

Planning Your Trip to Washington, D.C.

1 Visitor Information

Before you leave, contact the **Washington, D.C. Convention and Tourism Corporation (WCTC)**, 901 7th St. NW, Washington, DC 20001-3719 (☎ **800/422-8644** or 202/789-7000; www.washington.org), and ask for a free copy of the *Washington, D.C. Visitors Guide*, which details hotels, restaurants, sights, shops, and more and is updated twice yearly. At the ☎ 202/789-7000 number, you can speak directly to a staff “visitor specialist” and get answers to your specific questions about the city. You should also consult the WCTC website, which provides the latest information, including upcoming exhibits at the museums and anticipated closings of tourist attractions.

Also take a look at the D.C. government’s website, www.dc.gov, and that of the nonprofit organization, Cultural Tourism D.C., www.culturaltourismdc.org, for more information about the city. For additional information about Washington’s most popular tourist spots, access the National Park Service website, www.nps.gov/nacc (the Park Service maintains Washington’s monuments, memorials, and other sites), and the Smithsonian Institution’s website www.si.edu.

Also helpful is the *Washington Post* site, www.washingtonpost.com, which gives you up-to-the-minute news, weather, visitor information, restaurant reviews, and nightlife insights.

2 When to Go

The city’s peak seasons generally coincide with two activities: the sessions of Congress and springtime, starting with the appearance of the cherry blossoms along the Potomac. Specifically, when Congress is “in,” from about the second week in September until Thanksgiving, and again from about mid-January through June, hotels are full

Destination Washington, D.C.: Pre-Departure Checklist

- Have you packed a current, government-issued photo ID, such as a driver's license or passport? You'll need one to board a plane, of course, but even if you are not flying, you will probably be asked for photo ID when you're here.
- If you have an e-ticket, do you have your reservation confirmation number? To check in at a kiosk with an e-ticket, you'll need the credit card you bought your ticket with, a government-issued photo ID, and your frequent-flier card, or the confirmation number.
- Did you bring ID cards that may entitle you to discounts? Proof of AAA, AARP, or other membership, or of your status as a student can gain you special treatment or rates.
- Have you booked theater and restaurant reservations?
- Have you checked to make sure your favorite attraction is open? Some sites, such as the Pentagon, remain closed indefinitely to public tours, for security reasons. Other attractions, such as the FBI Building, are closed for renovations.
- Would you like to avoid the wait of a long line or the ultimate disappointment of missing a tour altogether? A number of sightseeing attractions permit you to reserve a tour slot in advance, including the Library of Congress, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, the National Archives, and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

with guests whose business takes them to Capitol Hill or to conferences. Mid-March through June traditionally is the most frenzied season, when families and school groups descend upon the city to see the cherry blossoms and enjoy Washington's sensational spring. This is also a popular season for protest marches. Hotel rooms are at a premium and airfares tend to be higher.

If crowds turn you off, consider visiting Washington at the end of August/early September, when Congress is still "out," and families return home to get their children back to school, or between

Thanksgiving and mid-January, when Congress leaves again and many people are ensconced in their own holiday-at-home celebrations. Hotel rates are cheapest at this time, too, and many hotels offer attractive packages.

If you're thinking of visiting in July and August, be forewarned: The weather is very hot and humid. Summer is also the season for outdoor concerts, festivals, parades, and other events. And, of course, Independence Day (July 4th) in the capital is a spectacular celebration.

WASHINGTON, D.C., CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Washington's most popular annual events are the Cherry Blossom Festival in spring, the Fourth of July celebration in summer, and the lighting of the National Christmas Tree in winter. But there's some sort of special event almost daily. For the latest schedules, check www.washington.org, www.culturaltourismdc.org, www.dc.gov, and www.washingtonpost.com.

January

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, Birthday. Events include speeches by prominent leaders and politicians, readings, dance, theater, concerts and choral performances, and prayer vigils. Call ☎ **202/619-7222**. Many events take place at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library, 901 G St. NW (☎ **202/727-0321**). Third Monday in January.

