

Washington's Churches and Gardens

by Cynthia A. Lockley
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Washington, D.C. has more museums and exhibition space per square inch than anywhere else in the world. The nation's capitol has more must-see landmarks than any other American city. It is easy to get overwhelmed. While touring the city's museums, memorials, galleries, and other treasures, you'll acquire more historical trivia than you can possibly assimilate. Bring your camera, plenty of digital camera memory cards (or film, if you prefer 35mm cameras), and comfortable walking shoes but don't try to see it all. Select a few landmarks to linger over or take some tours that give you a broader view of the city's sites.

If you need to slip away to a quiet place during the week to stroll in a beautiful garden, listen to an organ recital, or meditate on the beauty around you, slip off to one of the aesthetic respites from the modern city—the nation's historic churches and gardens. There are a thousand or more churches in and around the city. Over 20 denominations have chosen Washington, D.C. as the site for a national church. You'll find a surprising diversity of architecture, art, culture, and music. The following is a **small sample** of some of the more interesting places.

Just Gardens

[National Cathedral Flower Mart](#)

May 5-6, 2017. Enjoy the grounds of the cathedral, floral displays, children's activities and musical entertainment.

[Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival](#)

Through May 7, 2017, Winchester, VA. The annual celebration of spring showcases the blooming apple trees in the Shenandoah Valley with more than 45 events including the Coronation of Queen Shenandoah, parade, band competitions, dances, a carnival, Firefighters events, and more.

[Georgetown Garden Tour](#)

May 13, 2017, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. The Georgetown Garden Club sponsors a tour of eight Georgetown gardens.

Inspiring Parks & Gardens in Washington, DC

<http://washington.org/DC-focus-on/dcs-parks-and-gardens>

There are Bonsai trees, dogwoods, ferns, and a spectacular display of azaleas in every hue and color on view at the 444-acre **National Arboretum** (Maryland Ave. and M St., NE). The **National Bonsai and Penjing Museum**, on the grounds of the U.S. National Arboretum at 3501 New York Avenue N.E., started with China's gift of penjing trees to President Richard M. Nixon in 1972 and Japan's gift of fifty-three bonsai trees and seven viewing stones from the Nippon Bonsai Association to the U. S. National Arboretum in July of 1976 in honor of the American Bicentennial. Many more little trees in pots have been donated by Hong Kong, China, Japanese, and North American practitioners. The oldest tree is a Japanese White Pine (donor: Masaru Yamaki) that has been in training since 1625 and survived the nuclear blast of Hiroshima. The **U.S. Botanic Garden** at the foot of Capitol Hill contains a world-famous collection of orchids that includes 10,000 plants and at least 500 varieties of orchids, 200 of which bloom every week. The **Dumbarton Oaks Gardens** has

10 acres of magnolias, forsythia, Japanese cherries, and crab apples in superb flower. **Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens**, 1550 Anacostia Ave NE, Washington, DC 20019, is a lovely park on the banks of the Anacostia River. The park is divided into three sections: a board walk along the marsh to the river where you can see lots of birds; aquatic gardens with lily ponds, frogs, turtles, herons; and a wooded walk that arcs out to the river. **Hillwood Estate, Museum, and Gardens**, 4155 Linnean Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20008. The former home of Marjorie Merriweather Post has 18th-century Russian Imperial and French decorative art and twenty-five acres of landscaped gardens and natural woodlands. See below for information about the beautiful **Franciscan Monastery and Gardens**.

Lady Bird Johnson Park is a 15-acre island across the Memorial Bridge and off George Washington Parkway on the Virginia side of the Potomac River. It has azaleas, rhododendron, and more than 2,700 dogwoods. Also on the Virginia side, the 88-acre **Theodore Roosevelt Island**, south of the Key Bridge in the Potomac River, is accessible by footbridges. Two and one-half miles of foot trails wind through the island and provide good hiking and observation of bird and animal life. **Rock Creek Park**, is a 1,800-acre peaceful oasis inside the city. It is one of the oldest and largest parks in the nation. It is 4 miles long and 1 mile wide and offers a variety of activities not to mention beautiful near-virgin forest, black bears, 200-year old tulip beds, and naturalized daffodils.

