



BE MY GUEST: Washington DC

The seat of the US government and the home of the President, Washington DC is fast becoming a major power player in the nation's cultural and restaurant scene, too, says Ann Cochran

In Washington DC, there are residents from every corner of the globe, working in embassies, for the World Bank or think tanks. So it's no wonder that this city of politics, diplomacy and monuments has blossomed into a culinary paradise. And thanks to Obama and wife Michelle (his charm and her wardrobe), the girls and dog Bo – the Kennedys of a new era, perhaps – Washington is finally cool.

Street smart

In Georgetown, one of the city's oldest and most charming neighbourhoods, boutiques, restaurants and cupcake shops operate out of restored historic town houses. Renowned for its stylish shoes and accessories, **Sassanova** (www.sassanova.com) is no exception.

At **Lost Boys** (www.lostboysdc.com), instead of a back room, there's a by-appointment-only Black Room. For men with style, or who want it, the store offers wardrobe consultations and a fully-stocked bar. Next stop is **Hugh & Crye** (www.hughandcrye.com) for dress shirts that really fit: sizing is based on height and torso width as well as the neck and sleeve.

Neiman Marcus, Bloomingdale's and Saks anchor a cluster of stores around the DC/Maryland border. Buy a baby gift at **Giggle** (www.giggle.com), make-up at **MAC Cosmetics** (www.maccosmetics.com), a painted landscape at **Zenith Gallery** (www.zenithgallery.com), or a chocolate US Capitol at **Krön Chocolatier** (www.kronchocolatier.com).

The highlights

This year is the 100th anniversary of Washington's most beautiful phenomenon: the blossoming of the Japanese cherry trees that were given to the city by Japan. Mandarin Oriental, Washington DC is the capital's only hotel with views of the Tidal Basin, where the trees explode like clouds of cotton candy in the spring.

Extending from the Washington Monument to the US Capitol, the National Mall is DC's rectangular town square. The **Smithsonian Institution's** museums (www.si.edu) that line the mall include the National Museum of the American Indian (lunch alert: best museum food), the National Museum of American History,

the National Air and Space Museum, as well as the Freer Gallery of Art, the Arthur M Sackler Gallery, and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. The Smithsonian's 137 million or so objects range from chef Julia Child's kitchen to First Ladies' dresses.

On or near the mall are the major monuments and memorials. The newest, alongside an additional 180 cherry trees, is the Martin Luther King,

Above: the Jefferson Memorial on the cherry-tree-lined Tidal Basin. Below: the Empress Lounge at Mandarin Oriental, Washington DC

Kick back with jazz The Empress Lounge at Mandarin Oriental, Washington DC showcases top jazz vocalists every weekend





Jr Memorial on the Tidal Basin. For information about all the memorials, monuments and parks in the city, seek out the knowledgeable park rangers.

Culture fix

Dedicated to American theatre, the nationally renowned **Arena Stage** (www.arenastage.org) has recently reopened after a million-dollar renovation. Two historic and one new building are wrapped together in a 'curtain wall' of 370 glass panes.

The **Newseum** (www.newseum.org) is unusual for its entrance fee, but with exhibits such as Pulitzer Prize-winning photography and 15 theatre presentations to consider hours pass like minutes here. The long terrace has spectacular views of the US Capitol and Pennsylvania Avenue.

Meanwhile, the **National Gallery of Art** (www.nga.gov) shows Western art from the Middle Ages. And you can examine birds, Buddhism and the work of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei at the **Sackler Gallery** (www.asia.si.edu), which celebrates its 25th year showcasing Asian art and culture with the connecting **Freer Gallery**.

Stepping out

Hear the lions roar as you jog in the **National Zoo** (www.nationalzoo.si.edu) early in the morning. Although entry to the animal enclosures is at 10am, the grounds open at 6am. Another popular place to run, or tour on horseback, is **Rock Creek Park** (www.nps.gov/rocr).

Catch a **Washington Nationals** baseball game (<http://www.washingtonnationals.mlb.com>) at the new National Park stadium. Views from here include the riverfront, Navy Yard, US Capitol and Washington Monument.

Walk around the highest point in Georgetown at **Dumbarton Oaks** (www.doaks.org), a research institute of Harvard University dedicated to the history of gardens and landscape architecture, with 27 acres of formal garden rooms and natural landscaping.

Spa time

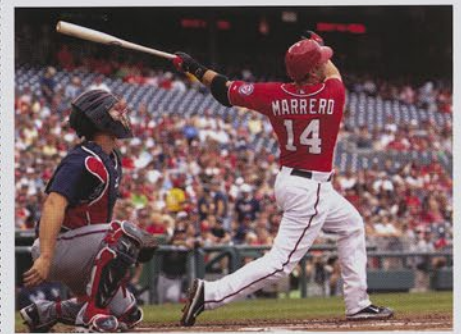
With a bow to Eastern culture, The Spa at **Mandarin Oriental, Washington DC** offers holistic rejuvenation. Its Time Rituals concept is based on traditional Chinese medicine and assesses your personality, skin type and stress levels, for instance, for a tailor-made therapy. Before or after treatments, there are a variety of heat and water experiences to try: an amethyst steam room, sauna, vitality and plunge pools, as well as an indoor lap pool and outdoor sun deck.

Dining scene

Oenophiles should head straight to **Proof** (www.proofdc.com), DC's wine-centric restaurant, to sample its extensive wine list alongside a plate of fine cheese or some charcuterie. And star chef Eric Ziebold presides over the award-winning **CityZen** at Mandarin Oriental, Washington DC, serving modern American cuisine.

Chef Fabio Trabocchi received a hero's welcome upon his return to DC to open his rustic Italian and much-lauded **Fiola** (www.fioladc.com). Back at Mandarin Oriental, a lower-key option is **Sou'Wester** for all-day American comfort food with views of the Washington Marina on the side. And don't skip dessert. Executive pastry chef Matthew Petersen was a finalist on American TV show *Top Chef: Just Desserts*. For more sweets, as well as Sunday brunch, **Co Co Sala**

Clockwise from above left: the chocolate lounge Co Co Sala; catch a theatre production at Arena Stage; the baseball team Washington Nationals playing at Nationals Park



(www.cocosala.com), in the hip and historic Penn Quarter, is a chocolate 'lounge and boutique' that makes its artisanal produce on the premises.

Night life

In DC, it's all about the magic of the monuments at night. The walks are romantic, with spotlights and moonlight shining on the marble. Park rangers are on duty until 11.30pm, but the monuments never close.

Don't miss out on the music scene. Recognised as one of the best five live jazz venues in DC by *Washingtonian* magazine, Mandarin

Oriental's **Empress Lounge** showcases top jazz vocalists every weekend. And the bartenders can mix a great cocktail – try the Mandarin Dream, a pear and pomegranate creation garnished with bourbon-soaked cherries.

Throughout the summer, all over town, the armed forces' bands put on free **outdoor concerts** (www.nps.gov/ncro/publicaffairs/summerinthecity.htm) almost every night.



Relax before a stunning setting Mandarin Oriental, Washington DC is the capital's only hotel with views of the Tidal Basin, where Japanese cherry trees explode like clouds of cotton candy in the spring