

# 14 Best Things to Do in Washington, D.C.

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Judy Colbert

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*United States Capitol. Feel free to have a picnic on the west lawn, play Frisbee with your fur baby, or just enjoy the view down the National Mall.*

Washington, DC, attracts more than 20,000,000 visitors every year. The city's historic with majestic museums and attractions, it has gorgeous gardens, eclectic neighborhoods, and restaurants with dishes that you'll post pictures of on your Instagram account.

Beyond the famous buildings, there are places to hike, pay tribute to our country's fallen, and any number of other activities.

Festivals, parades, kite-flying, sports (baseball, football, hockey, golf, boating, tennis, golf, marathons, etc.), performing arts (at 45 different venues), fireworks, and so much more fill the calendars in the city and surrounding areas.

Whether you're visiting for business or pleasure; alone or with your family, friends, or business associates; for the first time or you live here, there's something for you to occupy your time and interests.

Here's a list of some of the most popular attractions, some that may have escaped your attention, and a few new things to see and do.

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## 1. Lincoln Memorial

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At the western end of the National Mall, the Lincoln Memorial relates history in its design and in the number of speeches and presentations that have taken place here. There are 36 columns, representing the 36 states in the Union at the time of Lincoln's death.

Supposedly, the 19' Lincoln can "see" the entire Washington Monument mirrored in the Reflecting Pool. Climb the steps (58 steps from the plaza level or 87 steps from the reflecting pool level) or take the elevator to the second level to take a closer look and read the inscriptions behind the statue, the Gettysburg Address to the left and the Second Inaugural Address on the right.

Foggy Bottom and Smithsonian Metro stations (Orange, Blue, and Silver lines). (202) 426-6841. <https://www.nps.gov/linc/index.htm>

## 2. National Air and Space Museum



© Pedro Szekely Flickr

This museum is so popular it takes two buildings to exhibit everything, this one along the National Mall that opened in 1976 and the second, the Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Virginia, near Dulles International Airport. Together they have the largest and most significant collection of aviation and space artifacts in the world.

To modernize and update the exhibits, the Mall museum is undergoing a massive reconstruction project that started in 2018 and will continue for seven years.

Some exhibits are closed and some have been moved to the Chantilly setting.



Independence Avenue and 6<sup>th</sup> St., SW. (202) 633-2214. Smithsonian Metro station (Blue, Silver, and Orange lines). <https://airandspace.si.edu>.

### 3. National Building Museum

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© Gunnar Klack Flickr

The National Building Museum is off the Mall and has an admission fee, so when other places are so crowded a shadow can't move, there's plenty of room to explore the exhibits, sit in the lobby and look at the plants and fountain, or search the gift shop to find the most unusual gifts and souvenirs available in the City.

This is where you learn about the built environment, see an exhibit of architectural photographs, learn about border walls, or discover the relationship between play, work, and design.

Offsite tours (book early) may include the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library, an office building, or an old Nabisco cookie company horse stable that's been converted to artists' studio space.

Oh, it's right across the street from the Judiciary Square Metro station (Red line). 401 F. Street, NW. (202) 272-2448. (Temporarily closed until March 2020.) <https://www.NMB.org>

### 4. United States Botanical Garden

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© USCapitol Flickr

The United State Botanical Garden, to the southwest of the Capitol, is a living plant museum about the importance plants play in our lives and the earth's existence.

It was envisioned by George Washington and established in 1820 and is one of the oldest botanic gardens in North America. For this century, the Garden has committed itself to sustainability and how we can learn to live more sustainably through plants.

The garden has about 65,000 plants in such collections as economic plants, medicinal, orchids, carnivorous, cacti and other succulents, aroid, plants of eastern North America, bromeliads, cycads, and ferns.

The fruits and vegetables are left growing as long as possible so you can see how they grow. Some are picked for cooking demonstrations, discovery carts, and classes. What's left over or past its prime are used for compost. These are federally-owned plants, you may not pick or take them.

Check the calendar for such programs as cooking demonstrations, concerts, and trivia night botanical brainiacs. Take time to also visit the First Ladies Water Garden, the National Garden, and Bartholdi Park.

