

National Mall

Neighborhood Top Five

1 Climb the steps of the **Lincoln Memorial** (p58), stare into Abe's stony eyes and read his Gettysburg Address chiseled in the wall. Then go stand where Martin Luther King Jr gave his 'I Have a Dream' speech and feel the sweep of history.


2 Touch the moon and gawp at nuclear missiles at the **National Air and Space Museum** (p62).

3 Reflect on the sea of names sprawled across the **Vietnam Veterans Memorial** (p60).

4 Smell the roses, er, cherry blossoms around the **Tidal Basin** (p69) come springtime.

5 Poke around the monumental trove of paintings and sculpture at the **National Gallery of Art** (p61).



For more detail of this area, see Map p294 

Explore the National Mall

A nation is many things: its people, its history, its politics and its amassed knowledge. Somehow, every item listed above is given architectural life on the National Mall, the center of iconography of the most iconic city in America. This is where the nation's ideals are expressed in stone, landscaping, educational institutions, monuments and memorials.

It's also, for you first-timers, a big old lawn. Really, that's the gist of it – a couple of miles of scrubby grass sandwiched between the Capitol and Lincoln Memorial, pinned down by the Washington Monument, flanked by hot-dog vendors and T-shirt stands, and containing therein the American experience. This communal space is where Americans come to protest, to rally, to watch presidents get inaugurated. It's also where locals come to jog, dog-walk and toss a Frisbee.

With all the monuments and museums to see (for free!), you could spend your entire trip here. It's easy to get lost in the National Gallery of Art or the Air and Space Museum for half a day. Whatever you decide to explore, be prepared to walk. The main row of sights, from the Smithsonian museums west to the Lincoln Memorial, is about 2 miles tip to tip. The DC Circulator bus route stops by many of the hot spots, but you'll still be hoofing it quite a bit. Eating and drinking options are thin on the ground beyond the museum cafes. And while it's beautiful at night, there's not much going on after hours.

Local Life

- ➔ **Early to Rise** Many locals say the best cherry-blossom viewing is from the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial (p69) at sunrise.
- ➔ **Sunset Kiss** Looking for a romantic place to smooch your sweetie? Constitution Gardens (p70) at sunset is a well-known hot spot.
- ➔ **Nighttime Stroll** Don't overlook visiting the Mall at night. A walk along Constitution Ave past the dramatically lit monuments is atmospheric (and safe).

Getting There & Away

- ➔ **Metro** Smithsonian (Blue, Orange, Silver Lines) and L'Enfant Plaza (Blue, Orange, Silver, Green and Yellow Lines) for most sights; Foggy Bottom-GWU for the Lincoln and Vietnam Memorials – though they're about a mile walk from the station.
- ➔ **Bus** The new DC Circulator National Mall bus runs from Union Station around the Mall and Tidal Basin, with stops at main sights.
- ➔ **Bicycle** Several Capital Bikeshare stations fringe the Mall.

Lonely Planet's Top Tip

Aside from a couple of notable museum cafes and scattered snack vendors, it's a food desert on the Mall. It's wise to bring your own nibbles. One strategy: hit Eastern Market (p125) first to assemble a picnic for later in the day. It's a short hop east on the Metro's Blue, Orange and Silver Lines in the Capitol Hill neighborhood.

Best Gardens

- ➔ National Sculpture Garden (p67)
- ➔ United States Botanic Garden (p67)
- ➔ Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden (p67)
- ➔ Enid A Haupt Garden (p66)

For reviews, see p66. ➔

Best Museums

- ➔ National Air and Space Museum (p62)
- ➔ National Gallery of Art (p61)
- ➔ Freer-Sackler Museums of Asian Art (p66)
- ➔ National Museum of Natural History (p67)

For reviews, see p66. ➔

Best Monuments

- ➔ Vietnam Veterans Memorial (p60)
- ➔ Lincoln Memorial (p58)
- ➔ Washington Monument (p59)
- ➔ Martin Luther King Jr Memorial (p63)

For reviews, see p66. ➔