

How to Feel Like a Washington, D.C., Family

I moved to Washington, D.C., as a dewy-eyed college student—before the Kennedy Center or Metro; before Watergate, Iran-Contragate, Monicagate, or Iraqgate; and probably before you were born. I grabbed a B.A. from George Washington University in Foggy Bottom, married a native, and then found a job with a trade association—a polite term for lobbying groups. After a few years, I traded downtown traffic and bureaucracy for suburban diaper duty and freelancing. Raising two children a dozen miles from the National Mall had its perks. Whenever the kids grew restless—and in later years during school vacations—I bundled them into the car and we headed to D.C. Back then, there were few resources targeted to families visiting the nation's capital. So we were trailblazers in a way, discovering the wonders of Washington, D.C., by the seat of our pants (and, sometimes, diapers). Armed with a map and a Frommer's guidebook, we found out which museum exhibits had the most kid appeal and where to let off steam. We learned the best and worst times to visit the popular attractions and where to get a quick and cheap meal. An inveterate note-taker, I shared my notebooks with local friends and out-of-town visitors. Little did I know that I had sown the seeds for a guidebook. With the kids in school full time and bored with baking brownies for PTA functions, I began writing travel features in 1980. A decade later I parlayed my knowledge and our family's experiences into *Frommer's Washington D.C. with Kids*, here in its 9th edition.

Since I first set foot on a D.C. street more than 40 years ago, I've lived through more scandals than I can count, endured Potomac Fever and worsening D.C. traffic, and survived 13 administrations of nine presidents. I was at one of the Washington Senators' final baseball games in 1971 and at one of the Washington Nationals' first games in 2005. The kids are now grown and are parents themselves. In the blink of an eye, I morphed into the grandmother of four munchkins whom I delight in introducing to the wonders of the nation's capital. Heaven knows my step is a bit slower, and I have more silver in my hair than in my jewelry box. Restaurants, hotels, dress codes—and many of the major players—have come and gone. But some things haven't changed. I still get a thrill on Capitol Hill. And when I walk past the White House. Or visit the newest zoo babies at the National Zoo. Or take in a world-class exhibition at one of the myriad museums or galleries. And whenever I'm downtown with the family, if you dig into my backpack, you'll still find—tucked beneath the tissues and snacks and crayons—my notepad and pen.

There's no doubt that living in or visiting the Center of the Free World can be an exciting and educational experience. Washington produces and employs more spin-doctors than anywhere else on the planet. This is not only the nation's capital, but also

the *world* capital of security leaks. This is where congressional investigations, protests, spies, filibusters, motorcades, and national debts in the zillions are as commonplace as crabs in the Chesapeake Bay—or corn in Iowa. It's a place where our presidents take the oath of office outside the Capitol and subsequently lie in state in its Rotunda. D.C. is where protestors and special-interest groups converge to exercise their rights to free speech and assembly. Washington is where today's rumors bump noses with tomorrow's headlines—and coverups. What better place for children to learn the inner workings of our unique, if at times confounding, form of government?

If you scratch the District's grimy bureaucratic surface, you'll uncover a cosmopolitan city that is rich in history—a microcosm of the American experience and a living classroom. No wonder it's a top travel destination for families. For most of us who live in the Washington metropolitan area, D.C. is less about executive privilege, multibillion-dollar budgets, and votes than it is about *home*—a vibrant multicultural city where we work, play, and raise our kids. A place where families fly kites on the Mall or listen to free concerts from front-row blankets on the Capitol lawn. Where we pause, in awe, to watch the president's motorcade pass by, even if we dislike the current president's policies (or the president). We frequently spot—on city streets, in restaurants, shops, and theaters—legislators, media moguls, and Hollywood celebs. We never tire of visiting the city's magnificent landmarks, sights, and diverse neighborhoods, whether on foot or via Metro, bicycle, open-air tram, cruise boat, or kayak.