February

Black History Month. Numerous events, museum exhibits, and cultural programs celebrate the contributions of African Americans to American life, including a celebration of abolitionist Frederick Douglass's birthday. For details, check the *Washington Post* or call ☎ **202/357-2700**. For additional activities at the Martin Luther King Jr. Library, call ☎ **202/727-1111**.

Chinese New Year Celebration. A friendship archway, topped by 300 painted dragons and lighted at night, marks Chinatown's entrance at 7th and H streets NW. The celebration begins the day of the Chinese New Year and continues for 10 or more days, with traditional firecrackers, dragon dancers, and colorful street parades. Some area restaurants offer special menus. For details, call ☎ **202/789-7000**. Early February.

George Washington's Birthday. Similar celebratory events to Lincoln's birthday, centered around the Washington Monument. Call ☎ **202/619-7222** for details. February 22.

March

St. Patrick's Day Parade. A big parade on Constitution Avenue NW, from 7th to 17th streets, with floats, bagpipes, marching bands, and the wearin' o' the green. For parade information, call ☎ **202/789-7000**. The Sunday before March 17.

Smithsonian Kite Festival. This event is delightful if the weather cooperates—an occasion for a trip in itself. Throngs of kite enthusiasts fly their unique creations on the grounds of the Washington Monument, and compete for ribbons and prizes. Now in its 41st year, the kite festival even has its own website: **www.kitefestival.org**. Or call ☎ **202/357-2700** or 202/357-3030 for details. To compete, just show up at the designated spot with your kite and register between 10am and noon. A Saturday in mid- or late March, or early April, but always during the Cherry Blossom Festival.

April

Cherry Blossom Festival. Washington's best-known annual event: a 2-week festival coinciding with the blossoming of more than 3,700 Japanese cherry trees by the Tidal Basin, on Hains Point, and on the grounds of the Washington Monument. Events take place all over town, including fireworks, concerts, special art exhibits, park ranger-guided talks and tours past the cherry blossom trees, and sports competitions. A grand parade caps the festival, complete with floats, marching bands, dancers, celebrity guests, and more. For information, call ☎ **202/547-1500** or go to www.nps.gov/nacc/cherry, for information about the cherry trees, and www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org, for information about the festival. Late March to early April.

African-American Family Day at the National Zoo. This tradition extends back to 1889, when the zoo opened. The National Zoo, 3001 Connecticut Ave. NW, celebrates African-American families the day after Easter with music, dance, Easter egg rolls, and other activities. Free. Call ☎ **202/357-2700** for details. Easter Monday.

White House Spring Garden Tour. These beautifully landscaped creations are open to the public for free tours, 2 days only. Call ☎ **202/208-1631** for details. Two days in mid-April.

Filmfest D.C. This annual film festival presents more than 100 works by filmmakers from around the globe. Screenings are staged throughout the festival at movie theaters, embassies, and other venues. Tickets are usually \$9 per movie and go fast; some

events are free. Call ☎ **202/789-7000** or check the website, www.filmfestdc.org. Two weeks in April.

Smithsonian Craft Show. Held in the National Building Museum, 401 F St. NW, this juried show features one-of-a-kind limited-edition crafts by more than 120 noted artists from all over the country. There's an entrance fee of about \$15 per adult, free for children under 13, each day. No strollers. For details, call ☎ **202/357-4000** (TDD 202/357-1729), or check the website, www.smithsoniancraftshow.com. Four days in late April.

May

Georgetown Garden Tour. View the remarkable private gardens in one of the city's loveliest neighborhoods. Admission (\$25–\$30) includes light refreshments. Some years there are related events such as a flower show at a historic home. Call ☎ **202/789-7000** or browse the website, www.georgetowngardentour.com, for details. Early to mid-May.

