



THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO THE DMV

A curated list of must do's from the Congressional Award staff, compiled just for Gold Medalists.

National Portrait Gallery / Smithsonian American Art Museum
Chinatown, DC | Staff Pick: Kati



We are spoiled in DC with access to some great museums that offer free admission. While I visit the National Mall often, I love the Portrait Gallery/American Art Museum – a bit off the path – where there are a variety of art exhibits.

The Portrait Gallery obviously has some great exhibits, including all of the Presidents, which is a great long standing exhibit. It also has some portraits of celebs. On the west side of the gallery (The Art Museum half), you can find pieces from the [Works Progress Administration](#) from the 1930's. This exhibit not only shows some amazing pieces

depicting America in the 1930's, but is a great history lesson for the New Deal and the focus on the arts during the Great Depression.

If you head to the top of the building, you will find amazing spaces to just sit and relax, along with seeing some modern art. Finally, there is a courtyard ([Kogod Courtyard](#)) in the center of both museums that hosts events throughout the year and is a nice indoor space to avoid the heat.

Getting there – Metro accessible. Gallery Place/Chinatown is the closest (Red/Yellow/Green Lines) while Metro Center is only a couple of blocks walking from the 11th Street Exit (Red/Orange/Blue/Silver).

Milk Bar City Center, DC | Staff Pick: Kirsten



Milk Bar is an award-winning (Congressional Award) bakery. They have stores in NYC and Toronto as well as this new location in D.C. If you love sweet treats and fun décor this is the small shop for you. Chef Christina Tosi is the founder and owner of Milk Bar and is known for her whimsical, innovative creations.

People from all over the district flock here for her creations like cereal milk ice cream, compost cookies and crack pie. I have never, ever had a bad bakery item here and always end up buying treats to take home with me. My absolute favorites are the crack pie and the chocolate, chocolate cookie. I am also pretty positive I have tried every flavor cookie and can say that they make great souvenirs to take home to family (if you don't eat them all).

Getting there – Milk Bar is located on the corner of I and 11th St. NW. It is Metro accessible by way of Metro Center Station (Blue/Orange/Red/Silver).

National Gallery of Art's Sculpture Garden Fountain

National Mall, DC | Staff Pick: Erica

Dip your toes in the [National Gallery of Art's Sculpture Garden fountain](#). It's a great place to relax and take advantage of the beauty of the area. The kids also love it! Located on the National Mall, it's a quick and convenient stop in between museums. If you grab some food from a nearby food truck or hot dog stand, it's also a very affordable lunch spot. If you come back in the winter, the fountain becomes an ice rink. Make note!



Getting there – Metro accessible by Archives-Navy Memorial-Penn Quarter Metro Station (Yellow/Green Lines).

Postal Museum Opposite Union Station, DC | Staff Pick: Maggie



The Postal Museum is one of the most underrated Smithsonian museums. It takes you on a journey from modern mail, including how it is shipped, transported, and processed, to the earliest stages of American mail back when the country was just British colonies. The museum has an exhibit on Postal Inspectors, the history of transportation, and, of course, stamps.

One of my favorite things about this museum is how interactive it is – they have lots of things you are allowed and encouraged to touch, and you get to choose 6 stamps and a number of postcards to take home with you for free.

Getting there – Metro accessible by Union Station, which serves Red, Orange, Blue, and Silver Lines. It is directly across the street when you exit the Metro.

Tidal Basin Washington, DC | Staff Pick: Sibley



Another great spot to run around and enjoy the sights is the Tidal Basin. It sees a ton of action during Cherry Blossom season, but it's a hit all year round. Right across the water is the Jefferson Memorial. To the other side of you is the White House and Washington Monument. It's just a short walk to the Lincoln, WW11 and MLK Memorials. You can't go wrong here. Jog, picnic, read a book, sketch or play with the dogs. You can even paddle boat at the Jefferson Memorial. Although, perhaps not with Sibley. You'll be sure to take in some of DC's finest attractions here.

