

August 25, 2006

## 36 Hours in Washington, D.C.

By ADAM NAGOURNEY

WASHINGTON, in many ways, is an unsurprising place to visit — an expanse of monuments, symbols and sites familiar to any American who watches the evening news (or, at least, "West Wing"). Which is not to say that Washington can't be, with a little effort, a city of surprises and unfamiliar delights. So, yes, any 36 hours in Washington should include trips to all those famous buildings and memorials, but it should also include excursions to places that perhaps if less famous, are all the more interesting.

Friday

6 p.m.

### 1) THE BIG PICTURE

It's your first night, so head for Hotel Washington (515 15th Street NW, 202-638-5900; [www.hotelwashington.com](http://www.hotelwashington.com)), take the elevator to the top floor for drinks on the roof and walk out to a sweeping view. Be sure to check out the aerial view of the White House: it's a new perspective on the country's most familiar home and — we're not giving away any national secrets here, Mr. Vice President — a peek at some of the security apparatus that goes into guarding a president.

8 p.m.

### 2) CLAP YOUR HANDS, AND EAT

Here are two options on how to spend your first night here. Before you arrive, find out who is playing at the 9:30 Club (815 V Street NW, 202-265-0930; [www.930.com](http://www.930.com)). This is an out-of-the-way music club in a dicey neighborhood. It has great sound and heaps of personality and is arguably one of the best places in the country to see a show. The club attracts an eclectic roster of bands — think Wilco and Clap Your Hands Say Yeah. These shows sell out fast, and it's standing only for a good two hours — be warned, Baby Boomers. Shows generally start around 9:30 or 10, so that gives you time for an early dinner. Try out Al Crostino (1324 U Street NW, 202-797-0523), an unpretentious postage stamp of a restaurant that serves some of the better Italian food in the city. Ask for a table upstairs, tell the waiter you have a 9:30 to catch and try the vitello tonnato (chilled veal in a tuna sauce) or the linguine with shrimp and cherry tomatoes. If the 9:30 Club isn't your thing, make a night of dinner. Go to Penn Quarter, a vibrant Washington neighborhood, for Zaytinya (701 Ninth Street NW, 202-638-0800) a Mediterranean tapas restaurant, that serves fresh Middle Eastern plates in a bustling setting of candles and soaring ceilings. "It feels like New York," a friend said at dinner one recent night. Precisely. Try the grilled pork and orange rind sausage with white beans; the labneh, or Lebanese yogurt; and the potatoes fried in Greek olive oil. A

word of warning: Zaytinya is one of those Washington restaurants that annoyingly does not take reservations. As you wait, though, you can lounge at the bar and take a bath in one of its huge martinis.

Saturday

8 a.m.

### 3) OXYGEN DEBT

If you like running or biking, this is one of the delights of Washington: There are plenty of great places to do both. One of the best is the Towpath trail, which starts at the foot of Georgetown, where you can either run or rent a bike and make your way along the Potomac.

Noon

### 4) HEY, GET LOST!

If the weather is nice, explore Georgetown, a historic neighborhood of narrow tree-lined streets, some still with cobblestones, and historic homes and churches. And the best way to see Georgetown is to get lost there. Wander the streets randomly, notice the pleasing details of the Federal houses and, if the need arises, spot what passes for a celebrity in Washington. (Yes, that probably is the senator or television correspondent you think it is.) Keep an eye out for "Open House" signs: it's a great way to see the hidden Georgetown. Just walk right in for a completely authorized inside look at Washington parlors and excesses. Some friends and I could hardly contain ourselves when we visited a \$2.5 million, one-bedroom town house that had a mahogany paneled bathroom and a jungle-canopy bed.

4 p.m.

### 5) TIME TO REMEMBER

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Maya Lin's senior thesis project, looks best late in the day, when the sunlight doesn't shine as fiercely on the harsh, black granite. The memorial is hauntingly moving and easily overwhelming. And it should give solace to those who despair whether [New York City](#) planners will be able to agree on a fitting tribute on the grounds of the World Trade Center.

