There are two Washingtons. One is the nation’s capital, exemplified by the buildings on the Mall, the acres of marble corridors in public buildings, and the monuments to past presidents and past glories that are scattered all over the city. No one can or should ignore this Washington, particularly on a first visit.

The second Washington is the hometown of approximately 700,000 people who—except for an eccentric notion that the Mall is their very own backyard—tend to live a pleasant and increasingly sophisticated life in a city of broad avenues, distinctive (and sometimes international) neighborhoods, and charming outdoor restaurants.

The program for the 1981 AWCI Annual Convention and Exposition is designed to give you a chance to sample both Washingtons, but in case you’d like to do some exploring on your own—either before, during, or after the April 5-10 event—here are a few tips on how to see the traditional and not-so-traditional sights of Washington and to pretend, at least for a few hours, that this is your own exciting hometown.

Getting around

Except for forays to suburban shopping centers or to Mount Vernon or Alexandria, forget about using your car. Parking in the center of the city is expensive, when it’s available, and the famous traffic circles and one-way streets provide more stress than you want or need. Besides, the local transportation system is cheap and fast, and the distances to be covered are relatively short.

From AWCI’s convention headquarters at the Sheraton Washington Hotel, the best way to get around is either by taxi or by bus. At DuPont Circle, about a mile and a half down Connecticut Avenue from the hotel, you can pick up Washington’s pride and joy, the new Metro subway. Easy-to-read maps indicate how to get to the Mall, Capitol Hill, midtown shopping, or even across the Potomac to Arlington Cemetery, the Pentagon, or National Airport.

The fare system is a little tricky. You must purchase a fare card and use it both to enter and exit the subway. Signs at each station explain the fare system and how to use the fare-card machines. There are also real, live human beings in the information kiosks at each station who can help if you get confused. By all means, give the subway a try. It’s safe, clean, fast, and fun.

Once you’ve arrived at your chosen destination, the best thing to do is to walk. Washington is a wonderful city to explore on foot.

Visit the Mall

Most of the important buildings and monuments are on or near the Mall, a broad expanse of land which extends from the Lincoln Memorial in the west to the Capitol at the top of the Hill on the east. The vista either way is exciting, but the view from the Capitol down the hill is best in the daylight. However, the sight of the Reflecting Pool, Washington Monument and Capitol dome seen from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial is positively breathtaking at night. In fact, a visit to Old Abe at midnight is a ritual which culminates...
many a Washington party or date. It’s an unforgettable sight.

The easiest way to get around to all the major stops on the Mall and to Arlington Cemetery, located just across Memorial Bridge from the Lincoln Memorial, is by a Tour-mobile, operated under the auspices of the National Park Service. These jaunty blue and white vehicles make a continuous circuit, and a $5 ticket entitles you to ride all day, make as many stops at you like, and stay at any location as long as you wish.

A word of warning, however: It’s impossible to see the outsides and insides of all the featured buildings and monuments in a single day. It’s best to see the major buildings and monuments one day and save another day—or month—to explore the various parts of the Smithsonian.

From the top of the Washington Monument you can see the entire metropolitan area. In fact, a trip up the monument and the view from the top is a good way to orient yourself. The only drawback is the long line which is a regular part of this attraction during the spring months.

If money’s your thing (even devalued, inflation-attacked dollars), be sure to take the Bureau of Engraving tour, where the sight of stacks of bills is enough to make you discover depths of avarice you never knew existed. This 25-minute tour is free and runs several times a day.

By now you’re probably tired and hot. Reward yourself with a short stop under the glass-domed Botanic Garden at the foot of Capitol Hill. Here you can sit on stone benches and enjoy the lush atmosphere provided by palms, orchids, ferns, and many types of bromeliads.

The Capitol: a must

The number-one, must-see attraction in town is the Capitol. If you have time for only one monument, make this the one. Its history, both past and in-the-making, its rich architecture and frescoes, and its statuary make it a feast for mind and eye.