Just Churches (and some gardens)

All Souls Unitarian Church, 16th and Harvard Sts., NW. <http://www.all-souls.org/> Completed in 1924, the design for this church is a copy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London.

Franciscan Monastery and Gardens, Metro stop: Brookland CUA then walk to 14th and Quincy Sts., NE. <http://www.myfranciscan.org/monastery/tours/> If you always wanted to see the Roman catacombs, the Grotto of Lourdes, the tomb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Sepulcher of Christ, and other shrines but couldn't afford the trip to the Holy Land or Rome, you can see them in replica at the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America just up the road from the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Established as the Holy Land Commissariat of the Franciscan Order of the United States, the 44-acre monastery helps preserve shrines in the Holy Land by raising funds in the United States and by training missionary priests. The spring and summer gardens are beautiful and offer serenity no matter what your faith is. Take a contemplative stroll on the Cloister Walk, which is inscribed with Hail Marys in 100 languages including Apache and Crow.

Islamic Center, 2551 Massachusetts Ave., NW. <http://theislamiccenter.com/> The beautiful Islamic Center on the banks of Rock Creek Park is a cultural and religious center for the estimated 65,000 Islamic population of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The center contains administrative offices, a museum, a gift shop, lecture halls, and a mosque. The faithful are called to prayer five times a day from the top of the mosque's slender 160-foot minaret. The center was constructed between 1949 and 1957 with funds and materials that were donated primarily from the governments of Islamic countries. It is governed by a board composed of the heads of Islamic diplomatic missions in Washington, D.C. The decor of the center is a composite of Islamic arts including a Moorish colonnade, horseshoe arches, Turkish tiles, silk Iranian carpets, intricate designs painted on the high walls and ceilings, and a two-ton cast bronze chandelier from Egypt that is inlaid with nickel. Free guided tours take about 1 hour and must be scheduled 1 week in advance. Proper attire is required while visiting the mosque: arms, legs, (and women's heads) must be covered, and shoes must be removed. To make a reservation for a tour, call 1-202-332-8343.

Masonic National Monument, West on King Street, Alexandria, VA. <http://www.gwmemorial.org/> The Masonic National Memorial to George Washington sits on top of Shuter's Hill in Alexandria. It is the national home of Freemasonry. The temple houses a priceless collection of pictures and relics including the ivory-handled trowel used by President Washington in laying the cornerstone of the capitol building in 1793.

Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1518 M St., NW; Metro stop: Farragut North. <http://www.metropolitanamec.org/> This Gothic-style church was completed in 1846 and became one of the most influential black churches in the city. Abolitionist orator Frederick Douglass worshipped there and Bill Clinton chose it for the setting of his inaugural prayer service.

Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, 1334 29th St., NW. <http://www.umc.org/find-a-church/church/79850> This is the oldest black church in the city and was a stop on the Underground Railway. The vault in the nearby Old Methodist Burying Ground was used as a hideout for runaway slaves until their passage North could be arranged.

National Cathedral, take any number 30s bus to the intersection of Massachusetts and Wisconsin Avenues, NW. <https://www.cathedral.org> The National Cathedral, also known as the Washington Cathedral, is officially the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul. You can see it from miles away rising from Mount St. Albans, and standing as the highest point in Washington. It is the sixth largest cathedral in the world with flying buttresses, naves, stained glass windows, transepts, and barrel vaults modeled on 14th-century Gothic architecture. Completed in 1990, it took 83 years to build and is adorned with fanciful gargoyles and grotesques. Bring your binoculars to find Darth Vader, a camera, and other humorous creatures carved by master masons in the medieval style. (If it is raining, go outside and watch the gargoyles spouting rainwater away from the walls and stained glass.) Look for the genuine moon rock that is imbedded in a red disk in the Space Window, and don't miss the impressive view of the city and surrounding countryside from the Pilgrim Observation Gallery. The National Cathedral is nominally Episcopalian, but that denomination makes up less than half of those who worship there. Its purpose is to serve all the people. A synagogue meets in the Cathedral, and Methodists, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and others regularly use it for worship. It is frequently the site of interfaith services at times of national mourning or national celebration and a wide variety of concerts are held in the cathedral. Over 100 distinguished Americans have tombs in the cathedral including President Wilson, Helen Keller, and her teacher, Anne Sullivan.