7:30 p.m.

### 6) HOLDING COURT

The Cafe Milano (3251 Prospect Street NW, 202-333-6183), in Georgetown, is as much theater as food. It is a swirl of young and old, Georgetown and Capitol Hill, [Europe](#) and Washington, and the closest thing you'll get to a celebrity palace in Washington. (Was that really [John Kerry](#) having dinner on the patio? Why, yes!) It is not at all that unusual to find Vice President [Dick Cheney](#) having dinner in one corner of the restaurant, while [Terry McAuliffe](#), the former [Democratic National Committee](#) chairman and a friend of the Clintons, holds court from his regular table in the front right corner of the dining room. The food here is quite good (if often staggeringly expensive). Start with a Cafe Milano thin-crust and crisp pizza or focaccia with fresh rosemary; try the spaghetti Zegna with Manila clams and roasted branzino.

10 p.m.

#### 7) MEMORIAL NIGHT

Ask a cabdriver (or, if you have a car, do it yourself) for a nighttime tour of the monuments. It's a great time to walk up the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, then turn around and let the reflecting pool guide your gaze to the Washington Monument. The city is not as safe as it once was, so if you decide to walk around here, which is tempting in the moonlight, keep an eye out around you.

Sunday

8 a.m.

#### 8) HYMNS AND PRAYERS

On Lafayette Square, you will find St. John's Church, where, as the placard on the outside wall will tell you, every president since James Madison has come to pray. If President Bush is in town, the chances are pretty good that you will see him and his wife, Laura, show up for services at this small Episcopal church.

Noon

#### 9) HARDY PERENNIALS

The [National Gallery of Art](#) opened a sculpture garden, above, in 1999 next to its West Wing, a splendid expanse of art, flora and fountains (202-737-4215; [www.nga.gov](#)). There is much to soak up here, in particular a characteristically playful work of painted aluminum by [Roy Lichtenstein](#). After touring the grounds, stop by the cafe for paninis and salads that can be eaten beside the cool fountain that anchors this garden.

1 p.m.

#### 10) MUSEUM TWOFER

It's an easy walk to the Old Patent Office Building, a Greek Revival gem that houses two museums in one: the American Art Museum (202-275-1500, [www.americanart.si.edu](#)) and the National Portrait Gallery (202-633-1000, [www.npg.si.edu](#)), just opened by the [Smithsonian Institution](#) after a six-year \$300 million renovation and redesign. Give yourself time; this is a huge building (an entire block between F and G Streets) with much to explore.

4 p.m.

#### 11) SPY VS. SPY

If you are with children, and they have endured the sculpture garden and the portraits and all those American artists, you can reward them by going across the street to the International Spy Museum (800 F Street NW, 202-393-7798; [www.spymuseum.org](#)) for a lively, entertaining and interactive exhibition on everything you might want to know about spying. And if you can still walk, now it's time to go.

## The Basics

Hotel Monaco (700 F Street NW, 202-628-7177; [www.monaco-dc.com](http://www.monaco-dc.com)) is a spiffy luxury boutique hotel right in Penn Quarter across from the National Portrait Gallery. Rates range from \$169 to \$429.

Westin Embassy Row (2100 Massachusetts Avenue NW, 202-293-2100; [www.starwoodhotels.com/westin](http://www.starwoodhotels.com/westin)) is in a good location right off Dupont Circle and near a Red Line Metro station and an easy walk to Georgetown. Weekend rates are \$129 to \$189.

Embassy Suites Hotel Washington, D.C. (1250 22nd Street NW, 202-857-3388; [www.embassysuites.com](http://www.embassysuites.com)) has suites made for families and is well situated near Georgetown and Dupont Circle. Rooms are \$159 to \$229 on weekends.

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