The Capitol can be entered at ground level from either the north (the Senate side) or south (the House side). Those who want to see if their physical fitness programs have paid off can see the Capitol by climbing the steps on the East Front where past presidential inauguration ceremonies have taken place. (President Reagan’s Inaugural Committee elected to use the West Front.)

The main dome is magnificent. There’s a saying that when you’ve been in Washington so long that your heart doesn’t miss a beat when you’re looking up at the dome, it’s time to pack your bags and go back to where you came from.

The guided tour is the best way to see this large and complicated structure. It even allows a quick look at the visitors’ galleries of the House and Senate where you can see Congress in action. If you’re exploring on your own, you must have a pass to visit the galleries. These can be obtained from the office of your congressman or senator. Most congressional offices also have descriptive material about the Capitol available for constituents.

While you’re up on the Hill, as it is known in Washington, you might want to look around the Supreme
Whether to worship or visit, there are many churches to choose from, including Christ Church in Alexandria with its “wineglass” pulpit.

Like every other city in America, Washington has its traffic jams caused by commuters, like the one in Rosslyn, Virginia.

Court building or explore one of the most overlooked treasures in town, the Library of Congress. Besides books ranging from the Gutenberg Bible to yesterday’s best seller, the Renaissance splendor of the building and the fascinating displays make it worth an hour’s visit at least. It’s open seven days a week.

Past the library, where Independence Avenue meets Pennsylvania Avenue, Southeast, there is a neighborhood of restored townhouses, small shops, a famous farmers’ market, and restaurants and bars where Hill staffers meet to discuss the day’s events. It’s a fun place to end a Hill visit with a lunch or early evening libation.

Touring the White House

A block and a half off the Mall is the White House. Morning tours are available from Tuesday through Saturday. More than 10,000 people go through the public parts of the building each day and these long lines mean a fast visit preceded by a slow wait. You can get a ticket from a Park Service representative early in the day at the visitor assembly point on the Ellipse and wander around Lafayette Square until the specified time for your tour. Or you can write your senator or representative in advance for a ticket to a special early-morning tour, but these tickets are very limited.

In some ways, the area around the White House is more interesting than the White House itself. Lafayette Square is full of statues, flowering trees, aggressive squirrels, and usually a demonstrator or two. The restored federal townhouses fronting the square all have marvels histories and are now used by various government councils and agencies. St. John’s Church, the “Church of the Presidents,” and Decatur House are two buildings of special interest which are open to the public. The former, with its President’s Pew and exceptional stained-glass windows, has frequent noontime concerts as well as regularly scheduled services in both English and French.

Decatur House is the home of one of Washington’s most active ghosts. It was built in 1818 for the dashing Commodore Stephen Decatur who died in a duel one year after the House was completed. One of the first floor windows, which appears to be shuttered, is actually walled up in order to prevent the commodore’s apparition from staring out of the bedroom window of the house he loved.

Museums: something for all

There are museums in Washington for everyone, even nonmuseum-goers. Since your time is limited, the best thing to do is to learn what’s available and pick one or two for in-depth exploring, and leave the rest until later. Two of the most popular ones in recent years are the Air and Space Museum and the new East Building of the National Gallery of Art. Even people who have a fear of flying love the Air and Space Museum. How can you not love an institution which allots exhibit room to kites and a wonderful space machine powered by mechanical butterfly wings, as well as real space capsules and the “Spirit of St. Louis”?

Right across the Mall from this aviation treasure trove is the celebrated East Building of the National Gallery of Art, designed by I.M. Pei. The building is as much a work of art as the paintings, sculptures, and tapestries displayed there. Connecting this new addition with the main gallery is an underground concourse which features a wall of falling water, a well-stocked bookstore, and a cafe and cafeteria that serve good food at low prices.