100 Maryland Ave., SW. (202) 225-8333. Federal Center SW Metro station (Orange, Blue, or Silver lines). <https://www.usbg.gov>

## 5. Smithsonian's National Zoo & Conservation Biology Institute





© Pelican Wikimedia Commons

Part of the Smithsonian collection, it's time for lions and tigers and giraffes, oh my. And, of course, the zoo's beloved giant panda. They're all part of the 163-acre park where 1500+ animals reside in 18 distinct areas. About 25 percent of the zoo's residents are endangered.

Special programs abound, including Snore & Roar (an overnight summer camp for children six and older and their parents), after-hour events for adults (think ZooFari and Brew at the Zoo), and seeing up close farm animals at the Kids' Farm.

Be sure to wear comfortable walking shoes. Before you go, you might want to watch the naked mole rat, the pandas, elephants, or lions on the live webcams on the Zoo's website.

3001 Connecticut Ave., NW. (202) 633-4888. Woodley Park or Cleveland Park Metro stations (Red line). <https://nationalzoo.si.edu>

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## 6. National Children's Museum



© Nationalchildrenmuseum Instagram

Absent from the DC area for a few years, the National Children's Museum reopens in February, 2020. It's a unique hybrid institution that combines a science center with modern children's museum content. (Yes, you can have fun while learning!)

The target audience reflects this merger, and is aimed at children up to 12 years old, with a concentration on full-family engagement. The 33,000-square-foot play space emphasizes hands-on STEAM learning (science, technology, engineering, art and math).

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. (202) 844-2486. Federal Triangle Metro station (Orange line).  
<https://nationalchildrensmuseum.org>

## 7. African-American Civil War Museum and Memorial

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The African-American Civil War Museum and Memorial tells the story and pays tribute to men from African, European and Hispanic descent who fought in the Civil War and in other conflicts. It explores the history of the 209,145 members of the United States Colored Troops and how they helped end the war and free the country's 4 million slaves.

The museum moves to the historic Grimke School in the fall of 2020 where the museum's vast expansion will include a state-of-the-art media theater. The memorial, a sculpture, and a wall of servicemen's names, is across the street at 11th and U streets. Admission is free.

1925 Vermont Avenue, NW. (202) 667-2667. Ust/African American Civil War Memorial  
Cardozo Metro station (exit 10<sup>th</sup> & U St) (Green and Yellow lines).  
<https://www.afroamcivilwar.org>

## 8. Trapeze School New York

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© m01229 Flickr

When you want to fly without the hassle of an airport or plane, head to the Trapeze School New York (TSNY) where they say, “Forget Fear. Worry About the Addiction.”

You can learn to fly with silks, ropes, on a trampoline or on a flying trapeze. You’ll learn body awareness, timing, trust, relaxation and acquire a belief that you can do more than you imagined. Don’t want to leave the ground? You can also learn to juggle!

This school is suitable for people ages 6 and up, with special classes for children 6-14. Yes, you may wear a tutu and glitter, but it’s not essential.

520 Tingey St., SE. (This will take you to the wrong place if you use a GPS, so follow the directions on the Website. Navy Yard-Ballpark Metro station (Green line). (202) 479-6861. <https://washingtondc.trapezeschool.com>

## 9. The REACH Expansion

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© F Delventhal Flickr

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts has been a draw for decades, with concerts, musicals, dramas, operas, and a free show on the Millennium Stage every day at 6 p.m., no tickets required (with a few exceptions).

Now, there's the REACH, a \$175 million expansion with 72,000 square feet of performance and event space, 130,000 square feet of landscaping and gardens, terrace seating for up to 1,600 people, and a scenic walkway to nearby monuments and memorials.

2700 F St., NW. (202) 416-8000. Foggy Bottom/George Washington University/Kennedy Center Metro station (Orange, Blue, and Silver lines) and walk to the Center or take free Kennedy Center Shuttle. <https://www.kennedy-center.org>

## 10. Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial

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© Chuckmor Wikimedia Commons

This new memorial opens on May 8, 2020, on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of V-E Day when the United States declared a World War II victory in Europe. Ike supervised the allied assault on the Normandy Beaches on D-Day and then, seven years later, was elected the country's 34<sup>th</sup> President on November 4, 1952.

