



## How to Spend 4 Days in Washington D.C.

### Day 1: Mount Vernon, Old Town Alexandria, and Georgetown

The public transportation system is fantastic in the city, so you won't need a car to get around. However, for the first day, you will need to rent a car or take an Uber to see these sites outside the city.

#### Mount Vernon

The best way to kickstart your Washington DC trip is to visit Mount Vernon, the home of the first US president, George Washington.

General admission includes access to the 4-acre estate grounds located on the beautiful banks of the Potomac River. You'll be able to visit the gardens, demonstration farm with heritage breed animals, George Washington's tomb, historic outbuildings including the blacksmith shop and slave quarters, the slave memorial, and the wharf.

Keep in mind that general admission tickets do NOT include the mansion tour, these will need to be booked separately in advance for an additional fee. For this itinerary, I recommend booking the 10 am tour.

We loved taking the guided tour of the mansion and visiting the home of one of the most influential people in history. Our guide shared so many interesting facts and stories about the Washingtons and Mount Vernon.

The original home was built by George's father in 1734 and George Washington lived here for almost 45 years until he died in 1799. Additions have been added and renovations were made throughout the years, but the mansion has been beautifully restored to look much like it did when George and Martha lived here.

Not everything is original to the house, but a few artifacts did belong to the Washingtons. You can see the bedroom with the original bed frame from the bed where Washington died of a

throat infection. You can also see the desk where Washington wrote his final will.

Our tour guide told us that the Washingtons hosted 677 overnight guests at Mount Vernon during a one-year period! Lafayette, a famous French nobleman and military officer, was a good friend of the Washingtons and you can see the room where he frequently stayed.

After touring the mansion and grounds, stop by the museum and education center where you'll find interactive exhibits and a collection of Washington's personal belongings.

## Old Town Alexandria

Next, head to Old Town Alexandria, about a 15 minute drive from Mount Vernon. This town is so charming with its cobblestone streets and colonial-era buildings. It's the perfect spot to stroll around and grab some lunch.

The best way to see the heart of Old Town Alexandria is on the free hop-on hop-off trolley. It stops every few blocks on King Street and allows you access to the main sites in the town.

A few of the highlights you don't want to miss in Alexandria include Captian's Row, the oldest cobblestone street in the city with homes dating back to the 1740s.

While you're in the area, stop for lunch at Virtue Feed & Grain just around the corner. This eatery is located in a repurposed feed and grain warehouse from the 1800s. They serve fresh seasonal dishes, we especially love the braised short ribs and the Virtue Burger.

You can also dine at Gadsby's Tavern Restaurant. This historic tavern dates back to 1785 and was a favorite spot of George and Martha Washington, as well as Thomas Jefferson. Guided and self-guided tours of Gadsby's Tavern Museum are also available, I recommend doing the guided tour if you have time.

The Stabler Leadbeater Apothecary Museum is also worth stopping by. This is one of the oldest apothecaries in the US and was even frequented by the Washingtons. The apothecary was founded in 1792 and moved to this location in 1805. It was operated by the same family for 141 years before going bankrupt in 1933.

There is a minimal fee (\$5 at the time of our visit) to visit the small one-room museum with a guided tour. The tour is short and lasts about 20 minutes, but it was very interesting.

Almost everything in the pharmacy is original, and you'll have a chance to see some of the original hand-blown glass bottles filled with original ingredients.

We also learned some interesting history, like the fact that doctors prescriptions weren't required until the 1930s, so you could purchase substances like opium, arsenic, chlorophorm, and morphine over the counter!

We also learned that this was the only place to get sacramental wine during the prohibition.

While in Old Town Alexandria, be sure to check out the Hollensby Spite House located at 523 Queen Street. This is known as the narrowest house in America and is only 7 feet and 6 inches wide!

If you are visiting on a Saturday between 7 am and noon, stop by the Old Town Farmers Market. This is the oldest continuously run farmers market in the US and has been around since the 1700s.

You'll also want to stroll along King Street to visit the shops, grab some ice cream, and take in the waterfront views at Founders Park.

## Georgetown

Georgetown will be your last stop before heading into the city. I promise you'll fall in love with this sophisticated and classy neighborhood!

The Kennedy's have deep roots in Georgetown. John F Kennedy was living here when he met Jaqueline and you can see several of the homes where they lived, as well as the church where they worshipped, and some of their favorite spots in the city.

We loved following this fantastic [JFK self-guided walking tour](#) that gives the location and a little history about each stop.

