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## WASHINGTON DC

Underneath the suits there's a party pulse to the US capital: comfort food, cocktails – come now



**C**ommon Washington error No. 1: confusing the Capitol building with the White House. Common error No. 2: that everything in Washington DC is strictly business and politics, with a side order of Smithsonian museums and the Hope Diamond. The fact is that although this serious city works harder than a comeback actor in *The West Wing*, there's a surprisingly flirty, fun-loving vibe beneath all those grey suits.

True, the wheels of politics are turning wherever you go, so don't be surprised to hear deals being struck as

you're eating your burger. But beyond the big white buildings, cosmopolitan Washington knows that all work and no play makes for a dull metropolis. While you shouldn't arrive expecting the nightlife capital of the US – when Congress is out of session, midweek can feel almost provincial – come the weekend, hotspots don't cool off until so-late-it's-early, and the jazz is as hot as the Margaritas are icy.

DC is easy-peasy to navigate. The bars and bohemia of Adams Morgan, in the north, lead naturally to the coffee shops of Dupont Circle, where nights are buzziest. The student enclave of

**Above, white nights: The Capitol and Pennsylvania Avenue**

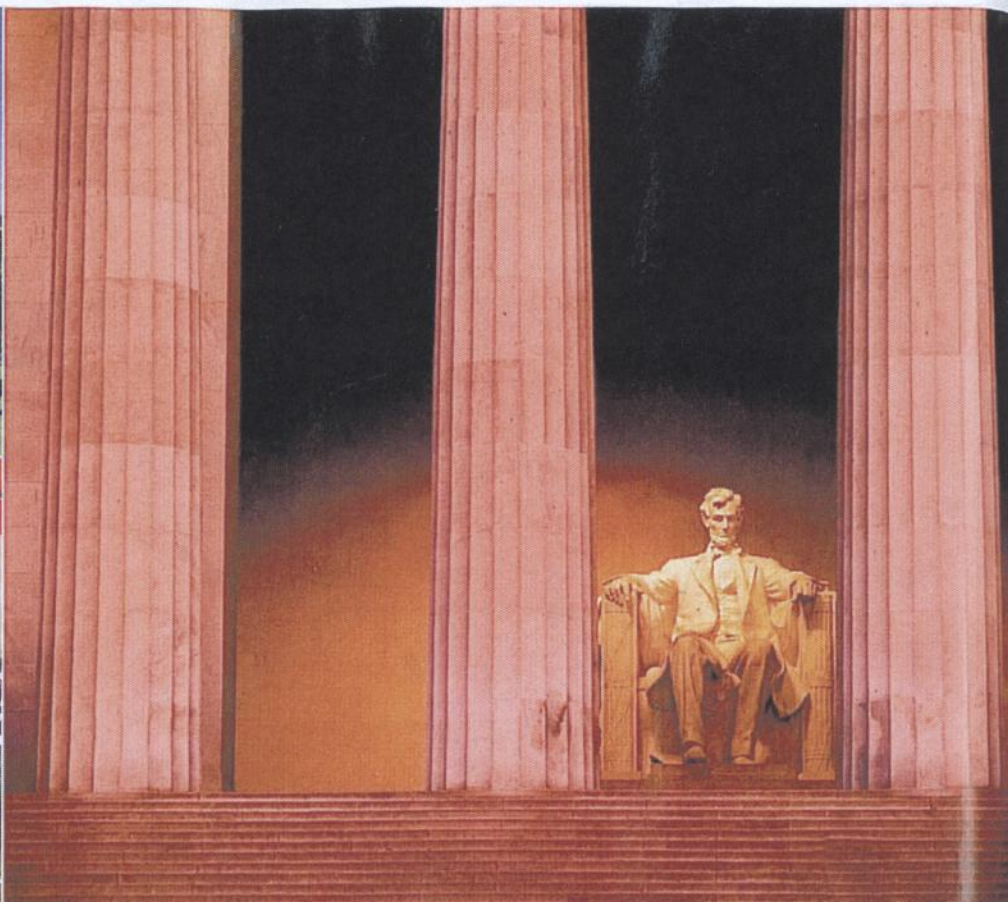
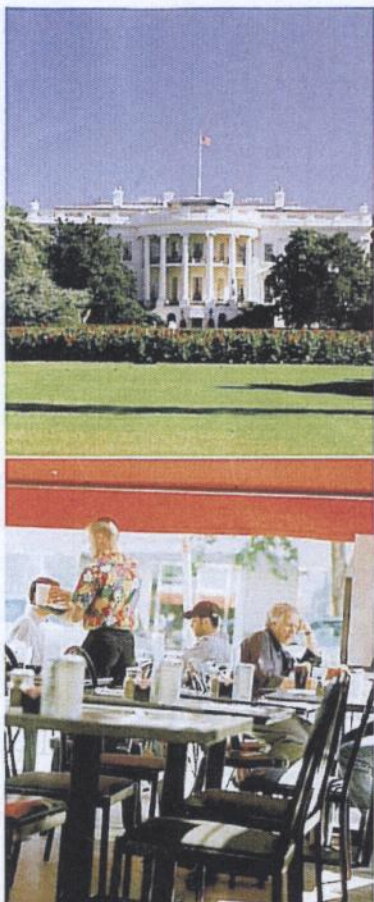
Foggy Bottom and boutiques of 'historic' (by American standards) Georgetown spread to the west, mirrored in the east by the edgier, up-and-coming U Street Corridor. Here, smart Washingtonians let their glossy hair down at the end of a hard day of international relations.

