



## Cooking Light Best Cities: Washington, D.C.

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Our capital city sets an accommodating agenda with farm-fresh dining, diverse cultures, and ample opportunity for exploration on foot.

A constant flow of new residents arrives in Washington, D.C., each political cycle, and their diverse influences converge in a richly textured cultural gumbo. This is a place that takes living well seriously, as evidenced across the city: morning jogs along the C and O Canal, neighborhood organic markets, first Friday gallery openings. The city abounds with amenities: ample green space, adventurous chefs, and plenty of quiet places to slip away. Locals and visitors all converge at some point in America's front yard, the National Mall, site of major events in U.S. history and countless individual moments of clarity and respite.

Washington, D.C., earned the third spot on our top 20 list of *Cooking Light* cities because it ranked highly in the following categories: the number of James Beard nominees for best restaurant and chef per capita; the number of farmers' markets per capita; the percentage of residents who consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day; and its walkability.

### EAT SMART ★★★★★

**Table for six:** Call ahead for **Minibar**, the in-demand microrestaurant tucked within **Cafe Atlantico** (202-393-0812, [www.cafeatlantico.com](http://www.cafeatlantico.com)) in downtown D.C. A dozen lucky diners score one of two nightly seatings (at 6 and 8:30 P.M.), for which Chef José Andrés and cohorts whip up elaborate, 30-course tasting menus both whimsical (dainty olive oil bonbons, crispy tumbleweed of beet) and sublime (smoked oyster and apples). If you miss the Minibar cut, request a second floor table in the Cafe, where you can watch the chefs in action while savoring Atlantico's Nuevo Latino courses, such as quail with mango and anchovy ravioli, or seared salmon drizzled with sweet papaya-vanilla sauce.

**Best emerging star chef:** Family ties (his wife, Meshelle, grew up here) and local produce drew 2007 James Beard nominee Chef Cathal Armstrong from D.C. six miles south to Alexandria, Virginia. "There's nothing more delicious than food that comes off the vine and goes on your plate," says Armstrong, who crafts daily menus based on seasonality. Past and future impress on Armstrong's culinary philosophies: His father in Dublin, Ireland, grew vegetables in the family yard, while concern for his own children's future inspires advocacy for sustainable agriculture, as well as the names for his elegant **Restaurant Eve** (703-706-0450, [www.restauranteve.com](http://www.restauranteve.com)) and comfy **Eamonn's**, a Dublin Chipper (703-299-8384, [www.eamonnsdublinchipper.com](http://www.eamonnsdublinchipper.com)). The recently reopened **Majestic Cafe** (703-837-9117, [www.majesticcafe.com](http://www.majesticcafe.com)) adds a third eatery to Armstrong's Alexandria fold.

**Best urban forager:** Though D.C. ranks high for farmers' markets per capita, Chef Robert Weland has upped the ante by cultivating an organic garden in the courtyard of his restaurant **Poste** (202-783-6060, [www.postebrasserie.com](http://www.postebrasserie.com)), in downtown's happening Penn Quarter. Housed in D.C.'s former central post office (hence the broad skylights above the main dining room), Poste houses nearly 80 pots of mixed greens, herbs, Cherokee purple heirloom tomatoes, and more. Diners anticipate dishes like house-cured prosciutto, salmon tartare in five-spice cones, and crisp, just-picked arugula salads with Parmesan. On Thursdays, Weland leads small group excursions (10 guests max; call to reserve your spot) to the **Penn Quarter FreshFarm Market** (202-362-8889, [www.freshfarmmarket.org](http://www.freshfarmmarket.org)), where he selects ingredients to be developed into a special three-course meal.

### BE FIT ★★★★★

**Best urban playground:** National parks are rare in American cities; what further distinguishes **Rock Creek Park** (202-895-6070, [www.nps.gov/rocr](http://www.nps.gov/rocr)) is how quickly hikers find peace and quiet within its boundaries. Spilling 15 miles south from D.C.'s northern corner, the 1,754-acre park traces a stream valley along forests of maples, oaks, and sycamores, sheltering white-tailed deer and migratory birds. Three primary trails run through the park, a boon to D.C. residents.

**Best lunchtime workout:** With its egalitarian attitude and self-policing honor code, ultimate frisbee may be America's most democratic sport. Pioneered in the 1960s, this soccer-with-flying-discs game

encourages participation (beginners welcome) and rewards players with a heart-healthy cardio session. Check the Web site of **Washington Area Frisbee Club** (301-588-2629, [www.wafc.org](http://www.wafc.org)) for matches and tournaments, or just arrive for pick-up games, with one of the best starting Fridays at noon on the National Mall near the National Museum of Natural History.

