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U.S. SERIES
THE NORTHEAST CORRIDOR

Greetings from WASHINGTON, DC

48 hours, solo, at your own pace

POCKET EDITION · 2027

48-HOUR GUIDE · SAFETY GUIDE · PLANNING CALENDAR
GOINGSOLO.LIFE

Welcome to Washington, DC

Washington is a city built for walking and made for the solo traveler. The monuments, the free museums, and the quiet neighborhoods behind them are all within a few miles, the Metro reaches the rest, and the best parts cost nothing to enter.

Traveling solo here works because the capital runs on solitary rituals: a sunrise at the Lincoln Memorial, a reading room at the Library of Congress, a quiet hour in front of a Rembrandt. Nobody asks why you came alone. Half the people around you are on their own business too.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read through once before you go. Day One walks the National Mall and Capitol Hill, from the Lincoln Memorial at sunrise to a reading room under the Capitol dome. Day Two heads to the Smithsonian museums, the National Gallery, and the Tidal Basin, then ends in Dupont Circle. Section 03 is the new-for-2027 feature on the free Smithsonian. The Metro covers the gaps between the Mall and the neighborhoods.

ESSENTIAL QUICK FACTS

CURRENCY
US dollar (cards accepted nearly everywhere)

TRANSIT
Metrorail · SmarTrip card, fares from about $2.25

TIME ZONE
Eastern (UTC–5; UTC–4 in summer)

EMERGENCY
911 · non-emergency 311

TIPPING
18–20% in restaurants

SALES TAX
About 10% on restaurant meals

01 DAY ONE

The National Mall · Capitol Hill

The first day walks the great lawn of the Mall from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol, with the monuments at their best in morning light and a long lunch on Capitol Hill.

MORNING · 8:00 AM – 1:00 PM

8:00 AM

Lincoln Memorial at Sunrise

The memorial is open around the clock. Go early to have the steps and the reflecting pool nearly to yourself, with the Washington Monument framed at the far end.

Walk down the steps and along the pool before the tour buses arrive.

9:30 AM

Vietnam & Korean War Memorials

Walk the black granite wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, then the Korean War Veterans Memorial's ghostly patrol figures a short way south.

Both are quietly affecting; allow time to slow down.

11:00 AM

National Archives

See the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights in the Rotunda. The documents are displayed in dim light and moving to see.

Reserve a free timed entry online, especially in spring and summer.

12:30 PM

Lunch — Market Lunch, Eastern Market

A counter inside Capitol Hill's historic market. The crab cake sandwich and blueberry buckwheat pancakes are the local order.

Closed Mondays; weekends are busy, so go early.

AFTERNOON · 2:00 PM – 6:00 PM

2:00 PM

Library of Congress, Jefferson Building

A free, ornate hall of marble and murals. Visit the viewing gallery above the Main Reading Room, one of the loveliest rooms in the city.

Bring ID and enter through the Capitol Visitor Center tunnel if the weather is wet.

4:00 PM

U.S. Capitol Visitor Center

Tours of the Capitol are free but require advance reservation. Even without one, the underground visitor center has exhibits and a view of the dome.

Book a free tour through the Capitol Visitor Center's website, or your Representative's office.

EVENING · 6:30 PM – 10:00 PM

7:00 PM

Dinner — Ben's Chili Bowl

A U Street institution since 1958, serving half-smokes and chili. Counter seats make it easy for one.

Order a half-smoke with chili and cheese, and expect a line on weekend nights.

9:00 PM

Jazz or a Late Walk on U Street

U Street has been a center of Black culture and music since the early 20th century. Catch a live set at one of the neighborhood clubs, or just walk.

Check listings for the week; many venues have no cover on weeknights.

02 DAY TWO

The Smithsonian · The National Gallery · The Tidal Basin · Dupont Circle

The second day is for museums, all of them free, and for the water at the end of the day.

MORNING · 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

9:00 AM

National Museum of Natural History

Arrive at opening to see the Hope Diamond and the Hall of Fossils before the crowds. Free, with no timed pass required.

Pick two halls and spend real time in each.

11:00 AM

National Air and Space Museum

The museum is free but requires a free timed-entry pass for every visitor, reserved online. Some galleries are being renovated, so check which are open.

Reserve your pass days ahead; midday slots go first.

12:30 PM

Lunch — Union Market

A food hall in a converted warehouse in NoMa, with counters for oysters, tacos, and sandwiches. Plenty of single stools.

Take a rideshare or the Metro to NoMa-Gallaudet U.