Washington National Cathedral Annual Flower Mart. Now in its 67th year, the flower mart takes place on cathedral grounds, featuring displays of flowering plants and herbs, decorating demonstrations, ethnic food booths, children's rides and activities (including an antique carousel), costumed characters, puppet shows, and other entertainment. Admission is free. Call ☎ **202/537-3185** for details. First Friday and Saturday in May, rain or shine.

Memorial Day. At 11am, a wreath-laying ceremony takes place at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery, followed by military band music, a service, and an address by a high-ranking government official (sometimes the president); call ☎ **703/607-8000** for details. A National Memorial Day Parade marches from the Capitol, down Constitution Ave., to the White House (call ☎ **202/772-7272**). On the Sunday before Memorial Day, the National Symphony Orchestra performs a free concert at 8pm on the West Lawn of the Capitol to officially welcome summer to Washington; call ☎ **202/619-7222** for details.

June

Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife. A major event reveling in both national and international traditions in music, crafts, foods, games, concerts, and exhibits, staged the length of the National Mall. Each Folklife Festival showcases 3 or 4 cultures or themes; 2006 introduced Alberta, Canada; Chicago's Latino music; and Native American basketmaking to festivalgoers. All

events are free; most events take place outdoors. Call ☎ **202/357-2700**, or check the website, www.folklife.si.edu, or the listings in the *Washington Post* for details. For 10 days in late June and early July, always including July 4.

July

Independence Day. There's no better place to be on the Fourth of July than in Washington, D.C. The festivities include a massive National Independence Day Parade down Constitution Avenue, complete with lavish floats, princesses, marching groups, and military bands. A morning program in front of the National Archives includes military demonstrations, period music, and a reading of the Declaration of Independence. In the evening, the National Symphony Orchestra plays on the west steps of the Capitol with guest artists. Consult the *Washington Post* or call ☎ **202/789-7000** for details. July 4, all day.

Bastille Day. This Washington tradition honors the French Independence Day with live entertainment and a race by tray-balancing waiters and waitresses from Les Halles Restaurant to the U.S. Capitol and back. Free, *mais bien sur*. Twelfth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW. Call ☎ **202/347-6848**. July 14.

Capital Fringe Festival. This event debuted in 2006 and celebrates experimental theater, in the tradition of the original fringe festival held annually in Edinburgh, Scotland. Five events take place at more than 20 venues daily for 10 days, adding up to about 1,000 acts in all. Local and visiting artists perform in theater, dance, music, and other disciplines. Tickets are \$10 per event and the action centers on 7th St. NW in the Penn Quarter. Check the website, www.capfringe.org, for more information. July 20 to July 30.

September

Labor Day Concert. West Lawn of the Capitol. The National Symphony Orchestra closes its summer season with a free performance at 8pm; call ☎ **202/619-7222** for details. Sunday before Labor Day. (Rain date: Same day and time at Constitution Hall or the Kennedy Center.)

Kennedy Center Open House Arts Festival. A daylong festival of the performing arts, featuring local and national artists on the front plaza and river terrace (which overlooks the Potomac), and throughout the stage halls of the Kennedy Center. Kids' activities usually include a National Symphony Orchestra "petting zoo," where children get to bow, blow, drum, or strum a favorite instrument. Admission is free, although you may have to stand in a

long line for the inside performances. For details, check the *Washington Post*, call ☎ **800/444-1324** or 202/467-4600, or access the website, www.kennedy-center.org. A Sunday or Sunday in early to mid-September, 11:30am to 7:30pm.

Washington National Cathedral's Open House. The year 2007 marks the anniversary of the laying of the cathedral's foundation stone in 1907. Events include demonstrations of stone carving and other crafts utilized in building the cathedral; carillon and organ demonstrations; and performances by dancers, choirs, strolling musicians, jugglers, and puppeteers. For details, call ☎ **202/537-6200**. A Saturday in late September or early October.

