

INSIDERS GUIDE

National Treasures Live

Capital cognoscenti tip us off to the wealth of experiences on the Mall. By SIOBHAN ROTH



In Washington, D.C., “Meet me at the Mall” means something altogether different than it does in the rest of the country. The National Mall has nothing to do with shopping for jeans. Rather, this ribbon of green, stretching two miles from the U.S. Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, is the nation’s playground and meeting place, where history is made and, in the 13 museums that flank the park, preserved. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech here in 1963, and hundreds of thousands have since gathered at the Mall to rally for peace, for change, and in support of their country. Almost all visitors to Washington, D.C., spend some time on the Mall, especially in late March/early April during cherry blossom season. To guide the way, D.C. insiders share their favorite finds.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

In the language of the Delaware and Piscataway peoples, *mitsitam* means, “let’s eat!” At lunchtime, federal workers pour into this museum from nearby office buildings to do just that, knowing that its in-house Mitsitam Cafe offers some of the best food on the Mall. The cafeteria-style restaurant has five stations, each serving cuisine indigenous to a region of the Americas, from Northern Woodlands elk to Mesoamerican tacos. “What I love most is that kids don’t feel afraid to experiment in this museum,” says Maggie Bertin, associate director of museum resources. “You’ll see a child getting a bowl of pumpkin soup with blue corn bread.” Her personal favorite? “Salmon from the Northwest Coast.”

HIRSHHORN MUSEUM AND SCULPTURE GARDEN

One of the world’s premier collections of contemporary art hangs in the Hirshhorn’s cylindrical building and studs an outdoor sunken garden (Henry Moore’s “King and Queen” pictured, right). D.C.’s Congressional Representative, Eleanor Holmes Norton, makes the garden a regular part of her race-walks. “It’s a world-class treat to have these sculptures outdoors in open view. Why leave all of your treasures on the inside?”



U.S. BOTANIC GARDEN

U.S. BOTANIC GARDEN

Capital Reflecting Pool

U.S. CAPITOL

U.S. CAPITOL

At the Sackler gift shop, pick up pan-Asian items like silk purses and sushi-shaped key chains.

THOMAS JEFFERSON MEMORIAL

THOMAS JEFFERSON MEMORIAL

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL

U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

WASHINGTON MONUMENT

WASHINGTON MONUMENT

KOREAN WAR VETERANS MEMORIAL

KOREAN WAR VETERANS MEMORIAL

VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

LINCOLN MEMORIAL No movie filmed in D.C. seems complete without a scene at the Lincoln Memorial. And it may be Washington’s most cherished and visited monument. “When I visit, I’ll read the Gettysburg Address, study it line by line, and the Second Inaugural Address,” says U.S. Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne. “Sometimes we put in long hours here, and on the way home, I may stop at the memorial late at night. I find it a place of great inspiration.”



TIDAL BASIN In 1912, Tokyo gave Washington 3,000 cherry trees that were planted around the Tidal Basin. Another 3,800 were added in 1965. D.C. sculptor Brook Halvorson remembers how his mother devised a scheme to enjoy the annual springtime blossoming minus the crowds. “When the cherry blossoms are at their peak, my mother organizes a picnic for five in the morning. We call it the Insane Family Picnic. You see the sun come up and watch the blossoms come into color. It’s really beautiful. It’s also usually freezing.”

OLD POST OFFICE PAVILION Washington’s first skyscraper was built in 1899. Most people visit for the food court. “The best part, however, is the panoramic view of the city from the tower,” says Jim Hage, a running columnist for the *Washington Post* and the winner of the 1988 and 1989 Marine Corps Marathons. Unlike the Washington Monument, there’s rarely a wait for the elevator, but the view is “every bit as good.” And to work off any food-court indulgences, Hage says, “take the steps from the base of the tower to the observation deck.”



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY Friday nights bring a different vibe to a building better known for its dinosaur fossils and live bug exhibits. The ground-floor atrium is transformed into a jazz supper club that draws top-shelf talent. “It’s a family-friendly environment,” says jazz drummer and bandleader Nasar Abadey. “Folks usually sit close to the band and are very much into what the musicians are playing.”



THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES The Archives’ soaring rotunda confirms that this is not merely a depository for dusty old papers. “The rotunda is the closest thing we have in this country to a national church,” says journalist Cokie Roberts. “It’s dark, and it’s silent, and the Constitution is the altar. And there is a wonderful new permanent exhibit of the American experience, which, believe it or not, makes all the documents come to life.”



NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, EAST BUILDING

Along the north side of I.M. Pei’s sharply angled building, sculptor Andy Goldsworthy built domes from slabs of rock fitted together without mortar. The rock domes “touch, they overlap, they merge into one another, and challenge the boundaries of inside-outside in a stunningly powerful way,” says Gail Kern Paster, director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, just a mile away. “I love to be near them.”



Curious hands have worn a smooth hollow into a section of the East Building’s famed sharp corner.

Favorite place for an off-the-record conversation? Lobbyist and art collector Tony Podesta suggests the Garden Café at the National

Gallery’s West Building. “There are no other lobbyists there; it’s all tourists.” A bonus: fresh menus themed to current art exhibits.