketmaster](http://www.ticketmaster.com) (www.ticketmaster.com) sells tickets to citywide events.

DC throws some impressive free events that are well worth attending, but require you to book well in advance – notably the lightings of the national Christmas tree and national Menorah (p16) and the Easter Egg Roll (p13). Also, if you plan to participate in the Marine Corps Marathon (p16) or the Cherry Blossom 10-Mile Run (p13), sign up well ahead.

If you're planning to rent a car for excursions out of town, it's wise to make advance arrangements, especially on holiday weekends when many rental-car agencies suffer a chronic shortage of automobiles.

Before you leave, you can start becoming well versed in upcoming goings-on by subscribing to email bulletins like [Daily Candy](http://www.dailycandy.com) (www.dailycandy.com) and perusing listings in the [Washingtonian](http://www.washingtonian.com) (www.washingtonian.com).

www.thenaturalcapital.blogspot.com Outdoor resources.

www.politico.com Independent website with great coverage of the American political scene from Washington insiders.

www.wamu.org WAMU, local NPR affiliate.

www.washington.org Official tourism site with useful links.

www.washingtonian.com Excellent insight into DC culture with features on dining, entertainment, shopping and local luminaries.

www.washingtoncitypaper.com City Paper – edgy weekly.

www.washingtonpost.com The city's oldest and most widely read daily paper covers news, arts, sports and nightlife in the capital.

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