Library of Congress National Book Festival. Co-sponsored by the Library of Congress and the First Lady, this festival welcomes at least 80 established authors and their many fans to the National Mall for readings, author signings, and general hoopla surrounding the love of books. Check www.loc.gov/bookfest, or call ☎ **202/707-8000** for more information. A Saturday in late September.

October

White House Fall Garden Tour. For 2 days, visitors have an opportunity to see the famed Rose Garden and South Lawn. Admission is free. A military band provides music. For details, call ☎ **202/208-1631**. Mid- to late October.

Marine Corps Marathon. More than 30,000 runners compete in this 26.2-mile race (the fifth-largest marathon in the United States). It begins at the Marine Corps Memorial (the Iwo Jima statue) and passes major monuments. Call ☎ **800/RUN-USMC** for details. Anyone can enter; register online at www.marine-marathon.com. Fourth Sunday in October.

Halloween. There's no official celebration, but costumed shenanigans seem to get bigger every year. Giant block parties take place in the Dupont Circle and Georgetown neighborhoods. Check the *Washington Post* for special parties and activities. October 31.

November

Veterans Day. The nation's war dead are honored with a wreath-laying ceremony at 11am at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery followed by a memorial service. The president of the United States or his stand-in officiates, as a military band performs. Wreath-laying ceremonies also take place at other war memorials in the city. Call ☎ **703/607-8000** for

more information about Arlington Cemetery events and 202/619-7222 for information about events elsewhere. November 11.

December

Christmas Pageant of Peace/National Tree Lighting. At the northern end of the Ellipse, the president lights the national Christmas tree to the accompaniment of orchestral and choral music. The lighting inaugurates the 4-week Pageant of Peace, a tremendous holiday celebration full of free activities, including musical performances, mostly of local school and church choruses, nightly on the Ellipse. Call ☎ **202/208-1631**, or check the website, www.pageantofpeace.org, for details; tickets are free but required to attend the tree-lighting ceremony.

3 Specialized Travel Resources

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Washington, D.C., is one of the most accessible cities in the world for travelers with disabilities. The best overall source of information about accessibility at specific Washington hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, and attractions is available from the nonprofit organization **Access Information**. You can read the information (including restaurant reviews) online at www.disabilityguide.org, or order a free copy of the *Washington, DC Access Guide* by calling ☎ **301/528-8664**, or by writing to Access Information, 21618 Slidell Rd., Boyds, MD 20841.

The **Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority** publishes accessibility information on its website www.wmata.com, or you can call ☎ **202/962-1245** with questions about Metro services for travelers with disabilities, including how to obtain an ID card that entitles you to discounted fares. (Make sure that you call at least 3 weeks ahead to allow enough time to obtain an ID card.) For up-to-date information about how Metro is operating on the day you're using it, call ☎ **202/962-1212**.

Major Washington museums, including all **Smithsonian museum buildings**, are accessible to wheelchair visitors. A comprehensive free publication called "Smithsonian Access" lists all services available to visitors with disabilities, including parking, building access, and sign-language interpreters. To obtain a copy, call ☎ **202/357-2700** or TTY 202/357-1729, or find the information online at www.si.edu/opa/accessibility. You can also use the TTY number to get information on all Smithsonian museums and events.

Likewise, all of the memorials, including the **Lincoln, Jefferson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Vietnam, Korea, and World War II**

memorials and the **Washington Monument** are each equipped to accommodate visitors with disabilities and keep wheelchairs on the premises. There's limited parking for visitors with disabilities at some of these locations. Call ahead to other sightseeing attractions for accessibility information and special services.

Call your senator or representative to arrange wheelchair-accessible tours of the **Capitol**; they can also arrange special tours for the blind or deaf at the Capitol. For further information about Capitol tours, call the **Congressional Special Services Office** (☎ 202/224-4048, TTY 202/224-4049; or go to www.house.gov, click on "Visiting D.C.," "U.S. Capitol Guide Service," and then on "accessibility."

