



## Elephants, Donkeys and Wheelchairs, Oh My!

by Adam Lloyd

**R**egardless of who actually reaches the White House in next month's election, Washington D.C. will continue to be one of the world's most popular tourist destinations. With a bevy of historical sites, monuments, museums and a chance to view the government at work, Washington has something to offer everyone. Even better, as the nation's only federal city, and its responsibility to lead by example, accessibility in D.C. ranks among the best in the nation.

As with any cosmopolitan center, Washington boasts its share of fine dining, nightlife, shopping and cultural venues. However, what sets the city apart, and the reason people travel there, is to experience, first-hand, the living history of the United States.

Washington is a rather small city, and traveling around it is, for the disabled and able-bodied alike, fairly easy. A first rate bus system, 70% of which is equipped with wheelchair lifts, will take you virtually anywhere. Another alternative is the city's superb subway system which services the majority of tourist locations and has excellent accessibility features including braille metro card machines, audio and visual train announcements, accessible turn-styles, and elevators at every station.



The Capitol is an excellent place to start a tour of the city. Accessible entrances are available on the east side of the building, facing away from the

National Mall. Once past security, you are free to roam the building, or may opt to take a guided tour (offered every 15 minutes between 9:00 a.m. and 3:45 p.m.). There is a Special Services office (202-224-4048 / TDD 202-224-4049) on the ground floor which offers pre-arranged accessible tours using ramps, elevators, sign language, FM systems, tactile and descriptive accommodations.



The Capitol is four floors, each with it's own fascinating sights.

Highlights are the original Supreme Court Chamber, the National Statuary Hall, the Rotunda, the old Senate Chamber and the Senate and House Chamber Galleries. Here, visitors can sit in on both houses of Congress and watch as legislative sessions actually take place. A monitor with closed captioning allows hearing impaired individuals to follow the proceedings.

Tours of the White House are given every Tuesday through Saturday, in both self guided and Congressional Guided (10 weeks pre-arrangement) formats. Free tickets are required and can be gotten on a first come, first served basis at the White House

Visitor Center starting at 7:30 a.m. Wheelchair users, and up to four companions, do not need tickets and can go straight to the entrance gate. Group or individual tours for those with hearing or visual impairments are available in conjunction with the Congressional Guided Tours; an interpreter will be provided for those with hearing disabilities and blind visitors are able to touch selected objects under Secret Service supervision.

It would be a simple thing to spend an entire vacation touring only the Smithsonian Museums; open almost uniformly from 10:00 a.m. until 5:30

p.m. With a total of 16 museums, from American History, to Air and Space, to modern art, the Institute holds over 140 million artifacts within its walls, all of which are free to the public.

The Smithsonian's exhibits are, for the most part, accessible to wheelchair users and those with visual and hearing impairments. Some information desks do not have lowered areas, not all titular labels on exhibits provide braille text, and a few rare areas have stairs only access. However, the large majority of the Smithsonian collection is easy to experience no matter who the visitor.

Signing tours are available at all of the Smithsonian's museums with two weeks advance notice (202) 786-2942 / TTY (202) 786-2414, and braille guides and audio tours are provided at most of the museums.

Another activity of choice, is to visit the many memorials throughout the city. The Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, Tidal Basin, Vietnam Memorial, Washington Monument, and FDR Memorial are all located along the National Mall. Each has wheelchair access, and sign language tours are available through the Park Service (202) 485-9880. Except for the Washington Monument, which stops admitting visitors at 5:00 p.m., all of the memorials are "open" from 8:00 in the morning until midnight daily.

Other unique, and fully accessible, sights in Washington include tours of the Supreme Court, FBI headquarters, the U.S. Mint, Ford's Theater (where Lincoln was shot), and the National Archives, home to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

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### **Other Resources:**

FBI Tours: [www.fbi.gov/yourfbi/tour/tour.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/yourfbi/tour/tour.htm)

Smithsonian Access: [www.si.edu/opa/accessibility/](http://www.si.edu/opa/accessibility/)

Washington Metro Transit Authority: <http://www.wmata.com/>

White House Tours:

[www.whitehouse.gov/WH/Tours/visitors\\_center.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/Tours/visitors_center.html)

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