

## WASHINGTON, D.C.

Washington DC is not one of the 50 states. But it's an important part of the U.S. The District of Columbia is our nation's capital.

Congress established the federal district from land belonging to the states of Maryland and Virginia in 1790. The Virginia portion was returned in 1846, leaving a 177-square-kilometer district. That's a densely populated area, when you consider Washington DC is currently home to about 618,000 people.

President George Washington commissioned French-born architect Pierre Charles L'Enfant to design the new capital. L'Enfant had served alongside Washington in the Revolutionary War. But L'Enfant got into a squabble over the plans with city commissioners, who had Thomas Jefferson's backing. Washington fired L'Enfant and brought in another architect, Andrew Ellicott to finish the design.

The district's population is among the most educated in the entire United States. Nearly half of all adults have at least a bachelor's degree. That's because Washington draws to it many of the nation's most ambitious young people, who come seeking opportunity in public service and politics.

Washington also has a diverse population. More than half of the district's inhabitants are ethnic and racial minorities, including many first generation immigrants. There is also a large international community. Washington is home to 176 foreign embassies and the headquarters of many international organizations including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The federal government is the top employer in the district. But Washington isn't only about politics.

Every year, more than 16 million tourists visit the museums and monuments. The Smithsonian Institution, an educational foundation chartered by Congress in 1846, maintains many of the museums and galleries in DC. The U.S. government partially funds the Smithsonian, so there's no entry fee.

The most popular museum in the whole U.S. is the National Air and Space Museum, located right down town, with more than 9 million visitors a year. My personal favorite is Hirshhorn, a modern art museum beside the National Mall, in whose sculpture garden I spent many an afternoon as a child.

The time to visit DC is from mid March to mid April, when the cherry blossoms are in bloom. In 1912, Tokyo, Japan gave 3,000 trees to the city as a show of friendship. The National Cherry Blossom Festival has been held annually since those first trees were planted by first lady Helen Taft. During the festival, a meandering stretch of the Potomac River appears to grace the city wearing an endless pink and white garland. It is really a sight to behold.

Some of the most architecturally interesting buildings in the U.S. are located in DC: The White House, the Washington National Cathedral, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, the Capitol, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Many of these historic attractions are located along the National Mall, a large open park. On the eve of my swearing in ceremony as the US Ambassador to Austria, I took my oldest daughter, Keep, to the Lincoln Memorial, also located along the National Mall. This was the place where Martin Luther King, Jr. riveted the nation with his “I have a Dream” speech 50 years ago now. I took my daughter there to introduce her to this legacy. As we walked up the steps to the monument, I found myself also moved to embark on the diplomatic work of this mission firmly rooted in the American ideals that great leaders like Dr. King and President Abraham Lincoln have come to represent.

From anywhere on the National Mall, you can see the Washington Monument, the District’s tallest structure. Unlike most American cities, Washington has no skyscrapers. But you can ride the glass elevator to the top of the 555-foot-tall Washington Monument and see the entire city.

Row houses are prominent in the areas developed after the Civil War. You’ll see many of those in Georgetown. Many people also know this neighborhood for its great restaurants and shopping on M Street.

Speaking of restaurants, Washington DC has many of the best in the U.S. The international community adds to the flavor of the district’s cuisine – everything from Caribbean to Salvadoran to Turkish food, in addition to traditional American fare, which more and more often now features local and organically grown cuisine. Being so close to the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, we also get our share of seafood. Most popular are the crabs. Personally, I like to go to Adams Morgan for some of the best Ethiopian food around. Washington is a national center for the arts, including the National Symphony Orchestra, the Washington National Opera and the Washington Ballet, all housed in the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. There are also several prominent theaters, including the historic Ford’s Theater, where President Lincoln was assassinated in 1865. For a change from the official, classical and monumental DC, the Eastern Market, a public farmers’ market on Capitol Hill, is a big attraction. The market was damaged by a fire in 2007 and rebuilt. It was also threatened by big chain supermarkets, but residents fought to keep their market open. Besides produce, vendors sell baked goods, meats, cheeses as well as art and antiques.

Washington has some good sports teams. Washington’s football team has won five professional league championships. Our soccer team has won four, the most in U.S. Major League Soccer history.

Many famous people were born in the District of Columbia, but most actually lived in the suburbs in Virginia and Maryland. Like actress Goldie Hawn and political satirist Steve Colbert.

Actress Helen Hayes got her start in DC theaters. Actor William Hurt spent many years in Washington DC, while his father worked for the State Department.

Actor/Singer Al Jolson was a Russian born immigrant whose family settled in the district in 1894. Jazz composer and big band leader Duke Ellington was born in the West End section of the district. And “What’s Goin On” singer Marvin Gaye also came from DC. Washington DC can’t help but foster patriotism. John Philip Sousa, “the March King,” comes from DC. And so does Francis Scott Key, a Georgetown lawyer who wrote our national anthem during the War of 1812.

As a child, my favorite thing about DC was climbing on the enormous dinosaur statue outside of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Now, as an adult, less of my time in DC is spent at the park. Now, when I go back, I am struck by the feeling of awe I encounter when moving between the Capitol and the White House. Along this corridor, you pass by building after building, filled with the people who have dedicated their lives in public service to the federal agencies that make our democracy hum, that make our children healthy and our communities just. And surrounding them, spreading out through the District’s many neighborhoods, are the legion more who labor in the non-governmental sector to help ensure that the work is getting done right. It is this image of the District of Columbia that moves me now, and inspires me to continue in that tradition through the work I am privileged to do with you here.