

America's capital has history, intrigue and a vibrant nightlife. And if you've already been there, done that, there are other ways to savour the most powerful city in the world, writes **Judith Ritter**

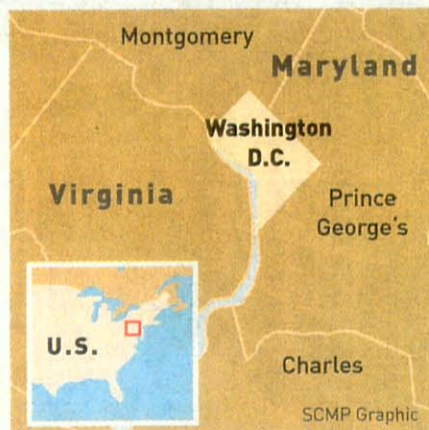


PERFECT 10

Washington, DC

1 Capitol views

Although most visitors line up outside the Washington Monument for a view from the top of the 169-metre-high marble obelisk near the Capitol building, locals recommend two dizzying sights of Washington that don't involve crowds. One is the view from the 96-metre clock tower of the Old Post Office (1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW; www.oldpostofficedc.com). The Romanesque revival-style Post Office, opened in 1899, was once the tallest building in Washington. A glass lift whisks visitors to the old observation deck for a 360-degree look around the city, which includes a breathtaking view



of the Capitol. For the best White House view, drop by the small, stately early-20th-century Hay-Adams hotel (www.hayadams.com), which has recently been restored. Ask the concierge's permission for a visit to the roof, the site of A-list parties and a vista from above the White House that's so close it's surprising it isn't illegal.

2 Spies and the city

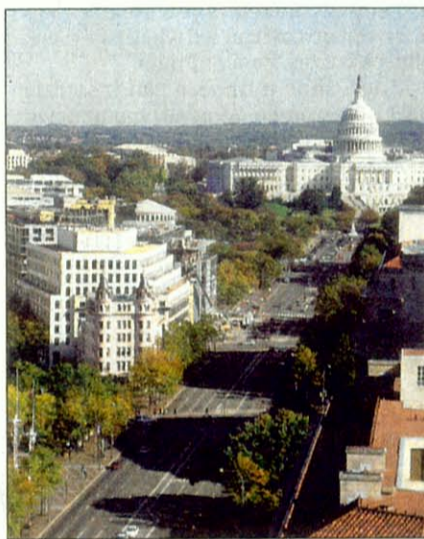
It's said you can't throw a stone without hitting a spy in Washington, so what better place to play the game of espionage for visitors intrigued by intrigue? Start your mission (should you choose to accept it) at the world's only museum dedicated to spies and spying, the International Spy Museum (800 F Street NW; www.spymuseum.org). The museum is an encyclopaedia of espionage and contains items such as a KGB lipstick pistol and a CIA radio transmitting shoe. Take a lunch break with your handler next door at Zola, a sleek and atmospheric restaurant with contemporary American cuisine, plus espionage decor featuring a secret door and a wall of genuine declassified CIA documents (www.zoladc.com). Finally, board a bus with a former CIA officer for the two-hour tour of Washington's real-life spy sites (www.grayline.com).

3 U Street

Corridor U Street, the centre of African-American history and culture, is still a lively place for shopping and nightlife. Visits start at the U Street/African American Civil War Memorial metro stop, where vibrant murals depict the area's past. Nicknamed Black Broadway, U is lined with brick Victorian row houses where turn-of-the-20th-century African-American intellectuals, artists and activists lived. There are two not-to-be-missed landmarks on U. The first is the gloriously restored 1920s Lincoln Theatre (1215 U; www.thelincolntheatre.org), where the likes of Pearl Bailey and Duke Ellington once played. The other is the vibrant, family-owned Ben's Chili Bowl (1213 U; www.benschilibowl.com). Try Washington's signature snack, the chilli half-smoke (a sausage in a bun with mustard and chilli for US\$4.95) and the outstanding R&B jukebox.

4 Eastern Market

The city's oldest public market, Eastern Market (www.easternmarket.net)



Among the must-sees of the capital are the renovated Smithsonian Museum's portrait gallery (top) and the view of the Capitol (above) from the Old Post Office tower. PHOTOS: JUDITH RITTER / US NEWSWIRE

is also where visitors and residents hunt for handicrafts, antiques and collectibles. Don't miss Jenae Michelle's purses (www.rangeofemotion.com) or Ken Hoffman's handmade furniture.

5 Paddle the Potomac

One of the most interesting and surprisingly pristine ways to see the city is from the River Potomac, minutes from the White House and the Capitol. Head down to Thompson Boat Center (2900 Virginia NW; www.thompsonboatcenter.com) in Georgetown, where US\$8 secures a brightly coloured canoe or kayak for an hour of lazy paddling, plus glimpses of deer, bald-headed eagles, blue herons and views of the Kennedy Centre and the Watergate Building.

6 The Phillips Collection

Visit this small, elegant museum just to see Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Luncheon of The Boating Party*. The Phillips (21st at

Q; www.phillipscollection.org), which opened in 1921 in the private home of collector Duncan Phillips, was the first museum of modern art in America. Works by artists from Matisse and Monet to Rothko and O'Keefe are presented in small, private rooms.

7 Marine Corps Marathon

An unusual and demanding way for visitors to see all Washington's major monuments, the marathon is preceded by two days of entertainment, but the real action takes place at the finish line at the bronze Marine Corps War Memorial, which depicts six soldiers raising the flag at Iwo Jima. (You can register online for the October 28 race at www.marine-marathon.com from May 9.)

8 National Portrait Gallery

This newly reopened gallery of the Smithsonian Museum (750 Ninth Street; www.npg.si.edu) displays everything from Andy Warhol prints to images of basketball player Shaquille O'Neal. Visitors can watch restorers at work in the conservation room.

9 Party with the powerful

There's more to do than soak up establishment venues such as the Willard Hotel (where lobbying was reputedly



The Chili Bowl, on U Street, is just the place to enjoy a chilli half-smoke to the sound of classic rhythm and blues

invented) because the capital also has a more fashion-forward scene for hipsters and sophisticates. Fly Lounge (1802 Jefferson Place; www.flylounge.com) near Dupont Circle is the latest destination for party people hankering for house, hip-hop and reggae. The sleek new venue with an aviation theme has 737-esque aluminium walls, servers dressed as flight attendants, peanuts in silver foil bags and a definite fashion vibe. Small bar-lounge Poste (555 8th Street NW; www.postebrasserie.com), in the newly hip Penn Quarter of the city, is quiet enough for conversation and cool enough for DC tastemakers.

10 Tea to a tee

You can find perfectly prepared pu'er or rare Royal Himalayan snowflake brews at the new Tea Cellar at the Park Hyatt Hotel (24th at M Street; www.parkhyattwashington.com). The hotel reopened recently after a redesign by Tony Chi (Spoon at the InterContinental, Tsim Sha Tsui; the Park Hyatt Tokyo). With the guidance of a sommelier, tea lovers can sample a 1949 cave-aged pu'er at US\$90 a pot, or a pot of US\$300 1985 Royal Reserve.



The U Street Mural celebrates the area's intellectual and musical heritage