

Planning Your Trip to Washington, D.C.

1 Visitor Information

Before you leave, contact **Destination D.C.**, the official tourism and convention corporation for Washington, D.C., 901 7th St. NW, 4th Floor, Washington, DC 20001-3719 (☎ **800/422-8644** or 202/789-7000; www.destinationdc.org), and ask for a free copy of the *Washington, D.C. Visitors Guide*, which covers hotels, restaurants, sights, shops, and more and is updated twice yearly. At the ☎ **202/789-7000** number, you can speak directly to a staff “visitor services specialist” and get answers to your specific questions about the city.

Be sure to consult Destination D.C.’s website, where you can read and download the visitors guide, along with the latest travel information, including upcoming exhibits at the museums and anticipated closings of tourist attractions. The website is also an excellent source for maps, which you can download and print from the site or order for delivery by mail. Once in D.C., you can stop by Destination D.C.’s offices on 7th Street NW (Metro: Gallery Place/Chinatown, H St. exit), to pick up the visitors guide and maps, and to talk to visitors services specialists. Office hours are Monday to Friday 9am to 4:30pm.

AT THE AIRPORTS AND TRAIN STATION

If you’re arriving by plane or train, you can think of your airport or the train station as a visitor information center; all three Washington-area airports and Union Station offer all sorts of visitor services. See the “Getting There” section, later in this chapter, for specific information about Union Station’s and each airport’s services, location, flights/train routes, and transportation options into town.

AROUND TOWN

The **D.C. Chamber of Commerce Visitor Information Center** (☎ **866/324-7386** or 202/289-8317; www.dcchamber.org) is a small

Ways to Get Ahead

Popularity has its price, and in Washington that equals a lengthy wait in a long line for admission to its famous sites. Doesn't have to be that way, though: When you know generally the dates of your trip to Washington, call or e-mail in advance for desired tickets, passes, or reservations, and you might be able to visit places off-limits to the walk-up tourist and waltz through the door of A-list attractions, leaving the queues behind you. Follow this timeline to make sure you obtain tickets and reservations to those venues you most want to visit. Turn to the page numbers listed for specific information on how to proceed.

- **Washington National Cathedral Tour and Tea:** 5 months ahead of the desired date, p. 133.
- **White House Tours:** At least 2 months and as much as 6 months in advance, p. 105.
- **Washington Monument:** At least 1 day prior, as much as 6 months in advance, p. 106.
- **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:** Two weeks ahead in spring and summer; the day before, otherwise, p. 125.
- **Theater Performances, Concerts, and Special Museum Exhibits:** As soon as you can.
- **Restaurant Reservations:** Two weeks ahead.

bureau inside the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center Building, at 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW. To enter the federal building, you need to show a picture ID. The visitor center lies on the ground floor of the building, a little to your right as you enter from the Wilson Plaza. From March 15 to Labor Day, the center is open Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 5:30pm, and on Saturday from 9am to 4pm; from Labor Day to March 14, the center is open Monday through Friday 9am to 4:30pm.

National Park Service information kiosks are located inside or near the Jefferson, Lincoln, FDR, Vietnam Veterans, Korean War, and World War II memorials, and at the Washington Monument. For more information, call ☎ **202/426-6841** or 619-7222; or visit

www.nps.gov/state/dc (all national parklands in D.C.) or nps.gov/nama (National Mall and Memorials Park sites).

The **White House Visitor Center**, on the first floor of the Herbert Hoover Building, Department of Commerce, 1450 Pennsylvania Ave. NW (btw. 14th and 15th sts.; ☎ **202/208-1631**, or 456-7041 for recorded information), is open daily (except for Christmas Day, Thanksgiving, and New Year's Day) from 7:30am to 4pm.

The **Smithsonian Information Center**, in the "Castle," 1000 Jefferson Dr. SW (☎ **202/633-1000**, or TTY 633-5285; www.si.edu), is open every day but Christmas from 8:30am to 5:30pm; knowledgeable staff answer questions and dispense maps and brochures.

The **American Automobile Association (AAA)** has a large central office near the White House, at 1405 G St. NW, between 14th and 15th streets NW, Washington, DC 20005-2111 (☎ **202/481-6811**). Hours are 9am to 5:30pm Monday through Friday. Maps and travel advice are available to members.

HELPFUL WEBSITES

Take a look at the D.C. government's website, www.dc.gov, the Cultural Tourism D.C. site, www.culturaltourismdc.org, and the *Washington Post* site, www.washingtonpost.com, for more information about the city.

2 When to Go

The city's peak seasons generally coincide with two activities: the sessions of Congress and springtime—starting with the appearance of the cherry blossoms along the Potomac. Specifically, from about the second week in September until Thanksgiving, and again from about mid-January to June (when Congress is "in"), hotels are full with guests whose business takes them to Capitol Hill or to conferences. And mid-March through June traditionally is the most frenzied season, when families and school groups descend upon the city to see the cherry blossoms and enjoy Washington's sensational spring. This is also a popular season for protest marches. Hotel rooms and airfares tend to be higher.

If crowds turn you off, consider visiting Washington at the end of August/early September, when Congress is still "out" and families return home to get their children back to school, or between Thanksgiving and mid-January, when Congress leaves again and many people are ensconced in their own holiday-at-home celebrations. Hotel rates are cheapest at this time, too, and many hotels

offer attractive packages. The year 2008 is an election year, which means that Washington during the normally quiet month of January will be rocking out with visitors here to pay tribute and party before, during, and a little bit after inauguration day, January 20, 2009.

If you're thinking of visiting in July and August, be forewarned: The weather is very hot and humid. Summer is also the season for outdoor concerts, festivals, parades, and other events. And, of course, Independence Day (July 4th) in the capital is a spectacular celebration.

WASHINGTON, D.C., CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Washington's most popular annual events are the Cherry Blossom Festival in spring, the Fourth of July celebration in summer, and the lighting of the National Christmas Tree in winter. But some sort of special event occurs almost daily. For the latest schedules, check www.destinationdc.org, www.nps.gov/ncro (click on "Calendar of Events"), www.culturaltourismdc.org, www.dc.gov, and www.washingtonpost.com.

