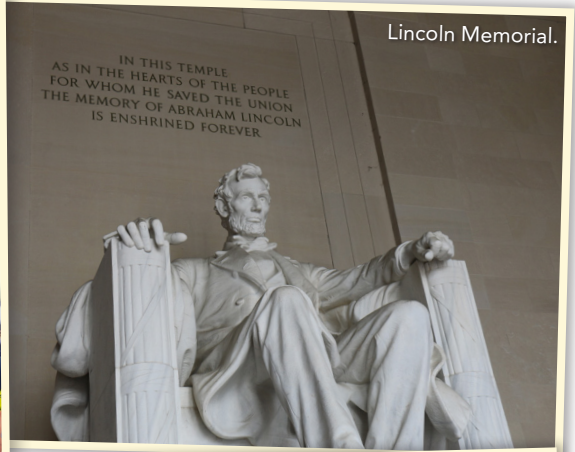




DC Boys Of Leather.



Lincoln Memorial.



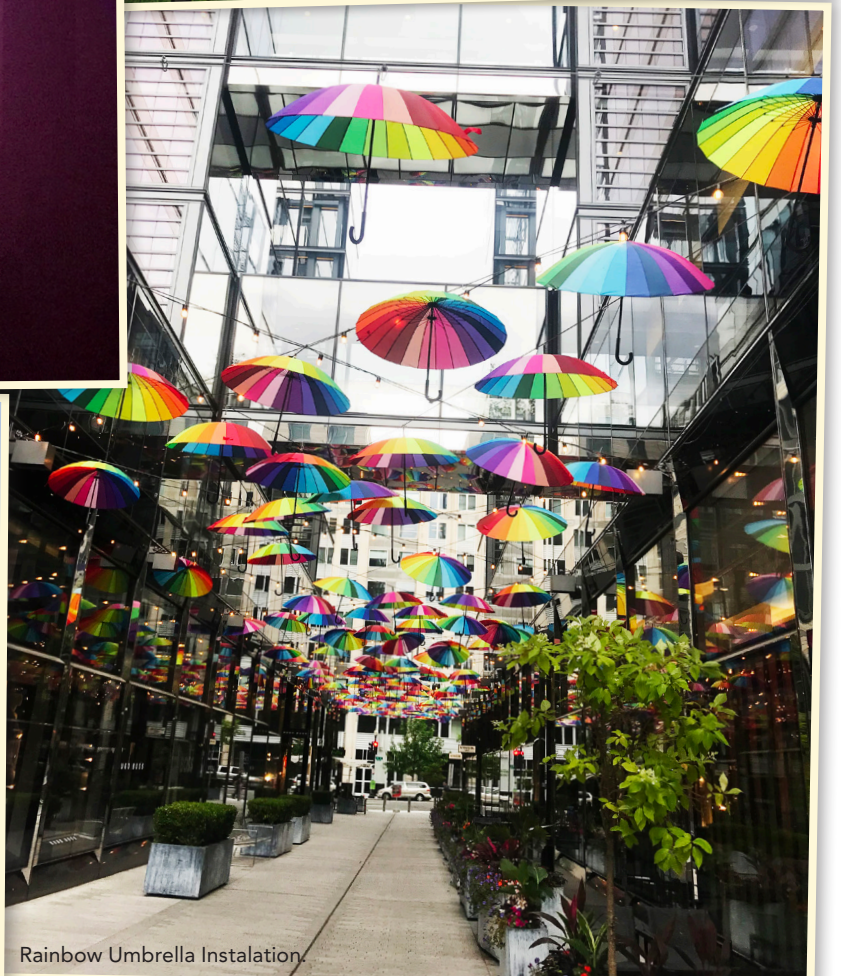
Outside The Whitehouse.



Riot Party at Capital Pride.



The White House.



Rainbow Umbrella Instalation.

PARTY CAPITOL

Washington is famous for politics, museums and humidity. Less well-known is its status as the gayest city in America. In 2025, it will host WorldPride – which could be awkward if a conservative, anti-gay government is returned to Washington's most famous house! Robert La Bua takes a tour...

Which US city has the highest percentage of gay residents? If you are thinking New York, San Francisco or Los Angeles, think again. The correct answer is Washington, DC.

Perhaps it's not that surprising. Washington is well endowed with a large gay population because it's an industry town where men dominate a transient population that varies from election to election, where fresh arrivals from small towns are looking for new friends in the big city, and where a highly international populace engenders a cosmopolitan lifestyle. It seems natural that many men of this world would be men of *our* world.

That was the thought that came to my mind on the plane to DC where a fellow traveller's Prince Albert was extremely obvious under his tight, white Levi's.

