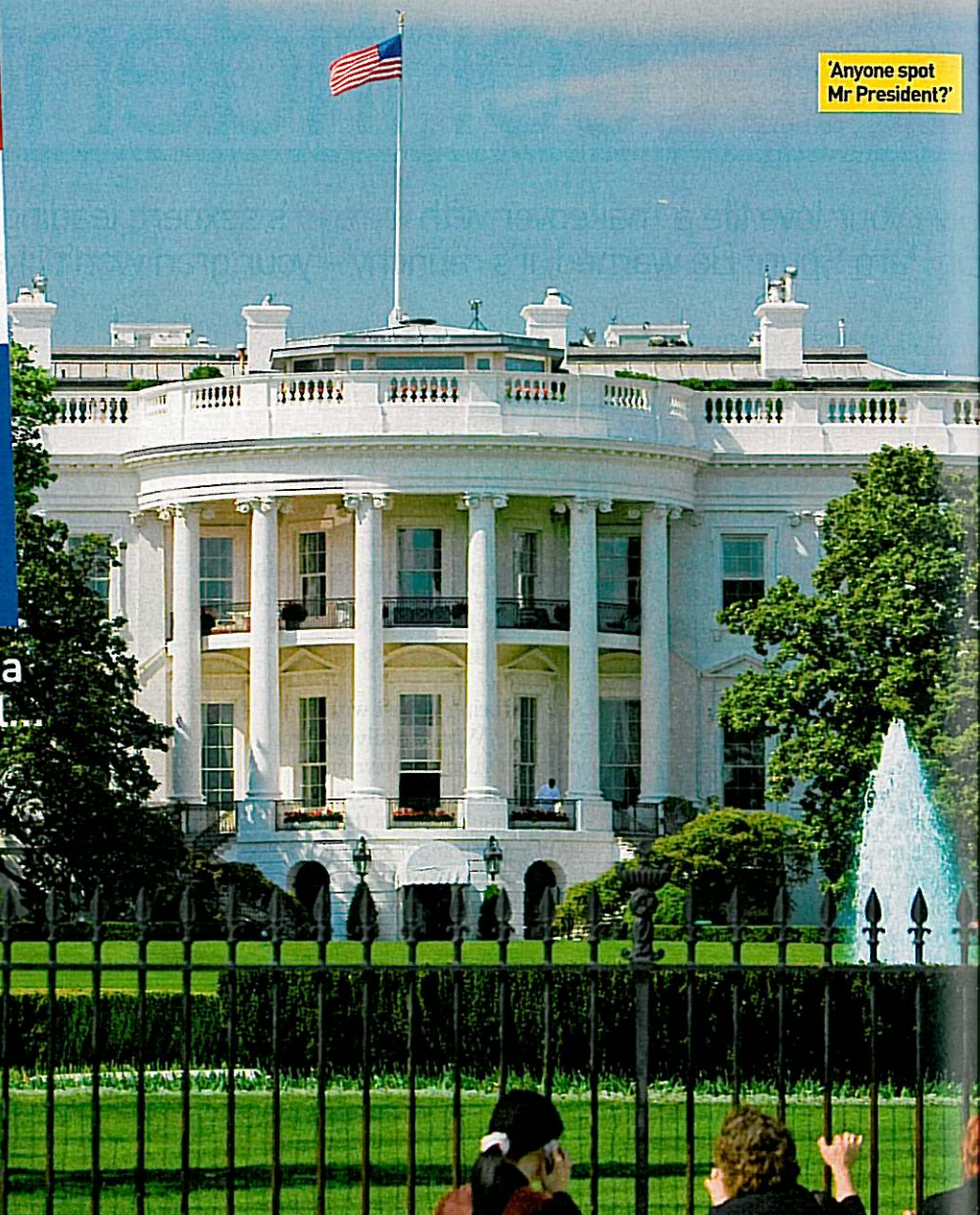


# MADE IN THE USA

'Anyone spot  
Mr President?'

For an American holiday with a difference, head to the capital...



# H

elicopters thunder overhead when suddenly, all around us, people stop in their tracks and point upwards, mouths open and cameras out. 'Oh, my Gawd, it's the President,' one of them yells.

I crane my neck for a better look – just as the fleet of choppers disappears into the distance, blades whirring furiously like something out of *Apocalypse Now*.

Then it hits me. A visit to Washington, DC is like being on a giant movie set. Everywhere you look, there are places immortalised in box-office hits.

A few yards from where we're standing is the statue of Abraham Lincoln, famously transformed into a monkey in the remake of *Planet of the Apes*.

## Movie magic

And there's the Lincoln Memorial, as featured in *Wedding Crashers*, *Forrest Gump*, *JFK* and *Legally Blonde 2*, to name just a few. And of

course, the city is featured in kids' fave, *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*, although, sadly, there wasn't any sign of Nicolas Cage during our visit.

And Washington, DC has even been invaded by aliens – in *Independence Day*, starring Will Smith.

Just a short ride across town are two of the most famous buildings ever to appear on film, or indeed, the news – the White House and the Capitol.

A lot of people confuse the two, but not me – honestly.

## Living history

For the record, they both look like giant wedding cakes, but the Capitol has a dome on top. And yes, you've seen them a million times on TV, but take it from me, seeing them for real is much more thrilling.

One thing you can't get away from in DC – and all of America – is the threat of terrorism. You'll notice barricades, blocked-off streets, and lots of police and security checks.

So, unfortunately, the closest you can get to the White House is the gates, where the strategically placed garden

fountains are guaranteed to spray you, just as you try to take photos. Make sure your camera is waterproof!

But don't let that put you off because there's still so much to see and do.

Our favourite place to hang out was the historic Georgetown district (as featured in *St Elmo's Fire*).

