

# Power play

The US capital is as much an arena of politics and journalism as it is a playground for the suit-and-tie set. Here's our insider's guide to **Washington, DC**

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In 1790, two American states along the country's eastern shore donated land towards the creation of a national capital that's officially known as Washington, the District of Columbia. Since then, it's been a prime location for many a disaster movie and the co-star of tons of TV dramas. Although it's a young city when compared with its European counterparts, it will surprise you with an atmosphere steeped in history and grandeur, particularly through its architecture.

As the centre of the US's federal government, the District is often seen as New York's more reserved, studious cousin – but it's not all congressional meetings, *The Fixer*- and *House of Cards*-style scandals and grey-haired Republicans in suits. The other half of its personality manifests through interactive museums and new eateries popping up almost weekly in a burgeoning food scene. Get the most from your visit with a diverse itinerary, from the most stately of must-sees to the most tie-loosened hot spots.

## SEE

### The White House

The seat of power for the so-called leader of the free world, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is more impressive from the south side, where the choppers land and where most of the speeches happen. You'll have to go through our embassy to book a tour, so plan in advance. Or snap some photos outside; hang around the north side long enough (but not



long enough to make the capital police suspicious) and you might just spot the presidential convoy.

• 1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW. [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov).

### The Capitol Building and the National mall

One of the most famous US icons, the Capitol is home to both houses of Congress. An original law required that no building in DC be built taller than the Capitol's dome; the law was later amended to dictate that no building be built higher than its street was wide. This gives the entire district an open, 'boulevard' feeling (much like Paris), with the Capitol as the skyline's focal point. Free guided tours are available, but sidestep the school groups and do a self-guided tour

around the building's grounds instead. Then explore the rest of The National Mall, DC's version of Central Park, where the Smithsonian Institute's free-to-enter collection of museums is situated.

• East Capitol St NE & First St SE. [visitthecapitol.gov](http://visitthecapitol.gov)

### Presidential Monuments

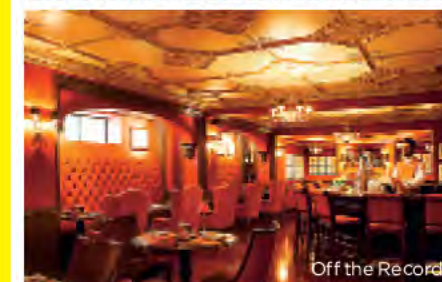
The National Mall is also the home of several presidential memorials, but there are three must-sees: the Jefferson Memorial honours the man who drafted the Declaration of Independence; the Lincoln Memorial honors of Honest Abe (and was the site of Dr King's speech), and the Washington Monument – the tallest in the city – is a nod to the nation's first president.

From left: The Jefferson Memorial; The Capitol Building (inset); The Washington Monument



The Willard Hotel's Round Robin scotch bar

**EAT** DC's sophisticated food scene grows almost daily, and it's a perfect representation of the US's 'melting pot' of cultures – there's even a Nando's in its Chinatown district – but if your time is limited, make your food tour simple and all-American.



Off the Record

### The Lafayette

Head to the Hay-Adams hotel's Lafayette restaurant for a proper power lunch – with an exquisite view of the presidential residence. The bar in its basement is appropriately called Off the Record, with the high booths, panelled walls and don't-be-seen-or-heard atmosphere that clandestine meets require.

• The Hay-Adams, 800 16th St NW. [hayadams.com](http://hayadams.com)



### Smoke and Barrell

Freddy's barbeque shop doesn't actually exist outside the *House of Cards* universe, so this is perhaps the best real option. Its slogan is 'beer, BBQ and bourbon', and it offers up exactly that, with a rich-yet-relaxed feel that matches the cuisine. Beer director Sam Fitz is a certified expert in beer and food pairing, so you can't go wrong.

• 2471 18th St NW. [smokeandbarreldc.com](http://smokeandbarreldc.com)



The hotel's historic lobby

### STAY The Willard Hotel

How often do you get to stay in a 165-year-old hotel? The building all but oozes both heritage and prestige. Dr Martin Luther King Jr wrote his iconic 'I Have a Dream' speech at the hotel in 1963. It's said the term 'lobbying' originated at the Round Robin scotch bar. It's two blocks from the White House and presidents regularly stopped in; Woodrow Wilson began the League of Nations (the UN's predecessor) in the lobby. Fans of architecture will appreciate its Beaux-Arts design and blue mansard roof with bullseye windows – a staple of the DC skyline.

• 1401 Pennsylvania Ave NW. [ihg.com](http://ihg.com)



The International Spy Museum

## DO

### Spy Museum

Covering the history of intelligence gathering, this place has hundreds of real spy tools on display, including shoes with hidden compartments, a lipstick pistol and a few you can buy, like a camcorder pen. Plan your visit during one of their Meet a Spy sessions.

• 800 F St NW. [spy-museum.org](http://spy-museum.org)

### The Newseum

An interactive space that celebrates journalism and the freedom of speech, the Newseum includes actual sections of the Berlin Wall and the World Trade Center towers, and memorialises other huge moments in news history. Put yourself in an editor's shoes at the ethics centre.

• 555 Pennsylvania Ave NW. [newseum.org](http://newseum.org)

### Georgetown

The university neighbourhood is DC's fashion capital, with tons of top shops that are perfect for topping up your wardrobe's American prep quotient. End off with a visit to a staple on the DC's extensive jazz scene, Blues Alley Jazz supper club, where some of history's greats cut their teeth.

• 1073 Wisconsin Ave NW. [bluesalley.com](http://bluesalley.com)

## Getting around

DC is an easy (read: flat) city to walk. Along the way you'll find tons of food trucks, and HQs for any and every organisation with 'National' or 'American' in its name. For every modern building, there'll be another three grande dames with ornate columns to appreciate. The easiest way to see it all is the Big City hop on/hop off buses – they're super frequent so you can follow your own schedule, and you can book a valid-for-48-hours ticket that includes a night tour. If you're headed for a particular neighbourhood like Dupont Circle or Georgetown, the Metro subway is your best bet. [GO](https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/illustration/illustration-of-a-city-street-with-tourists-and-landmarks/123456789)