National Presbyterian Church and Center, 4125 Nebraska Ave., NW (at the corner of Van Ness St., just east of Ward Circle). <http://www.nationalpres.org/> The beautiful sanctuary of the National Presbyterian Church is streamlined modern Gothic architecture with 42 semiabstract stained glass windows.

National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Metro stop: Brookland CUA then walk to 4th Street and Michigan Avenue. <http://www.nationalshrine.com/site/c.osJRKVPBjH/b.4719297/k.BF65/Home.htm> The blue-tiled dome of the National Shrine dominates the Northeast Washington skyline. It is the largest Catholic church in the Western Hemisphere and is the 8th largest cathedral in the world. The cathedral is a 20th-century combination of Romanesque and Byzantine architecture with a Gothic tower that soars over the Catholic University of America across the street. Construction began in 1920 using marble from 28 countries, brick, granite, tile, and concrete. The shrine was dedicated in 1959 and is the official national tribute to Mary, The Mother of Christ, who was given papal recognition as this country's patroness back in 1846. It has 57 chapels built with funds from ethnic communities from all over the United States. The 5,000-pound Algerian marble altar was built from the

donations of thousands of women with the name of Mary. The likeness of Mary is found in a wondrous array of mosaics, stained glass, statues, and paintings.

Nichiren Shoshu Myosenji Temple, 310 University Blvd W, Silver Spring, MD, <http://nstmyosenji.org> Awaken your Buddha nature. The Myosenji Temple holds regular Introduction to Buddhism meetings. Learn how to chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo and properly use the Juzu Beads (Buddhist prayer beads).

Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, 4001 17th St NW, Washington DC. <http://www.stjohndc.org/en/our-parish/our-history/cathedral-church-st-john-baptist> The building is executed in the 17th-century Muscovite-Yaroslav-style. Gilded onion domes, each crowned with a traditional Russian three-barred cross, a belfry, and icons of scenes from the life of St. John the Baptist above the three doors adorn the exterior. Murals and numerous centuries-old icons and an imposing four-tiered iconostasis make up the interior. Services are available in English and in Church Slavonic, the liturgical language of the Eastern-Slav Churches.

Saint Sophia Cathedral, Massachusetts Ave. and 36th St., NW. <http://www.saintsophiadc.com/> Saint Sophia is a Greek Orthodox cathedral that is noted for its explosion of Byzantine mosaic work on the interior of its dome. The ongoing project has taken more than 30 years and is supervised by Byzantine scholars from Dumbarton Oaks. The result is the most accurate representation of the Macedonian school of Byzantine art in the world.

Scottish Rite Temple, 1733 16th Street, NW. <https://scottishrite.org/headquarters/visitors/> This Masonic shrine, designed by famous architect John Russell Pope, is modeled after the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, one of the “Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.”. Open for tours from 10 am to 4:30 pm, Monday-Thursday. To schedule a tour, call 1-202-232-3579 or check the official Twitter account (@MasonicMuseum).

St. Andrew Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral, 15100 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20905, <http://www.standrewuoc.org/> The parish was founded in 1949, shortly after World War II. Construction of the church began in 1986 in the classical Kozak Baroque style, designed by architect M. Nimtsev. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986 moved the parish to dedicate the building to those who perished and the victims are commemorated at every Divine Liturgy. The church building was completed in 1987 and was consecrated on April 24, 1988 - a thousand years after Rus'-Ukraine became a Christian State.

St. John's Episcopal Church, Metro stop: McPhearson Square. <https://stjohnsgeorgetown.org/> Directly across the street from the White House on Lafayette Square, St. John's Episcopal Church is known as the "Church of the Presidents" because every President since Madison has attended a service here at one time. While visiting heads of state always sit on the first row, visiting U.S. Presidents sit on the ninth row in Pew 54 amid the people.

St. Matthew's Cathedral, 1725 Rhode Island Avenue, NW. <http://www.stmatthewscathedral.org/> This Renaissance-style church is the seat of Washington's Catholic archbishop. In 1963, it was the site of the funeral mass for President John F. Kennedy.