January

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday. Events include speeches by prominent leaders and politicians, readings, dance, theater, concerts and choral performances, and prayer vigils. On the Friday preceding the national holiday (third Mon in Jan), the National Park Service holds a ceremony at the Department of Interior Building at 1849 C St. NW, attended by schoolchildren and open to the public; park rangers then transfer the wreath used during the ceremony to the Lincoln Memorial. Call ☎ **202/619-7222**. Many events take place at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Library, 901 G St. NW (☎ **202/727-0321**). Third Monday in January.

February

Black History Month. Numerous events, museum exhibits, and cultural programs celebrate the contributions of African Americans to American life, including a celebration of abolitionist Frederick Douglass's birthday. For details, check the *Washington Post* or call the National Park Service at ☎ **202/619-7222**.

Chinese New Year Celebration. A friendship archway, topped by 300 painted dragons and lighted at night, marks Chinatown's entrance at 7th and H streets NW. The celebration begins the day of the Chinese New Year and continues for 10 or more days, with traditional firecrackers, dragon dancers, and colorful street parades. For details, call ☎ **202/789-7000**. Early February.

Abraham Lincoln's Birthday. This day is marked by a wreath laying and reading of the Gettysburg Address at noon at the Lincoln

Memorial. The year 2009 marks the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birthday, so expect a grand celebration. Call ☎ **202/619-7222**. February 12.

George Washington's Birthday. Celebratory events similar to Lincoln's birthday, centered on the Washington Monument. Call ☎ **202/619-7222** for details.

March

Women's History Month. Various institutions throughout the city stage celebrations of women's lives and achievements. For the schedule of National Park Service events, check the calendar at www.nps.gov/ncro; for Smithsonian events, call ☎ **202/633-1000** or go online at www.si.edu.

St. Patrick's Day Parade. A big parade on Constitution Avenue NW, from 7th to 17th streets, with floats, bagpipes, marching bands, and the wearin' o' the green. For parade information, call ☎ **202/789-7000** or go online at www.dcstpatsparade.com. The Sunday before March 17.

Smithsonian Kite Festival. This event is delightful if the weather cooperates—an occasion for a trip in itself. Throngs of kite enthusiasts fly their unique creations on the grounds of the Washington Monument, and compete for ribbons and prizes. Now in its 43rd year, the kite festival even has its own website: **www.kitefestival.org**. Visit the website or call ☎ **202/633-1000** or 633-3030 for details. A Saturday in mid- or late March, or early April, but always at the start of the Cherry Blossom Festival.

April

National Cherry Blossom Festival. Washington's best-known annual event: a 2-week festival coinciding with the blossoming of more than 3,700 Japanese cherry trees by the Tidal Basin, on Hains Point, and on the grounds of the Washington Monument. Events take place all over town, including fireworks, concerts, special art exhibits, park ranger-guided talks and tours past the cherry blossom trees, and sports competitions. A grand parade caps the festival, complete with floats, marching bands, dancers, celebrity guests, and more. For information, call ☎ **877/44BLOOM** (442/5666) or go to www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org. March 28 to April 12, 2009. National and local news programs monitor the budding.

African-American Family Day at the National Zoo. This tradition extends back to 1889, when the zoo opened. The National Zoo, 3001 Connecticut Ave. NW, celebrates African-American families the day after Easter with music, dance, Easter egg rolls,

and other activities. Free. Call ☎ **202/633-1000** for details. Easter Monday.

Filmfest D.C. This annual film festival presents more than 100 works by filmmakers from around the globe. Screenings take place primarily in movie theaters. Tickets are usually \$10 per movie and go fast; some events are free. Call ☎ **202/628-FILM** (3456) or check the website, www.filmfestdc.org. Two weeks in April.

Smithsonian Craft Show. Held in the National Building Museum, 401 F St. NW, this juried show features one-of-a-kind crafts by more than 120 artists from all over the country. There's an entrance fee of about \$15 per adult each day, free for children 12 and under. No strollers. For details, call ☎ **888/832-9554** or 202/633-5006, or visit www.smithsoniancraftshow.com. Four days in late April.

May

Washington National Cathedral Annual Flower Mart. Now in its 70th year, the flower mart takes place on cathedral grounds, featuring displays of flowering plants and herbs, decorating demonstrations, ethnic food booths, children's rides and activities (including an antique carousel), costumed characters, puppet shows, and other entertainment. Admission is free. Call ☎ **202/537-3185** or go to www.cathedral.org (click on "All Hallows Guild") for details. First Friday and Saturday in May, rain or shine.

Memorial Day. At 11am, a wreath-laying ceremony takes place at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery, followed by military band music, a service, and an address by a high-ranking government official (sometimes the president); call ☎ **703/607-8000** for details. A National Memorial Day Parade marches from the Capitol, down Constitution Avenue, to the White House. Ceremonies are held at the National World War II and Vietnam Veterans Memorial (☎ **202/619-7222** for details), and other activities take place at the U.S. Navy Memorial (☎ **202/737-2300**).

June

Smithsonian Folklife Festival. A major event reveling in both national and international traditions in music, crafts, foods, games, concerts, and exhibits, staged the length of the National Mall. Each Folklife Festival showcases three or four cultures or themes. All events are free; most events take place outdoors. Call ☎ **202/633-6440**, or check the website, www.folklife.si.edu, or the listings in the *Washington Post*, for details. For 10 days in late June and early July, always including July 4.

July

Independence Day. There's no better place to be on the Fourth of July than in Washington, D.C. The festivities include a massive National Independence Day Parade down Constitution Avenue, complete with lavish floats, princesses, marching groups, and military bands. A morning program in front of the National Archives includes military demonstrations, period music, and a reading of the Declaration of Independence. In the evening, the National Symphony Orchestra plays on the west steps of the Capitol with guest artists. And big-name entertainment precedes the fireworks display behind the Washington Monument. You can also attend a free 11am organ recital at Washington's National Cathedral. Consult the *Washington Post* or call ☎ **202/619-7222** for details. July 4, all day.

Bastille Day. This Washington tradition honors the French Independence Day with live entertainment and a block-long race by tray-balancing waiters and waitresses, along the stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of Brasserie Les Halles. Free, *mais bien sûr*. At 12th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW. Call ☎ **202/347-6848**. July 14.