The Mall is also the location for the Museum of Natural History, with its stuffed elephant and full-sized fiberglass model of a 92-foot blue whale. Here, too, are the rocks, fossils, and jewels, including the famous Hope Diamond. A special hit for kids of all ages is the live insect zoo located on the second floor.

Next door is the Museum of History and Technology, which features
the original Star-Spangled Banner, gowns worn by the First Ladies of America, and an entire floor devoted to American technology, from the covered wagon to the atom smasher. From the museum’s Constitution Avenue entrance, you can take a free, red double-decker shuttle bus to the National Portrait Gallery, which is located several blocks away. This museum features displays of Americans who have made an impact on their country, from the famous to the infamous, from cowboys to expatriates.

Connected by a courtyard is the National Collection of Fine Arts, which exhibits works of American artists from Gilbert Stuart and Benjamin West to present-day native American craftsmen. After your tour, hop back on the shuttle bus for a return trip to the Mall. There are still a few Smithsonian museums to go.

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, a dramatic circular building, features modern paintings and sculpture by such masters as Picasso, Henry Moore, Jackson Pollock, and David Alfaro Siqueros. The central reflecting pool of the adjacent sculpture garden is surrounded by monumental works—both in size and reputation—such as Rodin’s *The Burghers of Calais* and Epstein’s *The Visitation*. Because the garden is sunken, these works can be appreciated from a multitude of angles and levels.

For a complete change of scene, move up the Mall to the west. Set back, on the left, is the Freer Gallery, a treasure of oriental art set in a Florentine Renaissance Palace. In addition to 10,000 pieces of sculpture, painting, and pottery from the Orient, there are works by several American artists; the most famous work is the Peacock Room by James McNeil Whistler, who turned an already expensively decorated chamber into a fairyland designed to set off his painting, *The Princess from the land of Porcelain*. There is some disagreement as to whether the owner of the room and the portrait asked Whistler to go to such an extreme, but the results, while not your ordinary dining room, do linger in one’s mind.

**Oasis of calm**

Enough culture? How about a rest and respite for your soul? To the right of the main entrance of the Freer Gallery, through a walkway along a hedge, is a special, almost unknown oasis of calm: The Victorian Garden. Traffic noises are muted, and birds sing and insects buzz amidst gnarled trees, radiant roses, herbs, and vines. For the curious, there are signs to identify all the plants with both their common and Latin names. As in almost all gardens, spring is the most spectacular season, when acres of pansies and daffodils create a pallet of colors which rival the nearby museum collections.

There are still other parts to the Smithsonian—the Arts and Industries building; the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum; the Kennedy Center, which features an opera house, two theatres and a concert hall; and the National Zoo, home of the Pandas, the White Tiger and last, but not least, Smokey Bear. To see all that the Smithsonian Institution offers would take months, if not years, but you can certainly get a generous sample of its wonders in a day or so.

There are other museums in Washington as well—the Phillips Collection, a turn-of-the-century house filled with modern art and its sources, displayed in a comfortable, home-like setting; the Corcoran Gallery of Art, featuring mainly American artists of yesterday and today; the Organization of American States and adjacent Museum of Modern Art of Latin America; the Museum of African Art; the Folger Museum, housing some of the most valuable Shakespearean works in the world; and the Textile Museum, with its exciting collection of oriental rugs,
modern weavings, and pre-Columbian tapestries.

A comfortable change of pace is offered by the National Geographic’s Explorers Hall. Its small but exciting displays cover prehistoric man through to space travel and forward to technologies still under testing. Watch out for the large macaw in the northeast corner of the hall. It’s alive and occasionally lets out a loud screech just to prove the point.

A night of theater

If theater’s your bag, Washington can gratify almost any taste. Besides the two aforementioned theaters at the Kennedy Center, there is the National, The Arena, the Kreeger, and Ford’s Theatre, which includes a museum and an active theater, restored to look as it did the night President Lincoln was assassinated in it. It is picturesque, and most of the productions are delightful. But a word of warning: Our comfort quotient has increased in the last century. The straight-backed chairs, even with cushions, don’t encourage slouching or even an at-ease sitting position. It’s truly a you-are-there experience.