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Washington, D.C., has a strong gay and lesbian community and clearly welcomes gay and lesbian visitors, as evidenced by the fact that the Washington, D.C. Convention and Tourism Corporation includes on its website, www.washington.org, a link to information for gay and lesbian tourists: click on "Pride in D.C.," which appears on the site's home page.

While in Washington, you'll want to get your hands on the *Washington Blade* (☎ 202/797-7000; www.washingtonblade.com), a comprehensive weekly newspaper distributed free at Olsson's Books/Records, 1307 19th St. NW, and at numerous other locations in the District.

Washington's gay bookstore, **Lambda Rising**, 1625 Connecticut Ave. NW (☎ 202/462-6969; www.lambdarising.com), also informally serves as an information source and gathering place for the gay community, which centers on the Dupont Circle neighborhood.

SENIOR TRAVEL

Members of **AARP** (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons), 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (☎ 888/687-2277; www.aarp.org), get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP: The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

With or without AARP membership, seniors often find discounts awarded them at hotels, especially chain hotels such as the Hilton, so be sure to inquire when you book your reservation.

In Washington, you'll find discounted admission prices for seniors at theaters, at those few museums that charge for entry, and for discounted travel on Metro, although the designated "senior" age differs slightly from place to place.

4 The 21st-Century Traveler

INTERNET ACCESS AWAY FROM HOME WITHOUT YOUR OWN COMPUTER

Increasingly, hotels provide guests computer and Internet access on one or more computers in the hotel business center. In some cases, the hotel provides this as a free service. D.C.'s Embassy Suites Hotel Downtown and the Hotel Monaco (p. 52 and 38) are two such properties.

Washington doesn't offer many choices in reliable cybercafes, but if you wander the Dupont Circle neighborhood you may come upon one. For instance, **Kramerbooks & Afterwords**, 1517 Connecticut Ave. NW (☎ 202/387-1400; <http://www.kramers.com>), has one computer available for free Internet access, with a 15-minute time limit. All three of Washington's airports offer some variation of Internet access.

5 Getting There

BY PLANE

Domestic airlines with scheduled flights into all three of Washington, D.C.'s, airports, Washington Dulles International (IAD), Ronald Reagan Washington National (DCA), and Baltimore–Washington International Thurgood Marshall (BWI), include **American** (☎ 800/433-7300; www.aa.com), **Continental** (☎ 800/525-0280; www.continental.com), **Delta** (☎ 800/221-1212; www.delta.com), **Northwest** (☎ 800/225-2525; www.nwa.com), **United** (☎ 800/241-6522; www.ual.com), and **US Airways** (☎ 800/428-4322; www.usairways.com).

Low-fare airlines seem to be most successful and dependable these days. **Southwest Airlines** (☎ 800/435-9792; www.southwest.com) anchors BWI Airport with its roster of 164 daily flights (about half of BWI's passenger business) to more than 35 cities. Other bargain airlines that use BWI are **AirTran** (☎ 800/247-8726; www.airtran.com) and **Frontier** (☎ 800/432-1359; www.frontierairlines.com).

Discount airlines that serve Dulles Airport are United Airlines' subsidiary **Ted Airlines** (☎ 800/225-5833; www.flyted.com), America West, AirTran, **jetBlue** (☎ 800/538-2583; www.jetblue.com), and Frontier. In Fall 2006, Southwest Airlines also started up service at Dulles, though flight details weren't available at press time.

Four discount airlines use National Airport: US Airways, Frontier, **American Trans Air (ATA)** (☎ 800/435-9282; www.ata.com), and **Spirit** (☎ 800/772-7177; www.spiritair.com).

