



MUSIC. CULTURE. SOCIETY.

SOUL IN THE CITY: An Insider's Guide To Washington DC

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Though known mostly for its political ties, Washington D.C. is a city filled with arts, culture and fashion. For first time visitors, seeing the well known national sites can give you a sense of the city's history, but it won't necessarily give you a taste of the city's flavour. For that, you have to venture to some of the eclectic neighbourhoods where DC's diverse populations come together.

In order to give a feel for what there is to do, see, eat and experience in DC, this mini guide is going to take you through the individual areas that make DC a truly great city. Most of the locations listed below are within walking distance so this could be done as a walking tour. Divided into categories of “Food” “Nightlife” “Shopping” and “Arts/Culture”, this guide should help you find the right places and spaces to make your “local” DC experience genuine and exciting.

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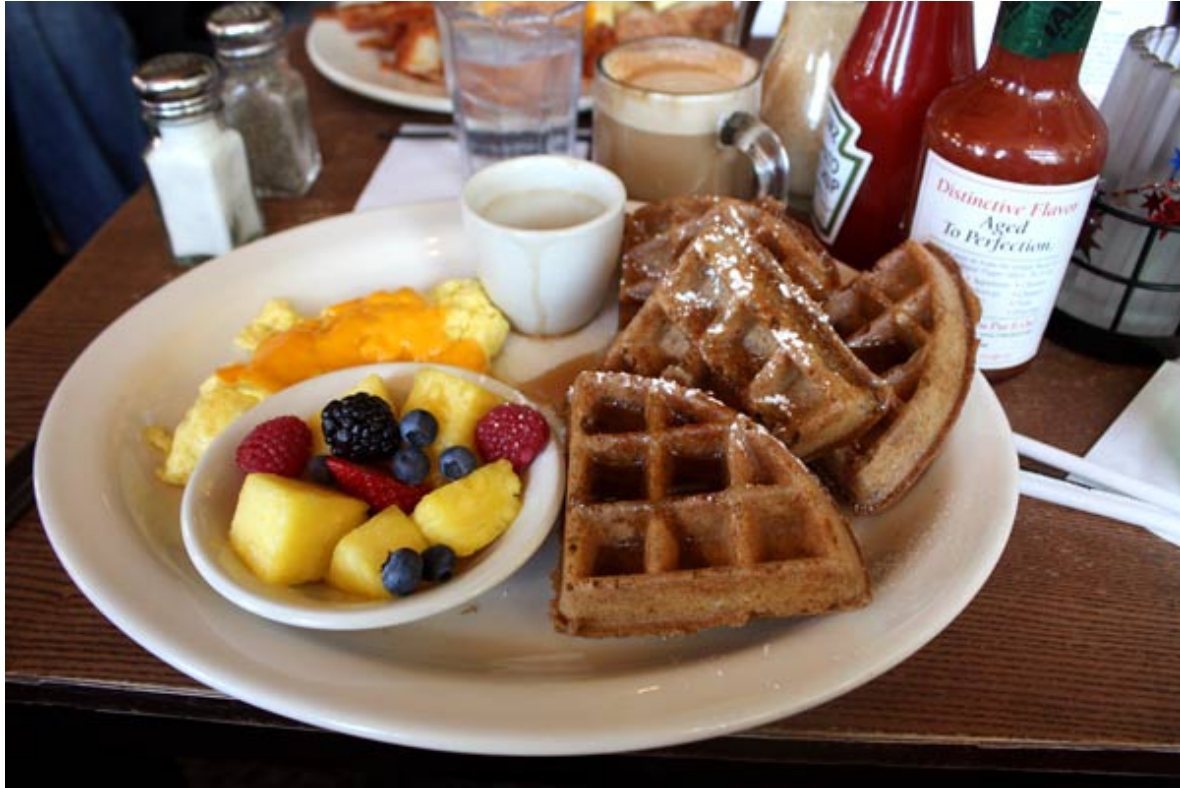
FOOD

Let’s start in on of DC’s most diverse neighbourhoods, Adams Morgan. Known as being a hot spot to bar hop on the weekends, Adams Morgan is actually nicest during the daytime. The main street in the area is 18th Street between Florida Avenue and Columbia Road. On this strip, you can find lots of foods from all around the world, including Ethiopia, India, France and Cuba. You can also find Jumbo slice pizzas and great burgers.