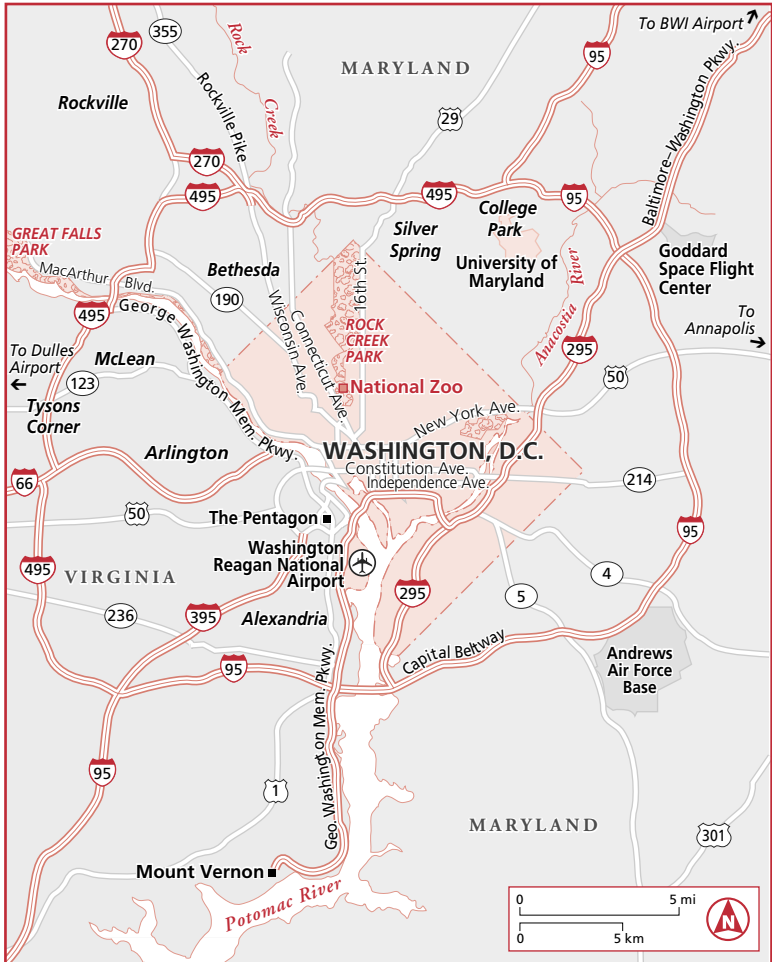
Washington, D.C., is just another place on the map. And it's like nowhere else.

Kids and Washington, D.C., go together like peanut butter and jelly. Little wonder, then, that children of all ages come to know and love the fascinating international playground that is the nation's capital. Washington has broad, tree-lined boulevards, numerous parks and recreational areas, and multiethnic shops and restaurants, not to mention a host of attractions (historic and new), waiting to be discovered and rediscovered. The nation's capital is as natural as a family vacation destination. Not bad for a 69-square-mile parcel of former swampland!

Some 15 million visitors traveled to Washington in 2006, the same year D.C. was named the sixth-most-visited U.S. destination by *Forbes Traveler*. Rest assured, the District pulls out all the stops to extend a friendly hand to families. Local hotels bend over backward to cater to families by offering special rates and perks to those with kids in tow. And restaurants go out of their way to please pint-size patrons, with kids' menus, half portions, crayons—and sometimes free food. It's no accident that thousands of buses and planeloads of schoolchildren arrive annually from all over the world. Where else can kids visit the president's house, touch a moon rock, view the city from atop a 555-foot obelisk, and cruise the Potomac on a luxury yacht or the C&O Canal on a mule-drawn boat—all within minutes of the U.S. Capitol? And that's just for openers!