Getting there - The best way to get to the Tidal Basin is to take Metro to Smithsonian Station (Blue/Orange/Silver Lines). From the station, walk west on Independence Avenue to 15th Street. Turn left and head south along 15th Street.

Parking: [East Potomac Park](#) has 320 FREE parking spaces. The Tidal Basin is just a short walk from the park.

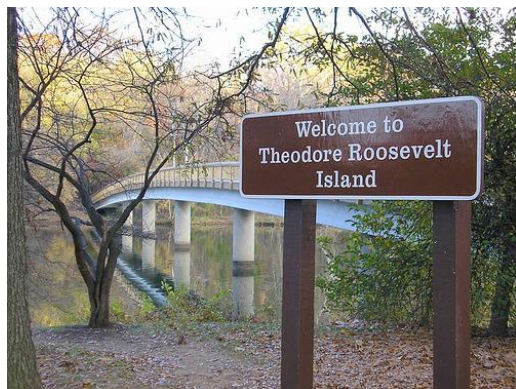
Busboys & Poets Various Locations in DMV | Staff Pick: Molly



Busboys and Poets is a great place to stop for a cold drink or an affordable healthy meal. They have a few locations around the city, and two just outside the city both in Virginia and Maryland.

My favorite thing about Busboys and Poets are the big comfortable chairs and laid back coffee shop feel. All of the locations have a bookshop and weekly events ranging from music, poetry readings, and storytelling.

Theodore Roosevelt Island GW Parkway, DC | Staff Pick: Fernando



Theodore Roosevelt Island is a memorial and attraction that is overlooked by most out-of-town visitors to Washington DC. The island is located along the [Mount Vernon Trail](#) and is easily accessible by bike.

The 91-acre wilderness preserve serves as a memorial to the nation's 26th president, honoring his contributions to conservation of public lands for forests, national parks, wildlife and bird refuges, and monuments.

The island has 2 1/2 miles of walking trails where you can observe a variety of flora and fauna and a 17-foot bronze statue of Roosevelt standing in the center of the island.

Getting there - Accessible only from the northbound lanes of the [George Washington Memorial Parkway](#).

Food Trucks Everywhere, DC | Staff Pick: Derek



Depending on what part of the country you're from, your life may be forever changed when you sink your teeth into a taco al pastor, lamb burger with Asian pork belly fries, crepe, or croqueta from one of the DC's preferred food on the go vendors. There is no one address to provide so use Twitter and/or [Food Truck Fiesta](#) to track down your meal and thank me later.

Baked and Wired Georgetown, DC | Staff Pick: Kati

The cupcake wars have slowed in recent years, but you can still find some amazing treats in DC. Your primary options are Sprinkles Cupcakes, Georgetown Cupcake, and my favorite, Baked and Wired – all in Georgetown! Grab a flavor of the day, or one of their [signature treats](#) (consider an Elvis Impersonator, a Unicorn & Rainbows, or a Texas Sheet Cake) and head down to the [Georgetown Waterfront](#). There is a walking path where you can see the Potomac looking down to the Kennedy Center. Or, you could grab your cupcake and walk a bit on the [C&O Canal](#) before cutting up to M or Wisconsin streets for [some shopping](#).



Getting there – Georgetown is not really Metro accessible. You can hop on the [Circulator](#) or if you like the walk, head that way from Foggy Bottom (Orange/Blue/Silver). It's a quick 15 minute stroll to the heart of Georgetown.

Marine Corps Sunset Parade at the Iwo Jima Memorial

Arlington, VA | Staff Pick: Erica



The memorial itself is certainly worth the trip across the bridge to Virginia. Held every Tuesday night during the summer months, the Sunset Parade is both patriotic and moving. The views are outstanding and there is no charge for admission.

If Tuesday evenings don't work for you, there's also a Friday night parade at the Marine Corps Barracks Washington at 8th and I.

Getting there – Metro accessible. A short walk away from Rosslyn Metro Station (Blue/Orange/Silver Lines).