Whichever way you do it, the place sure knows how to charm. In the clipped lawns and dazzling temples of government, or in the buzzy bars and restaurants around, this brilliant city *always* mixes business with pleasure. >

**Dennis Maloney**

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## POLITICS

- Peek through the fences of ① **The White House** (1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW; [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)). Unfortunately, unless you're in a group and have arranged the tour with a member of Congress (see website), that's about as far as you'll get. It's a similar story with ② **The Pentagon** (1400 Defense Pentagon; [www.pentagon.afis.osd.mil](http://www.pentagon.afis.osd.mil)): no entry unless you contact your country's embassy ([www.embassy.org](http://www.embassy.org)) well in advance. Still, both buildings are supremely iconic, and a glimpse of the White House lawn alone means you've seen arguably the world's most important patch of grass.
- Rub shoulders with congressmen and senators at ③ **The Grooming Lounge** (1745 L St NW; 00 1 202 466 8900, [www.groominglounge.com](http://www.groominglounge.com)), an old-school gentlemen's parlour that'll teach you more about US politics than a month's worth of CNN. Watch the schmoozers in action, while submitting to a serious power-makeover: hot lather shave, haircut or facial. Or, if you're already perfection personified, you'll have no trouble making friends over current-affairs chat.
- Stroll past the Reflecting Pool, climb

the stairs and chinwag with a movie star at ④ **The Lincoln Memorial** (National Mall; [www.nps.gov/linc](http://www.nps.gov/linc)). Perhaps of Abe is best known for politics, but just about every film shot in DC has a cameo from the statuesque man himself, from Capra's *Mr Smith Goes To Washington* to *Legally Blonde 2*. You can't help but be awed by the seated 16th President.

- Knowledge is power at ⑤ **Kramerbooks** (1517 Connecticut Ave NW; 00 1 202 387 1400, [www.kramers.com](http://www.kramers.com)), Washington's most famous independent bookstore. The main draws are its brunches, live music nights and late-licensed bar. Bookworms and barhoppers meet here either to read the hardbacks or to sidestep them in favour of an olive-laden dirty Martini.
- Who says gadgets are just for kids? Get a new identity at the ⑥ **International Spy Museum** (800 F St NW; 00 1 202 393 7798, [www.spy-museum.org](http://www.spy-museum.org); £9), the only public US museum of espionage. Memorise your spy codename and background before entering the briefing room to learn all there is to know about the fine art of going undercover, from code-cracking to not blowing your cover.



