

PLANNING *Your VISIT to* WASHINGTON

WHEN *to* GO

GOING WHEN THE WEATHER IS GOOD

THE BEST TIMES TO VISIT WASHINGTON are in the spring and fall, when the weather is most pleasant and nature puts on a show. The city's fabled cherry blossoms bloom in late March or early April—not necessarily coinciding with the Cherry Blossom Parade or festivities but luring a lot of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, which don't always coexist peacefully—while fall brings crisp, cool weather and, by mid-October, a spectacular display of gold, orange, and red leaves.

The summers—mid-June through September—can be brutally hot and humid. Visitors in July and August not only contend with the heat as they sprint from building to building, but also must endure the city's heavy reliance on air-conditioning that often reaches meat-locker chill. August, with its predictably oppressive heat, is the month when Washingtonians leave town in droves.

On the other hand, if you don't mind the humidity, or like an early-and-late schedule with a break in the afternoon, August has its good side: far less traffic (shorter lines), easy restaurant reservations, extended museum hours, and—because Congress is in recess and many federal employees on vacation—less-oppressive security. It's so much less crowded, in fact, that August is when Washington area chefs hold the year's second Restaurant Week, offering bargain-priced three-course lunch and dinner menus at about \$20 and \$30, respectively.

Washington's winter weather, on the other hand, is erratic. Balmy, mid-60s days are possible through December. While it often gets into the teens in January and February, midday temperatures can climb into the 40s and 50s. This is the season to beat the crowds.

March is tricky. While warm daytime temperatures are frequent, sometimes a large, moist air mass moving north from the Gulf of Mexico will collide with a blast of frigid air from Canada. The result

is a big, wet snowfall that paralyzes the city for days. (It should be further noted that the mere *prediction* of snow can paralyze D.C.)

Washington weather can run the gamut from subzero (rarely), to mild (most of the winter, some of the summer, and most of the spring and fall), to scorchingly hot and unbearably humid (most of July and August). The table below lists the city's average monthly temperatures, in degrees Fahrenheit.

WASHINGTON'S AVERAGE MONTHLY TEMPERATURES

| | HIGH | LOW | | HIGH | LOW |
|----------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|
| January | 42° F | 27° F | July | 87° F | 68° F |
| February | 44° F | 28° F | August | 84° F | 66° F |
| March | 53° F | 35° F | September | 78° F | 60° F |
| April | 64° F | 44° F | October | 67° F | 48° F |
| May | 75° F | 54° F | November | 55° F | 38° F |
| June | 83° F | 64° F | December | 45° F | 30° F |

AVOIDING CROWDS

IN GENERAL, POPULAR TOURIST SITES are busier on weekends than weekdays, Saturdays are busier than Sundays, and summer is busier than winter. The best days for avoiding big crowds at Washington's most popular attractions are Monday through Wednesday. Crowds begin to increase as the week progresses, with the volume of visitors peaking on Saturday. During the busiest tourist seasons—spring and summer—major Washington tourist attractions are always crowded between 9:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. For people in town on business, this tourist influx means heavier traffic, congested airports, a packed Metro . . . and a tough time finding a convenient hotel room.

Driving in weekday rush hours (featuring at least 100,000 frantic, short-tempered bureaucrats clawing their way to office or home) should be avoided at all costs. On weekends, the same government workers and their families become tourists, often creating midday traffic snarls during the warmer months.

TO BEAT THE CROWDS . . .

- Avoid the worst tourist seasons: the Cherry Blossom Festival (early spring) and midsummer.
- Hit major Mall attractions on weekdays or Sunday.
- Avoid driving in rush hour (which in D.C. means 6:30 to 10 a.m. and 2 to 7 p.m.).
- Get off the Mall and visit Georgetown, Dupont Circle, or downtown attractions.

If you're driving to Washington, try to time your arrival on a weekend or during a non-rush hour time—before 7 a.m. or during a rather narrow window that opens around 10 a.m. and starts to close quickly around 2 p.m. Afternoon traffic doesn't begin to clear up until 7:30 p.m. Friday afternoon rush hours are the worst: don't even think of driving near D.C. until after 8 p.m.

TRYING TO REASON WITH THE TOURIST SEASON

WHETHER YOU'RE IN TOWN ON BUSINESS or pleasure, it's a good idea to be aware of when the big crowds of tourists are likely to be jamming up the Metro, the sidewalk, or the place you've picked for lunch.

The best time to avoid crowds entirely is in winter. On weekdays especially, the Mall is nearly deserted and museums, monuments, and normally crowd-intensive hot spots like the Capitol are nearly empty—except for the people who work there. Furthermore, the relative scarcity of tourists in the off-season eliminates the worst of D.C.'s traffic gridlock, except during peak rush hours.

After the winter doldrums, crowds begin picking up in late March and peak in early April, when the Japanese cherry trees along the Tidal Basin bloom and Washington is flooded with visitors. Mammoth throngs pack the Mall, and it's elbow to elbow in the National Air and Space Museum. Because of the crowded conditions, we do not recommend touring Washington in the early spring.

Instead, if at all possible, delay your visit until late May or early June. Crowds are more manageable for a few weeks, and the weather is usually delightful.

The tourist pace begins picking up again in mid-June as schools let out. July through mid-August are very crowded—and usually the weather is brutally hot and humid. Popular museums such as the Museum of Natural History, the National Air and Space Museum, and the National Museum of American History (which is currently closed for an extensive renovation) fill up with masses of people; eating in restaurants becomes a stress-inducing ordeal; and the entire experience becomes exhausting. Driving conditions, never good in Washington, degenerate into gridlock—even on weekends—and the Metro is packed to rush-hour levels all day.

The throngs begin to thin during the last two weeks of August, when kids start returning to school. After Labor Day, the volume of visitors drops off significantly during the week, but weekends remain packed through October—though not as packed as in spring and summer. In November, tourist activity slows down dramatically.