AFTERNOON · 2:00 PM – 6:00 PM

2:00 PM

National Gallery of Art

Free, and home to the only Leonardo da Vinci painting in the Americas, Ginevra de' Benci. Spend an hour in the West Building and walk the sculpture garden.

The East Building's modern collection is quieter in the afternoon.

4:30 PM

The Tidal Basin

Walk the Jefferson Memorial, the MLK Memorial, and the water's edge. The cherry trees bloom here in spring.

Peak bloom usually arrives between late March and early April.

EVENING · 7:00 PM – LATE

7:00 PM

Dinner in Dupont Circle

Dupont is the city's most walkable neighborhood for dinner, with small restaurants, embassies, and bars on every block.

Look for counter seats and bar menus; most places seat singles right away.

9:30 PM

Kramerbooks & Afterwords Café

A bookstore, café, and bar in one, open late since 1976. A good place for a nightcap and a book.

Browse first, then take a table with your purchase.

03 THE SMITHSONIAN

The Free Smithsonian, Decoded

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know the founder of the Smithsonian never set foot in the United States?

James Smithson, an English chemist who died in 1829, left his fortune to the United States, a country he had never visited. The money arrived in Washington in 1838, and Congress created the Smithsonian Institution in 1846 "for the increase and diffusion of knowledge." Admission to its museums is still free.

A SHORT HISTORY

Smithson's will said that if his nephew died without heirs, the estate would go to the United States to found an establishment in Washington. The nephew died in 1835. The gift was worth roughly half a million dollars at the time, and no one knows for certain why an Englishman gave it to a country he never visited.

HOW TO DO IT RIGHT

Most museums are free and open daily except December 25. A few, including the National Air and Space Museum, require a free timed-entry pass. Pick two museums a day rather than four, and arrive at opening.

BEST TIME TO GO

Weekday mornings are quietest, and the museums are a refuge from summer heat and winter cold. In March and April the cherry blossoms along the Tidal Basin draw crowds, so book timed passes early.

04 WHERE TO EAT

Counters, markets, and late-night chili

Washington's food scene is better than its reputation. Most places below welcome a single diner at the counter or bar without a wait.

BREAKFAST & LUNCH

Market Lunch
EASTERN MARKET · $10–18

A counter inside Capitol Hill's historic market. Crab cake sandwiches and blueberry buckwheat pancakes.

Union Market
NOMA · $10–22

A food hall in a former warehouse district. Counters for oysters, tacos, and sandwiches.

Ben's Chili Bowl
U STREET · $8–14

Half-smokes and chili since 1958. A neighborhood landmark.

Kramerbooks & Afterwords
DUPONT CIRCLE · $10–20

A café inside a bookstore, with breakfast and late-night menus.

DINNER & LATE NIGHT

Ben's Chili Bowl
U STREET · $8–14

Also a dinner stop, open late on weekends.

Founding Farmers
FOGGY BOTTOM · $18–35

A farm-to-table restaurant with a big bar, near George Washington University.

Old Ebbitt Grill
PENN QUARTER · $20–40

The city's oldest saloon, founded in 1856. Oyster bar and bar seating for a single diner.

Blues Alley
GEORGETOWN · $30–60

One of the country's longest-running jazz supper clubs. Book ahead for a seat.

05 GETTING AROUND

Navigating Washington

The Mall is larger than it looks, about two miles from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial. The Metro, buses, and your feet cover the rest.

Metrorail	from about $2.25	Fares depend on distance and time of day. Buy a SmarTrip card or use a phone wallet.
Reagan National (DCA)	Metro	The airport is on the Blue and Yellow Lines, about 20 minutes to the Mall.
Dulles (IAD)	Silver Line	The Silver Line reaches downtown in roughly an hour.
Capital Bikeshare	by the ride	Docked bikes and e-bikes across the city, good for the Mall.
DC Circulator	check fare	Buses link the Mall, Georgetown, Union Station, and other neighborhoods.
Walking	Free	The Mall is flat, wide, and ideal on foot. Wear comfortable shoes.

Metrorail does not run all night, so check the last train before dinner. Rideshare covers late hours and the neighborhoods between lines.

06 BACKUP PLANS

Washington on a rainy afternoon

The capital's museums make rainy days an advantage. All of these are free and indoors.

THE MALL · FREE

National Gallery of Art

A great collection of European and American painting.

THE MALL · FREE

National Museum of American History

Objects from the Star-Spangled Banner to Julia Child's kitchen.