Despite the staggering number of museums and federal buildings, much of downtown Washington resembles an enormous park. First-time visitors are quick to note the abundance of greenery cozying up to all the marble and granite. In fact, gardens, fountains, and parks hug most major sightseeing attractions. The area known as the National Mall (stretching for 2 miles from the U.S. Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial) is the perfect site for chasing pigeons or flying a kite. Anyone with kids knows that they have short attention spans and typically get bored and antsy after an hour in a museum. These same kids, cranky from being cooped up and longing for physical activity, can exit almost any museum in D.C. onto a glorified yard and let loose.

Washington, D.C., Area



Compared with other urban areas, both in the United States and abroad, Washington's skyline is surprisingly and refreshingly uncluttered. You can thank the Founding Fathers for that: Because the original city planners declared that no building could be higher than the dome of the U.S. Capitol, the height of commercial buildings is strictly regulated to 110 feet. And if you've visited other major cities recently, you'll be pleased to discover that Washington's foremost tourist areas are clean and safe.

Getting around D.C. is a breeze. All major attractions are accessible by the Metro, the public rail/bus system. Despite the occasional delay, the subways are clean, safe, and surprisingly graffiti free. They're also quiet. It's easy to navigate the city with kids on the Metro, even if they're in strollers. Some stations are at hotels, shops, and food courts

listed in this book. Most are within a couple of blocks of your destination. And except for a few neighborhoods, where you're not apt to be in the first place, you can unleash older children to wander on their own. Teenagers will enjoy exploring areas such as Georgetown and Old Town Alexandria, which are uniquely appealing to this age group.

You don't need a degree in accounting—or a huge budget—to plan a D.C. vacation! Prices for food, lodging, and entertainment compare favorably with those of other tourist meccas around the United States and around the world. If you've recently been to New York, London, Los Angeles, or Rome, you'll find Washington a relative bargain—even if you can't sleep for free in the White House. Families also find that they can eat well in a wide variety of kid-friendly Washington restaurants without breaking the bank. Best of all, almost all the major attractions are free. Try that in New York or Paris!

Tourism is the second-largest industry in D.C. The first, as you might have guessed, is the federal government. The “natives” (sort of an inside joke, because so many residents come from somewhere else) are friendly, helpful, and eager to make visitors feel at home. Washington is, after all, everyone's home, and it tends to engender a sense of belonging to short-term guests as well as longtime residents.

Although D.C.'s citizens enjoy many perks, they have suffered, one way or another, because of local politics. Here's why. According to the Constitution, Congress has the power to “exercise exclusive legislation . . . over the seat of the Government of the United States.” Believe it or not, before 1961 and the passage of the 23rd Amendment, residents of the District could not vote in national elections. Under the Reorganization of 1967, the president appointed a mayor and nine-member council to govern the District.

In 1970, Congress okayed legislation for a delegate to represent the District in the House of Representatives, but here's the catch: This rep can vote on committees but not on legislation on the House floor. And although Washington has had an elected mayor and city council since 1975, Congress continues its tight reign over the D.C. budget. It must be true that adversity builds character, because those who live and work in the District share an immense feeling of pride. Chances are, it will rub off on you and yours during your visit.

Kids who snooze their way through American history in school wake up when they tour the Capitol, White House, and other federal buildings. Being there and seeing for themselves where laws are enacted, where the president lives, and where the government works leave a mark on young minds—one that won't soon be erased.

1 Frommer's Favorite Washington, D.C., Family Experiences

- **Watching the Fourth of July Fireworks on the Mall.** You can't beat the setting of the Washington Monument grounds, National Mall, or west front of the Capitol for observing the nation's birthday. A concert by the National Symphony Orchestra, culminating in the *1812 Overture*, accompanies the magnificent pyrotechnic display. See p. 129 for a map of the Mall.
- **Seeing the Sunset Behind the Lincoln Memorial.** Make sure your camera is primed and ready to snap for one of Mother Nature's better shows. The west front section of the Capitol is the best vantage point for a sweeping view across the Mall to the Lincoln Memorial and beyond.
- **Catching a Free Concert on the Capitol Lawn.** Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends and July 4th,

local families toting blankets and chairs camp on the Capitol lawn to hear a free concert by the National Symphony Orchestra and songs by a megastar or two, and then join in the traditional singalong. See “Calendar of Kids’ Favorite Events” in chapter 2 for more information.

