

Welcome to the City: Washington, D.C.

A Crowdsourced Guide by Davidson Alumni and Parents

Top “Must Do” Items in the City

- Listen to Jazz in the Sculpture Garden of the National Gallery of Art.
 - Free, very fun—grab a picnic basket and your friends and you’re good to go!
 - Bring a blanket and some snacks and beverages to hear some free jazz and hang with friends. In the winter, come here to ice skate!
- Go to a show/concert at the Kennedy Center’s Millennium Stage. Be sure to visit the Kennedy Center roof.
- Attend an outdoor movie screening in the evening. These are free, and there are many locations: Crystal City, Rosslyn, Silver Spring, Bethesda, the Mall, Adams Morgan, Mt. Pleasant, etc.
- Tour the memorials at night.
 - View the Korean War Memorial at night when it is lightly raining - so haunting! The other ones are great at night as well. And don't miss the FDR Memorial.
 - Summer is the ideal time to walk the monuments or zip around in the car with the windows down, at night. It's magical.
- Attend a Nationals game. While you’re there, rent a kayak for a couple of hours and float down the Anacostia.
- Visit the Eastern Market Farmer's Market & Flea Market on the weekends.
- You can sample all sorts of food, browse the flea market, or step inside to get a real meal.
- Visit Arlington Cemetery. The best view of the city is in front of Robert E. Lee's house, looking out over the Memorial Bridge.
- Go to the National Zoo.
- Rent a bike and spend a day in Old Town Alexandria.
- Check out Rock Creek Park. Beach Drive is closed all day Saturday and Sunday for all vehicles, so perfect for runners and walkers and bikers. Plus you can reserve picnic spots online with grills and picnic tables. Perfect way to spend the day.
- Have coffee in the atrium of the National Portrait Gallery.
- Go to the National Gallery of Art. No, it’s not a Smithsonian, but it is free. Great paintings and an absolutely gorgeous building.
- Go to the International Spy Museum (about \$13) and Newseum (\$26, good for 2 consecutive days). If you have enough time to really walk through the exhibits, they are worth the entrance fee.
- Do a pre-arranged guided tour of the Diplomatic Reception Rooms of the Department of State.
- Tour the U.S. Naval Observatory (alternating Monday nights from 8:30 to 10 pm).
- Take a guided tour by the Library of Congress of the Thomas Jefferson Building, including the Great Hall, the Main Reading Room, and several galleries.
- Tour the Capitol –call your congressman’s office.
- Attend a summer concert at Wolftrap.

- Hear a cool speaker at the Sixth & I synagogue.
- Go gallery hopping on a Friday in Dupont Circle.
- Tour Swedish Embassy on the weekend. It's free and has best view in town. It's located right next to Georgetown waterfront.
- Visit the U.S. Botanic Garden. At the foot of Capitol Hill, it's an overlooked gem for anyone interested in plants and gardening -- or looking for a tropical oasis on a snow day.
- Attend "Coffee and Cars" (millions of dollars in cars - every Sat. morning May-Nov.) in Great Falls.
- Rent a bike and go to Mt. Vernon.
- Tour the White House. Go on the White House Garden Tour or the Christmas Tour, and try to see the tree lighting at least once!
- Take a tower tour at the Washington National Cathedral.
- Visit the Arboretum.
- Check out H. St.'s rocking social scene. Whether it's trivia night at Biergarten Haus, Science night at Argonaut, going out to eat, or dancing the night away at Rock and Roll Hotel, H St. will give you a good time and no cover fees!
- Join a social sports league (ZogSports, United Social Sports, DC Kickball, etc.)
- Go to the top of the Washington Monument (free but ticket required).
- Go to Theodore Roosevelt Island.
- Bike, walk or run on the Mt Vernon/Custis/Four Mile Run/W&OD bike/multi-use trails in Virginia (all connected).
- Go to a concert at the 9:30 Club.
- Spend a Sunday summer afternoon on the mall.
- Rent a car with friends (Zipcar, or one from the rental places at Union Station or Reagan National Airport) and go out to the Shenandoah or Great Falls Park for a day (2).
- Walk the Tidal Basin / the Kenwood neighborhood in Bethesda, MD to see the Cherry Blossoms in spring.
- Have a drink or a meal at the Georgetown Waterfront.
- Take advantage of the DC libraries. Some of them (Capital Hill, Mt Pleasant, Petworth) are recently renovated and gorgeous!
- See a theater production at Signature, Studio, Woolly Mammoth, or the Folger. Season tickets are around \$35 for the Shakespeare Theater... And many theaters have student discounts!
- Have a doughnut at Astro Doughnuts. The creme brûlée doughnut is a great indulgence and a reasonable one for those interning or on an entry-level salary. RT's (Russia Today) Headquarters is across the street. You can heckle members of the new Pravda while you enjoy your yeasty taste of excellence. The coffee at Astro's is pretty good as well.
- Attend a "Free for All" Shakespeare performance through the Harmon Center for the Arts in late August or early September.
- Stop by Politics & Prose bookstore on Connecticut Ave. to hear an author talk about his or her latest book.
- Go for a spin on the Capitol Wheel, a large Ferris wheel built on the Potomac River's Maryland shore.
- Watch the Fourth of July fireworks from the Iwo Jima Memorial or a kayak near Key Bridge.