CAPITOL HILL · FREE

Library of Congress

Ornate halls, exhibits, and the Main Reading Room gallery.

PENN QUARTER · FREE

National Portrait Gallery

Portraits of presidents and cultural figures, in a lovely historic building.

L'ENFANT PLAZA

International Spy Museum

A ticketed museum on espionage, good for an hour or two.

PENN QUARTER · FREE

Kogod Courtyard

A glass-roofed courtyard inside the Smithsonian American Art Museum, ideal for a long, dry coffee.

07 NEIGHBORHOODS

Know your neighborhoods

THE GREAT LAWN
The National Mall
Monuments, Smithsonian museums, and long walks between them.

CAPITOL HILL
Capitol Hill
Eastern Market, rowhouses, and the Library of Congress.

COLONIAL CHARM
Georgetown
Cobblestone streets, canal-side boutiques, and the waterfront.

EMBASSIES & CAFÉS
Dupont Circle
Bookstores, bars, and some of the city's best restaurants.

MUSIC & MURALS
U Street
Jazz history, late-night food, and vibrant street life.

FOOD HALLS
Union Market & NoMa
A converted warehouse district with food, shops, and breweries.

08 GOOD TO KNOW

What nobody tells you

- Stand on the right on the Metro's escalators, and walk on the left. Locals notice.
- Many museums and government buildings have security screening. Pack light and expect a short line.
- Monuments and memorials are open 24 hours. The Lincoln Memorial at night is quiet and nearly empty.
- The Smithsonian museums are open daily except December 25. Some require free timed passes.
- Summer is hot and humid; carry water and take museum breaks. In winter, cold winds sweep across the Mall.
- Tip 18–20% in restaurants. Restaurant meals are taxed at about 10%.

WHEN TO GO

Mar–May	Best overall	Cherry blossoms, mild weather, and long walking days.
Jun–Aug	Peak season	Hot, humid, and crowded, with July 4th the busiest day of the year.
Sep–Nov	Second best	Comfortable weather and fall color along the Potomac.
Dec–Feb	Off-season	Cold but quiet, with the museums nearly empty on weekday mornings.

09 SOLO TRAVELER SAFETY

Is Washington, DC safe?

Safe in the places visitors go, with big-city awareness. The Mall, Capitol Hill, Georgetown, Dupont Circle, and downtown are busy and well-lit. Some neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River and far from the tourist core have higher crime, with little reason to detour there at night.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY AT A GLANCE

Georgetown	●●●●●
Dupont Circle	●●●●●
The National Mall (daytime)	●●●●●
Capitol Hill	●●●●○
U Street / Union Market	●●●●○
Mall at night	●●●○○
Southeast beyond the tourist core	●●○○○

COMMON SCAMS

Costumed characters near the monuments often pose for a photo and ask for tips. Unofficial "tour" sellers near the Mall can overcharge; book through the museum or tour operator directly.

HEALTH & MEDICAL

George Washington University Hospital is the nearest major ER to the Mall. Pharmacies such as CVS and Walgreens are widespread. Carry travel insurance.

SOLO TRAVELERS

Share your plan with someone back home, keep your phone charged, and use rideshare late at night if the Metro is not running. Stay on the busy paths around the Mall after dark.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Police, fire, medical	911
City services and non-emergency	311
Poison Control	1-800-222-1222
Nearest ER (Foggy Bottom)	GW Hospital · 900 23rd St. NW

10 PLANNING CALENDAR

Washington, DC, month by month

Exact dates shift each year, so confirm before booking.

MAR–APR CHERRY BLOSSOMS

- The National Cherry Blossom Festival runs for several weeks around peak bloom at the Tidal Basin.

MAY MEMORIAL DAY

- The National Memorial Day Concert fills the Capitol lawn.

JUN–JUL FOLKLIFE & FIREWORKS

- The Smithsonian Folklife Festival takes over the Mall, and July 4th brings fireworks over the monuments.

SEP AUTUMN

- Museum crowds thin and the weather improves.

OCT MARATHON

- The Marine Corps Marathon runs through the city in late October.

DEC HOLIDAYS

- The National Christmas Tree and holiday markets bring lights across the city.

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Every Stop, Mapped

Scan the code to open the free interactive Washington, DC map — every stop in this guide, filterable by day, food, and transport.

goingsolo.life/maps/washington-dc

TRAVEL ALONE. LIVE FULLY.
GoingSolo.Life · U.S. Series · The Northeast Corridor
48-Hour Guide · Safety Guide · Planning Calendar
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