Capital Fringe Festival. This event debuted in 2006 and celebrates experimental theater in the tradition of the original fringe festival held annually in Edinburgh, Scotland. Five events take place at more than 20 venues daily for 10 days, adding up to about 500 or more acts in all. Local and visiting artists perform in theater, dance, music, and other disciplines. Tickets are \$10 per event and the action centers on 7th Street NW in the Penn Quarter. Visit www.capfringe.org for details. The end of the month.

September

Labor Day Concert. The National Symphony Orchestra closes its summer season with a free performance at 8pm on the West Lawn of the Capitol; call ☎ **202/619-7222** for details. Sunday before Labor Day. (Rain date: Same day and time at Constitution Hall or the Kennedy Center.)

Kennedy Center Open House Arts Festival. A daylong festival of the performing arts, featuring local and national artists on the front plaza and river terrace (which overlooks the Potomac), and throughout the stage halls of the Kennedy Center. Kids' activities usually include a National Symphony Orchestra "petting zoo," where children get to bow, blow, drum, or strum a favorite instrument. Admission is free, although you may have to stand in a long line for the inside performances. For details, check the *Washington*

Post, call ☎ **800/444-1324** or 202/467-4600, or access the website, www.kennedy-center.org. A Saturday or Sunday in early to mid-September, 11:30am to 7:30pm.

Black Family Reunion. Performances, food, and fun are part of this 2-day celebration of the African-American family and culture, held on the Mall. Free. Check the website, www.ncnw.org/events/reunion.htm. Early to mid-September.

Library of Congress National Book Festival. Co-sponsored by the Library of Congress and the First Lady, this festival welcomes at least 80 established authors and their many fans to the National Mall for readings, author signings, and general hoopla surrounding the love of books. Check www.loc.gov/bookfest, or call ☎ **888/714-4696** for more information. A Saturday in late September.

October

Marine Corps Marathon. Thirty thousand runners compete in this 26.2-mile race (the fifth-largest marathon in the United States). It begins at the Marine Corps Memorial (the Iwo Jima statue) and passes major monuments. Call ☎ **703/432-1159** for details. Anyone can enter; register online at www.marinemarathon.com. Last Sunday in October.

November

Veterans Day. The nation's war dead are honored with a wreath-laying ceremony at 11am at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery followed by a memorial service. The president of the United States or his stand-in officiates, as a military band performs. Call ☎ **703/607-8000** for more information about Arlington Cemetery events and 202/619-7222 for information about events elsewhere. November 11.

December

Christmas Pageant of Peace/National Tree Lighting. At the northern end of the Ellipse, the president lights the national Christmas tree to the accompaniment of orchestral and choral music. The lighting inaugurates the 4-week Pageant of Peace, a tremendous holiday celebration full of free activities, including musical performances, mostly of local school and church choruses, nightly on the Ellipse. (Brrrr!) Call ☎ **202/208-1631**, or check the website, www.nps.gov/whho/pageant.htm, for details; tickets are free but required to attend the tree-lighting ceremony. The tree-lighting ceremony takes place at 5pm on a day in early December, and the Pageant of Peace continues every night throughout the month.

3 Staying Connected

WITH YOUR OWN COMPUTER

Many hotels, resorts, airports, cafes, and retailers are going Wi-Fi, becoming “hot spots” that offer free high-speed access or charge a small fee for usage. Most laptops sold today have built-in wireless capability. To find public Wi-Fi hot spots in Washington, go to **www.jiwire.com**; its Hotspot Finder holds the world’s largest directory of public wireless hot spots (465 in the center of Washington, last time I checked). Or, you could just head to your corner Starbucks, which has offered up free Wi-Fi service with its lattes for quite some time.

All of the D.C. hotels we review offer Internet access (mostly high-speed or Wi-Fi, but some have dial-up service).

Wherever you go, bring a **connection kit** of the right power and phone adapters, a spare phone cord, and a spare Ethernet network cable—or find out whether your hotel supplies them.

WITHOUT YOUR OWN COMPUTER

Increasingly, hotels provide guests computer and Internet access on one or more computers in the hotel business center, often as a complimentary service. Check out copy shops like **Kinko’s** (FedEx Kinkos), which offers computer stations with fully loaded software (as well as Wi-Fi). For help locating cybercafes and other establishments where you can go for Internet access, see “Internet Access” in the appendix (p. 167).

4 Getting There

BY PLANE

Three airports serve the Washington, D.C., area. General information follows that should help you determine which airport is your best bet. See the appendix at the back of this book for the listing of airline 800-numbers and websites.

Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) lies 4 miles south of D.C., across the Potomac River in Virginia, a trip of only a few minutes by car, 15 to 20 minutes by Metro in non-rush-hour traffic. Its proximity to the District and its direct access to the Metro rail system are reasons why you might want to fly into National.

Approximately 12 airlines serve this airport, which has nonstop flights to 69 U.S. cities, plus Nassau, Bermuda, Montreal, and Toronto. Nearly all nonstop flights are to and from cities located

within 1,250 miles from Washington. The exceptions are flights between National and Phoenix, Denver, Las Vegas, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake City. Delta and US Airways shuttles, together, offer hourly or nearly hourly flights between National and Boston's Logan Airport, and National and New York's LaGuardia Airport.

The Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority oversees both National and Dulles airports, so the website is the same for the two facilities: www.mwaa.com. Check there for airport information, or call ☎ **703/417-8000**. For Metro information, call ☎ **202/637-7000**.

Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD) is 26 miles outside the capital, in Chantilly, Virginia, a 35- to 45-minute ride to downtown in non-rush-hour traffic. Of the three airports, Dulles handles more daily flights, with about 30 airlines flying nonstop to 127 destinations, including 40 foreign cities. And though the airport is not as convenient to the heart of Washington as National, it's more convenient than BWI, thanks to an uncongested airport access road that travels half the distance toward Washington. The airport's website is www.mwaa.com, and its information line is ☎ **703/572-2700**.

Baltimore–Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI) is located about 45 minutes from downtown, a few miles outside of Baltimore. One fact especially recommends BWI to travelers: the major presence of Southwest Airlines, whose bargain fares and flights to nearly 40 cities seem to offer something for everyone. (Southwest also serves Dulles Airport, but in a much smaller capacity.)

In all, 16 airlines serve BWI, flying nonstop to 70 destinations, including 8 foreign cities. Call ☎ **800/435-9294** for airport information, or point your browser to www.bwiairport.com.