Here you'll find a shopping mall, lovely boutiques, fantastic restaurants serving every kind of food you can think of, a Ben & Jerry's ice-cream shop (oh, yes!) and Dean & DeLuca, an upmarket deli that sells the most delicious chocolate.

If you fancy a special dinner, visit DC Coast for a glass of champagne and some seafood. A plate of oysters on ice is a bargain at \$13 – about £6.50.

## Political correctness

Washington is brilliant for couples, but it's a fantastic city for families, too. One of the must-dos (if you plan well ahead) is a tour inside the Capitol, the heart of American politics.

But take note: you have to arrive early and be prepared to queue – and you'll need your passport, too. We

didn't follow the correct procedures, so we weren't allowed in.

Instead, we decided to explore the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum complex.

## American idols

Our favourite was the National Air and Space Museum, where you can see the *Spirit of St Louis* – the plane that Charles Lindbergh flew solo across the Atlantic in 1927.

There's also an amazing collection of Hollywood memorabilia at the National Museum of American History. Admire the ruby slippers worn by Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz*, General Custer's jacket – complete with bloodstains – and Kermit the Frog.

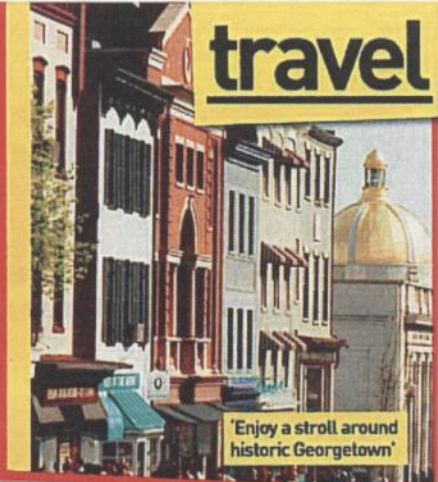
But one of the highlights of our trip was a visit to the brand-new International Spy Museum, where you can try your hand at being James Bond (or in my case, his not-so-glamorous sidekick) for the day.

You're given a secret identity to remember, otherwise you fail your mission... oops!

And you must have a go at Operation



'Aliens attacked the White House in *Independence Day*'



'Enjoy a stroll around historic Georgetown'



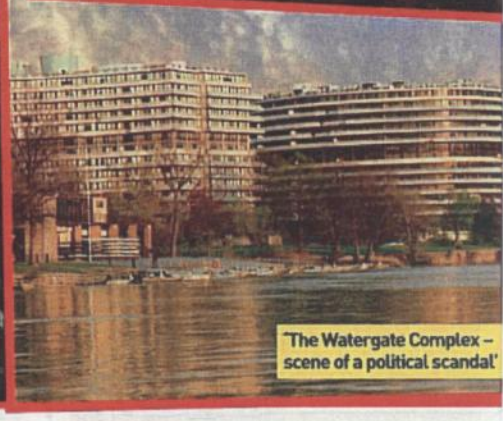
'The city's skyline is stunning at sunset'



'National Treasure Nicolas Cage at the Lincoln Memorial'



'Tom Hanks visited DC in *Forrest Gump*'



'The Watergate Complex - scene of a political scandal'

## WASHINGTON, DC FACT FILE

Spy - a brilliant role-playing session where you have to work out who your espionage enemies are.

Sadly, we failed to unmask the spy, but we had a great laugh trying.

### Put your feet up

You have to pace yourself in this city. It's very easy to think: 'Oh, we'll just go there, it's only a few more blocks,' and before you know it, you're almost on your knees, exhausted and weeping for your bed.

We stayed at the gorgeous Fairmont Washington, DC, Hotel, a five-star oasis just a short stroll from Georgetown.

By the way, I'm still not sure if it really was Dubya in that helicopter. But let's face it, with the US elections coming up, it doesn't really matter.

From the moment you arrive in Washington, DC, you're part of America's history - past, present and future. ■

### BEST TIME TO VISIT

Autumn (or the Fall) is incredible, with leaves turning shades of ruby, ochre and sienna. It even attracts 'leaf peepers', who get a thrill out of seeing the colours.

Spring is also beautiful, but summer's baking hot, so stay away if you can't stand the heat.

The best shopping malls are on the outskirts of Washington, DC. I recommend a visit to The Fashion Centre at Pentagon City ([www.fashioncentrepentagon.com](http://www.fashioncentrepentagon.com)), and I've got the credit card bills to prove it.

But the exchange rate's good, so you're bound to get a few bargains for your dollars.

### GETTING AROUND

The subway is simple to use, or go on an Old Town Trolley Tour ([www.trustedtours.com](http://www.trustedtours.com)). As well as the city's major buildings, you'll be shown the infamous Watergate Complex (linked to the scandal that forced the resignation of President Nixon), and Ford's Theatre, where Abraham Lincoln was shot. The tour winds up at Arlington National Cemetery, where JFK and his wife, Jackie, are buried.

### WHERE TO STAY

The Fairmont Washington, DC, Hotel offers standard rooms midweek from \$189 (£95),

based on two people sharing. For more info, or to book, call 001 202 429 2400, or log on to [www.fairmont.com/washington](http://www.fairmont.com/washington).

### GETTING THERE

Virgin Holidays offers breaks to Washington, DC, staying at the five-star Fairmont Washington, DC, Hotel, and including return direct international flights with Virgin Atlantic from Heathrow, from £645 per adult and £355 per child for three nights in April. Prices include transfers in the US. To book, call 0844 557 3860, or visit [www.virginholidays.com](http://www.virginholidays.com). For more information, log on to [www.capitalregionusa.co.uk](http://www.capitalregionusa.co.uk).