Meridian Hill Park 16th & W Streets NW, DC | Staff Pick: Kirsten

Meridian Hill Park is a hidden gemstone in D.C. Located in NW D.C. it is designed to match the European models of parks with monumental walls and fountains that are located throughout the 12-acre land. It really is hidden inside the walls that surround the park and if you were not paying attention there is a chance you might run right by it. But once you find it and are inside, you no longer feel like you are in the city.



My favorite weekend activity is to get a fruit juice popsicle (my favorite is Pineapple Basil) from [*Pleasant Pops Farmhouse Market*](#) a few blocks away and then grab a picnic blanket and catch up with friends. Meridian Hill is a huge picnic spot on the weekends and after work. You can often find people in large groups playing outdoor games, walking their dogs or just lounging with a good book.

Getting there – It is Metro accessible from the U Street/Cardozo stop (Green Line) or the DuPont Circle stop (Red Line). Both stops are about a half mile walk from the park.

W Hotel Rooftop Bar (POV) 15th & F NW, DC | Staff Pick: Erica



The W is just a block away from Old Ebbitt Grill, and it's where I take all of my out of town guests. You simply cannot beat the view. Stay for dinner (although menu options are somewhat minimal) or grab a refreshing drink (have we mentioned how important it is to hydrate in DC in June?) and take some family photos. You'll see the monuments, White House rooftop (complete with guards), planes taking off and landing at National Airport (DCA) as well as many of the museums and other DC (and Virginia) landmarks. It's also a cool nighttime stop, although your pictures won't come out. Don't miss it!

Getting there – Metro accessible via Metro Center (Red Line).

National Cathedral 3101 Wisconsin Ave NW, DC | Staff Pick: Maggie

This gothic-style building was completed in the 90s, but looks like it came straight out of medieval Europe. It has over 300 stained glass windows, more than 200 angels, and over 100 gargoyles. If you're going during the day, you'll see sunlight streaming in through the stained glass and creating bright, beautiful colors all across the main sanctuary which change as the sun moves.



There is a piece of moon in one of the windows, and stories of the nation's history are depicted in some of the windows. If you have the patience, and really good eyesight, you may even be able to find the Darth Vader gargoyle that is on the roof of the building!

Getting there – From Downtown DC, take Massachusetts Avenue north to Wisconsin Avenue. Turn right onto Wisconsin Avenue. The Cathedral is on your immediate right.

Embassy Row/Dupont Circle

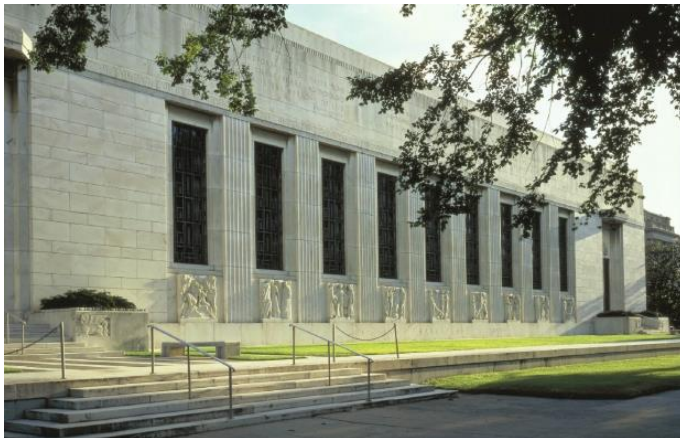
Massachusetts Ave. NW, DC | Staff Pick: Derek



Whether you take an official [tour](#) or stroll through on foot, it's impressive to see the diversity of private residences, embassies, diplomatic missions, and even the U.S. Naval Observatory. Wrap up your adventure by checking out a number of restaurants and attractions in Dupont Circle. Stop by the [The Board Room](#) for a bite and access to hundreds of board games.

Getting there – Start from DuPont Circle Metro Station (Red Line) and head northwest up Massachusetts Ave for Embassy Row.