Diversified shopping centers

If your idea of the way to get to know a town is to explore its retail establishments, you’re in luck. Washington offers a diversity of shopping experiences. The museum shops head the list. They offer unusual and top quality merchandise at reasonable prices.

In addition to the museums of the Smithsonian, each of which has its own shop, there are shops at the Library of Congress, the organization of American States, The Folger, the National Trust for Historic Preservation (located on Lafayette Square), and the National Geographic Society.

If small boutiques are your thing, head for Georgetown, a section of Washington that was a bustling sea-port city when the Capital was a muddy swamp. The place to start is at the corner of Wisconsin Avenue and M Street in Northwest Washington. Along M Street, and nearby sidestreets which cross the C & O Canal, are two shopping arcades—Canal Square and the Foundry. Each contains small stores offering jewelry, clothing, art, unusual gifts, and exotic goods from faraway lands. The Foundry has one shop given over almost entirely to old quilts and linens, another one to books from around the world. Canal Square has a tiny shop that features luxurious paper goods, stationery, note cards, wrapping paper, and so on.

M Street is also the home of a veritable United Nations of food: Greek, French, Vietnamese, Chinese, Indian, and Mexican restaurants abound.

Up Wisconsin Avenue are clothing shops for men and women, in styles both conservative and avant-garde. There are delights for all the senses; fancy cookware, fresh-roasted coffee beans, modern design furniture, and several outdoor flower stands where armloads of blooms can be had for a fraction of florist shop charges. Think how a few of those would liven up your room.

The crowded sidewalks and street vendors are part of the Georgetown scene and make window shopping great fun.

Upper Wisconsin Avenue has become a center for elegant department stores. The subway hasn’t reached this part of town yet, but the expectation of its arrival has spurred the creation of a bevy of stores within a four-block radius. You can explore Lord & Taylor, Saks Fifth Avenue, Woodward & Lothrop, and the latest marvel—an arcade called Mava Galerie, which features Neiman-Marcus and several smaller shops and restaurants.

The major downtown stores are located in two areas: F Street between 14th and 7th, Northwest, and Connecticut Avenue between K and R Streets, Northwest. Garfinkels, Woodward & Lothrop, and the Hecht Company are located along F Street, while smaller clothing, leather goods, and jewelry stores line Connecticut Avenue.

One new fun area is the Metro level of the Farragut North subway stop. This mirrored arcade attracts crowds lured by the exciting decor and the wonderful smells wafting from the on-the-premises bakeries. If you’re watching calories, there is even a health food carryout, but the eating area is shared by all the restaurants and is situated right in front of a counter filled with high-calorie goodies.

Out of the city itself, you can find that mecca of stylish merchandise at Bloomingdales (located at White Flint and Tysons Corner malls) and the elegant I. Magnin (at White Flint mall).

If books are your thing, Washington abounds in bookstores of all types, from Crown Books, which features best sellers at a 40 percent discount; Discount Records and Books and the Book Annex (two shops with smaller discounts but larger inventories); and the several Kramer Books stores, two of which feature French-style bistros mixed in with their book racks. These have become meeting places for lunch or late night gatherings and offer an unusual mix of food for both the body and mind.

Across the river

The Virginia side of the Potomac has attractions for both sightseers and shoppers. Arlington Cemetery, Mount Vernon, and the Pentagon all draw large crowds, although there isn’t much for a tourist to see at the Pentagon. Arlington Cemetery can be reached by Tourmobile or subway. The gravesites of John and Robert Kennedy and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier are both familiar stops in the nation’s cemetery.

Fewer people take the time to explore the mansion sitting atop the hill. It is the restored Custis-Lee Mansion, built by Martha Washington’s grandson and later the home of Robert E. Lee. From its vantage point you can enjoy a breathtaking
view of the capital city, Arlington Cemetery, the Netherlands Carillon, and the Iwo Jima statue.