- **Row, Row, Rowing Your Boat on the Potomac.** Don’t go home without viewing Washington’s waterfront and several major sights from an appropriate conveyance: rowboat, canoe, or kayak. Or let someone else play captain on a river cruise. Equally fun is pedaling a two- or four-seater around the Tidal Basin before visiting the Jefferson and FDR memorials. See “Boating” under “Outdoor Activities” in chapter 8.
- **Picnicking on the Mall.** Have your hotel pack a picnic, or get takeout from a food court or restaurant to enjoy on the Mall. There’s plenty of room on the 2-mile lawn between the Capitol and Lincoln Memorial.
- **Looking Up Your Congressional Representative or Senator.** Stop and say hello to the folks who partake in those lengthy and boring filibusters, battle the pigheaded opposition, and work long days (and often nights). Tell him/her how you feel—how you *really* feel—about important issues. Be prepared: You may end up shaking hands with an administrative assistant who looks about 12. Research your representatives or senators at www.senate.gov or www.house.gov, or call ☎ 202/224-3121. See p. 165 for more information on visiting the U.S. Capitol.
- **Spying on the Giant Pandas at the National Zoo.** Tai Shan, born July 9, 2005, is a baby no longer, but still adorable and a big draw. Plan your visit to arrive early in the day when the pandas are most active. For an even more up-close-and-personal look, you can use the zoo’s Panda Cam. See p. 146.
- **Taking Pictures of the Cherry Blossoms.** Forget about buying those touched-up postcards. Make your own. Photos of the cherry blossoms, the White House, or other famous D.C. sights make stunning cards to mail or e-mail to friends and family. My grandkids bring throw-away cameras to record their own memories.
- **Listening to a Military Band Concert.** March yourself over to a free military band concert, and salute the red, white, and blue. The concerts are held two or three evenings a week in summer at several D.C. venues and Arlington Memorial Cemetery. See “Military Band Concerts” under “Music” in chapter 10.
- **Seeing a Free Movie on the Mall.** Families blanket the Washington Monument grounds summer evenings for “Screen on the Green,” free screenings of classics such as *Casablanca* and *The Graduate* under the stars. See p. 263.
- **Getting a Bird’s-Eye View from the Washington Monument.** Order timed passes in advance and thrill to a panorama of downtown D.C.; Arlington, Virginia; and beyond. Yes, it is touristy, and yes, it is usually crowded. And those with altitude issues may not want to linger. Go anyway. If you’ve been during the day, go at night. You may not recognize the sights, but the view is spectacular! See p. 156.
- **Reading the Charters of Freedom at the Archives.** A moving experience awaits visitors, especially first-timers, regardless of their hailing port. Avoid lines and make reservations to see the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of

Rights in the National Archives Building. See p. 176.

- **Experiencing America the Beautiful in *To Fly at the Air and Space Museum's IMAX Theater*.** What is it about this movie? More than 30 years

after its debut, crowds still line up to view it. My eyes still mist over at the breathtaking photography—and I've seen it more than a dozen times. See p. 263.