After May and June, the best time to visit Washington is in the late fall and winter. While Thanksgiving Day brings hordes of visitors to popular sights on the Mall, car traffic is light and getting around town from November through March is easy. Winter visitors can't count on balmy weather, but crowds are virtually nonexistent and Washington's elaborate cultural season kicks into full swing. Plays, music,

opera, and ballet fill the city's theaters and halls—the Kennedy Center, Arena Stage, the Shakespeare Theater at the Folger, the National Theater, Ford's Theatre, and the Library of Congress. Both business visitors and folks in town to tour the sights will find Washington a lot easier to get around in during the late fall and winter.

A CALENDAR of FESTIVALS *and* EVENTS

January

WASHINGTON RESTAURANT WEEK Early to mid-January. More than 150 area restaurants offer fixed-price lunch (\$20) and dinner (\$30) menus. For more information go to www.washington.org/restaurantwk.

ROBERT E. LEE'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION Mid-January. The birthdays of Confederate General Robert E. Lee (January 19) and of his father, Revolutionary War Colonel Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee (January 29) are celebrated with period music, refreshments, and house tours at the Lee-Fendell House in Old Town Alexandria, home to members of the family from 1885 to 1903; for more information call ☎ 703-548-1789. (Ongoing renovation will prevent the 2007 celebration.)

February

CHINESE NEW YEAR PARADE Early February to early March. Marching bands, lion and dragon dancers, clowns, and other performers celebrate through Chinatown and around Verizon Center; ☎ 202-393-7838.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY February 12. A wreath-laying ceremony, music, and a dramatic reading of the Gettysburg Address at the Lincoln Memorial; ☎ 202-619-7222.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS'S BIRTHDAY February 14. A wreath-laying ceremony, musical tributes, and other activities honor the birthday anniversary of the abolitionist leader at Cedar Hill, the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site; ☎ 202-426-5961.

EAST COAST JAZZ FESTIVAL Mid- to late February. Workshops, recitals, and concerts by top local and national jazz artists sponsored by the Fish Middleton Jazz Scholarship Fund; ☎ 301-933-1822; www.fmjseastcoastjazz.com.

GEORGE WASHINGTON BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION Third weekend. Mount Vernon celebrates the first president's birthday anniversary with parades and a sample of Washington's favorite breakfast, “hoecakes swimming in butter and honey”; music; a wreath-laying ceremony; and free admission; ☎ 703-780-2000.

WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY PARADE Third Sunday. The nation's largest, with marching bands, floats, military reenactors, and other units, on the streets of Old Town Alexandria; ☎ 703-838-4200 or 703-991-4474.

AMERICAN CRAFT COUNCIL CRAFT FAIR Late February. More than 700 craft artists display their works during this annual edition of Maryland's largest indoor craft show at the Baltimore Convention Center; ☎ 410-649-7000 or 800-836-3470.

March

WASHINGTON ANTIQUARIAN BOOK FAIR About 75 exhibitors from across the United States offer rare books, manuscripts, documents, maps, and other memorabilia in this annual benefit for Concord Hill School, March 3 and 4, at the Holiday Inn Rosslyn, 1900 North Fort Myer Drive, Arlington; ☎ 301-654-2626; www.wabf.com.

SPRING ANTIQUES FAIR First weekend. More than 100 dealers offer furniture, folk art, jewelry, and other goods at the D.C. Armory; ☎ 301-933-9433.

ALEXANDRIA ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE First Saturday. The annual parade of floats, bands, Irish dancers, and other units through the streets of Old Town Alexandria; ☎ 703-838-4200 or 703-237-2199.

AMERICAN PIANO FESTIVAL Mid-March. A dozen public events, including concerts, lectures, videos, and symposiums, at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland in College Park; ☎ 301-405-2787.

WASHINGTON ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE Sunday before March 17. Dancers, bagpipers, and marching bands salute Ireland and all things Irish along Constitution Avenue NW from Seventh to 17th streets; ☎ 202-619-7222.

ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL Mid- to late March. Nearly 100 international documentary, feature, animated, archival, and children's films on environmental issues are screened at museums, universities, and other Washington venues; ☎ 202-342-2564 or www.dcenvironmentalfilmfest.org.

EQUINE EVENT EAST Mid-March. An all-breed, all-discipline horse expo with equestrian demonstrations, clinics by experts, and displays by vendors of related goods at Dulles Expo Center Road off Route Chantilly, Virginia; ☎ 410-321-9559 or 703-378-0910.

SMITHSONIAN KITE FESTIVAL Late March. The Smithsonian Institution hosts a free annual festival on the Mall with competitions in design, performance, and other categories; ☎ 202-619-7222 or 202-357-3030; www.kitefestival.org.



NATIONAL CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL Late March into early April. The blooming cherry trees surrounding the Tidal Basin are the centerpiece of this annual festival that culminates in the

annual National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade along Constitution Avenue NW and the Sakura Matsuri Street Festival on Pennsylvania Avenue; ☎ 202-547-1500 or 202-619-7222; www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org.

WHITE HOUSE EASTER EGG ROLL Late March to mid-April (April 8 in 2007, March 23 in 2008, April 12 in 2009, and April 4 in 2010). Colored egg collectings and entertainment held Easter Monday, rain or shine. Open to children ages 3 to 6 accompanied by adults. Free tickets are distributed at Ellipse Visitors Center, 15th and E streets, on the Saturday before Easter, beginning at 7:30 a.m.; ☎ 202-456-2200; www.whitehouse.gov/easter.

AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY CELEBRATION Late March to mid-April. The annual Easter Monday jubilee, with an Easter egg hunt, gospel music, storytellers, and food vendors, at the National Zoo; ☎ 202-633-4800.

April

THOMAS JEFFERSON'S BIRTHDAY Speakers, a military honor guard, and a wreath-laying ceremony mark the birthday anniversary of the third president, noon at the Jefferson Memorial; ☎ 202-619-7222.

MOUNT VERNON GARDEN PARTY Mid-April. Celebrate spring at the first president's estate with music, wagon rides, and gardening demonstrations at Mount Vernon, at the southern end of the George Washington Memorial Parkway; ☎ 703-780-2000; www.mountvernon.org/calendar.