Right in the heart of 18th is **Tryst Coffeehouse Bar and Lounge** (2459 18th Street, NW). Tryst is one of many DC locals’ favorite places because it creates an atmosphere that is somewhere between being at home and being out. For this reason, it is a spot where writers, journalists and artists come to work and hang out. Though it’s open late nights as a bar, Tryst is a great place to have lunch with friends or to do some work. With a menu that offers all day brunch (go for the Belgian waffles), good appetizers (like the spinach artichoke dip or goats cheese bruschetta) and fantastic sandwiches and seating on big comfy sofas and chairs, it’s no wonder that customers stay for hours on end. Tryst’s real specialty though? Order their Washington Carver, a milkshake made with peanut butter and Ghirardelli chocolate.

For those of you who have a hankering for sweets, try **Locolat** (1781 Florida Avenue, NW), a fine Belgian chocolateria, which is located around the corner from El Tamarindo. Here you can get an amazing assortment of chocolates, pastry treats and chocolate inspired coffee drinks, all made in house by Chef Niel Piferoen.

Cupcake fans should continue down U Street where they will find **Love Café** (1501 U Street, NW). Here, you can find that cupcakes that started the cupcake obsession in the DC area. Started by former lawyer Warren Brown, the original bakery, Cake Love (1506 U Street), is conveniently located across the street. The assortment of cupcakes is overwhelming, but some popular ones are the new red velvets, chocolate dipped and the 44 (made to taste like Obama’s favourite candy, salty caramel).



U Street is in one of DC's oldest neighbourhoods, Shaw, which was once home to Duke Ellington, Marvin Gaye, Lena Horne and Go Go Legend Chuck Brown. Many would consider the U Street Corridor the heart of Shaw and in the past ten years or so, the area has gone through some major changes. Being close to Howard University, U Street is a hub for both academic and cultural happenings and the intellectual presence has influenced some of the areas hotspots. For example, restaurant/café **Busboys and Poets** (2021 14th Street, NW) has become a hang out for activists, journalists, poets and artists who come for the good Americana food and stay for the readings, performances and fantastic bookstore. It's new sister restaurant, Eatonville, is also literarily inspired. The name comes from the African American author Zora Neale Hurston's hometown in Florida and the restaurants walls are painted with murals dedicated the her work. The food served is delicious traditional Southern home-style cooking with specialties like shrimp hush puppies and fried green tomatoes. Oh, and they only serve sweet tea.

Down the street, next to the historic Lincoln Theater, is another piece of DC history. **Ben's Chili Bowl** (1213 U St., NW) is now a popular destination for visitors especially after a certain Barack Obama came to sample a chilidog. However, if you don't feel like waiting in line with all the other tourists, pop in to Ben's Next Door (1211 U St., NW) the new upscale sports bar. Operated by the same owners, Next Door offers up the usual halfsmoke chili dogs, but also has a menu full of other delicious treats. Chef Rock Harper (winner of the US "Hell's Kitchen" season 3) helped create the menu. Diners can chow down on braised beef short ribs and brined fried chicken. If you are feeling extra special, treat yourself to a Chocolate City Kiss martini for desert. For weekend visitors, Next Door does a delicious Sunday brunch, which includes chicken and waffles and shrimp and grits in a white wine sauce.

MUSIC

DC has some of the greatest live music and DJ spots and is home to lots of talented artists.

For fans of Soul and R&B, stop by **Marvin** (2007 14th St, NW). This restaurant/bar pays homage to the short time Marvin Gaye spent in Ostend, Belgium recuperating from substance addiction. The bar has a wide variety of specialty Belgian beers and a rooftop beer garden where patrons can relax, winter or summer. The music is always top quality as Marvin gets some of the best DJs from around DC to play selections of R&B, Funk, Soul and House. The crowd is laid back, but trendy...and you never know just who you're going to meet there.

For live performances, check out **Liv Nightclub** (2001 11th Street, NW). Numerous performers have played Liv, including Alice Russell, Foreign Exchange, J*Davey, Blu and Exile and Tanya Morgan. If you are looking for good jazz, you don't have to go far. Downstairs from Liv is Bohemian Caverns (2001 11th Street, NW), DC's most historic jazz club. Originally opened in 1926, Bohemian Caverns was where entertainers like Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway got started. Since then it has played host to some of Jazz and Soul's greatest talents.

Another great live music spot is the **9:30 Club** (915 V Street, NW). Originally one of DC's oldest venues for alternative music, the 9:30 Club is still a popular spot for big name bands and music acts. The list of artists that have graced its stage is long and full of talent: Bloc Party, M.I.A., Wu-Tang Clan, Lily Allen, Mos Def, Esthero, and Gnarls Barkley, just to name a few. There is also the 9:30 Backbar which is located downstairs from the main stage. Here local DJs throw parties playing Hip Hop, electro and Baltimore club.

Another good rock and roll spot is **Asylum** (2471 18th Street, NW). Don't let its appearance fool you; though it looks and feels (and more or less is) a biker bar, it has provided a stage to many soul bands, rappers and electro DJs.