GETTING INTO TOWN FROM THE AIRPORT

Each of the three airports offers similar options for getting into the city. Follow the signs to “ground transportation” and look for the banners or a staff representative of the service you desire. Follow baggage claim signs, too, since ground transportation operations are always situated near baggage carousels.

TAXI SERVICE For a trip to downtown D.C., you can expect a taxi to cost anywhere from \$10 to \$20 for the 10- to 20-minute ride from National Airport; \$50 to \$60 for the 30- to 45-minute ride from Dulles Airport; and \$79 for the 45-minute ride from BWI.

SUPERSHUTTLE Vans (☎ **800/258-3826**; www.supershuttle.com) offer shared-ride, door-to-door service between the airport and

your destination, whether in the District or in a suburban location. You make a reservation by phone or online and then proceed to the SuperShuttle desk in your airport to check in and be assigned to your bus. The only drawback to this service is the roundabout way the driver must follow, as he or she drops off or picks up other passengers en route. If you arrive after the SuperShuttle desk has closed, you can summon a van by calling customer service at ☎ **888/888-6025**. The 24-hour service bases its fares on zip code, so to reach downtown, expect to pay about \$12, plus \$10 for each additional person from National; \$27, plus \$10 per additional person from Dulles; and \$35, plus \$12 per additional person from BWI. If you're calling the SuperShuttle for a ride from a D.C.-area location to one of the airports, you must reserve a spot at least 24 hours in advance.

Individual transportation options at each airport are as follows:

FROM RONALD REAGAN WASHINGTON NATIONAL AIRPORT

If you are not too encumbered with luggage, you should take **Metrorail** (☎ **202/637-7000**) into the city. Metro's Yellow and Blue lines stop at the airport and connect via an enclosed walkway to level two, the concourse level, of the main terminal, adjacent to terminals B and C. If yours is one of the airlines that still uses the "old" terminal A (Spirit, AirTran, Midwest, Northwest), you will have a longer walk to reach the Metro station. Signs pointing the way can be confusing, so ask an airport employee if you're headed in the right direction; or, better yet, head out to the curb and hop a shuttle bus to the station, but be sure to ask the driver to let you know when you've reached the Metro (it may not be obvious).

Metrobuses (☎ **202/637-7000**) also serve the area, should you be going somewhere off the Metro route. But Metrorail is fastest, a 15- to 20-minute non-rush-hour ride to downtown. It is safe, convenient, and cheap, costing \$1.35 base fare and going up from there, depending on when (fares increase during rush hours) and where you're going.

FROM WASHINGTON DULLES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

The **Washington Flyer Express Bus** (☎ **888/927-4359**; www.washfly.com) runs between Dulles and the West Falls Church Metro station, where you can board a train for D.C. In the airport, look for signs for the DULLES AIRPORT SHUTTLE, which leaves from Door 4 on the arrivals level. Buses to the West Falls Church Metro station run daily, every 30 minutes, and cost \$9 one-way. (By the

way, “**Washington Flyer**” is also the name under which the taxi service operates at Dulles.)

More convenient is the **Metrobus** service (no. 5A) that runs between Dulles (buses depart from curb 2E, outside the Ground Transportation area) and the L’Enfant Plaza Metro station, located near Capitol Hill and within walking distance of the National Mall and Smithsonian museums. The bus departs every 40 minutes weekdays, hourly on weekends; costs only \$3; and takes about an hour.

FROM BALTIMORE–WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT Washington’s Metro service runs an Express Metro Bus (“B30”) between its Metrorail Green Line Greenbelt station and BWI Airport. In the airport, head to the lower level and look for PUBLIC TRANSIT signs to find the bus, which operates daily, departs every 40 minutes, takes about 30 minutes to reach the station, and costs \$3. At the Greenbelt Metro station, you purchase a Metro fare-card and board a Metro train, which will take you into the city. Depending on where you want to go, you can either stay on the Green Line train to your designated stop or get off at the Fort Totten Station to transfer to a Red Line train, whose stops include Union Station (near Capitol Hill) and various downtown locations. Transfers can be tricky, so you may want to ask a fellow passenger or a Metro attendant to make sure you’re headed in the right direction.

You also have the choice of taking either an **Amtrak** (☎ 800/872-7245) or a **Maryland Rural Commuter (MARC)** (☎ 800/325-7245) train into the city. Both trains travel between the BWI Railway Station (☎ 410/672-6169) and Washington’s Union Station (☎ 202/484-7540), about a 30-minute ride. Amtrak’s service is daily (ticket prices range from \$12–\$38 per person, one-way, depending on time and train type), while MARC’s is weekdays only (\$6 per person, one-way). A courtesy shuttle runs every 10 minutes or so between the airport and the train station; stop at the desk near the baggage-claim area to check for the next departure time of both the shuttle bus and the train. Trains depart about once per hour.

BY CAR

If you are like most visitors, you’re planning on driving here, traveling on one of the major highways. No matter which road you take, there’s a good chance you will have to navigate some portion of the **Capital Beltway** (I-495 and I-95) to gain entry to D.C. The Beltway girds the city, about 66 miles around, with more than 56 interchanges or exits, and is nearly always congested (especially during weekday morning and evening rush hours, roughly 5:30–9:30am

and 3–7pm). Commuter traffic on the Beltway rivals, maybe surpasses, that of major L.A. freeways, and drivers can get a little crazy, weaving in and out of traffic.

Get yourself a good map before you do anything else. As mentioned earlier, **Destination D.C.’s** website, www.destinationdc.com, posts downloadable maps that are quite helpful. Another great source is the **American Automobile Association (AAA; ☎ 800/763-9900** for emergency road service and for connection to the mid-Atlantic office; www.aaa.com), which provides its members with maps and detailed TripTiks that give precise directions to a destination, including up-to-date information about areas of construction. AAA also provides towing services should you have car trouble during your trip.

The District is 240 miles from New York City, 40 miles from Baltimore, 700 miles from Chicago, 500 miles from Boston, and about 630 miles from Atlanta.