A few of the homes you'll see include the house where JFK was living when he was single, and the home where he met Jaqueline for the first time at a dinner party.

You can see the home where the newlyweds lived, and also where they lived during the presidential campaign and inauguration.

This is the 14-room mansion where Jaqueline Kennedy mourned after the death of her husband.

And this is the last home Jaqueline Kennedy lived in before leaving Georgetown for good.

For dinner, make a reservation at Martin's Tavern. This is where JFK proposed to Jackie and you can even see the booth where they were sitting when he popped the question.

After dinner, stop for cupcakes at Georgetown Cupcakes. They were the winners of Cupcake Wars on the Food Network, and they even had their own TV show. We thought the cupcakes were good and there are a variety of creative flavors to choose from, but they are a little expensive for the size.

If you're in the mood for some retail therapy or window shopping, Georgetown Cupcakes is located on M Street, a popular shopping street with local boutiques and high-end retailers.

A few other spots worth visiting in Georgetown include the C&O Canal. This historic canal runs 184 miles from Washington D.C. to Maryland. There is a nice walking path along the canal that is lined with charming townhomes. In the summer, you can even take a boat tour on the canal and through the historic locks.

The Old Stone House is the oldest building in Washington D.C. that is still on its original foundation. It was built in 1766, ten years before America even became a country!

It was originally believed that George Washington slept here, which is why it has been preserved for so many years, but he actually never stayed here. It is free to visit, but the inside "museum" is a little underwhelming with only one room open to the public.

The Tudor Place is worth visiting if you have time. You can tour this beautiful historic home and garden that was built in 1816 and belonged to Martha Washington's granddaughter.

You can also drive or walk around Georgetown University campus. This prestigious school is known as the highest recruited school on Wall Street, and the majority of US Congressmen are graduates of Georgetown and Harvard.

After spending the evening exploring Georgetown, it's time to head into the city and rest up for a busy day tomorrow!

## Day 2: Ford's Theater, Smithsonian Museums, Biking the National Mall, and Arlington Cemetery

Today will be a full day, so try and get an early start! Your first stop will be at Ford's Theater and I recommend making reservations for the 9 am tour.

When making your reservations, you'll notice that the tours differ depending on the day and time. If possible, try to book tickets that include the Museum, Theater: Ranger Talk, and the Peterson House.

### Ford's Theater

Of all of the places we visited in Washington D.C., Ford's Theater was unexpectedly my favorite! This is the theater where Abraham and Mary Lincoln were attending a show when he was assassinated.

The tour starts at the museum where you're free to walk around and see artifacts such as the actual gun that John Wilkes Booth used to shoot Lincoln. You can even see the blood-stained

pillow where Lincoln laid when he died, as well as the door to the theater box with the piece of wood Booth used to jam it closed.

After spending time at the museum, you'll head up to the theater where you'll be treated to one of the best ranger talks you'll ever experience. The ranger was a fantastic storyteller, he was entertaining, engaging, and informative as he relayed the details of that fateful night. It was surreal to be at the exact spot where history was changed forever.

Ford's Theater is still an active theater, so check the calendar if you are interested in watching a performance. As an interesting side note, every president since Gerald Ford has watched a play in this theater, except for President Biden.

If the Peterson House is included in your ticket, then after the ranger talk you'll walk across the street to the Peterson House. This is the boarding house where Lincoln was taken after being shot. He clung to life for 9 hours in an upstairs bedroom before passing away.

The house is tiny and there was a larger group when we visited, so we were quickly ushered through. Although we didn't get to spend much time there, it was a memorable experience to see the bed and room where President Abraham Lincoln died.

If you are driving instead of taking the train, we found that the parking garage next to Ford's Theater was one of the cheapest in the city with a flat day rate. We just parked here and walked to the museums.

## National Air and Space Museum

Next on the itinerary are a few of the most popular Smithsonian museums.

The museums are free to visit and are all located within walking distance of each other. I would plan to spend about 1-1/2 hours at each museum. You could easily spend longer, but this will allow you to see the main highlights.

First up is the National Air and Space Museum. You are required to reserve a [timed-entry ticket](#) in advance for this museum, so I recommend booking tickets for 11 am.

The National Air and Space Museum is my kids' favorite Smithsonian Museum. They have so many cool hands-on exhibits and historic artifacts like the Wright brothers' Flyer and the Apollo 11 Command Module. There are also flight simulators, science demonstrations, and a planetarium.

If you're interested in seeing larger aircrafts, the Udvar-Hazy Center next to the airport is a treasure trove of historic air and spacecrafts. This museum is free to visit and timed-entry tickets are not required.