Folger Shakespeare Library Capitol Hill, DC | Staff Pick: Fernando



To be, or not to be ... the world's finest collection of Shakespeare materials and Renaissance books, manuscripts and art? To be, of course! The library's esteemed reading rooms are only open to scholars and researchers, but other rare materials are meant to be actively used. So ask a librarian any burning questions lingering from high school English, or consult its online catalog, Hamnet, when you go.

Getting there – Metro accessible via Capitol South (Blue/Orange/Silver Lines)

Gravelly Point Park

George Washington Memorial Parkway, Arlington, VA | Staff Pick: Sibley



If you are interested in a little jog, the Mount Vernon Trail is one of Sibley's favorites. Stopping at Gravelly is perfect for watching the planes from Reagan National Airport land and take-off. Bring a ball and run around the grassy fields. Take in the DC views from across the Potomac. Bring a lunch and you've found a great (albeit a bit noisy) spot!

Getting there - Accessible by car off of the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

Union Market Northeast DC | Staff Pick: Derek



If you're anything like me, you believe that the best way to explore a new town is to eat your way through it. Get your culinary fix at DC's gourmet food hall. The warehouse-like market sits on a 50 acre lot that used to be home to the 1930's Union Terminal Market. You won't find many places in Northeast DC topping the list so it's worth the trip out if you find yourself near Union Station. Inside you'll find over 40 local artisans that offer charcuterie, gelato, cheeses, pastries, and more. Be sure to stop by TaKorean for some Korean BBQ Tacos.

Getting there – Just a few blocks away from NoMa-Gallaudet Metro Station (Red Line).

Old Ebbitt Grill 13th & G NW, DC | Staff Pick: Erica



Washington's oldest bar and restaurant makes for a DC classic. Located just next to the White House, it's a traditional eatery for White House staff and DC lobbyists. The menu offers a good range, with the crab cakes remaining one of their most popular items. The restaurant is also very large, with three separate bar areas, two dining rooms and the atrium. Its family friendly, Metro accessible, and fun. The wait can be

long, so plan ahead! Plus, you never know who you will run into there!

Getting there – Metro accessible via Metro Center (Red Line).

The Newseum 555 Pennsylvania Ave NW, DC | Staff Pick: Kirsten

With the many free museums that Washington has to offer you might ask why one would pay to enter this one, but the Newseum is one of the most unique and interactive museums in the district. It is dedicated to free expression and the five freedoms of the First Amendment. There are seven levels of [interactive exhibits](#) including 15 galleries and 15 theaters.



The two that are the most memorable exhibits are the 9/11 Gallery featuring the broadcast antennae from the top of the World Trade Center and the Berlin Wall Gallery whose eight concrete sections are one of the largest pieces of the original wall outside Germany.

My favorite exhibits that are currently at the Newseum are the CNN Politics Campaign, which is a partnership exhibit with CNN Politics that takes a look into the 2016 presidential race, and the

“First Dogs” exhibit, which looks at the many dogs that have lived at the White House including the very famous Sunny and Bo.

The Newseum does require tickets to enter, \$22.95 for adults (19 to 64) and \$13.95 for youth (7 to 18) but that is a small price to pay for the knowledge that you will walk away with. My advice would be to [purchase your tickets](#) in advance and get there right before it opens, as it is a very popular stop for visitors.

Getting there – Metro accessible by Archives/Navy Memorial/Penn Quarter (Green/Yellow) and the Judiciary Square (Red).

The Village at Shirlington Arlington, VA | Staff Pick: Sibley

If you happen to be staying on the Virginia side, Shirlington Village is a fantastic place to stay, eat and shop. It's uber dog-friendly with two dog parks, (complete with an adjacent brewery), trails, parks, family friendly eateries, a public library, theater and grocery store. It's all very walkable and close to DC.



Yogi Castle is THE spot for some awesome frozen yogurt. Luna Grill dishes up some great breakfasts. Busboys & Poets is our favorite because of it's great vibe and it doubles as a book store. The Carlyle has an outstanding menu. And then stop in Dogma Bakery because you may very well find Sibley there seeking out some gourmet treats!