2 Best Hotel Bets

- **Most Family-Friendly Hotels near the Mall:** The **JW Marriott**, 1331 Pennsylvania Ave. NW (☎ 202/393-2000), and **L'Enfant Plaza**, 480 L'Enfant Plaza SW (☎ 202/484-1000), are each less than a 10-minute walk to the Mall. Both offer plenty of family perks, along with nearby sight-seeing, dining, and shopping opportunities. And both have direct access to the Metro, so no raindrops need fall on your heads. See p. 74.
- **Most Child-Pampering Hotel: The Four Seasons**, 2800 Pennsylvania Ave. NW (☎ 800/332-3442 or 202/342-0444), does not discriminate, pampering children every bit as much as their parents. Some of the hotel's kid-spoiling tactics include gifts at check-in, brownies and milkshakes at tea, videos to borrow, kid-size Terry-cloth robes, and milk and cookies at evening turndown. See p. 79.
- **Most Fun for Kids 5 and Older: The Helix**, 1430 Rhode Island Ave. NW (☎ 800/706-1202 or 202/462-9001), knows how to create the right atmosphere for young-at-heart fun-seekers. When was the last time you had a pillow fight? Well, get on the stick! Request the Family Bunk Room for four, with a king and double-decker bed (top single, bottom double), and battle it out for the top berth. See p. 77.
- **Best Views: L'Enfant Plaza**, 480 L'Enfant Plaza SW (☎ 202/484-1000), has rooms that enjoy views of the Potomac River; Arlington, Virginia; and Georgetown. See p. 74.

Some top-floor rooms of the **Omni Shoreham**, 2500 Calvert St. NW (☎ 202/234-0700), overlook Rock Creek Park and/or downtown. See p. 82.

- **Best Value for Families: The Hotel Harrington**, 11th and E streets NW, (☎ 202/628-8140), is a centrally located, family run property with three restaurants and double, triple, and quad rooms (\$135–\$169). Don't expect bells and whistles (or room service), but for location and value, you can't beat it. See p. 76.
- **Best Suite Deals: Washington Suites Georgetown**, 2500 Pennsylvania Ave. NW (☎ 877/736-2500 or 202/333-8060), is a short walk from the Foggy Bottom Metro and has lots more to recommend it—kids 18 and under stay free in the same suite (with a separate bedroom), and the hotel offers complimentary cribs, strollers, and expanded continental breakfast daily. Pets are welcome, too. You'll find a grocery store and slew of neighborhood restaurants within a few blocks. See p. 81.
- **Best Bargain for Families: Hostelling International–Washington, D.C.**, 1009 11th St. NW, at K Street (☎ 202/737-2333). If you don't mind roughing it a bit, staying here is a bargain and makes for a unique family experience not far from the action. Kids 3 to 11 (with a parent) pay only \$10 per night, those 2 and under are free, and special family activities are gratis. See p. 72.

- **Hippest Bathrooms: Helix**, 1430 Rhode Island Ave. NW (☎ 800/706-1202 or 202/462-9001). Better than a jolt of java in the morning are the Helix's minimalist, crayon-colored bathrooms. What? A bathroom without a traditional vanity? Where does the water go? And how does it get there? This could be the most fun your family members have ever had brushing their teeth. See p. 77.
- **Most Peace and Quiet: Morrison-Clark Historic Hotel**, 1015 L St. NW (between 11th St. and Massachusetts Ave.; ☎ 800/332-7898 or 202/898-1200). If your kids are out of diapers and well behaved—there are lots of antiques here ripe for breaking—opt for a room with a porch or balcony overlooking the garden courtyard. Stay here for a genteel experience a tad off the beaten path yet convenient to the Metro and the sights. Kids 16 and under stay free with a parent, and weekend breakfast is complimentary. See p. 71.
- **Coolest Decor: Helix**, 1430 Rhode Island Ave. NW (☎ 800/706-1202 or 202/462-9001). In a town that takes itself too seriously, here are royal blue and orange countertops, curtained platform beds, floating entertainment centers, lava lamps, and Pop Rocks in the honor bar. This is hotel as entertainment. See p. 77.
- **Best Pool: L'Enfant Plaza**, 480 L'Enfant Plaza (☎ 202/484-1000). The attractive outdoor pool (covered in the winter) is surrounded by potted flowering plants and has plenty of seating and, best of all, a snack bar. Many families opt for a room off the pool. (This is also front-row seat for watching the Fourth of July fireworks!) See p. 74.
- **Best Hotel Food Deal for Kids: At the Grand Hyatt at Washington Convention Center**, 1000 H St. NW (☎ 800/233-1234 or 202/582-1234), kids 3 and under eat for free in the Grand Cafe; kids 12 and under can order from the kids' menu or half portions from the regular menu. See p. 73.
- **Most Welcoming to Pets:** From April to October, **The Hotel Monaco Alexandria** in Old Town, 480 King St., Alexandria, Virginia (☎ 703/549-6080), hosts Doggy Happy Hour every Tuesday and Thursday from 5 to 8pm. Bring Fido for water and biscuits while you enjoy drinks and pooch-watching in the brick courtyard. See p. 87.
- **Best for Athletic Families:** The jocks and jockettes in your family will love the **Omni Shoreham**, 2500 Calvert St. NW (☎ 202/234-0700), for its oversize outdoor pool and extensive grounds for power walks or jogs. Exit the hotel's back door to Rock Creek Park's 10 miles of hiking and biking trails and its 1½-mile fitness course with 18 exercise stations. You can also walk to the zoo. See p. 82.