## National Museum of Natural History

The National Museum of Natural History is another family favorite. Timed-entry tickets are not required to visit this museum.

You may recognize this museum as scenes from *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* were filmed here.

Some cool things to see in the museum include the priceless Hope Diamond, 2000 year old Egyptian mummies, the massive African bush elephant in the main rotunda, Bone Hall with the skeletons of hundreds of animals, the Butterfly Pavilion with live butterflies, and you can't miss the skeleton of a blue whale hanging from the ceiling.

## National Museum of American History

Next up, is the National Museum of American History. Timed-entry tickets are not required for this museum either.

Some of the most popular exhibits in this museum include the Star-Spangled Banner, the First Ladies' gowns (my personal favorite!), the First Ladies' china collections, George Washington's uniform, and Dorothy's ruby slippers from the *Wizard of Oz*.

This was my kids' least favorite museum, so if you only have time for one or two museums this is probably the one I would skip.

## Biking the National Mall

Our favorite thing to do in Washington D.C., was hands-down riding bikes around the National Mall!

The 146-acre National Mall, often referred to as "America's front yard", is a sprawling park lined with iconic monuments and memorials. It stretches 2 miles from the U.S. Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, so riding bikes is the best way to cover a lot of ground in a short amount of time.

We rented City Bikes which are very affordable and easy to use through the Lyft app. They have several racks located around the National Mall, so they are also easy to find.

When we rented ours, there was a \$1 start up fee per bike, then it was .5 cents per minute for a total of \$7 for 2 hours!

Some of the main monuments that you'll want to visit are the Lincoln Memorial and reflecting pool, the Washington Monument, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the World War II Memorial, the Korean War Veteran's Memorial, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial.

If you want to take an elevator to the observation deck at the top of the Washington Monument, you can [reserve tickets](#) 30 days in advance. A select number of same-day tickets are released each day, but it's best to reserve them in advance to guarantee a spot.

## Arlington National Cemetery

Arlington National Cemetery is located about 1 mile from the Lincoln Memorial, so we rode our bikes across the Arlington Memorial Bridge to visit the cemetery. Bikes are not allowed inside of the cemetery, but there are City Bike racks located outside of the entrance.

This historic cemetery was first established in 1864 and is the final resting place for over 400,000 people. The majority of the graves are for soldiers who served in conflicts ranging from the Civil War to present day.

Other notable people who are buried in Arlington Cemetery include John and Jacqueline Kennedy, Thurgood Marshall, William Howard Taft, boxer Joe Louis, and the 7 astronauts from the Space Shuttle Challenger.

While at Arlington, be sure to stop by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and watch the Changing of the Guard. It's a very moving experience, and you'll be filled with emotion and patriotism.

The Changing of the Guard takes place every hour on the hour, with the last one at 5 pm. It's about a 20 minute walk through the cemetery, so try to plan accordingly.

Day 3: FBI Experience, National Portrait Gallery, National Archives Museum, Library of Congress, Supreme Court, US Capitol Building, and Chinatown

Don't be intimidated if it seems like there are a lot of stops on the itinerary for this day. Most of them are just quick stops, so it's possible to fit it all in!

## FBI Experience

It's a little trickier to plan ahead for the FBI Experience. You'll need to request tickets through your [Member of Congress](#) anywhere from 4 weeks to 5 months in advance.

When requesting tickets, you'll submit 3 dates then you will be assigned a date and time. You'll need to be flexible with this part of the itinerary.

We did the 9 am FBI Experience and it was a great way to get a behind-the-scenes look at the FBI's history and operations. The tour lasts about 60-90 minutes. It starts out with a presentation, then the exhibit portion is all self-guided.

I'll be honest, the tour wasn't quite what I expected. I thought we would be touring the FBI Headquarters Building, but it was more of a museum. Don't get me wrong, it was still cool, but

just not what I expected!

They have artifacts from famous cases such as the Oklahoma City Bomber and 9/11. The coolest artifact was the actual boat that the FBI confiscated when one of the Boston Marathon bombers was hiding out in it after a four-day manhunt.

There are also different hands-on activities and interactive exhibits. We enjoyed the interactive exhibit where you use clues to solve a bank robbery. My boys also liked trying to find the hidden camera in a room using verbal directions, we couldn't believe how tiny and well-hidden the camera was!

If the gun range is open, you'll be able to watch a firearms demonstration. It was closed when we were there, but it would have been cool to see!

No videos or DSLR cameras are allowed, but you can take photos from your phone while it is on airplane mode. Large bags are also prohibited, but there are luggage lockers located around the city that you can rent.