SHUTTLE SERVICE FROM NEW YORK, BOSTON & CHICAGO

Delta and US Airways continue to dominate the lucrative D.C.–East Coast shuttle service. Between the two of them, the airlines operate hourly or almost hourly shuttle service between Boston's Logan Airport and Washington, and New York's La Guardia Airport and Washington. The **Delta Shuttle** (☎ 800/933-5935) travels daily between New York and Washington, while the **US Airways Shuttle** (☎ 800/428-4322) operates daily between Boston and Washington and New York and Washington. Both airlines fly into and out of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. Discount airline **Southwest** (see details above) offers nearly hourly service daily between BWI and Chicago's Midway Airport, Providence, Hartford, Long Island, Manchester (New Hampshire), Orlando, and Nashville.

D.C. AREA AIRPORTS

Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) lies across the Potomac River in Virginia, a few minutes by car, 15 to 20 minutes by Metro from downtown in non-rush-hour traffic. Its proximity to the District and its direct access to the Metro rail system are reasons why you might want to fly into National.

Approximately 14 airlines serve this airport, which has nonstop flights to 69 U.S., one Caribbean, and two Canadian cities. Nearly all nonstop flights are to and from cities located within 1,250 miles from Washington. The exceptions are flights between National and Phoenix, Denver, Las Vegas, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake City.

The Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority oversees both National and Dulles airports, so the website is the same for the two facilities: www.metwashairports.com. Check there for airport information, or call ☎ 703/417-8000. **Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD)** is 26 miles outside the capital, in Chantilly, Virginia, a 35- to 45-minute ride to downtown in non-rush-hour traffic. Dulles has 31 airlines flying nonstop to 108 destinations, including 37 foreign cities. The airport's information line is ☎ 703/572-2700.

Baltimore–Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI) is located about 45 minutes from downtown, a few

miles outside of Baltimore. This airport is growing in leaps and bounds as more and more travelers turn to it. One factor especially accounts for this tremendous progress, the same that recommends BWI to travelers: the major presence of Southwest Airlines and its bargain fares. Call ☎ **800/435-9294** for airport information, or point your browser to www.bwiairport.com.

GETTING INTO TOWN FROM THE AIRPORT

TAXI SERVICE For a trip to downtown D.C., you can expect a taxi to cost anywhere from \$10 to \$20 for the 10- to 15-minute ride from National Airport; \$50 to \$60 for the 30- to 40-minute ride from Dulles Airport; and \$63 for the 45-minute ride from BWI.

SUPERSHUTTLE Vans (☎ **800/258-3826**; www.supershuttle.com) offer shared-ride, door-to-door service between the airport and your destination, whether in the District or in a suburban location. You can't reserve space on the van for a ride from the airport, which means that you probably will have to wait 15 to 30 minutes before boarding, so that your driver can fill his van with other passengers, to make his trip worthwhile. If you arrive after midnight at either National or Dulles airports, you can summon a van by calling the toll-free number above or ☎ **888/826-2700** from BWI. The 24-hour service bases its fares on zip code, so, to reach downtown, expect to pay about \$12, plus \$8 for each additional person from National; \$22, plus \$10 per additional person from Dulles; and \$26 to \$32, plus \$10 per additional person from BWI. If you're calling the SuperShuttle for a ride from a D.C. area location to one of the airports, you must reserve a spot at least 24 hours in advance.

Individual transportation options at each airport are as follows:

FROM RONALD REAGAN WASHINGTON NATIONAL AIRPORT If you are not too encumbered with luggage, you should take **Metrorail** (☎ **202/637-7000**) into the city. Metro's Yellow and Blue lines stop at the airport and connect via an enclosed walkway to level two, the concourse level, of the main terminal, adjacent to terminals B and C. If yours is one of the airlines that still uses the "old" terminal A (Spirit, AirTran, Midwest, Northwest, and ATA), you will have a longer walk to reach the Metro station. Metrorail offers a 15- to 20-minute non-rush-hour ride to downtown. It is safe, convenient, and cheap, costing \$1.35 base fare and going up from there, depending when (fares increase during rush hours) and where you're going.