WHITE HOUSE SPRING GARDEN TOURS Mid-April (weather permitting). Free, timed tickets distributed each day on first-come basis at Ellipse Visitors Pavilion at 15th and E streets NW at 7:30 a.m.; ☎ 202-456-2200.

SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHDAY Third Sunday. Annual open house with free cake, children's activities, theater tours, dramatic readings, medieval crafts, and entertainment at the Folger Shakespeare Library; ☎ 202-544-4600; www.folger.edu.

WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL Mid- to late April. Scores of new American and foreign films are screened in theaters across town during the annual Filmfest DC; ☎ 202-628-3456; www.filmfestdc.org.

SMITHSONIAN CRAFT SHOW Third weekend. About 120 artists and artisans display their museum-quality creations in 12 juried media categories at the National Building Museum; ☎ 202-357-4000 or 888-832-9554; www.smithsoniancraftshow.com.

MARYLAND DAY Last Saturday. The University of Maryland holds an open house with exhibits, lectures, demonstrations, tours, and performances throughout the campus in College Park; ☎ 877-868-3777 or 301-405-1000; www.marylandday.umd.edu.

GEORGETOWN HOUSE TOUR Last Saturday. Tour private homes in Washington's Georgetown district; ☎ 202-338-1796; www.georgetownhousetour.com.

May

VIRGINIA GOLD CUP First Saturday. Annual running of the international steeplechase classic at Great Meadow in The Plains, Virginia; ☎ 540-347-1215; www.vagoldcup.com.

CHESAPEAKE BAY BRIDGE WALK First Sunday (weather permitting). 4.3-mile Chesapeake Bay Bridge is closed to vehicles for pedestrian crossing; ☎ 877-229-7726.

MARY LOU WILLIAMS WOMEN IN JAZZ FESTIVAL Second weekend. At multiple sites at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; ☎ 202-467-4600; www.kennedy-center.org/programs/jazz/womeninjazz.

PREAKNESS PARADE Second Saturday. The Preakness Parade, with floats, marching bands, and giant balloons in Baltimore's Inner Harbor, kicks off a week-long celebration culminating in the running of the Preakness Stakes at Pimlico; ☎ 877-225-8466.

NATIONAL ZOO ZOOFARI Mid-May. This annual fund-raising gala features tastings by more than 100 area restaurants, international wines, entertainment, animal demonstrations, and a silent auction at the National Zoo; ☎ 202-633-4800; www.nationalzoo.si.edu.

MOUNT VERNON SPRING WINE FESTIVAL AND SUNSET TOUR Mid- to late May. Taste wines from Virginia vineyards, learn more about George Washington's winemaking efforts, and enjoy live jazz at the first president's estate. Tickets are required; ☎ 202-397-7328 (tickets) or 703-780-2000 (information); www.mountvernon.org.

D.C. CHILI COOK-OFF Third Saturday. The area's leading chili chefs compete for a place in the International Chili Society's world championships, with music on multiple stages and other foods and refreshments around 12th and C streets SW; ☎ 202-244-7900.

PREAKNESS STAKES Third Saturday. Running of the middle jewel in thoroughbred horse racing's Triple Crown at Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore; ☎ 410-542-9400; www.preakness.com.

JOINT SERVICE OPEN HOUSE AND AIR SHOW Mid- to late May. Aerial demonstrations by precision flying teams and other aircraft, a mass paratroop drop, sky diving by the Golden Knights, and ground displays of vintage and modern warplanes are featured at Andrews Air Force Base; ☎ 301-981-4424; public.andrews.af.mil/jsoh/schedule.html.

SHAKESPEARE THEATRE "FREE FOR ALL" Late May to early June. The Shakespeare Theatre presents free outdoor performances of Shakespeare plays at Carter Barron Amphitheatre. Free tickets are distributed day of show; ☎ 202-547-1122 or 202-334-4790; www.shakespearetheatre.org/about/free.aspx.

ROCKVILLE HOMETOWN HOLIDAYS Last weekend. Three-day street festival in Rockville includes Memorial Day parade, Rockville restaurant vendors, children's activities, and local and national entertainers; www.rockvillemd.gov.

NSO MEMORIAL DAY CONCERT Last Sunday. The National Symphony Orchestra and guest performers from Broadway, pop, and country music in a free concert on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol; ☎ 202-619-7222.

MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONIES Last Monday. Commemorative events and wreath layings are scheduled at Arlington National Cemetery, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial, the Air Force Memorial, and the Women in Military Service for America Memorial; ☎ 202-619-7222.

MEMORIAL DAY PARADE Last Monday. Marching bands and veteran units from all 50 states parade down Constitution Avenue, beginning at noon.

MEMORIAL DAY NAVY BAND CONCERT The U.S. Navy Band performs a free concert at the U.S. Navy Memorial; ☎ 202-433-2525 or 202-433-2525.

June

UPPERVILLE COLT AND HORSE SHOW More than 1,000 horse-and-rider teams compete at the show grounds in Upperville; ☎ 540-253-5760 or 540-592-3858; www.upperville.com.

COLUMBIA FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS Mid-June. International, national, and regional music, stage, and dance stars perform over two weeks at venues throughout Columbia; ☎ 410-715-3044; www.columbiafestival.com.

CAPITAL PRIDE FESTIVAL Second weekend. A parade Saturday in the Dupont Circle area and a street festival Sunday along Pennsylvania Avenue with crafts and food vendors wind up week-long celebration by the area's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender residents; ☎ 202-797-3510; www.capitalpride.org.

ANTIQUÉ AND CLASSIC BOAT FESTIVAL Mid-June. Displays of antique and classic boats, wooden boat building demonstrations, a crafts fair, music, and food vendors at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, Maryland; ☎ 410-745-2916; www.chesapeakebayacbs.net.