### National Portrait Gallery

The National Portrait Gallery is located by the FBI Headquarters if you have time to stop by.

I wouldn't consider it a "must-see", but it does have a cool collection of portraits of every president beginning with George Washington. They are each done by different artists in different artistic styles, and I thought it was interesting.

The building has beautiful architecture and you'll also find rotating exhibits and portraits of other famous figures from American history and culture.

### National Archives Museum

The National Archives Museum is only a few blocks from the National Portrait Gallery and FBI Headquarters. It houses important documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the 1297 Magna Carta. It's so cool to be able to see the historic documents in person!

I also really liked the exhibit featuring Russel Lee's photos documenting the life of coal miners and their families in 1946. It was a powerful glimpse into the life of American blue collar workers.

This museum plays a big role in the movie *National Treasure*, so it's a fun one to watch together as a family before your trip!

The museum is free to visit, but you will need to reserve timed-entry tickets in advance. We reserved 11 am tickets, but that will depend on what time you do the FBI Experience, and if



you stop by the National Portrait Gallery.

## Library of Congress

The next few stops on the itinerary will be by the US Capitol building over a mile away, so I recommend renting a City Bike, taking public transportation, or hiring an Uber.

First up is the Library of Congress and it is a must! This is the largest library in the world and it is also considered one of the most beautiful libraries in America.

Timed-entry tickets are required, we booked the 1 pm slot. That gave us enough time to grab a quick bite to eat after visiting the National Archives Museum.

The Library of Congress features the beautiful Court of Neptune Fountain, the impressive Great Hall with marble floors and stained glass windows, the intricate Mosaic of Minerva, and the jaw-dropping Main Reading Room.

This is the most impressive room in the library and it is absolutely stunning in person! Visitors can't enter the room, but you can view it from from a gallery on the top floor.

The Library of Congress is not a typical library, its main purpose is to serve as a research facility for the US Congress.

The US Copyright Office is also located here, as well as Thomas Jefferson's personal library, and the largest rare book collection in North America. You can also view artifacts such as an original copy of the Gutenberg Bible. This bible was printed in 1455 and is one of only 48 copies that still exist in the world.

## Supreme Court Building

The Supreme Court Building is located next to the Library of Congress and it's worth stepping in to check out the impressive architecture. This building was completed in 1935 and it is so grand and beautiful!

The main areas are open to the public and you don't need a timed-entry ticket to visit. You can only visit the actual Supreme Courtroom if you are attending a public lecture or a courtroom session that is open to the public.

The public lectures are led by knowledgeable docents and give visitors an introduction to the judicial functions of the Supreme Court.

The lectures are held Monday thru Friday on days when court is not in session. They are offered every hour from 10:30-2:30 and last about 25 minutes. If you time it right, you can make the 2:30 lecture. Attendance is on a first-come first-serve basis, so arrive early if you want a seat. Check the [calendar](#) to see what dates the lectures are being held.

## United States Capitol Building

The US Capitol Building is located directly across from the Supreme Court. It plays an important role in America's past and present government as it has housed Congress since 1800.

The Capitol Visitor Center and Exhibition Hall are open to the public where you'll find interactive exhibits and artifacts.

If you would like to tour the Capitol Building, tickets are free, but you'll need to [reserve](#) them in advance. We did the 3:30 tour.

The tours last about an hour and include a 13-minute film and a guided tour. You'll have a chance to visit a few different rooms in the building, including the Crypt, Statuary Hall, and the iconic Rotunda.

This impressive soaring domed room is a ceremonial space where historic events have taken place and state funerals have been held, including Abraham Lincoln's.

If you would like to visit the Senate and House Galleries, you will need to [request tickets](#) through the office of your delegate or resident commissioner at least 4 weeks in advance.

## Chinatown

For dinner, head to Chinatown for authentic Chinese food. Our favorite restaurant is China Boy. Try the Pork Steamed Buns, Beef Chow Foon, Chicken Fried Rice, and Beef Rice Noodle Soup.

After dinner, walk around the vibrant and eclectic neighborhood. Shop for trinkets and grab a boba smoothie or sweet buns from local shops for dessert!

## Day 4: White House, Holocaust Museum, Bureau of Engraving and Printing, Lunch at Founding Farmers

It's your last day in Washington D.C., so make the most of it!

### White House Tour

Taking a tour of the White House is a must when visiting Washington D.C.!

You'll need to [request tickets](#) through your Member of Congress at least 4 weeks and up to 5 months in advance.

