

Explore: Washington DC

Words: Rob Yandell

► LIVE LIKE A LOCAL

Get underneath the skin of Washington by organising a group with **DC Metro Food Tours** and exploring the city's neighbourhoods, the food and its people. Get away from the major tourist areas and visit places such as Old Town Alexandria and enjoy a former British Colonial town that brings you through the original streets drawn by George Washington. Or how about a fun pub crawl that combines a historic walking tour with stops at bars and pubs favoured by the locals?

► WHERE TO STAY?

Holiday Inn Washington-Georgetown is only a 15-minute walk to the heart of lovely Georgetown but a more affordable option from a trusted brand, albeit a hotel lacking soul.

www.ihg.com/holidayinn

Expect an ultra modern, cool stay at the five-star W Hotel. It's not for everyone's taste but is very well appointed, right in the heart of Washington and with a hip rooftop bar overlooking the White House.

www.washingtondc.com

The Henley Park Hotel was originally a grand residence frequented by high society in years gone by. Its central location means an easy walk to the main attractions - expect large fireplaces and grand archways in this boutique independent.

www.henleypark.com

► ESSENTIAL SIGHTS

The White House: Photos of the front and back are obligatory for any tourist but tours are hard to come by. You won't be able to organise something through a tour operator and your best chance is to contact the British Embassy in DC in plenty of time before your group visit. Then cross your fingers.

The Capitol Building: The famous white domed building is home to Congress and you can take the tour. But as non-US residents you will need to pre-book via the website and keeping everyone together is difficult depending on your size and the time of your group visit. There is an excellent museum to wander around before and/or after your tour.

The Lincoln Memorial: It's a simple yet grand monument honouring the 16th president of the United States and, like many of DC's buildings, there's a Romanesque influence to its architecture. A large statue of Lincoln sits between two of his most famous speeches on each wall: the Gettysburg Address and his Second Inaugural Address. The memorial is located at one end of the National Mall and you can gaze all the way back, past the Washington Monument to the Capitol Building. The best time to enjoy the surroundings is early in the morning when the sun rises and your fellow tourists are still sleeping.



▶ BEST FOR GROUPS

See the city by bike on one of the excellent tours from **Bike n Roll**. For a small group it's a lot of fun and means you can get some exercise too. From easy to moderate, short or long, you can choose a tour level that suits. Not only can you 'bike the sites' around the National Mall and Capitol Hill, but there is an option to explore charming Alexandria across the river. You can also opt for a segway instead of a bike or create a bespoke tour.

There are lots of excellent museums in Washington with 17 **Smithsonian Museums** and Galleries to explore. All are free and open daily. Your options include the Natural History Museum or the excellent National Museum of American History. Seeing the very first American flag and the iconic black hat which was worn by Abraham Lincoln the night he was shot is quite remarkable.

From Pulitzer Prize Photographs, to new media and newspapers from the American Civil War; the acclaimed **Newseum** explores how the press and media have reported and commented on the most significant world events throughout history. Not only are the places, people and landmarks themselves interesting, but the way in which news coverage has changed is fascinating.



> The Lincoln Memorial is just one of the sights you can visit by exploring DC by bike or even segway.

▶ FOOD & DRINK

With Washington having more Ethiopian restaurants than anywhere else in the US, sample spicy stews in the U Street Corridor known as 'Little Ethiopia'.

For something a little more traditional, try one of the eateries in lovely Georgetown, which is an historic neighbourhood that grew up some 40 years before DC. I recommend paying a visit to Martin's Tavern where you can sit at one of the booths frequented by presidents from Truman to Bush and tuck into something hearty.

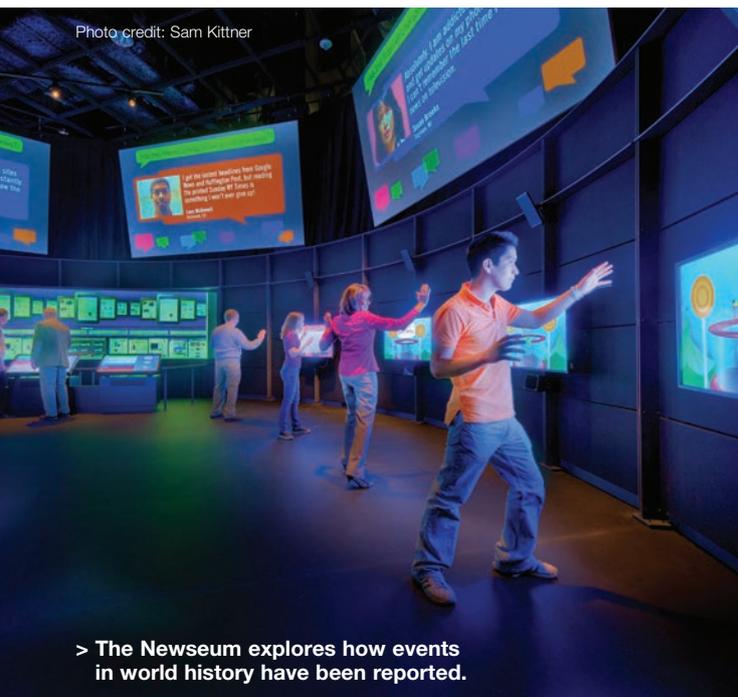


Photo credit: Sam Kittner

> The Newseum explores how events in world history have been reported.

▶ FACT FILE

Journey time: Approximately seven to seven and a half hours flight from London.

Currency: US Dollar.

Best time to go: When the famous cherry blossom trees are in bloom. Nature is unpredictable, but if you travel to DC at the beginning of April you're likely to see some stunning colour. ■

 <http://washington.org/groups>



> The Washington Monument from the World War Two Memorial on the National Mall.