

On Washington, DC

by Gwen Kirkpatrick | Georgetown University

LASA is happy to welcome you to Washington, District of Columbia, the nation's capital city. The LASA Congress at the Marriott Wardman Park is in one of the city's most pleasant locations, the Woodley Park neighborhood, with the Metro just steps away and with easy access to shops and restaurants. The National Zoo, a beautiful space for people of any age, is a short walk from the hotel. The weather in late May is usually free from the notorious heat and humidity of July and August, and the lovely late spring days often extend into mid-June.

As the nation's capital, **Washington** has changed in recent years to become a vibrant, multilingual, and multicultural city, with notably improved local government and municipal financial stability. The city has escaped the worst of the recession, although its neighborhoods still offer stark contrasts in economic disparity, and attempts to reform and improve its schools have gained national attention. Washington's overall increase in prosperity and the entry of many new businesses into the city have created debates about gentrification and how it pushes long-standing low-income residents farther out into the suburbs in Maryland and Virginia, a debate familiar to cities undergoing growth.

The Latino community is an important force in the area. In the 1970s and 1980s refugees and immigrants from Central America, especially El Salvador, developed into an important cultural and political force. In the past few decades the growing presence of a wide range of Latin Americans in the larger Washington area has transformed neighborhoods, schools, sports, cuisine, and government. The Bolivian community is so numerous that Arlington, Virginia, is nicknamed "Cochabambina" because of their presence.

Peruvian restaurants are joining more established Salvadoran, Mexican, and Nicaraguan offerings, along with Cuban and Brazilian restaurants. In addition, several decades of African immigration, especially from Ethiopia and Eritrea, has contributed to the city's cultural mix. For American cuisine, the U Street corridor and other neighborhoods offer notable soul food restaurants.

Transportation in DC: Traffic in DC is usually heavy and drivers are aggressive, but public transportation is quite efficient. Find maps, directions, and schedules for buses and the Metro on wmata.com. You can purchase tickets online. The Metro stations display instructions for buying tickets, but they are not always easy for newcomers to comprehend. Station attendants or veteran passengers can usually answer questions. Credit cards as well as cash can be used at many locations. Washingtonians are generally hospitable, but they are unforgiving about Metro escalators: stand on the right and walk on the left. If you prefer to bicycle, the District of Columbia's Department of Transportation and Arlington County in Virginia launched Capital Bikeshare in 2010 to help decrease car emissions and increase healthy activity. The number of bicycle stations is constantly increasing because the service is very popular. For membership, pricing, and station locations, visit Capital Bikeshare at capitalbikeshare.com.

Tourism: A useful website for visitors is washington.org/find-dc-listings/attractions. There you can order free guides and search for attractions, transportation, restaurants, tours, and events.

Family favorites in Washington are the National Zoo nationalzoo.si.edu (near the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel) and the Air

and Space Museum airandspace.si.edu on the National Mall, both with free admission. (For hard-core air and space fans, the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center near Washington Dulles International Airport is the companion facility to the museum on the Mall.) Another family favorite is the Museum of Natural History on the Mall (mnh.si.edu).

For those who haven't visited Washington for a while, an extraordinary and beautiful museum constructed less than a decade ago is the American Indian Museum, "home to one of the largest and most diverse collections of Native art and historical and cultural objects; exhibitions are designed in collaboration with Native communities from across the hemisphere" (nmai.si.edu). Latin Americanists interested in indigenous cultures throughout the Americas will find historical displays as well as an important presence of contemporary indigenous cultures. The emphasis on contemporary cultures distinguishes the museum from most museums devoted to indigenous cultures. On the Mall near the Capitol, the building itself is a beautiful structure of sandstone with curving walls meant to evoke flowing water. (Its interior design has not received the same acclaim.) The museum's cafeteria, specializing in American foods, is rated as the best on the Mall.

The Smithsonian Latino Center latino.si.edu/aboutus/ promotes a wide variety of cultural programs, often in collaboration with other museums.

For art lovers, museums on the Mall with free admission include the National Gallery of Art nga.gov/, the Freer and Sackler Galleries asia.si.edu, the African Art Museum, and other art museums. A full list is at si.edu/Museums. (For the National Gallery, the Gallery Place Metro stop is

closer than the Smithsonian stop.) Two important art museums that charge admission are the extraordinary Phillips Collection near Dupont Circle and the Corcoran Gallery of Art on 18th Street near the Mall. The National Museum of Women in the Arts is near the Metro Center metro stop.

For researchers, on Wednesday, May 29, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., a LASA Congress pre-conference program will introduce the resources of the Library of Congress and its Hispanic Reading Room and Maps Division. For those who don't attend the workshop, the Library of Congress building has been magnificently restored and merits a tour. Its Reading Room is known as the most beautiful room in Washington. (The library is very near a Metro stop or you can walk from Union Station.) The National Archives building, also an important research site, faces the Mall.

A stunning nighttime tour is a visit to the **monuments**, especially the Lincoln and Jefferson Monuments. (You will need an organized tour or your own transportation.) At any time of day, the Vietnam Memorial is a powerful tribute to those lost in that war. Recently constructed are the monuments to World War II veterans and to Korean War veterans. The most recent addition is the memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King. The Holocaust Museum is just off the Mall. The Washington Monument is closed for repairs after the earthquake of August 2011.

The historic core of **Georgetown** is easily walkable. Also in Georgetown, the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection (doaks.org) specializes in antiquities, especially pre-Columbian. A visit to the extensive and beautiful

Dumbarton Gardens should be very rewarding in late May. The Georgetown Waterfront (on the Potomac River) has undergone a transformation. There is a boardwalk, restaurants, a nearby park, and bicycle trails. For those who like to shop, Wisconsin Avenue and M Street are the core areas in Georgetown.

Just outside of DC and accessible by Metro, **Arlington Cemetery** (arlingtoncemetery.mil) receives many visitors each year. A bit farther out, a short trip by bus or car to George Washington's **Mount Vernon** (mountvernon.org) offers a beautiful drive near the river.

Old Town Alexandria is accessible by boat or by Metro. Boats leave from Georgetown and other locations. Although not as fast as the Metro, the boat gives you a chance to get your bearings geographically, and it's just nice to be on the water. Historically dense and easily walkable, Alexandria offers architecture from the colonial period and a lesson in American history from its streets and museums. It also includes shopping areas, art galleries, antiques, clothing shops, and restaurants.

The past decade has seen an upsurge in **theater** activity in the area. There are several area theaters devoted to Spanish-language productions. The *Washington Post* washingtonpost.com has up-to-date information.

Washington is rich in **universities**: in DC are American University, Catholic University, Gallaudet University, George Washington University, Georgetown University, Howard University, Trinity Washington University, and the University of the District of Columbia. There are also many specialized educational institutions such as the Corcoran College of Art and Design. Just outside of DC are two major

universities: the University of Maryland and George Mason University, as well as many other institutions.

Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston? You'll have plenty to do in Washington, but just in case.... In addition to air travel, trains depart from Union Station (Metro Red Line). Buses are a much less expensive alternative, as low as \$20 to New York. The Greyhound terminal is near Union Station; other companies pick up at various sites around the city.

We hope you will enjoy your stay in Washington and take extra time to explore the city! Combining an exciting LASA Congress with Washington's many cultural offerings will make your experience memorable. ■