BY TRAIN

Amtrak (☎ 800/USA-RAIL (7245); www.amtrak.com) offers daily service to Washington from New York, Boston, and Chicago. Amtrak also travels daily between Washington and points south, including Raleigh, Charlotte, Atlanta, cities in Florida, and New Orleans. Amtrak’s **Acela Express** trains offer the quickest service along the “Northeast Corridor,” linking Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington. The trains travel as fast as 150 mph, making the trip between New York and Washington in about 3 hours and 30 minutes and between Boston and Washington in about 7 hours. Amtrak runs fewer Acela trains on weekends, and honors passenger discounts, such as those for seniors and AAA members, only on weekend Acela travel.

Amtrak offers a smorgasbord of good-deal rail passes and discounted fares; although not all are based on advance purchase, you may have more discount options by reserving early. The bargain fares can be used only on certain days and hours of the day; be sure to find out exactly what restrictions apply. Tickets for children ages 2 to 15 cost half the price of a regular coach fare when the children are accompanied by a fare-paying adult. For more information, go to **www.amtrak.com** and click on the website’s “Hot Deals” section, where you’ll find assorted discount possibilities. **Note:** Amtrak requires reserved seating on its regional trains running between Boston and Newport News, Virginia, which means that every traveler is guaranteed a seat.

Amtrak trains arrive at historic **Union Station**, 50 Massachusetts Ave. NE (© 202/371-9441; www.unionstationdc.com), a short walk from the Capitol, across the circle from several hotels, and a short cab or Metro ride from downtown. This stunning depot is conveniently located and connects with Metro service. Taxis are almost always available

5 City Layout & Neighborhoods In Brief

CITY LAYOUT

Washington's appearance today pays homage to the 1792 vision of French engineer Pierre Charles L'Enfant, who created the capital's grand design of sweeping avenues intersected by spacious circles, directed that the Capitol and the White House be placed on prominent hilltops at either end of a wide stretch of avenue, and superimposed this overall plan upon a traditional street grid. The city's quadrants, grand avenues named after states, alphabetically ordered streets crossed by chronologically ordered streets, and parks integrated with urban features are all ideas that started with L'Enfant. President George Washington, who had hired L'Enfant, was forced to dismiss the temperamental genius after L'Enfant apparently offended quite a number of people. But Washington recognized the brilliance of the city plan and hired surveyors Benjamin Banneker and Andrew Ellicott, who had worked with L'Enfant, to continue to implement L'Enfant's design.

The U.S. Capitol marks the center of the city, which is divided into **northwest (NW)**, **northeast (NE)**, **southwest (SW)**, and **southeast (SE) quadrants**. Most, but not all, areas of interest to tourists are in the northwest. The boundary demarcations are often seamless; for instance, you are in the northwest quadrant when you visit the National Museum of Natural History, but by crossing the National Mall to the other side to visit the Freer Gallery, you put yourself in the southwest quadrant. Pay attention to the quadrant's geographic suffix; as you'll notice when you look on a map, some addresses—for instance, the corner of G and 7th streets—appear in all quadrants.

MAIN ARTERIES & STREETS From the Capitol, North Capitol Street and South Capitol Street run north and south, respectively. East Capitol Street divides the city north and south. The area west of the Capitol is not a street at all, but the National Mall, which is bounded on the north by Constitution Avenue and on the south by Independence Avenue.

The primary artery of Washington is **Pennsylvania Avenue**, which is the scene of parades, inaugurations, and other splashy events. Pennsylvania runs northwest in a direct line between the Capitol and the White House—if it weren't for the Treasury Building, the president would have a clear view of the Capitol—before continuing on a northwest angle to Georgetown, where it becomes M Street.

Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House—between 15th and 17th streets NW—remains closed to cars for security reasons but has been remade into an attractive pedestrian plaza, lined with 88 Princeton American Elm trees.

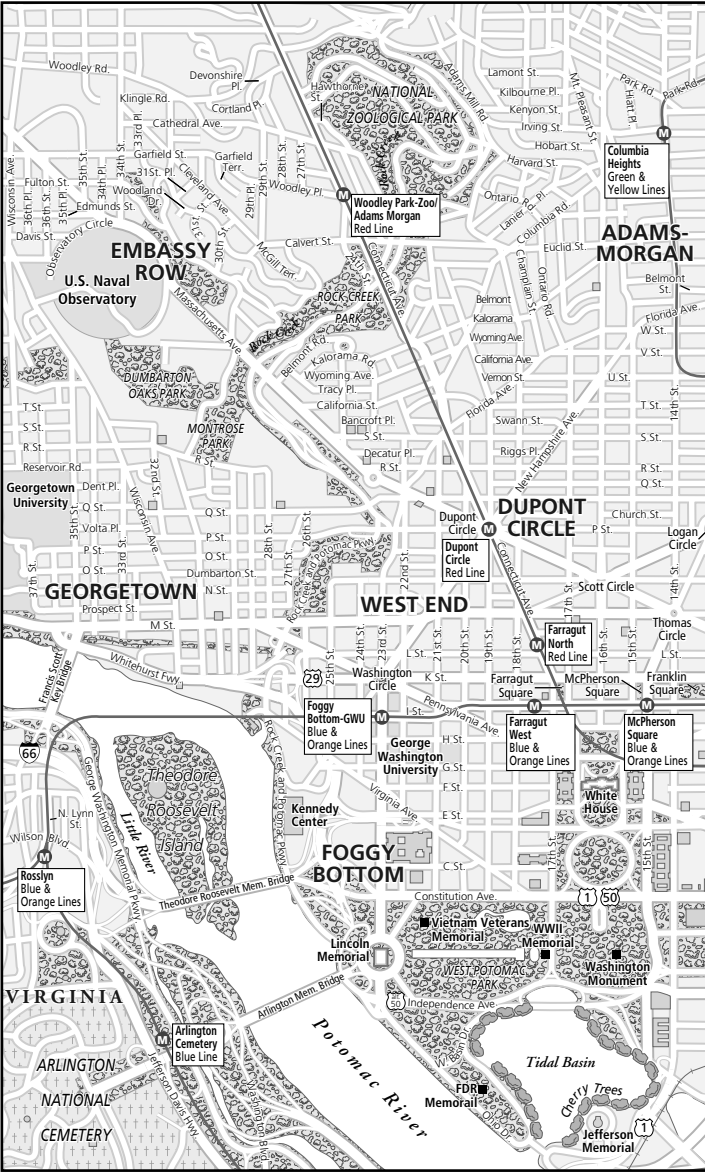
Constitution Avenue, paralleled to the south most of the way by Independence Avenue, runs east-west, flanking the Capitol and the Mall. If you hear Washingtonians talk about the “House” side of the Hill, they’re referring to the southern half of the Capitol, the side closest to Independence Avenue and home to Congressional House offices and the House Chamber. Conversely, the Senate side is the northern half of the Capitol, where Senate offices and the Senate Chamber are found, closer to Constitution Avenue.