FROM WASHINGTON DULLES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT The **Washington Flyer Express Bus** runs between Dulles and the West Falls Church Metro station, where you can board a train for D.C. In the airport, look for signs for the “Dulles Airport Shuttle” or ask at the information desk. Buses to the West Falls Church Metro station run daily, every 30 minutes, and cost \$9 one-way.

More convenient is the **Metrobus** service that runs between Dulles and the L’Enfant Plaza Metro station, located near Capitol Hill and within walking distance of the National Mall and Smithsonian museums. The bus departs hourly, daily, costs only \$3, and takes about 45 to 60 minutes.

FROM BALTIMORE–WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT Washington’s Metro service runs an Express Metro Bus (“B30”) between its Metrorail Green Line Greenbelt station and BWI Airport. In the airport, head to the lower level and look for “Public Transit” signs to find the bus, which operates daily, departs every 40 minutes, takes about 30 minutes to reach the station, and costs \$3. At the Greenbelt Metro station, you purchase a Metro fare card and board a Metro train, which will take you into the city.

You also have the choice of taking either an **Amtrak** (☎ 800/872-7245) or a **Maryland Rural Commuter (MARC)** (☎ 800/325-7245) train into the city. Both trains travel between the BWI Railway Station (☎ 410/672-6169) and Washington’s Union Station (☎ 202/484-7540), about a 30-minute ride. Amtrak’s service is daily (ticket prices range from \$13 to \$38 per person, one-way, depending on time and train type), while MARC’s is weekdays only (\$6 per person, one-way). A courtesy shuttle runs every 10 minutes or so between the airport and the train station; stop at the desk near the baggage-claim area to check for the next departure time of both the shuttle bus and the train. Trains depart about once per hour.

BY CAR

If you are like most visitors to Washington, you’re planning on driving here, traveling on one of the following major highways: I-270, I-95, and I-295 from the north; I-95 and I-395, Route 1, and Route 301 from the south; Route 50/301 and Route 450 from the east; and Route 7, Route 50, I-66, and Route 29/211 from the west.

No matter which road you take, there’s a good chance you will have to navigate some portion of the **Capital Beltway** (I-495 and I-95) to gain entry to D.C. The Beltway girds the city, about 66

miles around, with more than 56 interchanges or exits, and is nearly always congested, but especially during weekday morning and evening rush hours, roughly from 6 to 9:30am and 3 to 7pm.

Get yourself a good map before you do anything else. The **American Automobile Association (AAA; ☎ 800/763-9900** for emergency road service and for connection to the mid-Atlantic office; www.aaa.com) provides its members with maps and detailed Trip-Tiks that give precise directions to a destination, including up-to-date information about areas of construction. AAA also provides towing services should you have car trouble during your trip. The District is 240 miles from New York City, 40 miles from Baltimore, 700 miles from Chicago, 500 miles from Boston, and about 630 miles from Atlanta.

BY TRAIN

Amtrak (☎ 800/USA-RAIL; www.amtrak.com) offers daily service to Washington from New York, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles (you change trains in Chicago). Amtrak also travels daily between Washington and points south, including Raleigh, Charlotte, Atlanta, cities in Florida, and New Orleans.

Metroliner service—which costs a little more but provides faster transit and roomier, more comfortable seating than regular trains—is available between New York and Washington, D.C., and points in between.

Even faster, roomier, and more expensive than Metroliner service are Amtrak's high-speed **Acela Express** trains. The trains travel as fast as 150 mph and navigate the Northeast Corridor, linking Boston, New York, and Washington.

Amtrak trains arrive at historic **Union Station**, 50 Massachusetts Ave. NE (☎ 202/371-9441; www.unionstationdc.com), a short walk from the Capitol, across the circle from several hotels, and a short cab or Metro ride from downtown. Union Station is a turn-of-the-20th-century Beaux Arts masterpiece that was magnificently restored in the late 1980s. Offering a three-level marketplace of shops and restaurants, this stunning depot is conveniently located and connects with Metro service. Taxis are almost always available.