



Illuminated at night, the new Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial punctuates an evening sky on the National Mall.

Monumental Style

A TOUR OF WASHINGTON, D.C., DAZZLES VISITORS YEAR-ROUND

By JENNIFER BARGER

THE DISTRICT OF Columbia's grandeur—the U.S. Capitol, the White House, and the National Mall—gets shown off in a Yankee Doodle dandified way during January's presidential inauguration. And a recent economic and cultural boom—*Forbes* named D.C. the country's second coolest city to live in—means the District is also a prime place to dine, boutique-hop, and sip speakeasy-style cocktails. “Tourists may not realize there are interesting neighborhoods and a really thriving city behind the pomp they see on television,” says local writer and performance artist Holly Bass.

DAY ONE

MORNING *Breakfast of Insiders*

Named for the hostel in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Dupont Circle's **Tabard Inn**, a cozy restaurant within an inn, fills up with

both deal-making locals and travelers. They dine on house-made bagels and salmon and goat cheese omelets.

Easier to score tickets to than the White House, free tours of the **U.S. Capitol** (tours.visitthecapitol.com) are offered every day except Sundays and holidays. Cheerful, red-jacketed guides steer small groups through the “crypt” level (actually, more of a basement, since no one is buried there), with its dimly lit Old Senate Chamber, where Supreme Court justices heard arguments from 1810 to 1860. But the real drama is upstairs in the Rotunda, where statues of presidents and oil paintings of early explorers compete with the iron dome's fresco.

AFTERNOON *Museum-Hopping*

Take D.C.'s easy-to-use Metro system one stop from the Capitol to **Eastern Market**, a lively 19th-century building that hosts

bakers, fishmongers, and the **Market Lunch**, a counter-service café known for its crispy, Old Bay-spiked crab cakes. If you want a more sit-down meal, the nearby clubby **Chesapeake Room** restaurant serves local seafoods and bison burgers and pours brews from Maryland and Virginia (try the Heavy Seas Marzen if it's on tap).

D.C. boasts dozens of museums devoted to everything from Asian art (the **Freer and Sackler** galleries) to global espionage (the **International Spy Museum**). Seeing them all in one trip would be like getting a bill through subcommittee. Instead, pick one or two of the Smithsonian Institution's free-to-everyone storehouses, most of them on the National Mall. The **National Museum of American History** shows off the “star-spangled banner,” first ladies' inaugural gowns, and TV relics including a Kermit the Frog puppet. **The National Museum of**

the **American Indian** displays Diné (Navajo) blankets, Ojibwa birchbark baskets, Oglala Sioux beaded moccasins, and other tribal artifacts in a curvy, golden Kasota limestone building.

EVENING *Monuments by Moonlight*

Mintwood Place's menu of creative nibbles (salty, blistered *shishito* peppers; escargot hush puppies) and American mains (cast-iron chicken) put chef Cedric Maupillier's Adams Morgan bistro on the culinary map. President Obama and Michelle dined there with supporters last summer, and the eatery got even hotter. Neighbors jam the weathered wooden booths and the zinc-topped bar for specialty cocktails like the Woodrow Wilson made with Holland *genever*, elderflower, cava, and peppery Hum liqueur.

D.C.'s memorials honor soldiers, presidents, and now, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. They're edifying by day but electrifying at night, when raven skies set off the mostly white marble monuments. "These places are meant to be solemn, and that quality comes out in the dark," says Carolyn Crouch, founder of **Washington Walks**, which leads tours past sites like the domed Jefferson Memorial, the lesser-known George Mason Memorial, and the Reflecting Pool, which connects the Lincoln Memorial to the National World War II Memorial, and recently underwent a \$34 million face-lift.

DAY TWO

MORNING *Neighborhood Nosh*

Grab brunch in leafy Georgetown at **Puro Café**, a Euro-chic Mediterranean restaurant located in a 19th-century brick town house with a mod interior that includes cherry red chandeliers and abstract art. The menu is totally 21st-century, though: prosciutto-fig flatbread, a diet-busting coconut French toast ladled with butterscotch crème anglaise. After brunch, stroll a few blocks east to **Tudor Place Historic House and Garden**, the stately home built by Martha Washington's granddaughter and her husband in 1816, where more than 100 objects—from dinnerware to furnishings—that belonged to George Washington are on display.

AFTERNOON *Shop Local*

Though much of Georgetown has been colonized by a chain-store gang (J. Crew, Gap, Anthropologie), the cobblestone sidewalks of upper Wisconsin Avenue between P Street and Reservoir Road offer mostly local boutiques. Climb the brick stairs to **Sherman Pickey** for preppy-but-stylish men's and



District must-dos (clockwise from top left): Tour the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, sample shishito peppers at Mintwood Place, and amble the streets of Georgetown.

women's clothing including frocks by Milly and polos by Southern Tide. Antiques shops also cluster here, including funky **Darrell Dean Antiques & Decorative Arts**, where you're as likely to land a 1970s metal floor lamp shaped like a robot as a hand-colored fashion print. Stock up on take-home treats at **Fleurir Chocolates**, where the rosebud cardamom bonbons are irresistible.

EVENING *Hipper Sippers*

Craft beer, crafted cocktails, and a crafty approach to mid-Atlantic cuisine are fueling the District's appetite. Find all three

in the booming Logan Circle and U Street neighborhoods. Ale is what cures you at **ChurchKey**, where a hops-heavy list tops off at 555 beers from around the world. **Pearl Dive Oyster Palace** serves custom-grown Virginia oysters and seafood specialties from the Chesapeake Bay. After dinner, slip into the **Gibson**, a neo-speakeasy where mixologists shake up reinventions of pre-Prohibition cocktails, including the Rickey, a potent gin-based drink invented in D.C. in the 1880s. Originally intended to cool down the heat of summer, the drink also succeeds at adding a warm spark to a winter's night. ■

JUST IN

For sites farther afield (George Washington's home, Mount Vernon, and the Smithsonian's airplane- and spacecraft-filled Udvar-Hazy Center), rent one of newcomer **Car2go's** Smart cars (www.car2go.com). The exhibit "Food: Transforming America's Table, 1950-2000" at the **American History Museum** dishes up exhibits on modern cooking and eating lore via displays on Julia Child's kitchen, U.S. winemaking, and farming innovations.