ALEXANDRIA WATERFRONT FESTIVAL Third weekend. Music on multiple stages, an arts-and-crafts fair, ship tours, exhibits, rides, food vendors, and more at Oronoco Bay Park on the Potomac; ☎ 703-549-8300; www.waterfrontfestival.org.

BOOZ/ALLEN CLASSIC Third week. The world's top golfers compete at this PGA Tour event at Congressional Country Club in Bethesda; ☎ 301-469-3737.

WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL WINE AND FOOD FESTIVAL Late June. Sample thousands of wines from around the world and watch demonstrations by celebrity chefs; tickets required; ☎ 800-343-1174.

NATIONAL CAPITAL BARBECUE BATTLE Late June. Teams from across the country compete to represent the United States in the World Barbecue Championship, with entertainment on multiple stages, cooking demonstrations by celebrity chefs, children's activities, and food vendors, along Pennsylvania Avenue between Ninth and 14th streets NW; ☎ 202-828-3099; www.barbecuebattle.com.

CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL Late June. Parade along Georgia Avenue on Saturday winds up near Howard University with food, dance, arts and crafts, and entertainment; festival continues Sunday; ☎ 202-726-2204.

SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL Late June to early July. Annual festival celebrates the food, music, arts, and culture of at least one state or territory and one foreign country, on the Mall between Seventh and 14th streets; ☎ 202-633-1000; folklife.si.edu/center/festival.html.

July

FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION Independence Day is commemorated with the National Independence Day Parade along Constitution Avenue NW, the "Capitol Fourth" concert by the National Symphony Orchestra, and guest celebrities on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol, culminating in fireworks over the Washington Monument grounds; ☎ 202-619-7222.

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN THEATER FESTIVAL Second weekend through the rest of the month. New American plays are performed in rotating repertory at Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, West Virginia; ☎ 304-876-3473; www.catf.org.

USA/ALEXANDRIA BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION First Saturday. The Alexandria Symphony Orchestra celebrates the City of Alexandria's birthday (it's older) and America with a concert that includes Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* with cannon followed by fireworks at Oronoco Bay Park on the Potomac; ☎ 703-883-4686.

BASTILLE DAY CELEBRATION July 14. Live entertainment and a race by tray-bearing waiters and waitresses down Pennsylvania Avenue from 12th Street to the U.S. Capitol and back; ☎ 202-347-6848.

SCREEN ON THE GREEN Mid-July to mid-August. Monday night outdoor screenings of classic movies on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol; ☎ 202-619-7222.

CHINCOTEAGUE PONY SWIM Late July. Wild ponies are rounded up and swum across the channel for auction in Chincoteague, Virginia, the event made famous by *Misty of Chincoteague*; ☎ 757-336-6161.

LEGG MASON TENNIS CLASSIC First week. The U.S. Open men's tennis tour (and young women pros) stop at FitzGerald Tennis Center in Rock Creek Park; ☎ 202-397-7328 (tickets), ☎ 202-721-9500 (information); www.leggmasontennisclassic.com.

August

COMCAST OUTDOOR FILM FESTIVAL Mid-month. Watch free family feature films on a giant outdoor screen nightly on the lawn of the Music Center at Strathmore in North Bethesda; ☎ 301-581-5100; www.filmfestnih.org.

WASHINGTON RESTAURANT WEEK Early- to mid-August. More than 150 area restaurants offer fixed-price lunch (\$20) and dinner (\$30) menus; www.washington.org/restaurantwk, or contact the DC Convention and Tourism Corporation.

MARYLAND STATE FAIR Late August to Labor Day. Huge old-fashioned fair features livestock displays, home and garden exhibits, thoroughbred racing, carnival rides, and entertainment at the Maryland State Fairgrounds in Timonium; ☎ 410-252-0200; www.marylandstatefair.com.

MARYLAND RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL Late August to late October. Entertainment, food, crafts, and jousting in a re-creation of a 16th-century English village; weekends and Labor Day in Crownsville, outside Annapolis; ☎ 800-296-7304 or 410-266-7304; www.rennfest.com.

September

LABOR DAY CONCERT First Sunday. Broadway, pop, country, and armed-forces bands join the National Symphony Orchestra for a free concert on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol; ☎ 202-619-7222.

NAVY BAND CONCERT First Monday. The U.S. Navy Band and Sea Chanters commemorate Labor Day with a free concert at the U.S. Navy Memorial; ☎ 202-433-2525 or 202-433-2525.

ALEXANDRIA FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS Second weekend. An outdoor festival features sculptures, paintings, photography, fused glass, jewelry, and other works by more than 150 artists and artisans along King Street in Old Town Alexandria; ☎ 703-838-5005 or 703-838-4200.

NATIONAL CAPITAL CAT SHOW Second weekend. More than 500 cats compete in nation's largest feline show at Dulles Expo Center in Chantilly, Virginia; ☎ 703-378-0910; www.nationalcapitalcatshow.com.

BLACK FAMILY REUNION Second weekend. Annual cultural celebration of the African American family, with live entertainment, exhibits, an arts-and-crafts marketplace, and food vendors on the Mall; ☎ 202-737-0120.

KENNEDY CENTER OPEN HOUSE Mid-September. Free daylong celebration of music, ballet, theater, and other performance arts on multiple indoor and outdoor stages at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; ☎ 202-467-4600; www.kennedy-center.org/openhouse.

ROSSLYN JAZZ FESTIVAL Mid-September. Daylong free outdoor concerts by local and national jazz stars at Gateway Park (near the Rosslyn Metro station); ☎ 703-228-1850; www.rossren.com/ros_arts_jazzfest.cfm.

SILVER SPRING JAZZ FESTIVAL Mid-September. Daylong free outdoor concerts by local and national jazz stars downtown (near Silver Spring Metro station); ☎ 301-565-7300.

ADAMS-MORGAN DAY Second Saturday. Daylong celebration of Washington's most famous multicultural neighborhood with entertainment, children's activities, food vendors, and sports; ☎ 202-232-1960; www.adamsmorganday.org.