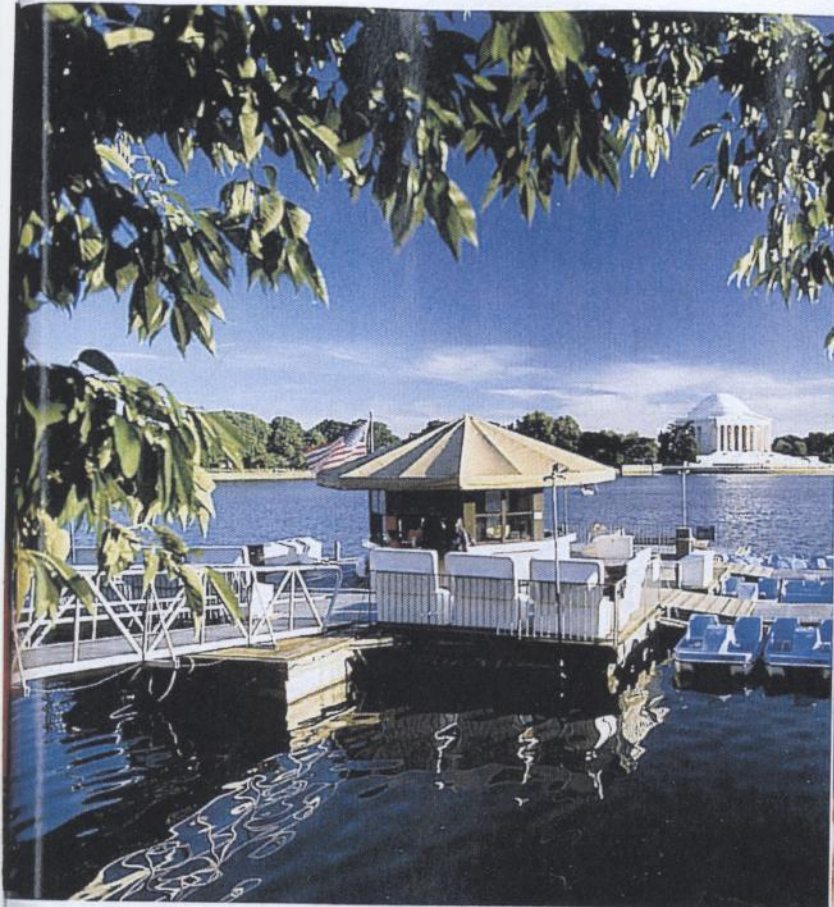
Top left, George's place: **The White House**; below left, cafe at **Kramerbooks**; top, **The Lincoln Memorial**; above, **Som records**; below, **spy shoe transmitter**

All ages are welcome, so you can bring out your inner kid.

## PLEASURE

- Devour soul food at ⑦ **Georgia Brown's** (950 15th St NW; 00 1 202 393 4499, [www.gbrowns.com](http://www.gbrowns.com)): fried green tomatoes, fried chicken and (non-fried) ice-cream... Calories are the order of the day, amid this mish-mash of Art Deco and huge sculptures made of cutlery. Doggy bags are inevitable at its Live Sunday Jazz brunch, thanks to its





wonderful home-baked corn bread, but it's also the perfect place to kick-start a night out on the town.

● Chat to Gina at (8) **Rasika** (633 D St NW; 00 1 202 637 1222, [www.rasikarestaurant.com](http://www.rasikarestaurant.com)). Washington's Cocktail Queen is an ex-New Yorker who casts spells over your tastebuds at the bar of this fine Indian-fusion restaurant, with an open kitchen that showcases the chefs in action. Decadent mixes include coconut whip, meringue and Kashmiri chilli. Ask Gina for her recommendations – the dessert cocktails are for hardcore sweet-tooths only.

● Peddle away your hangover on a bike tour of the major attractions with **Bike and Roll** ([www.bikethesites.com](http://www.bikethesites.com)). It's an ingenious way to piece Washington together. It conducts outings day and night or you can customise your own. From £20pp for a three-hour tour.

● Do Mint Juleps in (9) **The Round Robin Bar** at The Willard Hotel (1401 Pennsylvania Avenue NW; 00 1 202 628 9100, [www.washington.intercontinental.com](http://www.washington.intercontinental.com)). Perhaps the most venerable of old-school venues, this place is dominated by a huge mahogany bar, stuffed with

starch-shirted waiters and lined with bookcases and cabinets of cigars (at prices that raise eyebrows). Sink into a leather high-back, drink up, and if you haven't had enough grandeur, go take a peek at the hotel lobby – it could be Roosevelt's front room.

● Don't miss final call at (10) **Fly Lounge** (1802 Jefferson Pl NW; 00 1 202 828 4433, [www.flylounge.com](http://www.flylounge.com)). This silver-and-chrome bar, modelled on an airline cabin, is staffed by some very sexy uniformed flight attendants. The DJs and late-twentysomething clientele

Above left, Thomas Jefferson Memorial across the waters; top right, Rasika restaurant; above, The Grooming Lounge

fly into the early hours. Ask your hotel concierge to ensure your name is on the guest list.