Washington’s longest avenue, **Massachusetts Avenue**, runs parallel to Pennsylvania (a few avenues north). Along the way, you’ll find Union Station and then Dupont Circle, which is central to the area known as Embassy Row. Farther out are the Naval Observatory (the vice president’s residence is on the premises), Washington National Cathedral, American University, and, eventually, Maryland.

Connecticut Avenue, which runs more directly north (the other avenues run southeast to northwest), starts at Lafayette Square, intersects Dupont Circle, and eventually takes you to the National Zoo, on to the charming residential neighborhood known as Cleveland Park, and into Chevy Chase, Maryland, where you can pick up the Beltway to head out of town. Downtown Connecticut Avenue, with its posh shops and clusters of restaurants, is a good street to stroll.

Wisconsin Avenue originates in Georgetown; its intersection with M Street forms Georgetown’s hub. Antiques shops, trendy boutiques, nightclubs, restaurants, and pubs all vie for attention. Wisconsin Avenue basically parallels Connecticut Avenue; one of the few irritating things about the city’s transportation system is that the Metro does not connect these two major arteries in the heart of the city. Buses do, and, of course, you can always walk or take a taxi from one avenue to the other; read about two supplemental bus systems, the Georgetown Metro Connection shuttle (www.metroconnectiondc.com/getting-here/shuttle) and the D.C. Circulator (see “Getting

D.C. Neighborhoods & Major Metro Stops





Around,” below). Metrorail’s first stop on Wisconsin Avenue is in Tenleytown, a residential area. Follow the avenue north and you land in the affluent Maryland cities of Chevy Chase and Bethesda.

FINDING AN ADDRESS If you understand the city’s layout, it’s easy to find your way around. As you read this, have a map handy.

Each of the four corners of the District of Columbia is exactly the same distance from the Capitol dome. The White House and most government buildings and important monuments are west of the Capitol (in the northwest and southwest quadrants), as are major hotels and tourist facilities.

Numbered streets run north-south, beginning on either side of the Capitol with 1st Street. Lettered streets run east-west and are named alphabetically, beginning with A Street. (Don’t look for a B, a J, an X, a Y, or a Z St., however.) After W Street, street names of two syllables continue in alphabetical order, followed by street names of three syllables; the more syllables in a name, the farther the street is from the Capitol.

Avenues, named for U.S. states, run at angles across the grid pattern and often intersect at traffic circles. For example, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts avenues intersect at Dupont Circle.

NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

Atlas District The Atlas District, no more than a section of H Street NE, really, between 12th and 14th streets northeast of Union Station, is increasingly a nightlife and live music destination. A hardscrabble part of town by day, the Atlas District turns into a music and bar playground at night (especially Thurs–Sat). There are no hotels, for now.

Barracks Row Barracks Row, likewise, refers mainly to a single stretch of 8th Street SE, south of Pennsylvania Avenue SE, but also to side streets occupied by Marine Corps Barracks since 1801, hence the name. Known for its lineup of shops, casual bistros, and pubs, Barracks Row’s attractions have been rapidly multiplying, ever since the Nationals baseball team’s stadium, Nationals Park, opened in April 2008. Currently, the closest hotel, Capitol Hill Suites, is 6 blocks away, at C and 2nd Street SE.

Cleveland Park Cleveland Park, just north of Woodley Park, is an enclave of beautiful old houses with wraparound porches, found on picturesque streets extending off the main artery, Connecticut Avenue. With its own stop on the Red Line Metro

system and a respectable number of excellent restaurants, Cleveland Park is worth visiting when you're near the zoo (just up the street) or in the mood for some fine cuisine and a sense of affluent D.C. neighborliness. The closest hotels lie a short walk away in Woodley Park.

Capitol Hill Everyone's heard of "the Hill," the area crowned by the Capitol. The term, in fact, refers to a large section of town, extending from the western side of the Capitol to the D.C. Armory going east, bounded by H Street to the north and the Southwest Freeway to the south. It contains not only the chief symbol of the nation's capital, but the Supreme Court building, the Library of Congress, the Folger Shakespeare Library, Union Station, and Eastern Market. Much of it is a quiet residential neighborhood of tree-lined streets and Victorian homes. There are a number of restaurants in the vicinity and a smattering of hotels, mostly close to Union Station. Keep to the well-lit, well-traveled streets at night, and don't walk alone—crime occurs more frequently in this neighborhood.

The Mall This lovely, tree-lined stretch of open space between Constitution and Independence avenues, extending for 2½ miles from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, is the hub of tourist attractions. It includes most of the Smithsonian Institution museums and several other notable sites. Tourists as well as natives—joggers, food vendors, kite flyers, and picnickers among them—traipse the 300-foot-wide Mall. Most hotels and restaurants are located beyond the Mall to the north, with a few located south of the Mall.

Downtown The area roughly between 6th and 21st streets NW going east to west, and M Street and Pennsylvania Avenue going north to south, is a mix of the Federal Triangle's government office buildings; K Street, ground zero for the city's countless law and lobbying firms; Connecticut Avenue restaurants and shopping; historic hotels; the city's poshest small hotels; **Chinatown**; the huge convention center; and the White House. You'll also find the historic **Penn Quarter**, now D.C.'s hottest area, which has continued to flourish ever since the 1997 opening of the Verizon Center (venue for Washington Wizards and Mystics basketball games and rock concerts). A number of off-the-Mall museums, like the mammoth Newseum, the International Spy Museum, and the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery and American Art Museum, are here. This is also where you'll find the hippest restaurants, boutique hotels, and nightclubs. The total downtown

area takes in so many blocks and attractions that I've divided discussions of accommodations and dining into two sections: "**Midtown,**" roughly the area west of 15th Street to 21st Street, and north of Pennsylvania Avenue to M Street; and "**Penn Quarter,**" roughly east of 15th Street to 6th Street, and Pennsylvania Avenue north to New York Avenue.