You can request tickets for the FBI Experience and White House Tour at the same time. Just like with the FBI Experience, you can't choose the time of your tour. Instead, you will submit

your top 3 date preferences and you'll be assigned a tour time.

We were assigned the 9:30 tour, but just like with the FBI Experience, you'll need to be flexible with this part of your itinerary.

The tour takes about a half hour and it is all self-guided. You'll have a chance to walk through different rooms in the East Wing. There are informational signs explaining the purpose of each room, and there are staff on hand to answer questions. You can also download the WHExperience app that has more information as you walk through each room.

Some interesting facts that we learned about the White House is that the cornerstone was laid in 1792, but it wasn't completed until 1800.

George Washington picked the site for the White House, but John Adams was the first president to live here. In 1901, Theodore Roosevelt directed a major remodelig project which included the addition of the East & West Wings.

Grover Cleveland is the only president to get married in the White House, and Eleanor Roosevlet was the first First Lady to host a press conference.

Videos and DSLR cameras are not allowed, but you can take cell phone photos. Bags and purses of any kind are not allowed, but there are luggage lockers available around the city.

After the tour, you can get a good view of the White House from Lafayette Square. The White House Visitor Center is also located nearby and includes informational exhibits about the building's history and the lives of its residents.

### United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is about 0.7 miles from the White House Visitor Center, you can either walk or rent a City Bike to reach it.

The museum is free to visit, but you'll need to reserve timed-entry tickets. We booked ours for 11:30 am and we spent about an hour there.

This powerful museum tells the story of the Holocaust through artifacts, photographs, and survivor testimonies.

It is so well done and worth a visit. If you are unsure about bringing kids, the most sensitive film clips have tall walls around the screens so that young kids can't watch them.

Our favorite exhibit was the wall filled with photos that you can scan and learn more about the people in the photos.

After the museum, we grabbed a quick lunch nearby at Potbelly's where they have delicious sandwiches with reasonably priced combo meals.

## Bureau of Engraving and Printing

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing is located near the Holocaust Museum. Admission is free and tours run approximately every 15 minutes. Advanced reservations are not required, but check the [BEP website](#) for an updated schedule and visitor information.

This is one of only two facilities in the US where money is printed, the other location is in Fort Worth, Texas.

No phones or videos are allowed on the tour, but it was really interesting to learn how U.S. currency is produced. On the guided tour, you'll have a chance to watch the printing process in action and learn some fascinating facts.

Here are some interesting things that we learned while touring the Bureau of Engraving and Printing:

- They mostly reprint old bills that are collected and destroyed by the banks.
- The paper bills aren't really made of paper. The material is a blend of cotton and linen made by the Crane paper company in Massachusetts.
- Only notes are printed here, coins are produced at 6 different US Mint facilities.
- Andrew Jackson will be replaced by Harriet Tubman on the \$20 bill starting in 2025.
- The Bureau uses 4.8 million pounds of paper each year.
- The life expectancy of a \$1 bill is 18 months.

After the tour, stop by the visitor center to see a collection of rare currency. I loved the tiny little bills that were once used instead of coins. You can even see a \$100,000 bill!

We also learned about star notes on the tour, and you'll have a chance to see some at the visitor center. If there is an error during printing, the defective bill is replaced with a star note so that the serial numbers aren't messed up.

We thought it was an interesting tour and a rare opportunity to see money being printed!

## Lunch at Founding Farmers

Grab a late lunch at Founding Farmers before heading to the airport for your evening flight.

We love this farm-to-table restaurant that offers hearty American dishes. The food is made from scratch using ingredients that are grown and harvested by local family farms.

If you have a big appetite, my husband and boys loved the Farmhouse Platter with fried chicken, BBQ pork ribs, baby cheeseburgers, street corn, and coleslaw.

I love the homemade biscuits, and the Butternut Squash Ravioli. You really can't go wrong with anything on the menu!

## In Conclusion

There is so much to do and see in Washington D.C., and I hope that this itinerary will help you make the most of your time there. It is an ambitious itinerary and not for the slow traveler, but it will allow you to see as much of the city as you can during your 4 days in the city!

It's easy to combine Washington D.C. and New York City in the same trip. It's a 3 1/2 hour Amtrak train ride, or approximately 4 hour drive depending on traffic. If you do plan to go to New York, here are some helpful guides:

- [An Ambitious 3 Day New York Itinerary](#)
- [A Foodie's Guide to the Best Places to Eat in New York City](#)
- [14 Things Not to Miss on Your First Trip to New York City](#)