● If you must insist on cramming in some culture, visit (11) **The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden** (Independence Avenue at Seventh Street SW; 00 1 202 633 4674, [www.hirshhorn.si.edu](http://www.hirshhorn.si.edu)). In the centre of museum-land, this place presents something a little more contemporary. Look out for the huge UFO plonked on The Mall, and see one of the best sculpture collections in the US. >

**BOTTLED UP:** Residents of DC consume more wine per capita than any other US State. By 'coincidence' the city also has more than 4,000 psychiatrists. **GOING UNDERGROUND:** Think twice about grabbing something to nibble on the Metro – eating food anywhere on the system is an arrestable offence. **MAKE A MEAL OF IT:** Brunch is the most popular meal – and one of the most offbeat is the Drag Brunch at Perry's in Adams Morgan on Sundays. **CLOSE ENCOUNTERS:** The big city draw is Ford's Theatre – where Lincoln was assassinated – and the Petersen House, over the road, where he finally slipped away.

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## WHERE TO STAY

## NO EXPENSE SPARED

(12) **Four Seasons**, 2800 Pennsylvania Ave NW (00 1 202 342 0444, [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com)). Politicos and rap stars mill around the lobby or clink glasses of Pinot Grigio in the bar. The hotel gym has the hottest waiting list in town. And you're here for the large, stylish rooms and impeccable service. Doubles from £273, room only.

(13) **Park Hyatt**, 24th and M Streets NW (00 1 202 789 1234, [www.hyatt.com](http://www.hyatt.com)). New York's modern-Zen master Tony Chi designed last year's £12 million refit, and DC's hot shots opt for the 'stateside samurai'-style rooms with oversized beds and bathrooms. A tea salon serves cuppas from high-end estates, including some from Japan and the Himalayas. Doubles from £258, room only.

## MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

(14) **Washington Court Hotel on Capitol Hill**, 525 New Jersey Ave NW (00 1 202 628 2100, [www.washingtoncourthotel.com](http://www.washingtoncourthotel.com)). In the middle of Capitol Hill, minutes from Union Station, this elder-statesman hotel commands respect, with a grandiose lobby and Italian-style rooms heavy on print fabrics. Doubles from £160, room only.

(15) **Renaissance M Street**, 1143 New Hampshire Ave NW (00 1 202 775 0800, [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)). This business hotel is anything but an office with a bed: look no further than the lounge and bar (sectioned off by

striking Japanese paper screens), the exposed brick and the theatrical light and sound system. Pull up a zebra-stripe chair at the M bar for a devilish 'Martizzi' – a Martini inspired by 'Fizzies', those '50s effervescent drink tablets. Doubles from £145, room only.

## ON A BUDGET

(16) **Hotel Helix**, 1430 Rhode Island Avenue NW (00 1 202 462 9001, [www.hotelhelix.com](http://www.hotelhelix.com)). A touch of Tinseltown in DC, this boutique hotel assaults the senses with platform beds and gourmet mini-bars stocking Makers Mark bourbon and retro candy bars. Idle in the neon-lit bar, bathed in digital projections, or catch a movie on the patio. The more energetic play Twister at the same time. Doubles from £100, room only.

(17) **The Quincy**, 1823 L Street NW (00 1 202 223 4320, [www.quincysuites.com](http://www.quincysuites.com)). The interiors are designed by the duo behind a string of sexy DC nightspots, but the emphasis at this all-suite hotel is on peace and quiet. It's rich in bachelor-pad leather, with full-size in-room kitchens ignored in favour of dinner at local steakhouses, and the hotel restaurant downstairs. Doubles from £95, room only.

## WHERE TO EAT

## NO EXPENSE SPARED

(18) **Cityzen**, 1330 Maryland Ave SW (00 1 202 787 6006, [www.cityzenrestaurant.com](http://www.cityzenrestaurant.com)). Balletic service delivers six-course tasting menus, with lobster,

Above left to right, Four Seasons hotel; Ben's Chili Bowl; Vapiano Kitchen; below, Strawberry Shortcake from CakeLove

Kagoshima Wagyu beef, cheese plates and steamed chocolate pud to finish. If, that is, you haven't already filled up on the divine bread rolls, presented in their own mahogany box. Menus from £55.

(19) **DC Coast**, 1401 K St NW (00 1 202 216 5988, [www.dccoast.com](http://www.dccoast.com)). A dining institution, this Beaux-Arts room requires you to dress up for southern-style seafood, such as pan-seared black sea bass and Cajun salmon. Leave room for the crispy chocolate Gianduja bar: milk chocolate and ground hazelnuts. Mains from £12.

## MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

(20) **Billy Martin's Tavern**, 1264 Wisconsin Ave NW (00 1 202 333 7370, [www.martins-tavern.com](http://www.martins-tavern.com)). This is the epitome of Georgetown dining, and each booth has its own history – JFK proposed to Jackie in number three. The roll call of presidential diners includes Truman and George W Bush. Recommended: the secret-recipe crab cake. Mains from £7.