ARTS-ON-FOOT FESTIVAL Mid-September. Free performances, artist demonstrations, cooking lessons, open rehearsals, and theatrical events in Washington's Penn Quarter; ☎ 202-482-7271; www.artsonfoot.org.

18TH-CENTURY FAIR Mid-September. Crafts displays and demonstrations by artisans in Colonial attire, 18th-century entertainment, and children's activities at Mount Vernon; ☎ 703-780-2000; www.mountvernon.org.

KALORAMA HOUSE AND EMBASSY TOUR Mid-September. Visit embassies, ambassadors' residences, and other sites; ☎ 202-387-4062.

MOUNTAIN HERITAGE CRAFTS FESTIVAL Third weekend. Displays by about 200 artists and artisans, music by bluegrass bands, and food vendors; between Harpers Ferry and Charles Town, West Virginia; ☎ 304-725-2055 or 800-624-0577; www.jeffersoncounty.com/festival.

INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL Third weekend. Children's performers from around the world entertain on multiple stages at Wolf Trap Park in Vienna; ☎ 703-642-0862 or 703-255-1860; www.artsfairfax.org/festival/index.shtml.

COLUMBIA CLASSIC GRAND PRIX Late September. World-class and Olympic team riders compete in this annual equestrian event at Howard Community College in Columbia; ☎ 410-772-4450; www.howardcc.edu/grandprix.

NATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL Last Saturday. More than 70 authors of all types gather for readings, signings, and literacy exhibits along the Mall; www.loc.gov/bookfest.

October

MOUNT VERNON FALL WINE FESTIVAL AND SUNSET TOUR October 6 to 8. Taste wines from Virginia vineyards, learn more about George Washington's winemaking efforts, and enjoy live jazz at the first president's estate; at the southern end of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Tickets are required, and advance purchase is recommended. For tickets, ☎ 202-397-7328; for information, call ☎ 703-780-2000 or visit www.mountvernon.org.

DUKE ELLINGTON JAZZ FESTIVAL First weekend. Over 60 concerts at venues around town, including the Kennedy Center and the Mall; www.dejazzfest.org.

WATERFORD FAIR First weekend. The 62nd annual festival on the streets of this 1733 village, with music, a crafts fair, crafts demonstrations, and tours of Colonial homes in Waterford, Virginia; ☎ 540-882-3018 or 540-882-3085; www.waterfordva-wca.org/waterford-fair.htm.

TASTE OF BETHESDA First Saturday. This street festival features samples from area restaurants, entertainment on multiple stages, and kids' activities in downtown Bethesda; ☎ 301-215-6660; www.bethesda.org/specialevents/taste/taste.htm.

ART ON THE AVENUE First Saturday. A multicultural arts festival, with exhibits by more than 300 artists, entertainment, and food vendors, along Mount Vernon Avenue in Alexandria; ☎ 703-683-3100; www.artontheavenue.org.

ALEXANDRIA SEAPORT DAY First Saturday. Boat-building demonstrations, model boat-building workshops, exhibits, and boat rides at Waterfront Park in Old Town Alexandria; ☎ 703-549-7078; www.alexandriaseaport.org.

FESTIVAL OF THE BUILDING ARTS First Saturday. Hands-on activities for all ages illustrate the skills used in the building arts at the National Building Museum; ☎ 202-272-2448; www.nbm.org.

COLUMBUS DAY CEREMONY A celebration of the explorer's achievements at the Columbus Memorial Statue at Union Station; ☎ 202-619-7222.

WHITE HOUSE FALL GARDEN TOURS Mid-October. Free, timed tickets distributed each day on first-come basis at Ellipse Visitors Pavilion at 15th and E streets NW at 7:30 a.m.; ☎ 202-456-2200.

INTERNATIONAL GOLD CUP Third Saturday. Annual running of this fall classic steeplechase race at Great Meadow in The Plains, Virginia; ☎ 540-347-1215; www.vagoldcup.com.

GRAND MILITIA MUSTER Third weekend. Competitions and pageantry by St. Maries City Militia and other 17th-century military reenactment units in Historic St. Mary's City, Maryland's first capital, in St. Mary's County; ☎ 800-762-1634.

BETHESDA ROW ARTS FESTIVAL Third weekend. More than 180 artists and artisans display their creations along four blocks in downtown Bethesda; ☎ 301-816-6958; www.bethesdarowarts.org.

WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOW Late October. Hundreds of horses and riders from around the world compete in hunter and jumper events at the Verizon Center. For tickets, ☎ 202-397-7328; for information, ☎ 202-628-3200 or 301-987-9400; www.wihs.org.

"BOO AT THE ZOO" Last weekend. Halloween trick-or-treating, animal demonstrations, and zookeeper talks at the National Zoo; ☎ 202-633-4800; www.nationalzoo.si.edu.

MARINE CORPS MARATHON Last Sunday in October. Tens of thousands of runners start at the Iwo Jima Memorial in Arlington and follow a course into Washington, along the Mall and back to the Memorial; ☎ 800-786-8762; www.marinemarathon.com.

November

VETERANS DAY CEREMONIES November 11. Commemorations and wreath-laying ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery, the U.S. Navy Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Vietnam Women's Memorial, and the Women in Military Service for America Memorial; ☎ 202-619-7222.

WATERFOWL FESTIVAL Mid-November. The annual festival celebrates ducks and geese in photographs, paintings, carvings, sculpture, and other media, with music, duck-calling contests, children's activities, and food vendors in Easton, Maryland; ☎ 410-822-4567; www.waterfowlfestival.org.

WASHINGTON CRAFT SHOW Mid-November. Nearly 200 artists from across the country display their glassworks, furniture, textiles, and other creations at the Washington Convention Center; ☎ 202-249-3000 or 203-254-0486; www.craftsamericashows.com.

MOUNT VERNON BY CANDLELIGHT Thanksgiving weekend though early December. Tour the first president's estate, including the usually closed third-floor Cupola; ☎ 703-780-2000; www.mountvernon.org.