3 Best Dining Bets

- **Best Burgers: Houston's**, 7715 Woodmont Ave., Bethesda, Maryland (☎ 301/656-9755), and 12256 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland (☎ 301/463-3535), consistently serves the best burgers in the area. I mourn the day Houston's closed its Georgetown location. Go at off times or bring a copy of *War and Peace* to read while you wait. Runner-up award goes to the fast-food **Five Guys**: 1645 Connecticut Ave. NW (Dupont Circle), 1825 Eye St. NW (downtown), 808 H St. (Chinatown near Verizon Center), 1335 Wisconsin Ave. (Georgetown), 13th and F

streets NW (downtown). And order fries with that!

- **Best Hot Dogs: Nathan's**, the top dawgs introduced in 1916 in NYC, get my vote. Try one at the Food Court (next to Flamers) at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW (☎ 202/312-1300). Runner-up goes to **Sabrett's**. Just look for the carts with the blue and yellow umbrellas downtown and near the Mall. See p. 95.
- **Best Kids' Menu:** I wish I were a kid again so I could order from the kids' menu at the **Austin Grill**, 750 E St. NW (☎ 202/393-3776). For \$3 to \$7, *los niños* can have a taco, enchilada, quesadilla, or nachos, or a burger or PB&J with a drink and a side dish. Ice cream is only \$1 more. See p. 99.
- **Best Place for Politicking:** Head for the exclusive **Senate Dining Room** (☎ 202/224-2350) in the U.S. Capitol to rub elbows with U.S. senators and order a tureen of famous Senate Bean Soup, which, after many years, is still a deal at \$5. You'll need a "request letter," and men must wear a suit and tie to experience this D.C. moment. See the introduction to the "Capitol Hill" section of chapter 5 for more information.
- **Best Pizza: Pizzeria Paradiso**, at 2029 P St. NW (☎ 202/223-1245) and 3282 M St. NW (☎ 202/337-1245), is *the* place for wood-oven-baked classic pizza. I usually stick to the basic Margherita or Quattro Formaggi (four cheeses)—pizza this good doesn't need extra toppings. See p. 113.
- **Best Tex-Mex: Austin Grill**, 750 E St. NW, between 7th and 8th streets (☎ 202/393-3776); 2404 Wisconsin Ave. NW (just north of Georgetown; ☎ 202/337-8080); and in the Maryland and Virginia burbs, has a varied menu of *deliciosa* Tex-Mex favorites and margaritas for Mom and Dad. ¡*Muy bueno!* See p. 99.
- **Best Food Court: The Food Court** at the **Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center**, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW (☎ 202/312-1300), near the Federal Triangle Metro station, is a centrally located refueling spot (less than a 10-min. walk from the Washington Monument or the Mall) for hungry sightseers. Belly up to one of the stands for hamburgers, hot dogs, chicken, salads, deli, Cajun, wraps, subs, smoothies, gelato, and ethnic fare (pizza, sushi, dim sum, and filled pita). From spring through fall, you can take lunch outside where there's free entertainment. On Capitol Hill, you will find similar fare with even more selections (plus all those trains and shops) at **Union Station**, 50 Massachusetts Ave. NE (☎ 202/371-9441). See p. 103.
- **Best Restaurant for Teens:** A trip to the **Hard Rock Cafe**, 999 E St. NW, next to Ford's Theatre (☎ 202/737-ROCK), will make you a hero to your kids. Here, you can ogle (depending on your age) Britney Spears' costume, an autographed Stones photo, or one of Chuck Berry's guitars. This will take your mind off the food, which is okay but nothing to write a song about. See p. 100.
- **Best Ice Cream: Gifford's**, 555 11th St. NW (☎ 202/347-7755). Also in Chevy Chase, Bethesda, and Rockville, Maryland, has been pleasing generations of area ice cream lovers for decades with its rich ice cream treats. Try the hot fudge or Swiss sundaes or double-dip cone. See p. 102. Behind by a nose, but missing the local flavor, is any one of **Ben & Jerry's** six D.C. locations. See p. 98.