(21) **Vapiano**, 1800 M Street NW (00 1 202 640 1868, [www.vapianointernational.com](http://www.vapianointernational.com)). Dine with the financial wizards at Vapiano, with its canteen-style service in a

glass-encased dining room. The Martini list is as long as the menu: pair linguine with a pomegranate Martini, or seafood with the Vapiano – vodka, raspberry liqueur and pineapple juice. Mains from £5.





#### ON A BUDGET

⑫ **Ben's Chili Bowl**, 1213 U St NW (00 1 202 667 0909, [www.benschillbowl.com](http://www.benschillbowl.com)). Ask Washingtonians about guilty pleasures, and this place will almost certainly be on the list. It may not be much to look at, with its Formica tables, but here it's all about the chilli – the Dog, Half-smoke, Burger, Sub or the 'Works'. They sell it by the gallon if you're really hungry. Mains from £3.

⑬ **Five Guys**, 1335 Wisconsin Ave NW (00 1 202 337 0400, [www.fiveguys.com](http://www.fiveguys.com)). Vegetarians, look away now. This is 24-carat carnivore territory, and has won just about every burger award in the book. Order sides of plain or Cajun fries (and plenty of napkins). Burgers from £3.

#### BARS AND CLUBS

⑭ **Adams Morgan** is the district to be post-work. Its bars (see [www.bardc.com](http://www.bardc.com) for full listings) are filled with a mix of suited workers and university students, while live comedy and music make this the beer-scene hub – try happy hour at **Bedrock Billiards** on Columbia or **Brass Monkey** on 18th Street NW.

⑮ **Eighteenth Street Lounge**, 1212 18th St NW (00 1 202 466 3922, [www.eighteenthstreetlounge.com](http://www.eighteenthstreetlounge.com)) is a converted townhouse that hosts the city's party elite in intimate candlelit rooms, dotted with mismatched furniture. The Lounge's music scene has even spawned its own record label – and big-name DJs play here regularly.

#### SHOPPING

⑯ **Circle Boutique**, 1736 14th St NW (00 1 202 518 2212, [www.circleboutique.com](http://www.circleboutique.com)). On the hunt for a prêt-à-porter souvenir? This is worth the hike for labels such as Saja and Lover.

⑰ **Cakelove**, U Street 1506 NW (00 1 202 588 7100, [www.cakelove.com](http://www.cakelove.com)). They're so proud of their confections here, they whip them up from scratch in front of passers-by. Order a Strawberry Shortcake or 'My Downfall': a rich dark-chocolate cake with two layers of buttercream – it's the shop's signature creation. ■

## ask the local



Eric Hilton is one half of DC-based electronic music production duo Thievery Corporation

⑲ **Marvin** (2007 14th Street, NW; 00 1 202 797 7171), the coolest new restaurant and bar in town, is named after DC native son and soul legend Marvin Gaye. I also love the ⑳ **Rumba Cafe** (2443 18th Street NW; 00 1 202 588 5501, [www.rumbacafe.com](http://www.rumbacafe.com)) for one word: **Mojitos**. I can never walk past without popping into ㉑ **Som Records** (1843 14th Street NW; 00 1 202 328 3345, [www.somrecordsdc.com](http://www.somrecordsdc.com)). **Record collectors from all over the world visit**. Come nightfall, ㉒ **Nightclub 9:30** (815 V Street NW; 00 1 202 265 0930, [www.930.com](http://www.930.com)) is the best live music club in DC. I love ㉓ **Eastern Market** (7th Street and North Carolina Avenue SE); the atmosphere is fantastic at its Sunday flea market.

#### TRAVEL BRIEF

##### GETTING THERE

**Virgin Atlantic** (0870 574 7747, [www.virgin-atlantic.com](http://www.virgin-atlantic.com)) flies direct to Washington Dulles from Heathrow from £318, as does **British Airways** (0844 493 0787, [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) from £387.

##### GOING PACKAGED

**Funway** (0844 557 3333, [www.funwayholidays.co.uk](http://www.funwayholidays.co.uk)) has four-night breaks in Washington from £716pp, including flights from Heathrow. Alternatively, try **Virgin Holidays** (0871 222 5825, [www.virginholidays.com](http://www.virginholidays.com)).

##### FURTHER INFORMATION

One of the best ways to see the city is with **Open Top Bus Sightseeing** ([www.graylinedc.com](http://www.graylinedc.com)). Single day pass, £16 adults, £8 children.