December

KENNEDY CENTER HOLIDAY FESTIVAL All month. The Kennedy Center celebrates the holidays with free performances and ticketed concerts; ☎ 202-467-4600; www.kennedy-center.org.

D.C. WINTER ANTIQUES FAIR First weekend. More than 100 dealers offer fine art, furniture, jewelry, and other goods at the D.C. Armory; ☎ 301-933-9433.

SCOTTISH CHRISTMAS WALK First Saturday. More than 100 Scottish clan units parade through Old Town Alexandria; ☎ 703-549-0111 or 703-838-4200; www.scottishchristmaswalk.com.

HOLIDAY SING-A-LONG First Sunday. Free family carol-sing at Wolf Trap Park in Vienna; ☎ 877-965-3872 or 703-255-1860; www.wolftrap.org.

PAGEANT OF PEACE Early December. The lighting of the National Christmas Tree on the Ellipse, usually by the President and First Lady, kicks off a month of free holiday activities, including nightly choral performances and a display of lighted trees representing the state and territories; ☎ 202-208-1631 or 202-619-7222; www.pageantofpeace.org.

PEARL HARBOR DAY December 7. A ceremony commemorates the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor at the U.S. Navy Memorial; ☎ 202-737-2300.

HISTORICAL ALEXANDRIA CANDLELIGHT TOUR Second Sunday. Sites include the Lloyd House, Lee-Fendell House, Gadsby's Tavern Museum, and the Carlyle House in Old Town Alexandria, with music, colonial dancing, period decorations, and light refreshment; ☎ 703-838-4242.

NEW YEAR'S EVE Family-oriented, alcohol-free "First Night" festivals with concerts, children's entertainers, and other activities are in Alexandria (☎ 703-838-4200), Annapolis (☎ 410-268-8553), Fredericksburg (☎ 800-260-3646), Leesburg (☎ 703-777-6306), Warrenton (☎ 703-777-6306), and Baltimore's Inner Harbor (☎ 877-225-8466).

The Longest Lines

Unlike Disney World, a tourist destination with which Washington shares some similarities, D.C. has only a handful of attractions that require enduring long queues—most notably, the U.S. Capitol and the FBI (currently closed to tourists). Even at these, a little judicious planning can virtually guarantee you won't spend hours standing in line.

If your visit to Washington must coincide with the heavy tourist season, read on: There are ways to make it more tolerable, in spite of the record crowds jamming the Mall, the popular museums, eateries, public transportation, and highways. Check Part Five (page 113) for detailed information on transportation and Part Six (page 133) for sightseeing tips.

THE LOCAL PRESS

WASHINGTON IS A CITY OF NEWS JUNKIES, and the *Washington Post* is the opiate of choice. Visitors should make a point of picking up Friday's edition, which includes the paper's "Weekend" section. It's loaded with information on things to do in and around Washington; if you can, grab a copy of a Friday Post on your way into town for the weekend.

The *Washington Times*, D.C.'s other major daily newspaper, offers a more conservative slant on national and world events.

City Paper, a free weekly "alternative" newspaper, is another good source of information on arts, theater, clubs, popular music, and movie reviews. It's available from street-corner vending machines and stores all over town.

The *Washingtonian*, a monthly magazine, is strong on lists (top 10 restaurants, etc.) and provides a calendar of events, dining information, and feature articles.

Where/Washington is one of several free publications that list popular things to do around town; it's usually available in your hotel or at airport racks.

Visitors looking for the latest information on Washington theater, nightlife, restaurants, special exhibitions, and gallery shows in advance of their trip should call or write:

Where/Washington Magazine, 1225 19th Street NW, Suite 510, Washington, D.C. 20036-2411, ☎ 202-463-4550.

The *Washingtonian*, 1828 L Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, D.C. 20036, ☎ 202-331-0715.

WHAT *to* PACK

WASHINGTON MAY BE A TOURIST TOWN, but it's also an old Southern city, and a cosmopolitan center to boot. Which means you'll be tolerated in shorts during the day—and Lord knows you'll be one of hundreds—but you might feel a social chill if you wear that Hawaiian shirt to a moderately upscale restaurant for dinner. (Everyone will be too polite to actually comment unless you're a celebrity, in which case you'll be assumed to be making a fashion statement.) After all, most people will still be in work clothes—at least long pants if not suits.

This doesn't mean you have to pack a tuxedo, unless you have a formal engagement. But it never hurts to dress up rather than down. A nice sports jacket or even sweater, for either sex, is not only a way of looking nice but of usefully offsetting either air-conditioning or off-season chill. (Plus, sweaters pack thinner than sweatshirts.)

In general, shorts and polo shirts are fine for day close to half the year (spring and fall are temperate times); a sundress or reasonably neat pair of khakis will make you look downright respectable. A rainproof top of some sort, a lightweight jacket and/or sweater may be all you'll need in the summer; not only will you probably be going in and out of air-conditioning or showers, but if you're flying into Washington, you'll have that on-and-off-the-airplane chill.

Something along the lines of a trench coat with a zip-in lining or a wool walking coat with a sweater will usually do in winter. Fur coats are not a moral issue in Washington but are only likely to be necessary in January or February, and the hassle of dealing with them on planes these days makes them unpleasant unless you're staying for some time.

Women will find a heavy scarf or shawl a good interim layer in fall, and it will stand in as a sweater (or throw) in emergencies. Men should take not just polite little pocket squares but decent-sized handkerchiefs: they make good seat covers and sun protectors as well as forehead moppers.

With the ever-shifting regulations about packing on-board items, we would recommend you pack only the amount of any prescription medicines you really need for 12 hours of so, but carry photocopies of the prescription or numbers in case your packed bag gets lost. Zippered plastic bags are one of the great inventions of humanity: they

unofficial TIP

A penlight and magnifying reading glasses may come in handy for perusing small or dimly lit art or museum captions.

keep dry clothes dry and wet clothes separated, keep your underwear together so the luggage inspector doesn't have to sort through them, prevent jewelry from tarnishing, and prevent shampoos and lotions from leaking. Those stain-removing pens or packets can be very helpful, too.