What We Wish We'd Known / Advice for Alumni New to the City

- Remember to get out of the city occasionally. There are great parks and battlefields within only an hour or two of DC!
- Figure out your commute.
- Take advantage of all the events (most are free!) that are happening all around the city all the time, and go to the markets on the weekends!
- Work on the hill.
- Live in the District itself, and don't be afraid to move here without a job." "Live as close to the city as possible.
- Use the train.
- There are many Wildcats here – don't be shy! Say hi!
- Be open to meeting new people and making new friends. DC can be very transient and it is important to make new friendships/relationships.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions or ask for help, and do it as often as you want or need. Not only will you benefit, so will your employers, peers and colleagues.
- Network! Network! Network!
- Don't be afraid to go to events by yourself – you'll never know where you will make friends. Also – take advantage of the fact that DC is a destination and a lot of people will come visit.
- Don't get wrapped up in the politics or discouraged when all the hill staffers continually ask you to happy hours at 5 p.m. and you can't make it.
- If you are going to work downtown, think hard about how you will get there as you decide where to live. In 1981, the Beltway was considered far out, and it took 25 minutes to drive downtown. Now, the Beltway is considered close in, and it often takes an hour.
- Come up with a question that you can rely on when you meet new people, that is something other than, 'What do you do?' I always like 'How did you get involved with ...?' or 'How did you end up here (event, volunteer meeting, bar, etc.)?' It gets old answering what you do!
- Go to alumni events and don't be afraid to talk to people working in the field you're interested in.
- Cast a wide net when looking for jobs, understand that cost of living is high and do your best to save money, and do not be afraid to ask your connections (alumni included) for things. We can't help you if we don't know you need it.
- Learn to bike in the city!
- Buy a SmarTrip card your first time on the metro. Always have enough money on your SmarTrip card or have cash on hand because you can't use a credit card to reload your card to get out of the metro gates if your balance is \$0 when you get to your stop. Traffic is terrible. Take the metro or walk. DC drivers are awful, so be careful crossing the street or biking. Everyone loves to make fun of tourists, but if you can help when they ask you a question or look lost, do it. That means you need to get to know the city yourself.
- Don't be afraid of buses! They are far less of a headache than the subway half the time. The bus system is far more comprehensive than you think.

- Live on the same side of the river you work...you can talk to a perfect stranger around here for hours about traffic and have so much in common...if you are able to avoid the bridge traffic in the morning commute, you are doing yourself a huge time-saving favor.
- Be sure to look at the color of the metro train before you get on, or else you might end up crossing a river you didn't mean to. It happens to everybody, but the first time you end up at the Pentagon instead of Nationals Park, you'll feel kinda silly.
- Never buy gas in the city unless you absolutely have to. Also, if you are driving around downtown, be sure to know all the ways in and out of the area (including South Dakota Avenue, I-395, Rock Creek Park, GW Parkway, and Canal Road), as constant public programming can cause street closures on the weekend and metro can be unreliable because of infrastructure upgrades.
- Always make sure you know which "quadrant" you're supposed to be going to (NE, SE, SW, NW). Nothing like having your cab driver drop you off at 15th and D northwest when you really needed to be northeast!
- Free parking in Arlington after 6:30 pm. NO FREE PARKING in Old Town Alexandria. Boo! Free parking in DC on Sundays - and handicapped park free in DC all the time -- DC is very very efficient about handing out parking tickets. But take Metro if you can.
- Don't forget to play tourist, and take advantage of living in a city with world-class, not to mention FREE museums.
- The best cupcakes in DC are NOT at Georgetown Cupcake. Don't let the long lines fool you. Go up the street to Baked and Wired on Thomas Jefferson Street.
- Remember, non-profit means no profit. Many non-profit institutions are built by CEOs earning hundreds of thousands of dollars a year and operated by highly educated idealists being paid slave wages. Non-profits can be a great experience, but they can also be a trap, narrowing one's resume if one stays too long.
- Most people with ties to DC actually don't live there. They live in the suburbs or exurbs.
- On the 4th of July try to pop up to a rooftop where you can watch the fireworks on the National Mall. Don't go to the Mall itself- it will be crazy.
- DO go to the Mall for the fireworks. It will be crazy, but they are beautiful up close!
- College, at least grading-wise, is almost (but not totally) a pure meritocracy. Success in DC, or indeed, in any field that I know of, is not. Make friends, be genuine, help other people when you can, and ask for help. Most people who are not sociopaths are flattered when they are asked for advice or help, and most enjoy being able to provide it to someone just starting out.
- When figuring out apartments, the main factors to consider are price, size, and location. Prioritize which you want, because you can rarely get all three. And don't be afraid of Craigslist.

What to Read

- *Washington Post*: Breaking news and analysis on politics, business, world national news, entertainment and more.
 - Going out Guide: A daily guide to local entertainment
- Politico: Political news about campaigns, Congress, lobbyists and issues.
 - Playbook: Politico's must-read briefing on what's driving the day in Washington
- Washingtonian.com: DC's best things to do, restaurants and cultural news
- Popville.com: Chronicles the happenings in Washington, D.C. neighborhoods
- DCist.com: Weblog, news and events, restaurants and nightlife, happenings, goings-on and observations from a group of residents
- Borderstand: A community news website that covers breaking news, arts and entertainment, politics, local business and everything in between
- Brightest Young Things: Daily online magazine + party throwing experts dedicated to all things good in DC & NYC
- Meetup: Meet people in your local community who share your interests
- 730 DC – A daily email newsletter (that counts Hayden Higgins '12 and Margaret Kaufmann '15 among its founders!) that connects young Washington to their city and each other. Weekday mornings, 7:30 a.m.
- The Skimm.com – The go-to source for friends seeking the scoop on current events or breaking news

Note from Alumni Relations: While we don't keep these guides updated year round, we do ask alumni and parents in our chapters for updates to them each fall when we send out our Welcome to the City invitation. If you'd like to add something, we'd love if you could hold your recommendation until next fall!