Getting there - Accessible by car off of I-395.

The Air Force Memorial Arlington, VA | Staff Pick: Kirsten



This is a prime spot if you are looking for something to do at night (or during the day) with a beautiful view of Washington, D.C. This memorial overlooks the Pentagon and is adjacent to Arlington Cemetery. It honors the service and sacrifices of the men and women of the United States Air Force and its predecessor organizations.

Why do I like to go at night? Because there is nothing like seeing the skyline of Washington D.C. lit up from a distance, and you can see the planes land at Reagan National. It's beautiful, never crowded (at night) and is a little off the normal "tourist" path of attractions.

Getting there - It is unfortunately not metro accessible (about a one mile walk). If you're able to drive, take I-395 S from downtown D.C. toward Virginia. You will exit at 8A for VA-27/Washington Blvd toward Pentagon South Parking/S Arlington Ridge Road and keep right at the fork. This will take you to VA-27 W/S Washington Blvd. where you will then take the VA-244 E/Columbia Pike Ramp to Navy Annex and turn right onto VA -244 E/Columbia Pike. On your left will be the memorial. There is free parking inside until 11 p.m.

Matchbox various locations in DC, MD, & VA | Staff Pick: Kati

Matchbox is a regional restaurant that serves great pizza and sliders. Affordable for the DC area, it's kid friendly and has a nice warm aesthetic. They have a great outdoor space at the 14th Street location, but Chinatown and Eastern Market are also favorites. If you stay through the weekend, the breakfast pizza can't be beat. Their sister restaurant [Ted's Bulletin](#) is also great! Go for the food, leave with a Pop-Tart!

Getting there – Metro accessible. Gallery Place/Chinatown is the closest (Red/Yellow/Green Lines) while Metro Center is only a couple of blocks walking from the 11th Street Exit (Red/Orange/Blue/Silver).



National Zoo Woodley Park, DC | Staff Pick: Maggie



This is one of the best zoos ever, and it's free! There are, of course, the Giant Pandas, including the baby Bei-Bei, and his parents. If you aren't into pandas, there are lots of other animals to see. The O-Line, a way for orangutans to cross from one home to another in an open-air space, is unique to this zoo, and you'll never have another opportunity for monkeys to be climbing over your head. There are the usual animals like lions and tigers and bears (oh my) and birds,

fish, cheetahs, and hundreds of other animals. The zoo is even divided into separate trails like Amazonia, Asia Trail, American Trail, and Great Cats so that it is easy to find what you are looking for.

Getting there - Take the Red Line to either Woodley Park or Cleveland Park. They are the same distance from the zoo, but Woodley Park is an uphill walk and Cleveland Park is a nice, flat walk.

Lincoln Memorial National Mall, DC | Staff Pick: Molly

While you're checking out the National Mall's museums and monuments, you will probably stop at the Lincoln Memorial. Try to go at night when it's cooled down, less crowded, and the dramatic lighting makes the monument and the National Mall really special.

As for my favorite things to look for at the monument- a plaque commemorating Martin Luther King Jr. is at the top of the steps just outside the building, and is the place where he stood to deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech. Also, Lincoln's second inaugural address is engraved on the north wall of the memorial and has a typo in the first paragraph- try to spot it!

Getting there - Take Metro to Smithsonian station, which drops you right in the middle of the National Mall. The Lincoln Memorial is East, past the Washington Monument and the Reflecting Pool.



Old Town Alexandria Alexandria, VA | Staff Pick: Derek



Old Town Alexandria is a historic district and is known as the epicenter of the city that George Washington called home. Line with cobblestone streets and brick sidewalks, you can stroll down King Street for one mile of non-stop shopping and restaurants. The area is bookended by the [George Washington Masonic Memorial](#) the Potomac River waterfront.

Getting there – Metro accessible by King Street-Old Town Metro Station (Blue/Yellow Lines). A free trolley is also offered.