The American capital is well known for political parties. But the kinds of parties with chitchat about protein powders, or the sweaty bodies intermingling on dancefloors parties, or the backroom-let's get-naked parties are not hard to find either. It is, after all, a city of men, away from home, working in a pressure-cooker environment and looking to blow off some steam.

As in other major cities such as Amsterdam, Paris, London and their aforementioned American counterparts, former enclaves of urban gay life have been diluted in recent years by the influx of non-gay residents and the dissolution of geographically defined communities as many men have moved on from cruising backrooms to thumbing their phones for the next hook-up. Even further removed from previous generations are the gay dads learning the best way to change a diaper.

With Grindr and Scruff as constant companions, who needs to go out? Rear Admiral Samuel Dupont would no doubt be aghast to observe the changes in his eponymous Circle where gay life thrived

for decades. Other parts of the District have also undergone astonishing metamorphosis, changing them from no-go zones to sought-after neighbourhoods. In less insalubrious zones, soaring real-estate prices have become the default indicator of gentrification. These days, the shiny new incarnation of Logan Circle has shifted the attention and dollars of Washington's gay community a bit further south from Admiral Dupont's roundabout; even the rear admiral himself was moved on from the Circle when his statue was relocated to Delaware, home of the rich and powerful Dupont family.

Mr P's may be no more, Lambda Rising may have fallen, but vestiges of Dupont Circle's past nevertheless survive to this day, albeit in a more splintered fashion. The times when drag queens performed downstairs in Mr P's while bikies met upstairs in The Loft have disappeared into the annals of history.

“**On summer evenings it's packed with gay dads, bears, businessmen, bodybuilders, pretty boys and their friends...**

The exception is Annie's on 17th Street, a street that survives as a vibrant gay thoroughfare in the Dupont Circle area. Formerly known as Annie's Paramount Steak House, this intentionally unassuming restaurant, celebrating its 75th anniversary this year has never been more popular.

It's packed with the peeps on steamy summer evenings and weekends with suburban gay dads, bears, otters, businessmen, bodybuilders, pretty boys, truckers, and their friends, not all of whom are free and easy in their weekday personae.

It's said that, years ago, Annie herself told two men holding hands under the table, “You don't have to hide that here,” which cemented the restaurant's reputation as a welcoming sanctuary for people of all colours, body types, ages, orientations and persuasions.

Therein lies the Washington dichotomy: the city and its inhabitants are homophobic, while on Capitol Hill, some of America's most vocally homophobic politicians attempt to legislate our rights away. It's a macho world of politics in which figurative dick-waving attempts to curtail the much more fun activity of literal dick-waving!

Undoubtedly, some of Washington's civil servants and politicians feel the pressure to stay

closeted despite the progressive laws in the District Of Columbia. Showtime's current gay drama, *Fellow Travelers* starring Matt Bomer and Jonathan Bailey illustrates this dilemma within an historical perspective.

As a travel destination, Washington is great for LGBTQIA+ visitors. June sees the annual Capital Pride parade and festival hit the streets. The Parade is a colourful daytime event that draws community groups and commercial entities alike as floats and walking groups. It winds its way through the gay 'hoods and culminates in a free-to-all block party. The plan for WorldPride in 2025 is to stage the parade down Constitution Ave, a longer and straighter stretch.

Capital Pride weekend culminates in an outdoor concert with big-name guest artists – Idina Menzel headlined this year. There's a carnival atmosphere with food trucks and market stalls. It can be very hot and humid, so take hats, umbrellas, sunscreen and water!

There is much to discover in the American capital. Where money goes, the arts follow, and Washington is one of the wealthiest cities in the United States. Today, Washington's array of wonderful museums, big and small, attract visitors looking for stimulation beyond the phallic Washington monuments.