Saint Nicholas Cathedral (Russian Orthodox), 3500 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC. <http://www.stnicholasdc.org/> St. Nicholas is the Primatial Cathedral of the Autocephalous (self-governed) Orthodox Church in America. Founded in 1930 as a Russian Church, the building was

constructed between 1951 and 1962; it became a Cathedral in 1978. The fresco icons, completed in 1992-94, are expressed in a tradition that originates from the very beginnings of Christianity.

Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 9900 Stoneybrook Drive, Kensington, MD. <https://www.lds.org/locations/washington-dc-temple-visitors-center?lang=eng>

The striking Mormon temple in suburban Maryland is one of the newest Washington landmarks. This 300-foot monolith with its six gold-plated spires, and blue lights rises above the Beltway and is especially dazzling at night. It is closed to non-Mormons, but there is a visitors' center that offers a view of the beautiful white-marble temple. The visitors' center shows multimedia presentations, revolving dioramas, and a film about the temple and what takes place inside. The 57-acre grounds have azaleas, dogwood, and tulips in the spring.

The Diyanet Center of America Mosque, 9704 Good Luck Rd, Lanham, MD, <https://diyanetamerica.org/> The mosque and cultural center opened in April 2016. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan led dignitaries in dedicating the majestic complex, which includes a fellowship hall, traditional-style Turkish houses, and a Turkish bathhouse. The large domed mosque and minaret stand out amid the nearby condominium and apartment complexes.

The Hindu Temple of Metropolitan Washington, 10001 Riggs Road, Adelphi, MD, <http://www.hindutemplemd.org/> | **BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir**, 4320 Ammendale Rd, Beltsville, MD, <http://www.baps.org/Global-Network/North-America/WashingtonDC.aspx> | 6300 Princess Garden Pkwy, Lanham, MD, <http://www.murugantemple.org/> | **Sri Siva Vishnu Temple**, 6905 Cipriano Rd, Lanham, MD, <https://www.ssvt.org/> |

U.S. Zen Institute (Chinese Chan Buddhism) 19225 Liberty Mill Road, Germantown, MD, <http://www.ibcdc.org/temples/uszi.htm>. The initial temple was in an 85-year old wooden church, which burned to the ground in 1992. With faith and generous donations from Buddhists everywhere, a new 10,300 square feet temple was opened on the same site in 2001.

Washington Ethical Society, 7750 16th St., NW. <http://www.ethicalsociety.org/> Liberal religious, educational, and community service activities are held at the Ethical Society's Meeting House and Administration Building. It is also the site for many concerts of The Folklore Society of Greater Washington.

Washington Hebrew Congregation, 3935 Macomb Street, NW. <http://www.whctemple.org/> The Washington Hebrew Congregation is the city's largest and oldest Reform synagogue. At the front of the sanctuary, two massive stone tablets separate during services to reveal the ark, which holds the scrolls of the Torah. Like the National Cathedral, other interfaith groups use the synagogue for religious services. Tours are arranged by request: call 1-202-7100.

Other Fun Festivals and Events in the Washington, DC Area in May

[DC Funk Parade](#)

May 6, 2017. U Street Corridor, Washington DC. This is a one-of-a-kind street fair, parade and music festival bringing to life one of the city's liveliest entertainment districts.

[Around the World Embassy Tour](#)

May 6, 2017, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. The event showcases embassies from Africa, Asia, Oceania, the Middle East, and the Americas, with artists and artisans, performers, lecturers, teachers, and others.

[Passport DC - Open Houses at Washington, DC Embassies](#)

Throughout May. The multi-cultural event, sponsored by Cultural Tourism DC, features a wide range of performances, talks, and exhibits at DC's foreign embassies.

[Virginia Gold Cup](#)

May 6, 2017. The Plains, VA. The annual steeplechase in Virginia horse country features horse races, Jack Russell Terrier races, tailgate competitions and more.

[Maryland Craft Beer Festival](#)

May 13, 2017. Carroll Creek Park, Frederick, MD. More than 25 breweries present over 175 different brews.

[DC Dragon Boat Festival](#)

May 20-21, 2017. Thompson's Boathouse Center, 2900 Virginia Avenue, NW, Washington DC.

Sponsored by the Chinese Women's League of Washington, DC, the event features dragon boat races on the Potomac River, cultural performances and hands-on activities