A state-of-the-art memorial designed by Frank Gehry, in a four-acre urban park at the base of Capitol Hill, features the D-Day beach and cliffs etched in a one-of-a-kind steel tapestry by Tomas Osinski, stone bas reliefs, and heroic-sized bronze sculptures designed by sculptor Sergey Eylandbekov.

540 Independence Avenue, SW (across from the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum).  
(202) 296-0004. L'Enfant Plaza Metro station (Orange, Silver, Blue, Yellow, and Green lines).  
<https://eisenhowermemorial.gov/#>

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## 11. Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture

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The Robert and Arlene Kogod Courtyard at the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture, part of the Smithsonian Institution complex. © Judy Colbert

The former United States Old Patent Office Building is the home for two Smithsonian museums, American Art Museum and the National Portrait Gallery. A massive glass-and-steel canopy covers the Kogod courtyard. Note, each glass panel is a distinct size with no duplicates.

On the National Portrait side, temporary exhibits might include recent acquisitions, a collection of American portraiture today, or a survey of how the media portrayed Marian Anderson. Permanent exhibits include 20<sup>th</sup> century Americans, a visual history of America, a collection of presidential portraits (plus former First Lady Michelle Obama's portrait by Amy Sherald), and a child's hands-on exhibit about portraiture.

On the American Art side, look for Georgia O'Keeffe, John Singleton Copley, Winslow Homer, Nam June Paik, and James Hampton (*Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General*).

8<sup>th</sup> & F streets, NW. (202) 633-8300. Gallery Place/Chinatown Metro station (Yellow, Green, or Red lines) <https://npg.si.edu> and <https://americanart.si.edu>

## 12. Gravelly Point

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[© Ted Eytan Wikimedia Commons](#)

Gravelly Point is about an unstructured adventure as could be imagined. It's a piece of land on the north end of National Airport where you can take a blanket (or grab a picnic table) and picnic lunch and watch planes taking off and landing.

You're also at an access point of the paved Mount Vernon Trail in the National Park Service's George Washington Memorial Parkway where people jog and bike or just walk while enjoying nature and the relative quiet (except when a plane flies overhead).

George Washington Parkway, Arlington, VA. (800) 296-7996.

## 13. Women in Military Service For America Memorial

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[© Arlington National Cemetery Wikimedia Commons](#)

Women have been involved in military service since the start of the country and The Women in Military Service For America Memorial (Women's Memorial) is the only major memorial dedicated to honoring women who have defended the United States throughout history. Within the 624 acres of Arlington National Cemetery.

It has a fascinating collection of exhibits, history, photographs, documents, textiles, and artifacts. Call at least two weeks in advance if you'd like a tour that includes the exhibit gallery, the register room the Hall of Honor, and the Upper Terrace.

Twelve terminals let you explore the names of registered women who have served in the military. A photo ID is required to enter the Memorial and the Cemetery.

Memorial Ave. and Schley Dr., Arlington, VA. (703) 892-2606. Arlington Cemetery Metro (Blue line). <https://www.womensmemorial.org/>



## 14. The Capital Wheel

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© Ron Cogswell Flickr

Soaring 180' over the Potomac River, the Capital Wheel Ferris wheel offers you a breathtaking view of the Potomac River, the Washington Monument, and the City of Alexandria (across the River and on the other side of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, the Masonic Temple in Alexandria, and north to Georgetown).

The only way you can see a better view is if you're sitting in a window seat as you're flying into National Airport AND landing from the north. The 42 climate-controlled gondolas operate daily (weather permitting) and the daytime views are the nighttime views each offer a different feel to your aerial sightseeing tour.

A VIP ticket is in a gondola with leather bucket seats, Amazon Alexa technology, a glass floor, and a deluxe photo package (and you can skip to the front of the line).

On the first and third Saturday of the month, check into the Scout Days opportunity (learn how the Wheel works). For a super big splash, rent the 16,000,000+ LED lights on the wheel and make your big announcement (baby gender reveal, birthday, proposal, etc.).

Save a few moments for playtime at the beach where J. Seward John's "The Awakening" stretches to free himself. Other attractions are the MGM National Harbor casino and hotel, Gaylord National Resort, shops, a seasonal farmers' market, and more.

165 Waterfront St. (877) 628-5427. <https://www.nationalharbor.com/play/the-capital-wheel/>

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