



# Capital in the 21st century

Washington DC is more commonly associated with political intrigue and backroom deals, but once you get beyond the Beltway there are many fascinating landmarks to enjoy, writes **Lisa Hughes**



The White House on Pennsylvania Avenue

rallings of the White House, it's hard to picture anywhere else having this title.

Built according to Pierre L'Enfant's masterplan, DC was intended from the start to be a city of great monuments and memorials, and today even the most nondescript offices are housed in grand buildings which give a nod to a by-

gone era. The reality is that most of the city isn't that old, so this planned historic look creates an almost film set-like feel.

Two of DC's best-loved tourist attractions won't cost you a cent. In full bloom at this time of year, the famed cherry blossoms (a 1912 gift from Mayor Yukio Ozaki of Tokyo to the city) add an unex-

pected pop of colour and make the city postcard-perfect in summer. See them in all their glory with a stroll around the scenic Tidal Basin, or skip the crowds and soak up the blossoms in the National Arboretum.

Next up is the Mall, the closest thing to a tourist-driven city centre in DC. This two-mile-long stretch of parkland makes for a blissful summer stroll, as well as hosting many of the city's monuments, including the recently-reopened Washington Monument.

With all the major monuments illuminated, Washington at night is a different city. The night-time Monuments By Moonlight bus tour is the only way to see the city and get a crash course in American history on the side. Taking off from Union Station, this two-and-a-half-hour vintage trolley tour stops off at the area's most notable places, including a sojourn to nearby Virginia.

The short hop across the Vir-

ginia border into Arlington means you can not only tick another US state off your bucket list but also come face to face with the iconic Marine Corps War Memorial. Based on Joe Rosenthal's photograph Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima, the bronze statue of six marines hoisting a Stars and Stripes makes for powerful viewing in person.

Back in DC, the Martin Luther King statue more than does justice to King's legacy, and at the Lincoln Memorial you can stand on the exact spot where King delivered the "I have a dream" speech. Standing at the Abraham Lincoln statue and looking towards the Washington Monument eerily dominating the horizon feels like a scene plucked from a movie, and is just one reason why this tour is a must-do.

But Washington isn't just a city of monuments and memorials: it's a museum haven too, with 17 Smithsonians and the next addition

Capitol Hill looks cinematic as the sun sets *Thinkstock*

— the Oprah Winfrey-backed Museum of African American History and Culture — currently springing up. Unmissable picks are the Newseum for news junkies and the National Museum of the American Indian, noted for its architectural style of no right angles and also for its restaurant's traditional American Indian dishes.

A DC museum that everyone will love exploring, especially if you have kids in tow, is the mammoth Smithsonian Museum of American History. This homage to American culture houses everything from Dorothy's ruby slippers in The Wizard Of Oz to the iconic top hat Abraham Lincoln wore when he was assassinated, the first Stars and Stripes flag and a replica of legendary TV chef Julia Child's kitchen.

Sartorially-minded visitors will find an unbeatable fashion



The Lincoln Memorial



The Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington

fix at the First Ladies exhibition. As much a showcase of changing times as it is a dress display, the evolving role of the First Lady from sideline supporter to centre stage is conveyed through the modest evening gowns of past First Ladies like Caroline Scott Harrison, all the way up to Michelle Obama's glamorous red inauguration dress.

If you want a niche museum, DC has two off-kilter offerings which are surprisingly popular picks. Everything from hidden camera gadgets and getaway cars to Hollywood "spies" like Marlene Dietrich are revealed at the Spy Museum, a one-stop shop for all things espionage-related.

Another offbeat museum that feels wrong to enjoy is the Crime and Punishment Museum. In the lobby, you're greeted by one of Ted Bundy's infamous Volkswagen Beetles, and this sets the scene for what lies inside.

Awash with criminal memorabilia, there's the bullet-riddled car Bonnie and Clyde were ambushed in, Al Capone's rosary, John Wayne Gacy's chilling clown suits and more. It's not to everyone's taste, but fans of thrillers and CSI will enjoy it.

DC has sightseeing and museum in abundance, but what about food?

While it doesn't have a staple

dish like the Chesapeake Bay crabcakes in nearby Baltimore, Washington does have an eclectic food scene, with new restaurants rapidly popping up across town. A great way to get a flavour of DC — and do some lesser-spotted sightseeing — is on a DC Metro food tour. The Capitol Hill tour, in particular, takes you away from DC's main tourist hub to the pretty side streets, and splices landmarks such as The Maples (the oldest house in the city) with tastings at different restaurants.

Sample fresh houmous and grilled halloumi at Cava, a Greek restaurant and DC success story offering a delicious taste of the Mediterranean, as well as twists on traditional drinks like the Ouzo Old-Fashioned. In Zest, the risotto is the definition of comfort food, and the sweet ginger cocktail is the best \$7 you'll spend.

Between restaurants, you get another view of DC. A world away from the perfect colonial-style buildings around the central Mall area, the Civil War-era Old Naval Hospital and the amusingly asymmetrical Marine Corp Commanders House are architectural gems which inject more character into Washington.

The final port of call, Lavagna, is the highlight of the tour. Here, everything is made from scratch and the only ingredient in

the kitchen from a can is tomatoes. Try the fresh tiramisu, which is so light it barely counts as dessert, or just go straight for the homemade limoncello.

Even if you don't join the walking tour, DC more than holds its own for places to eat. A night-time pilgrimage to the Barack Obama-approved Ben's Chili Bowl is fast becoming a tourist cliché, and if you need to indulge your sweet tooth, head for Ted's Bulletin, where they whip up homemade pop tarts in front of a drooling crowd.

If a view is what you're hungry for, make your way to the Old Post Office on Pennsylvania Avenue. At 270 feet high, the observation deck is no Empire State Building, but the panorama across Capitol Hill as the sun sets is suitably cinematic.

## FACTFILE

For more information, see [capitalregionusa.co.uk](http://capitalregionusa.co.uk).

**Where to stay:** enjoy views of the Jefferson Monument and easy access to the National Mall at the Mandarin Oriental DC. Deluxe rooms start from \$265 per night at [mandarinoriental.com/washington](http://mandarinoriental.com/washington).

**Getting there:** United Airlines flies non-stop from Dublin to its Washington, DC hub. Dulles International Airport, with fares starting from €782. Price includes tax and is valid for travel between August 23 and October 31. Visit [united.com](http://united.com) or call 1890-925252 to book.

## Activities

**DC Metro Food Tours:** [dcmetrofoodtours.com](http://dcmetrofoodtours.com)

**Old Town Trolley Tours:** [trolleytours.com/washington-dc](http://trolleytours.com/washington-dc)

**National Museum of American History:** [americanhistory.si.edu](http://americanhistory.si.edu)

**International Spy Museum:** [spymuseum.org](http://spymuseum.org)

**Crime and Punishment Museum:** [crimemuseum.org](http://crimemuseum.org)