Frankly, the most important thing to consider when packing is comfortable shoes, and more than one pair of them. This is a culture of concrete and marble, and even if you are using one of the trolleys or shuttles, you're likely to be standing about at monuments and in museums quite a bit. Wearing walking or running shoes during the day is fine, but don't think you're necessarily going to want to pull on those high heels or shiny lace-ups at the end of a long day of sightseeing. Pick your evening shoes (or boots) with reasonable comfort in mind.

Finally, as longtime travelers, we can assure you that the most common mistake tourists make is packing too much—expecting to wear a different outfit every day (and evening). Nobody is going to know if you wear the same shirt twice, or the same jeans or khakis. Little black dress? Think little black skirt—something thin that folds flat. If you do overpack, you're just going to have to lug a heavier suitcase around. (Why do you think they call it luggage?) And besides, you're probably going to buy a souvenir T-shirt anyway.

PEOPLE *with* SPECIAL NEEDS

WASHINGTON IS ONE OF THE MOST accessible cities in the world for folks with disabilities. With the equal-opportunity federal government as the major employer in the area, Washington provides a good job market for disabled people. As a result, the service sector—bus drivers, waiters, ticket sellers, retail clerks, cab drivers, tour guides, and so on—are somewhat more attuned to the needs of people with disabilities than service-sector employees in other cities. It doesn't hurt that a number of organizations that lobby for physically challenged people are headquartered in Washington.

The Metro, for example, was designed to meet federal standards for accessibility. As a result, the stations and trains provide optimal services to a wide array of people with special requirements. Elevators provide access to the mezzanine, or ticketing areas platform, and street level; call the Metro's 24-hour elevator hot line at ☎ 202-962-1825 to check if the elevators at the stations you plan to use are operating.

The edge of the train platform is built with a 14-inch smooth, light-gray granite strip that's different in texture from the rest of the station's flooring so that visually impaired passengers can detect the platform edge with a foot or cane. Flashing lights embedded in the granite

strip alert hearing-impaired passengers that a train is entering the station. Handicapped-only parking spaces are placed close to station entrances. While purchasing a farecard is a strictly visual process (unless the station is equipped with the talking vending machines), visually impaired passengers can go to the nearby kiosk for assistance. Priority seating for senior citizens and passengers with disabilities is located next to doors in all cars.

Visitors with disabilities who possess a transit ID from their home city can pick up a courtesy Metro ID that provides substantial fare discounts; the ID is good for a month. Go to Metro Headquarters, 600 Fifth Street NW, from 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekdays to pick one up; call ☎ 202-962-1245 for more information. If you want to ride the Metro to get there, the nearest station is Judiciary Square (F Street exit), a half-block away. For a free guide with information on Metro's rail and bus system for the elderly and physically disabled, call ☎ 202-637-1328. "Metro Mobility Link" is a help line for people with disabilities. Call ☎ 202-962-6464 for basic as well as more specialized information on Metro stations.

The Smithsonian and the National Park Service, agencies that run the lion's share of popular sights in Washington, offer top-notch services to people with disabilities. Museums are equipped with entrance ramps, barrier-free exhibits, elevator service to all floors, and accessible restrooms and water fountains. Visually impaired visitors can pick up large-print brochures, audio tours, and raised-line drawings of museum artifacts at many Smithsonian museums. The National Air and Space Museum offers special tours that let visitors touch models and artifacts; call ☎ 202-357-2700 for information.

 **unofficial TIP**
Designated handicapped parking spaces are located along Jefferson Drive on the Mall.

Hearing-impaired visitors to the National Air and Space Museum can arrange tours with an interpreter by calling ☎ 202-357-2700. Public telephones in the museum are equipped with amplification, and the briefing room is equipped with audio loop. For a copy of the Smithsonian's "A Guide for Disabled Visitors," call ☎ 202-357-2700 or ☎ 202-357-1729 (TDD).

The Lincoln and Jefferson memorials and the Washington Monument are equipped to accommodate disabled visitors. Most sightseeing attractions have elevators for seniors and others who want to avoid a lot of stair climbing. The White House, for example, has a special entrance on Pennsylvania Avenue for visitors arriving in wheelchairs, and White House guides usually allow visually handicapped visitors to touch some of the items described on tours.

Tourmobile offers a special van equipped with a wheelchair and scooter lift for disabled visitors. The van visits all the regular sites on the tour; in fact, visitors can usually specify what sites they want to see in any order, and the van will wait until they are finished touring. The

service is the same price as the standard Tourmobile rate, \$20 for adults and \$10 for children. Call ☎ 202-554-7020 at least a day in advance to reserve a van. Information is available at www.tourmobile.com.

In spite of all the services available to disabled visitors, it's still a good idea to call ahead to any facility you plan to visit and confirm that services are in place and that the particular exhibit or gallery you wish to see is still available.

Foreign visitors to Washington who would like a tour conducted in their native language can contact the **Guide Service of Washington** (see “Get Up Close and Personal” on page 155).

GETTING *to* WASHINGTON

FOLKS PLANNING A TRIP to our nation's capital have some options when it comes to getting there: by car, train, or plane. Your distance from Washington—and your tolerance for hassles such as Capital Beltway gridlock and inconveniently located airports—will probably determine which mode of transportation you ultimately take. (See also Part Four, Arriving and Getting Oriented, page 87.)