For Hip Hop heads, check out **Jin**. Calling itself an “Asian Caribbean Soul Lounge,” Jin has a posh atmosphere but won’t leave your wallet feeling empty (try their five dollar Happy Hour specials). On Friday nights, you can check out DJ Jerome Baker III as he plays a fantastic selection of Hip Hop to an always packed house. If you want live Hip Hop, check out Pure Lounge (1326 U Street, NW). On Monday nights, Pure has a Hip Hop open mic where some of the best talent from the “DMV” come to show off their skills. You can also hear DJs spin Hip Hop classics, reggae and DC’s own musical style, Go Go.

Fans of DJ dance nights will be happy to know that DC’s DJs are top quality. In addition to the big nightclubs, there are numerous dance parties in smaller, more intimate venues. There’s a number of dive bar like clubs that hold weekly and monthly DJ parties: the **Black Cat** (1811 14th Street, NW), **DC9** (1940 9th Street, NW) and DC9’s sister club **Rock & Roll Hotel** (located a little further a field at 1353 H Street, NE). If you are in the mood to dress up, check out **Policy** (1904 14th Street, NW), a new DC hot spot. If you are out on a Saturday, try **Napoleon** (1847 Columbia Road, NW) for DJs playing a selection of classic top 40s and a bar that serves good champagne.

SHOPPING

Just because DC is a political town, does not mean DC locals have to dress like it. DC is full of fashionistas and this list of stores should give you an in to where they all shop.

Though still pretty new, DC’s streetwear and sneaker scene has grown in the past five years. One of its center points is “The Block” (1781 Florida Avenue, NW). Originating in Virginia Beach,

Virginia, Commonwealth is best known for its collaborations with N.E.R.D., the Clipse and DJ A-Trak. The store in DC is its second location and since its opening, has become an integral part of DC's urban fashion scene. With the opening of Stussy and the higher end The Greater Good, this strip of stores is becoming a new mecca for streetwear aficionados and sneakerheads. The three stores not only sell clothes, but also provide a hang out spot for local trendsetters. Well known music industry types have also been known to stop in and shop. The stores have events as well including album listening parties, meet and greets with musical artists and on occasion live performances.

For women's clothes, U Street is the place to check out. **Nana** (1528 U Street, NW) has new clothes that feel vintage inspired. The styles are classic but funky and the staff friendly and helpful. It is hard to leave here without finding something. Across the street is **Lettie Gooch** (1517 U Street, NW). Here you can find bold print dresses, beautiful handbags and accessories. Just a block down, go into Caramel. Here you can find both men and women's clothes from an assortment of fashion designers, some of who are local. If you want to check out local designers, try **Dekka** (1338 U Street, NW 2nd Floor). A fashion, art and music retail showroom, Dekka features a wide range of clothes and jewellery from local fashion designers. Also working as an artist collective, many of the designers/artists volunteer to work in the store.



ARTS & CULTURE

Home to many famous galleries and museums, like the Smithsonian Institute or the Corcoran, DC is also a place to find small galleries where local and international artists have their work displayed.

Small galleries like **Transformer** (1404 P Street, NW), **Hamiltonian** (1353 U Street, NW) and the **Hillyer Art Space** (9 Hillyer Court, NW) have exhibitions that are highly conceptual with showcases of up and coming talent in the art world. The bigger Irvine Gallery exhibits more established artists (like the Shepard Fairey's famous "Obama" canvas).

If you feel like venturing out a bit, check out **Dissident Display** (416 H Street, NE), a gallery that focuses on multimedia exhibitions. Their openings always have elements of music, art and technology and the crowd who frequents the exhibitions are a who's who of the Washington art world. Their next showcase will be a solo show by the talented DC-based artist Aniekan Udofia.

Also further afield, in National Harbor, Maryland is **Art Whino** (173 Waterfront Street, National Harbor, Maryland). Though not directly in DC, Art Whino was rated the second best gallery in the city. Dealing in mostly "low brow" art, Art Whino has a selection of international artists whose works range from traditional paintings to customized sneakers. The artwork is generally reasonably priced as Art Whino prides itself on making art more available to a greater audience. If you decide to visit the gallery, stay and explore National Harbor. Art lovers will be amazed by the famous "Awakening" sculpture that was moved to the Harbor after it was built.

Though there are a lot of things listed here, this guide is by no means all there is to see and do in DC. There is constantly something going on somewhere in the city, making it difficult to include everything. However, when you come visit our fair city, SoulCulture's Soul In The City: Guide To DC should give you a good start to discovering new and exciting sides to the Nation's Capital.



About SoulCulture

SoulCulture is an international online magazine exploring the entity of 'soul' in its many forms across a spread of black music, culture, entertainment and beyond.

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