U Street Corridor D.C.'s avant-garde nightlife neighborhood radiates out from 14th Street to include U Street between 9th and 18th streets NW. The quarter continues to rise from the ashes of the nightclubs and theaters located here decades ago when the performances of jazz and blues legends Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and Cab Calloway gave the area the name "Black Broadway." Today, clubs like Twins Jazz and HR-57 honor that legacy, drawing a diverse mix of jazz lovers, while the corridor's many clubs fill nightly with the city's young and restless. New restaurants and little shops proliferate. Go here to party, not to sleep—there are no hotels along this stretch.

Adams-Morgan Though this ever-trendy, multiethnic neighborhood is about the size of a postage stamp, it's crammed with boutiques, bars, clubs, and restaurants. Everything is located on either 18th Street NW or Columbia Road NW. You won't find any hotels here, but there are several nearby in the Dupont Circle and Woodley Park neighborhoods (see below). Parking during the day is okay, but difficult at night, especially weekends (a parking garage on Champlain St., just off 18th St., helps things a little). Luckily, you can easily walk (be alert—the neighborhood is edgy) to Adams-Morgan from the Dupont Circle or Woodley Park Metro stops, bus it, or take a taxi there. The weekend begins Thursday nights in this nightlife land.

Dupont Circle One of my favorite parts of town, Dupont Circle is fun day or night. It takes its name from the traffic circle minipark, where Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut avenues collide. Washington's famous **Embassy Row** centers on Dupont Circle, and refers to the parade of grand embassy mansions lining Massachusetts Avenue and its side streets. The streets extending out from the circle are lively, with all-night bookstores, good restaurants, wonderful art galleries and art museums, nightspots, and Washingtonians at their loosest. It is also the hub of D.C.'s gay community. There are plenty of hotels.

Foggy Bottom/West End The area west of the White House, south of Dupont Circle, and east of Georgetown encompasses both Foggy Bottom and the West End. Foggy Bottom, located south of Pennsylvania Avenue, was Washington's early industrial

center. Its name comes from the foul fumes emitted in those days by a coal depot and gasworks, but its original name, Funkstown (for owner Jacob Funk), is perhaps even worse. There's nothing foul (and not much funky) about the area today. The West End edges north of Pennsylvania Avenue, booming with the latest big-name restaurants and new office buildings. Together, the overlapping Foggy Bottom and West End neighborhoods present a mix of town-house residences, George Washington University campus buildings, small- and medium-size hotels, several fine eateries, student bars, and the Kennedy Center, lining either side of Pennsylvania Avenue and its side streets.

Georgetown This historic community dates from Colonial times. It was a thriving tobacco port long before the District of Columbia was formed, and one of its attractions, the Old Stone House, dates from pre-Revolutionary days. Georgetown action centers on M Street and Wisconsin Avenue NW, where you'll find the luxury Four Seasons hotel (and less-expensive digs), numerous boutiques, chic restaurants, and popular pubs. Expect lots of nightlife here. But detour from the main drags to relish the quiet, tree-lined streets of restored Colonial row houses, stroll the beautiful gardens of Dumbarton Oaks, and check out the C&O Canal. Georgetown is also home to Georgetown University. Note that the neighborhood gets pretty raucous on the weekends.

Woodley Park Home to Washington's largest hotel (the Marriott Wardman Park), Woodley Park boasts the National Zoo, many good restaurants, and some antiques stores. Washingtonians are used to seeing conventioners wandering the neighborhood's pretty residential streets with their name tags still on.

6 Getting Around

Washington is amazingly easy to traverse on foot—so easy, in fact, that the Brookings Institution recently named it the most walkable city in the country. Our public transportation and taxi systems are accessible and comprehensive, as well.

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Metrorail

Metrorail is a wonderful way to get around, but if you travel Metrorail during rush hour (Mon–Fri 5–9:30am and 3–7pm), you may not be so smitten with the system, since delays can be frequent, lines at farecard machines long, trains overcrowded, and Washingtonians at their rudest. An increasing ridership is overloading the system, maintenance problems are cropping up, and the Washington Metropolitan

Area Transit Authority (WMATA; ☎ 202/637-7000; www.wmata.com) is struggling just to keep pace, much less prevent future crises. Among the solutions are the addition of new trains and the installation of passenger-information display boxes on station platforms reporting the number of minutes before the arrival of the next train and any delays or irregularities.

Metrorail's system of 86 stations and 106 miles of track includes locations at or near almost every sightseeing attraction; it also extends to suburban Maryland and northern Virginia. There are five lines in operation—Red, Blue, Orange, Yellow, and Green. The lines connect at several points, making transfers easy.

Metro stations are indicated by discreet brown columns bearing the station's name and topped by the letter M. Below the M is a colored stripe or stripes indicating the line or lines that stop there. When entering a Metro station for the first time, go to the kiosk and ask the station manager for a free ***Metro System Pocket Guide***. It contains a map of the system, explains how it works, and lists the closest Metro stops to points of interest. The station manager can also answer questions about routing or purchase of farecards. You can download a copy of the pocket guide and loads of information, including schedules, from Metro's website (www.wmata.com). The pocket guide is available in 11 languages, from Arabic to Vietnamese.

To enter or exit a Metro station, you need a computerized **farecard**, available at vending machines near the entrance. The machines take nickels, dimes, quarters, and bills from \$1 to \$20; they can return up to \$4.95 in change (coins only). The vending machines labeled PASSES/FARECARDS accept both cash and credit cards. At this time, the minimum fare to enter the system is \$1.35, which pays for rides to and from any point within 7 miles of boarding during non-peak hours; during peak hours (Mon–Fri 5–9:30am, 3–7pm, 2am–closing), \$1.65 takes you only 3 miles. The maximum you will pay to the farthest destination is \$4.50.

Once you're on the platform, you'll figure out your correct side of the track by finding your desired station stop on the list of upcoming stops posted on the brown pylon for trains headed in your direction. A display board overhead flashes the number of minutes anticipated before the next train pulls into the station. Lights embedded in the platform floor pulsate to alert you to the train's impending arrival. The only tricky part of traveling on Metro concerns transferring to a different line. Metro has eight transfer hubs, and probably the busiest hub is at Metro Center, where tracks crisscross on upper and lower levels and passengers can switch to a red,

blue, or orange line train; read and follow the signs carefully, or ask someone for help, to make sure you get to the right track.