- **Best Ice Cream Parlor: Thomas Sweet** (“Sweet’s” to locals), 3214 P St. NW (at Wisconsin Ave.; ☎ 202/337-0616), reminds me of my youth and the Malt Shoppe in Archie comics. The ice cream is made on the premises, and a single-dip ice cream cone is \$2.75; a double, \$3.49. Quite a deal in this day and age. See p. 109.
- **Best Milkshake: Chick & Ruth’s Delly**, 165 Main St., Annapolis, Maryland (☎ 410/269-6737), makes the kind of thick shakes and malts of which poetry is written. If you have to ask how much ice cream goes into these monsters, you shouldn’t go here. You could nurse one of these too-thick-to-sip-through-a-straw babies for an hour. See p. 289.
- **Best Breakfast: The Market Lunch** (in Eastern Market), 225 7th St. SE (☎ 202/547-8444), is the place for blueberry pancakes and local Capitol Hill ambience. You may have to wait, but that’s part of the experience. See p. 98. For hearty breakfast platters—bacon and eggs, omelets, and the like—head to **Afterwords Café**, 1517 Connecticut Ave. NW (☎ 202/387-1462; p. 112), or **Luna Grill & Diner**, 1301 Connecticut Ave. NW (☎ 202/835-2280; p. 110). If you want more formal trappings (for example, tablecloths), make a reservation at the **Old Ebbitt Grill**, 675 15th St. NW (☎ 202/347-4801). See p. 102.
- **Best Place for a Picnic:** Tote that hamper or brown bag to the **National Mall**, between 4th and 7th streets NW. For picnicking alfresco, you can’t beat the lawn between the Washington Monument and the Capitol. (Aren’t you glad you don’t have to cut the grass?) When in Georgetown, go to **Washington Harbour Park**, at the foot of 31st (below M St.).
- **Best Waterfront Dining:** Friends, we have a three-way tie here. **Sequoia**, 3000 K St. (☎ 202/944-4200), perched on the Potomac in Georgetown, has a drop-dead view of the riverfront and pretty good food. At the **Chart House**, 1 Cameron St., Alexandria, Virginia (☎ 703/684-5080), on another part of the Potomac, you can drool over the yachts along with your coconut shrimp. **Cantler’s Riverside Inn**, 458 Forest Beach Rd., Annapolis, Maryland (☎ 410/757-1311), is situated on picturesque Mill Creek and is *the* place to go for steamed Maryland blue crabs. See p. 198, 276, and 288, respectively.
- **Best Selection: America**, 50 Massachusetts Ave. NE at Union Station (☎ 202/685-9555), serves tasty takes on regional favorites and comfort food (meatloaf, steak, pizza, pork chops, ribs, burgers, wraps, soups, and sandwiches). Few, other than linebackers, can finish the oversize portions here. Let the kids split an order, or doggie-bag the leftovers. See p. 94.
- **Best Romantic Restaurant (for a Night When You Hire a Sitter): The Sea Catch Restaurant and Raw Bar**, at Canal Square, 1054 31st St. NW, Georgetown (☎ 202/337-8855), has seating overlooking the picturesque C&O Canal. Many think the restaurant serves the best seafood in D.C. Make a reservation for a covered outdoor table as soon as you plan your escape. See p. 106.