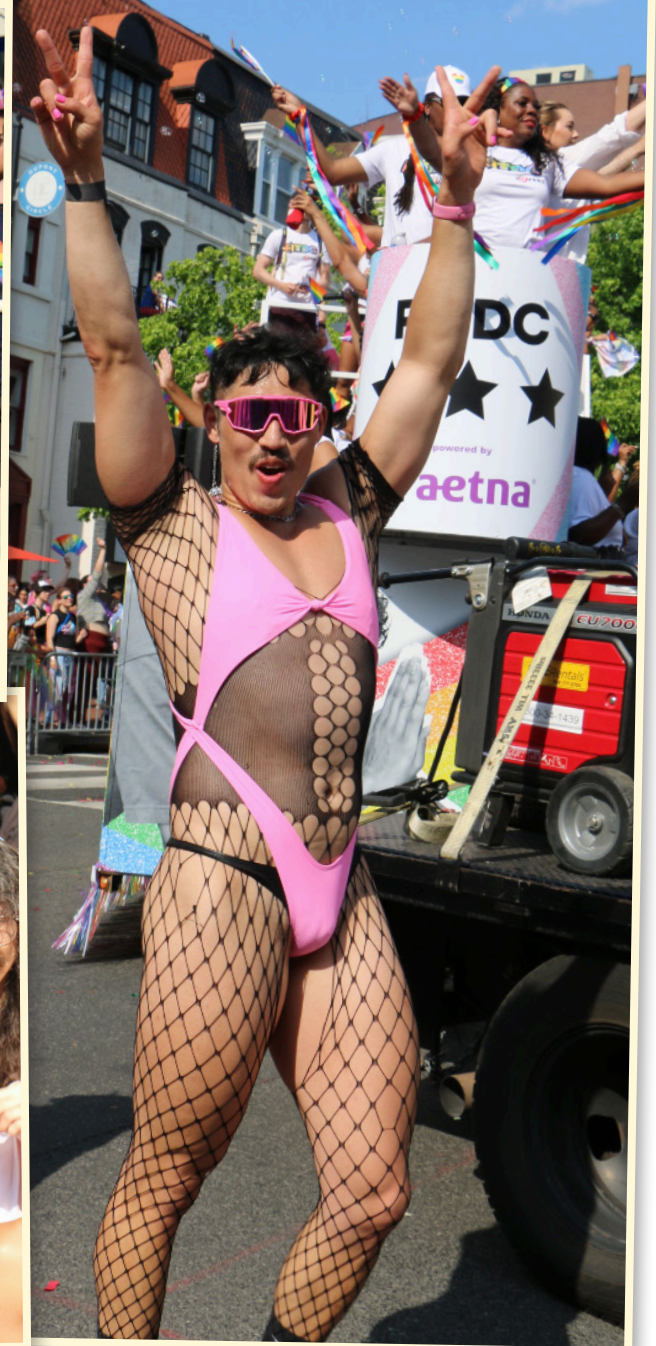
Although the splendid museums of The Smithsonian Institution are worthy of dayslong visits, replete as they are with infinite masterpieces of art and science, the smaller museums of Washington offer more intimate opportunities to understand the city without masses of tourists as companions.

While The Smithsonian museums are free entry, it's still a good idea to book in advance to make sure you can get in, especially during holiday seasons and weekends. If you intend doing the big five: White House, Capitol Building, Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial and the World War II memorial, definitely hire a bike or an e-scooter otherwise you're in for a lot of walking!

Hidden among the greenery of Rock Creek Park and dense vegetation of its own extensive estate, Hillwood, the former home of American cereal heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post was the last residence of one of America's richest women.

The only child of CW Post, who built a business empire on the back of breakfast foods, Marjorie was groomed from an early age to eventually takeover the family business. She was 27 when her father died but, rather than be overwhelmed by enormous responsibility, applied her business acumen to multiply an already large fortune into a vast empire of wealth.

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>> Reflecting her love of beauty in all its forms, Hillwood Estate provided Marjorie Merriweather Post with the canvas to paint her vision of love inside her home and out. The themed gardens that surround the house contrast with the wild forest beyond; you would never know The White House is only a few kilometres away.

Indoors, the contrast of Russian and French art in the various rooms of the mansion reminded Marjorie of her favourite places. As the wife of the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union in the 1930s, just as the Soviet government sought to divest itself of all those inconveniently decadent trappings of royalty formerly owned by the Russian Imperial family, Marjorie was able to buy up valuable antiques and bring them back to Washington at the end of her husband's assignment. It was quite the shopping spree, the result being the largest collection of Russian art found outside Russia. No collection of Imperial Russian art would be complete without a Fabergé egg; the two here are exquisite examples of what were once priceless gifts to members of the Russian Imperial family.

Similarly enchanting ostentation can be found in Anderson House. A short walk from Dupont Circle is the headquarters of the little-known Society Of The Cincinnati, a virile association of American and French descendants of officers who fought against the British in America's Revolutionary War. More than a hundred years later, the Society Of The Cincinnati is still very much a unifying entity for its members, who gather on occasion in the sumptuous Anderson House, a gift of Cincinnati member Larz Anderson and his wife to the Society.

The Beaux Arts-style mansion looks impressive enough from its Massachusetts Avenue entrance but the ornate exterior, however imposing, still belies the extent of riches found inside the large home. As did Marjorie Merriweather Post, the Andersons personified the two most desirable traits in Washington high society; being both wealthy and well-connected enabled them to amass a valuable treasure trove of unusual objects ranging from the large Belgian tapestries lining the walls of the opulent dining room to the small crystal ball that was a particular favourite of Mrs Anderson.

