

Washington DC Travel Tips from OnBoard Tours

1. You can't bring it all with you. Pack light. Your bags will get heavier the longer your trip. Getting through airports these days is a real challenge.

2. You can't take it all home with you, either. You will probably want to buy some stuff while you are here. Whether it's clothes you bought at Pentagon City Mall, or the giant inflatable Washington Monument, you will need space in your bags to bring it home. Remember that airlines charge checked bag fees for most customers that are higher than shipping costs to ship items home.

3. Stay close. There's a reason why hotels in the middle of DC are so expensive – they are unbelievably convenient. Staying near the airport, or in Virginia or Maryland is great, and you will save money on your room, but only if you commit to taking trains back and forth. Otherwise, you may end up spending more money. For instance, if you stay in the city too late one night, and miss the last train to Virginia, one cab ride can cost up to \$60, one way. You are better off finding a less-expensive hotel around the Washington Mall. If you need help, call OnBoard. We have some suggestions.

5. Pick your hotel wisely. Make sure you research your hotel room extensively. Many hotels that have 3 star ratings are VERY disappointing because they are either run down, poorly staffed, or they just barely meet that designation. 1 and 2 star hotels can be even worse. Great hotels that are conveniently located include the Holiday Inn Capitol, the Renaissance, the Grand Hyatt, the Red Roof Inn Chinatown, the Marriott Courtyard Convention Center, and the Best Western Rosslyn/Iwo Jima.

6. Take a tour. Get the lay of the land. This is the best way to make sure you maximize the time you have in Washington DC to get the most profound impact from your trip. Make sure it's an overview tour, and take advantage of having a LIVE tour guide with you so you can ask all the questions you need to know the answers to as to how to spend the rest of your visit.

7. Don't waste your time visiting the Washington Monument. The line is outrageous. As fantastic as the view is, it isn't worth the wait anymore. The best way to experience Washington DC from above is to go to the top of the Old Post Office Pavilion Observation Deck. It's the only observation deck in DC from which you can see the Washington Monument. It also has much shorter lines.

8. Take Your Time. Plan to spend at least 4 hours in any Smithsonian Museum you visit. The Natural History Museum, American History Museum, and Air & Space Museum can each take all day if you really want to see everything. Spending at least 4 hours is recommended.

9. There are Spies Among Us. Most people love visiting the Spy Museum. It has great exhibits that play on Washington DC's role in the Cold War spy game. Check it out. OnBoard can reserve your tickets for you.



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10. Hang out at the Mall. No, not a shopping mall. The Washington Mall. It's the park between the Washington Monument and the Capitol Building. It's a great place to people watch, take a stroll, jog, play Frisbee, or just hang out on a bench.

11. Eat International Cuisine. Washington DC is known for having every kind of international food available. The most diverse spots are in Georgetown and Adams Morgan. Your OnBoard Ambassador or Hotel Concierge can help you choose the most unique places.

12. Ride the Metro subway. Don't be afraid. Just ask a Washingtonian to help you figure it out. It's an experience you won't forget. The Washington Metro was built as a nuclear fallout shelter during the cold war. It is one of the nicest and most well-maintained subway systems in the world.

13. Visit the Capitol Visitor's Center. It's brand new, and it's huge. Check it out.

14. Listen to Those Who Have Come Before You. If there is something you are planning to see or do, look it up online and read what other visitors wrote. TripAdvisor.com and Yelp.com are two great places to start.

15. Talk to your hotel's concierge. They have all kinds of advice on where to go, what to see, where to eat, etc.

16. Take a Night Tour. Washington DC is fantastic after dark. OnBoard operates the DC The Lights! Tour, which will give you the whole experience. It's the only night tour in DC where you actually stop at the monuments, get out, and have a tour guide accompany you to the monuments.



17. Insist on the Best Tour Guides. The Department of Consumer & Regulatory Affairs licenses tour guides. You would be amazed how hard it is to get that license. Make sure that your guide is licensed and that he or she is one of the top tour guides in the city. Don't settle on substandard for the person who is responsible for telling you about the city.

18. Safety Tip #1: If you're not sure whether the neighborhood is safe to walk around, ask your tour guide or concierge.

19. Safety Tip #2: Make sure your tour company has the highest possible safety rating. Make sure your tour company has the highest possible safety rating from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Find out whether customers have been injured while on their tours. Make sure that all of their drivers are certified by the Department of Transportation for passenger vehicles.

20. Safety Tip #3: There is safety in numbers. In your home town, traveling in groups of two is probably sufficient. In high tourist areas, groups of 3 or fewer are targets for thieves and violent criminals. When you are in unfamiliar areas, stay with a group. The best plan is to join an organized

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tour of travelers who are sightseeing together. In those situations, the tour guide can reduce the chances of you being targeted.

21. Safety Tip #4: Stay Alert. Watch around you. Make sure no one is watching you. If you turn your head and sweep your eyes over the areas around you, potential attackers will recognize that they cannot surprise you, and they will move on to some other victim.