4 Best of the Best

- **Best Place to Run Around:** Head for the **National Mall** (you can’t miss it—just step outside almost any Smithsonian museum). If you have time, go to **Rock Creek Park** at 5200 Glover Rd. NW (☎ 202/426-6829),

where you may also ride bikes or horses, play tennis or golf, gaze at the stars, swing, slide, hike, or rent a boat on the C&O Canal or Potomac. See p. 215.

- **Best Views: The Washington Monument**, 15th Street and Constitution Avenue NW (☎ 202/426-6841), can't be beat. Order timed passes so you don't have to wait in line. See p. 156. You'll rarely have a wait at the **Old Post Office**, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave. NW (☎ 202/289-4224). Take the elevator to the clock tower for a panoramic view of downtown and beyond. See p. 175. The **National Cathedral**, Massachusetts and Wisconsin avenues NW (☎ 202/537-6200), is a bit out of the way, but the view from the Pilgrim Observation Gallery is spectacular. See p. 161.
- **Best Ride for Kids: Both the Carousel on the Mall**, 1000 Jefferson Dr. SW (on the Mall outside the Smithsonian "Castle"; ☎ 202/357-2700), and the **Dentzel Carousel** at Glen Echo Park, MacArthur Boulevard at Goldsborough Road, Glen Echo, Maryland (☎ 301/492-6282), get my vote. See "Carousels" under "Rides for Children" in chapter 8.
- **Best Souvenirs: Souvenir City**, 1001 K St. NW (between 10th and 11th sts.; ☎ 202/638-1836), sells shirts, books, paperweights, mugs, and other D.C.-inspired mementos. See p. 250.
- **Best Toy Store: Barston's Child's Play**, 5536 Connecticut Ave. (☎ 202/244-3602), and **Sullivan's**, 3412 Wisconsin Ave. NW (☎ 202/362-1343), get my vote and have stood the test of time. Both are in the Friendship Heights neighborhood, because that's where a large number of affluent D.C. families live. Though they're a bit out of the way if you're staying in downtown D.C., the stores are well stocked and excel at giving their young customers one-on-one attention. (For this toy shopper, they are a refreshing alternative to the large, impersonal toy "factories" where customer service is far from the number-one concern.) See p. 249.
- **Best History Lesson: For older kids, sitting in the House or Senate galleries at the U.S. Capitol**, East Capitol Street and 1st Street NE (☎ 202/225-6827 or 202/224-3121), when either is in session is to view history in the making. Bear in mind that the House and Senate are not in session all the time. You can check the local papers or the Capitol website to see what is on the docket. See p. 165.
- **Most Unusual Tours: D.C. Ducks**, Union Station, 50 Massachusetts Ave. NE (☎ 202/966-DUCK), departs Union Station to tour various Washington, D.C., sights on land and sea (the Potomac River) in refurbished World War II amphibious vehicles. With precocious kids 10 and older, take the 2-hour **Spy City Tour**, cosponsored by the International Spy Museum and Grayline, Saturdays at 10am (800 F St. NW; ☎ 202/EYE-SPY-U). See p. 183.