Mount Vernon, sixteen miles downriver from the District of Columbia, can be reached by bus, by car, or by boat. The first two methods are the fastest, but the boat is the most fun, and the walk up the steps from the river landing gives one the feeling of visiting the plantation rather than sightseeing.

One of the most pleasant and interesting places to explore across the Potomac is Old Town Alexandria, located five miles from National Airport along George Washington Parkway and easily reached by car or bus. Like Georgetown, Alexandria was founded as a shipping port where planters could send their crops to England and receive return orders of staples and luxuries which the mother country provided.

Unlike Georgetown, however, Alexandria’s old section has retained its quiet charm despite an influx of elegant shops, restaurants, and a growing number of tourists. As you take a walk down the old brick sidewalks, past houses dating from as far back as the late 1700s, you get the feel of a time when this village was George Washington’s hometown. Even the street names evoke the colonies: Queen, King, Duke, Pitt, and Royal. And Gadsby’s Tavern, rumored to be George’s favorite bistro, is still open for business.

Located at the foot of King Street, on the river, the Torpedo Factory is a good place to start an afternoon’s ramble through the historic section. It is a monument to the early military-industrial complex, but it has been turned into studios and showcases for sculptors, painters, and craftsmen of all types, from bookbinders to violin makers. Up King Street are small shops and eateries. Two blocks up on the corner of Royal Street is Ramsay House, the oldest building in Alexandria, which is now being used as a visitors center. Here you can obtain maps and walking-tour information or just enjoy the small garden and the people-watching. Some spots of special interest—and all within easy walking distance—are Carlyle House, Christ Church with its “wineglass” pulpit, General Lee’s boyhood home, and the restored houses and cobbled streets of Captains’ Row.

A market for early risers

If you’re an early riser, try the Alexandria farmers’ market. It has been held every Saturday morning in Market Square for more than 100 years. In fact, the new city hall buildings were built with the market in mind. In warm months, the fresh fruit, produce, flowers, and baked goods are displayed under the outside overhang; in the winter the whole shebang moves indoors.

Do you want to see a different Washington or have you been here many times before and want to widen your horizons? There’s plenty to see and do. For starters, how about doing a brass rubbing in the basement of the National Cathedral? The cost is minimal, the instructions are simple, and you would return home with your very own souvenir not only of Washington, but of England, where the original brasses are located.

While at the Cathedral, take a look around. Not yet completed, this Gothic edifice may well be the last of its kind to be built. Pay particular attention to the stained-glass windows, especially the Rose Window and the window which contains a genuine moon rock. The Children’s Chapel, with its miniature pews, is a delight, and outside, on the grounds of the Cathedral Close, there is a marvelous herb garden.

If you’re a jogger, the city abounds in paths from the monuments, along the Potomac, and up through Rock Creek Park. If you’d like to feel a little bit of France, go to the Bread Oven on 19th Street, Northwest, around 9 a.m. and watch authentic French bakers make real French bread in ovens imported from Gay Paree. Admire the agility with which they manipulate the seven-foot-long poles that push the hot breads onto a wheeled platform. The café au lait served there is the real thing, as are the accents of the charming waitresses.

If you’re a film buff, check the listings at the American Film Institute, located in the Kennedy Center, or any one of the movie houses which specialize in old, not-so-old, and foreign films.

If you want to get away from it all, visit the Franciscan Monastery, located near the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, both of which can be reached by subway. The monastery, with its lovely gardens and medieval atmosphere, is both interesting and restful. There are replicas of actual Holy Land shrines, including the Grotto of the Nativity and the Catacombs. There are tours almost every hour during the week and Saturday, and afternoon tours on Sunday.

There’s something for everyone in Washington. Plan to take some extra time to explore this fascinating and fun city during AWCI’s 64th Annual Convention, April 5-10.

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