22. Know Who (Not) To Trust. You can almost always trust your concierge. You can almost always trust your tour guide (if he or she is licensed by the Department of Consumer & Regulatory Affairs). Please don't trust people on the street, whether they have set up a table or whether they are walking around. If someone asks you for money because they have been robbed or have fallen on hard times, refer them to a homeless shelter or to the NYC & Co. Visitor Center.

23. Find a Good Food Court. There are several great food courts and cafeterias to grab lunch in when you are touring in DC. The best are the Air & Space Museum Cafeteria, the food court at Pentagon City Mall, the food court in the Ronald Reagan Visitor's Center, and the food court in the Old Post Office Pavilion.

24. DC It All! The DC It All! Tour is consistently the highest rated bus tour in Washington DC. It's a comprehensive tour that will show you the major sights in DC in the most efficient way. The tour guide hops off with the guests at each stop to point out and narrate the attractions in detail. The tour includes a boat cruise on the Potomac River, which will give you spectacular views of the major monuments.

25. Stay Cool. The OnBoard sightseeing tours are run on buses that are enclosed and climate controlled. They are cool in summer and warm in winter. Don't leave yourself subject to the weather.

26. Check the brochure rack in your hotel. There are thousands of things to do in and around Washington DC. Your concierge can help you also.

27. Print Some Money. Visit the Bureau of Engraving & Printing. It's a great tour.

28. Take a walk. Washingtonians love to walk. The best places for strolls are in and around the Mall, around the Tidal Basin near the Jefferson Memorial, and along the Potomac at National Harbor.

29. Plan for traffic -- It can be brutal. This is one of the reasons we recommend you take a sightseeing tour. The tour will circumvent bad traffic jams most of the time. That way, you don't waste your valuable vacation time. The worst traffic is during rush hour and coming in and out of Georgetown. It can also get rough around the Lincoln Memorial. If you can avoid driving or riding in a cab, do so.

30. Plan for long lines. You are likely to waste 30% of your trip if you don't plan for and/or avoid long lines. If you take a hop-on, hop-off tour, expect to have to wait in line for the next bus. The lines can be terrible, particularly at the most popular stops. We recommend



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taking a guided tour that avoids long lines.

31. Don't forget that neighborhoods are attractions too! Adams Morgan, Georgetown, U Street, Old Town Alexandria, and more.

32. Don't Leave Your Tour Guide on a Bus! The OnBoard tour guides hop off with you at each attraction on your tour.

33. See a Show at the Kennedy Center. You won't ever forget the performance you see at the Kennedy Center. There are few better venues to see a performance. OnBoard can help you get tickets for any performance at the Kennedy Center. Whether it's the National Symphony Orchestra playing Beethoven, or a ballet company from Europe, or the comedy whodunit *Shear Madness*, the Kennedy Center delivers an experience you will never forget.



34. Visit Mount Vernon. The home of George Washington is fantastic. We didn't believe it until we visited there. The views of the river are fantastic. The house is great. There is more history in that one house than in most buildings in Washington.

35. Eat at Ben's Chili Bowl. Even if you don't like hot dogs, you'll love Ben's. The food is great, the atmosphere is better, and the experience promises to be memorable. For fancier fare, try Ben's Next Door.

36. Do not waste your money on a rental car. Unless you plan to take excursions out of the city, it is a waste of time and money to rent a car. Parking is exorbitantly expensive, and the confusing DC streets make it extremely time consuming to travel by street. Plan to ride subways, walk, and take taxis if you need to.

37. Keep your eyes up. Most of the "run of the mill" buildings in DC are truly fantastic. However, most people tend to walk around looking down, and never notice them. You will see normal buildings on side streets with fantastic gargoyles carved in them, copper plating on their facades, and spectacular architecture.

38. Visit Old Town Alexandria. Old Town Alexandria is another great place to visit when you are in Washington DC. There are plenty of shops and restaurants to visit here. We recommend it as an evening excursion to include dinner.

39. Get a good map. Ask your concierge for one. They are several free ones that will help you get around.

40. Careful where you eat. Don't eat a restaurant if they have one near where you live. You came to Washington DC to experience stuff you can't do at home. Find a local restaurant, preferably not in a

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tourist area like Georgetown, and try it. The best places are in Adams Morgan. How do you find it? Call us! Or, ask our tour guides, check yelp.com, zagat.com, opentable.com, or talk to your hotel concierge.

41. Take a cruise up the Potomac. You can buy tickets individually from OnBoard, or you can just purchase the DC It All! Tour and the boat cruise is included. You will see the major monuments, Reagan Airport, many military buildings, and the DC Bridges. Taking a boat cruise (especially during the Cherry Blossom Season) is another experience you will never forget.



42. Come back again. All of our visitors who come back for a second or third trip say they cannot believe how much new stuff they saw on their subsequent trip. There is so much to do and see in Washington DC that you will have plenty to do no matter how many times you come back.

43. Get The Presidential Treatment. Let OnBoard plan your trip to Washington DC. Our Customer Service Ambassadors know everything there is to know about planning memorable trips to the City. Call us anytime at 301-839-5261 or email us at dc@onboardtours.com