As was normal for privileged families of the time, the Washington home of the Andersons was only one of several residences they maintained around the country. The Anderson House was only occupied for the ten-week season in the autumn when the lobbying, jostling, and schmoozing calendar of Washington society was at its apogee in the lead-up to November elections.

Unabashedly showy, the Andersons hosted parties where every guest was assigned a personal attendant (famously dressed anachronistically in silk britches and powdered

wigs) to ensure that every need was satisfied – the shirtless waiters of their day.

Rather less opulent is the simple residence of former US President Woodrow Wilson. Like Anderson House, the Woodrow Wilson House is unknown even to most Washingtonians. It's located in the exclusive Kalorama Heights neighbourhood among the many embassies found in the area known today as Embassy Row. Diplomatic missions looking for suitable premises for their representations to the United States bought up the beautiful mansions built in this part of the city in the late 19th and early 20th centuries once the previous owners were faced with a new challenge to their wealth: income tax, a financial burden not borne by foreign governments whose assets are exempt from property taxes.

Understated in comparison to other house museums in the area, the Woodrow Wilson House is nevertheless full of beautiful objects from across the world given as gifts to President Wilson by envoys of countries thankful for his efforts in creating the League Of Nations. In contrast to the ornate mansions meant to impress guests, the house served as a refuge for the president, who had suffered a stroke during his second term, which affected his physical abilities. The furnishings are original to the house and are evocative of a bygone era.

One of the most famous paintings in the world is found in a former mansion located just off Massachusetts Avenue, a block from Anderson House. The Phillips Collection, the former home of the wealthy Phillips family, houses a valuable collection of works by the most famous painters in the compendium of Western art. Among the Van Goghs, Monets, Cezannes, and Modiglianis is *Luncheon Of The Boating Party*, perhaps the most recognizable work of Pierre Auguste Renoir, who painted his wife and his friends around a table against a diaphanous background typical of the Impressionist school. The large painting occupies a prime position in The Phillips Collection and commands the attention as much as the imagination of visitors lucky enough to see this famous work of art in person.

Whether by day exploring these and other cultural attractions or by night enjoying dinner and drinks in a convivial local hangout, Washington offers more than enough stimulation to keep visitors busy for days.

Dining out is extremely social and popular, and locals like to find new places in their city's ever-evolving, up-and-coming neighbourhoods. The peerless pizza at Timber Pizza Company in Petworth is to die for, and an Ethiopian dining experience at Ethiopic on the H Street Corridor is delicious fun. A day of mental stimulation, a nice dinner with a new friend, and an evening of more stimulation, perhaps attending a performance at the splendid Kennedy Center – what better way to enjoy Washington before withdrawing to a room for private negotiations? •

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Capital Pride culminates in a free **outdoor concert** – Idina Menzel headlined this year.

Rowdy Clubs And Cozy Cafés

Washington DC boasts a diverse range of gay and gay-friendly venues.

The Lyle Hotel is in the heart of the Dupont Circle gaybourhood. It's elegant and contemporary while retaining the old-world charm of the district. Close to gay venues, great shopping strips and a short walk or uber to the monuments and museums, it's a picturesque 20-minute drive from Ronald Reagan airport.

Trade is an edgy gay club in the Logan Circle neighbourhood. A diverse crowd enjoys the hot-and-sweaty unpretentious vibe. The club hosts themed nights, drag shows, and special events. Recommended.

The Fireplace Described as “a lively gay dive bar” find it in the old DuPont gaybourhood. Travelgay says, “The drinks are cheap, the people are friendly and the music is old school... A great place to meet gay locals.”

Pitchers DC in the Adams Morgan neighbourhood combines sports-bar vibes with a lively nightclub atmosphere. With multiple levels and diverse events, including drag shows and parties, Pitchers caters to a broad spectrum of tastes within the LGBTQIA+ community.

The Dirty Goose is little bit New York, a little bit Atlanta. The Goose has women's nights and *Drag Race* viewing parties with your hostesses Tatianna and Crystal Edge.

Nellie's Sports Bar is a popular, relaxed gay bar with sports-themed decor that also hosts drag brunches on the weekend.

The Vue Rooftop at the Hotel Washington boasts an excellent bar and cocktail menu, and a mouth-watering modern-American menu. The restaurant's “vue” is The White House itself and whether you are seated on the terrace or one of the inside booths you are treated to a great view of Washington. Gay friendly.

The Gatsby is a gorgeously decorated restaurant on Half Street serving American classics like Chicken Pot Pie and Chicken-Fried Pork Chop. It's mid-priced and has good options if you're travelling with kids.

For more go to:

W: capitalpride.org

W: washington.org



Pride Festival.



Taco at Mi Casa Mexican.



DuPont Circle: the gaybourhood.



Gay engagement party at The Lyle Hotel.



Pride is celebrated.



It's hot. Get a fan.