**Best moonlight paddling:** Hooting bard owls, leaping fish, beavers slapping the water with their tails to alert comrades to your presence—such reception awaits paddlers on moonlight kayak rides down **Piscataway Creek**, a Potomac tributary by Mount Vernon, George Washington's plantation 17 miles south of downtown. **Atlantic Kayak** (301-292-6455, [www.atlantickayak.com](http://www.atlantickayak.com)) leads groups of all levels on excursions departing at sunset.

Just south of the National Mall, **Tidal Basin Paddle Boats** (202-479-2426, [www.tidalbasinpaddleboats.com](http://www.tidalbasinpaddleboats.com)) rents two- and four-person boats for sunset rides around this lake-like tributary of the Potomac. Enjoy views of the Jefferson Memorial, the FDR Memorial, and others, which are even more impressive by the twilight's last gleaming.

## LIVE WELL ★★☆☆

**Best comeback story:** Billie Holliday, Dizzy Gillespie, and D.C. native son Duke Ellington graced the stages of jazz clubs lining U Street in the **Shaw district** during the "Black Broadway's" mid-century heyday. Postwar blight dimmed the lights, but an encore arrived in the late 1990s with the Shaw's renaissance as one of D.C.'s top nightlife neighborhoods. Jazz still tops bills here, with Cuban **timba** (a style similar to salsa) ensembles and swing jazz orchestras enlivening the colorful **Bohemian Caverns** (202-299-0800, [www.bohemiancaverns.com](http://www.bohemiancaverns.com)), and tuneful trios gigging at tiny **Twins Jazz** (202-234-0072, [www.twinsjazz.com](http://www.twinsjazz.com)), opened more than 20 years ago by Ethiopian twin sisters, Kelly and Maze Tesfaye. By day, historical markers guide walkers to neighborhood highlights, including Ellington's boyhood home on T Street.

**Best arts enclave:** The city's most walkable neighborhood, leafy **Dupont Circle** in Northwest D.C., may be its most creative, with striking 19th-century architecture and art galleries clustered along P, Q, and R streets. Grab the free **Galleries Magazine** guide ([www.artline.com](http://www.artline.com)), available in neighborhood shops and galleries, or set out wandering, popping into places like the **Burdick Gallery** (202-986-5682, [www.burdickgallery.com](http://www.burdickgallery.com)), where proprietor John Burdick spotlights Inuit art he gathers in northern Canada, or the **Studio Gallery** (202-232-8734, [www.studiogallerydc.com](http://www.studiogallerydc.com)), a collective of mixed-media D.C. artists. On the first Fridays of each month, galleries stay open late, often showcasing new exhibits while guests enjoy wine and cheese. For a quirkier tour, follow the **Art on Call Boxes** (202-661-7581, [www.dupontcirclecallbox.com](http://www.dupontcirclecallbox.com)), a Cultural Tourism D.C. project that refurbished old neighborhood fire and police call boxes as public art, each decorated by local artists.

**Best museum off the beaten path:** Don your secret identity upon entering the **International Spy Museum** (202-393-7798, [www.spymuseum.org](http://www.spymuseum.org)), a kitschy trip through the spy versus spy era. This repository of bizarre gadgets like buttonhole cameras and invisible ink seems all the more surreal when juxtaposed with true tales of code breaking and the Berlin Wall.

## Where to Stay

**Best historical hotel:** Filled with history (Martin Luther King, Jr., penned "I Have a Dream" here), the circa-1850 **Willard Intercontinental** (from \$299; 202-628-9100, [www.washington.intercontinental.com](http://www.washington.intercontinental.com)) aims to conserve resources with its new sustainability plan, drawing on wind energy and funding local conservation projects. Its red and blue-hued Federal-Victorian decor sets a stately tone.

**Best Georgetown boutique:** Hip and stylish, the **Latham Hotel** (from \$209; 888-587-2377, [www.georgetowncollection.com](http://www.georgetowncollection.com)) has compact rooms offset by a mingling scene at the rooftop pool and sun deck.

**Best way to stay fit on the road:** In-room ellipticals and yoga stations make the **Topaz Hotel** (from \$139; 202-393-3000, [www.topazhotel.com](http://www.topazhotel.com)) a wise choice for the fitness-focused.

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