DRIVING

A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO LIVE in the populous Eastern Seaboard or anywhere else within a 12-hour drive of D.C. automatically jump in the family car when embarking on a vacation to Washington. And no wonder: even though gasoline prices have increased, a nearly complete interstate highway system makes the car trip both easy and inexpensive. The problem, however, is when you arrive in Washington . . . or, to be more exact, when you hit the notorious Capital Beltway that surrounds the city in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs. Arrive on a weekday morning between 6:30 a.m. and 10 a.m. or in the afternoon from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. and you'll discover why Washington has a reputation for traffic congestion rivaled only by New York and Los Angeles: traffic inches along during rush hours and is astonishingly heavy the rest of the day and on warm-weather weekends as well. It only gets worse the closer you get to the Mall. Washington's peculiar geography and 18th-century street layout, coupled with unremitting urban and suburban growth, makes touring by car almost impossible. Street parking near popular tourist sights is severely limited, and parking garages, while plentiful in downtown D.C., are expensive and often inconvenient. Our recommendation: If at all possible, leave the car at home. Washington's air-and-rail connections are excellent, and its Metro subway system is one of the best in the world. And where the Metro won't take you—Georgetown, Mount Vernon, and the Washington National Cathedral come to mind—plentiful cabs, shuttle buses, and commercial touring outfits will. If you do drive, arrive on a weekend to miss the worst traffic, or very early or late on

a weekday. Stay at a hotel with off-street parking and within easy walking distance to a Metro station. Use public transportation and leave the car parked through most of your stay.

TAKING THE TRAIN

WASHINGTON'S GLEAMING UNION STATION, recently refurbished and the city's most visited tourist attraction (the National Air and Space Museum is number two), is only one of the reasons that taking the train to D.C. is an excellent idea. Another is convenience: Folks living along the East Coast from Boston to Miami are served daily by Amtrak, and lots of people living east of the Mississippi are

Amtrak Passenger-train Service to Washington

| REGION/CITY | DISTANCE | TRAVEL TIME | FREQUENCY |
|------------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| NORTHEAST | | | |
| Philadelphia | 115 miles | 1.5–2 hours | more than 1 per hour |
| New York City | 225 miles | 3–4.5 hours | more than 1 per hour |
| Boston | 400 miles | 8–9.75 hours | 11 per day |
| SOUTH | | | |
| Richmond | 110 miles | 2 hours | 8 per day |
| Newport News | 187 miles | 4 hours | 2 per day |
| Raleigh-Durham | 305 miles | 6 hours | 2 per day |
| Charlotte | 376 miles | 8.5–10 hours | 2 per day |
| Charleston, S.C. | 503 miles | 9–9.5 hours | 2 per day |
| Atlanta | 633 miles | 13.5 hours | 1 per day |
| Birmingham | 799 miles | 18 hours | 1 per day |
| New Orleans | 1,155 miles | 25–36 hours | 1 per day |
| Jacksonville | 753 miles | 13.5–15 hours | 3 per day |
| Tampa | 996 miles | 18 hours | 1 per day |
| Orlando | 1,129 miles | 16.5–18.5 hours | 2 per day |
| Miami | 1,166 miles | 22.5–24 hours | 3 per day |
| WEST | | | |
| Pittsburgh | 300 miles | 7.5 hours | 1 per day |
| Cleveland | 440 miles | 11 hours | 1 per day |
| Toledo | 550 miles | 13 hours | 1 per day |
| Cincinnati | 602 miles | 14 hours | 3 per week |
| Chicago | 780 miles | 18 hours | 10 per week |

close to direct rail service into the nation's capital. In some cases you can board the train in the evening and arrive in Washington in the morning. From Union Station you're only minutes from a downtown hotel by subway—the Union Station Metro is right alongside the tracks and covered from the weather—or, if your hotel isn't near a Metro stop, you can easily hail a cab. Because of the city's exasperating traffic—and a public-transportation system that virtually eliminates the need for a car—it's the smart way to travel to Washington. We've provided a listing of some major cities with direct Amtrak passenger train service to Washington's Union Station (the frequency of service indicates the number of trains running in both directions). For schedules and reservations, call Amtrak at ☎ 800-872-7245 or visit www.amtrak.com.

FLYING

WASHINGTON, THE SEAT OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT and probably the world's most powerful city, is understandably well served by the airline industry. The town boasts three airports, each with its own peculiarities. **Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport** is by far the most convenient, located a few miles south of D.C. on the Virginia side of the Potomac River. Yet its closeness to the city has resulted in some odd restrictions: planes aren't allowed to fly over the White House and other sensitive places, so all approaches and takeoffs are routed over the Potomac River; no planes are allowed to take off or land late at night; only 37 large jets are allowed to land or take off in an hour; and a “perimeter rule” restricts nonstop flights to and from National to a distance of 1,250 miles or less. With virtually no international connections, think of National as the “East Coast short-hop” airport. If you can't get a direct flight into National from your hometown, consider making a connection that will get you into National. It will probably be faster—and certainly more convenient—than flying into either of the other two airports that serve Washington. While the recently refurbished (for about \$1 billion) National is our first choice for travelers flying into D.C., its close proximity to the bustling city can create problems for the unwary flyer: it's often congested by heavy traffic; parking is expensive; long-term parking is a long bus ride away; and renting a car and driving into D.C. can be a drawn-out, frustrating experience. The good news: cab fares to downtown are reasonable; free shuttles can get you to your hotel in a half-hour or so; and National has its own Metro stop.

Dulles International Airport is 45 minutes to an hour from the city by car and with no direct public transportation downtown (although a light-rail connection to the Vienna Metro is being studied). Dulles is primarily known as an international hub, although domestic flights are on the increase (spurring a construction project that in 1996 doubled the main terminal's size to 1.1 million square feet).

In a sly marketing move a few years back, Baltimore's Friendship Airport became **Baltimore-Washington International Airport (BWI)**, and eventually Thurgood Marshall Baltimore-Washington International (whew!). It worked: 2000 was a record-breaking year for this ever-expanding air hub. Southwest Airlines, for example, has increased its low-cost service to 65 flights a day, attracting a lot of travelers to Washington who would otherwise drive. BWI is also aggressively pursuing an international market and in 1997 opened a \$110-million international pier. Yet this busy airport is still closer to Baltimore than to Washington, which means D.C.-bound tourists face at least a 50-minute car or van ride before the Washington Monument comes into view. Another option for folks arriving at BWI is to take the train: Maryland commuter rail service (called MARC) and Amtrak connect BWI to D.C.'s Union Station. The train ride takes almost an hour, though—hardly convenient for tourists itching to explore the marble edifices lining the Mall.