Passes are also available—check out the website or call the main number for further information. Up to two children ages 4 and under can ride free with a paying passenger. Seniors (65 and older) and people with disabilities (with valid proof) ride Metrorail and Metrobus for a reduced fare.

When you insert your card in the entrance gate, the time and location are recorded on its magnetic tape, and your card is returned. Don't forget to snatch it up and keep it handy; *you have to reinsert your farecard in the exit gate at your destination*, where the fare will automatically be deducted. The card will be returned if there's any value left on it. If you arrive at a destination and your farecard doesn't have enough value, add what's necessary at the Exitfare machines near the exit gate.

Most metro stations have more than one exit. To save yourself time and confusion, try to figure out ahead of time which exit gets you closer to where you're going.

Metrorail opens at 5am weekdays and 7am Saturday and Sunday, operating until midnight Sunday through Thursday, and until 3am Friday and Saturday. **Note:** The one exception is the stretch of the Yellow line between Mt. Vernon Square/7th Street–Convention Center, which does not operate during weekday rush hours, 5 to 9:30am and 3 to 7pm, but otherwise follows the same schedule as the rest of the system. Call ☎ **202/637-7000**, or visit www.wmata.com, for holiday hours and for information on Metro routes.

Metrobus

The **Metrobus** system encompasses 12,301 stops on its 338 routes (it operates on all major D.C. arteries as well as in the Virginia and Maryland suburbs). You'll know the stops by their red, white, and blue signs. However, the signs tell you only what buses pull into a given stop, not where they go. Furthermore, don't rely on the bus schedules posted at bus stops, which are sometimes out-of-date. Instead, for routing information, call ☎ **202/637-7000**. Calls are taken Monday through Thursday from 6am to 10:30pm, Friday 6am to 11:30pm, Saturday 7am to 11:30pm, and Sunday 7am to 10:30pm. Call this same number to request a free map and time schedule, and information about parking in Metrobus fringe lots, as well as for locations and hours of the places where you can purchase bus tokens.

Base fare in the District is \$1.35, \$3.10 on express routes; bus transfers are free and valid for 2 hours from boarding. There may be additional charges for travel into the Maryland and Virginia suburbs. Bus drivers are not equipped to make change, so be sure to carry exact change or tokens.

Most buses operate daily almost round-the-clock. Service is quite frequent on weekdays, especially during peak hours. On weekends and late at night, service is less frequent.

Up to two children 4 and under ride free with a paying passenger on Metrobus, and there are reduced fares for seniors (☎ 202/637-7000) and people with disabilities (☎ 202/962-1245 or 962-1100).

D.C. Circulator

In addition to its Metrobus service, D.C. offers a fantastic supplemental bus system that is efficient, inexpensive, and convenient. The D.C. Circulator's fleet of air-conditioned red-and-gray buses travel three circumscribed routes in the city: the north-south route between the D.C. Convention Center and the waterfront, the east-west route between upper Georgetown and Union Station, and the Smithsonian/National Gallery route, which simply loops around the Mall, from 4th Street to Independence Avenue, to 17th Street, to Constitution Avenue, and back around. Buses stop at designated points on their routes (look for the distinctive red-and-gold sign, often topping a regular Metro bus-stop sign) every 10 minutes, and operate daily between 7am and 9pm, except for the Smithsonian/National Gallery route, which operates from 10am to 6pm weekends only. In addition, the system accommodates nightlifers by offering a special service between upper Georgetown and the intersection of 17th and I streets NW, from 9pm to midnight Sunday to Thursday, 9pm to 2am Friday and Saturday. The fare at all times is \$1 (35¢ with the use of a Metrorail transfer) and you can order passes online, or pay upon boarding with exact change or with the use of a Smar-Trip Metro card, or a D.C. Circulator bus ticket purchased at a street meter near the bus stop. For easy and fast transportation in the busiest parts of town, you can't beat it. Call ☎ 202/962-1423 or go to www.dccirculator.com.

BY CAR

Nearly 75% of all leisure visitors to the District arrive by car; but when you get here, my advice is to park your car and use your own feet, Metrorail, the Georgetown Shuttle, and the D.C. Circulator to get around.

If you must drive, be aware that traffic is always thick during the week, parking spaces are often hard to find, and parking lots are ruinously expensive. If you're hoping to snag a metered space, better set out with a pocketful of quarters, since 25¢ buys you 15, sometimes 20, minutes.

Watch out for **traffic circles**. The law states that traffic already in the circle has the right of way. No one pays any attention to this rule, however, which can be frightening. The other thing you'll notice is that while some circles are easy to figure out, others are nerve-rackingly confusing (Thomas Circle, where 14th St. NW, Vermont Ave. NW, and Massachusetts Ave. NW come together, is to be avoided at all costs).

Sections of certain streets in Washington become **one-way** during rush hour: Rock Creek Parkway, Canal Road, and 17th Street NW are three examples. Other streets change the direction of some of their traffic lanes during rush hour: Connecticut Avenue NW is the main one. In the morning, traffic in four of its six lanes travels south to downtown, and in late afternoon/early evening, downtown traffic in four of its six lanes heads north; between the hours of 9am and 3:30pm, traffic in both directions keeps to the normally correct side of the yellow line. Lit-up traffic signs alert you to what's going on, but pay attention. Unless a sign is posted prohibiting it, a right-on-red law is in effect. The speed limit within city boundaries is usually 25 mph, up to 35 mph on some streets.

BY TAXI

In May 2008, the D.C. taxi cab system switched from charging passengers by geographical zones to charging passengers according to time- and distance-based meters. Fares begin at \$3, plus 25¢ per each additional 1/6 mile, 25¢ per minute of wait time, and \$1.50 per additional passenger. Other charges might apply, for instance, if you telephone for a cab, or for extra luggage or services. Expect to pay your fare in cash; very few cabbies accept credit cards.

Try **Diamond Cab Company** (☎ 202/387-6200) or **Yellow Cab** (☎ 202/544-1212).

Call ☎ 202/645-6018 to inquire about fares within the District and ☎ 202/331-1671 to find out the rate between any point in D.C. and an address in Virginia or Maryland. For more information, check out the D.C. Taxicab Commission's website, www.dctaxi.dc.gov.