

# D.C. Off the Beaten Path

by Elmo Dattalo



**T**here are literally hundreds of guidebooks that will tell you how to get to the White House, Capitol Building, Supreme Court, and all of the buildings of the Smithsonian Institution. However, D.C. is not only about these BIG name places. D.C. is also a city in its own right, with many places of interest that most visitors to the city never hear about—or notice. One general caveat on safety, do not wear your meeting badge out of the Convention Center. Especially in some of the neighborhoods below, it will mark you as a target for purse snatchers and pickpockets. Listed below are just a few of the many that exist.

## Malcolm X/Meridian Hill Park

Located at 16th Street and north of Florida Avenue, this park was once surrounded by huge homes of the very wealthy. Officially named Meridian Hill Park, the people of the city renamed this park many years ago after the late civil rights leader Malcolm X. Cab drivers, if they are new to the city, may even be confused if you use the official name. This is one of the most beautiful spots in D.C. With elegant waterfalls and fountains, terraced gardens, and statues of Dante, Joan of Arc and President Buchanan, this park is spectacular for an inner city space. It has, however, a difficult reputation of danger and violence. When I first moved to D.C. in the late '70s, there were rumors that foreign diplomats used the park for drug connections and sexual liaisons. It is true that you have to be careful. Keep an eye on your belongings. And, I would not recommend that you visit at night or alone at any time. But, do visit if you have the time. You will be delighted and surprised.

## Sonny Bono Memorial Park

One of D.C.'s newest parks, this was actually a small green area traffic triangle until a private citizen overcome with grief over Sonny Bono's death worked (and paid for personally) with the National Park Service to create this little memorial to Mr. Bono's memory. At the intersection of 20th Street, O Street, and New Hampshire Avenue, N.W.—you could actually go by this one by cab and not miss much. Otherwise, it is just a block away from the Dupont Circle (red line) Metro stop's south exit. Unfortunately, only a few D.C. residents know that this park exists, so getting directions outside of the Metro will not be easy. You are better to ask for directions to the street's intersection. Be careful, traffic is heavy around there and cars may be whizzing around you.

## The Mansion on O Street

A fabulously interesting B & B that is a showplace for "stuff." Everything, including the building(s) is for sale at any given moment—and for the right amount of cash.

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*An insider's guide to the city's less-obvious charms, including eggs and insults...heavy Lenin...injera...and hutches for disco bunnies. If you do nothing else, order the strawberry pie!*

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There are pictures, sculptures, dishes, clothes, ceramics, antiques, mirrors, nicknacks, tchotchkes, and bibelots all over the place. Located at 2020 O Street, N.W., and run by H.H. Leonards (a woman of mystery—she is known only as "H" and her son is "Z"), this is the place where President Clinton's mother would often stay when she visited Washington. Cindy Crawford and Richard Gere have been guests. Just ring and ask to see the House. H is very nice about letting people in to just look around when there are no parties or guests scheduled.

## Temperance

This is a wonderful small monument at Pennsylvania Avenue and 7th Street, N.W. Erected in 1880, it originally dispensed iced water (in 1880!!) as an alternative to liquor. It stood in front of the APEX Liquor Store for years before the building behind it was renovated.

## Yenching Palace

At 3524 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., this place is one of those big and sprawling Chinese Restaurants of our youth—black and red all over with half-moon banquets and a mish-mash of Chinese/American dishes. The food is really nothing special (it has been called dreadful and expensive, actually). However, it was in this restaurant that some of the Cuban Missile Crisis negotiations took place between the Russians and the American delegations. It says so, right on the menu.

## Sherrill's Bakery on Capitol Hill

Located at 233 Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E. (Eastern Market Metro stop) for 77 years, it still looks much the same as the day it opened. You can come for the food, which is lunch-counter good, but you really come for the waitresses. Ed Debevic's tries to get it right, Sherrill's does it right. Be prepared for "eggs and insults" from someone who looks like your Great Aunt Estelle. Also known for its really low prices.

## Eastern Market

Just two blocks north of the Eastern Market Metro stop (walk up 6th Street), this is a produce, meat, bakery, and flea market on Capitol Hill. The bakery is a good one with good prices. The meats are fresh and also well priced. The fresh fruit and vegetables are each and every one perfect—but, astronomical in price. (If the stalls are up outside, you can get better deals there.) Forget all of that, however, and run to the back of the building and get in line for Blueberry Pancakes (for breakfast) or Barbeque Sandwiches (for lunch). Yes, they are served on paper plates with plastic utensils, but the line down the hall and out the door from opening to closing isn't there without a reason. If you are here on a weekend, take a walk through the flea market stalls outside. You will find everything from papier-mâché Hindu gods to period antiques!

## Reeves Bakery

Order the Strawberry Pie. Order the Strawberry Pie. Order the Strawberry Pie. Since this place is only a few blocks from the Convention Center, you might end up coming back a few times during the Annual Meeting. Some people think the thick strawberry-flavored glaze a bit much, but if you like it sweet, you'll love it here. I recommend the fresh, over the baked version, with its HUGE raw strawberries on a flaky crust. The rest of the menu can be fairly mediocre—come for just pie and coffee.

## U Street

U Street has a history. It is a street of mystery and delight. Once one of the major thoroughfares of African American city life, it was a victim of the Washington, D.C., riots following the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the last five years, U Street has seen a renaissance of sorts. The renovation of the Lincoln Theatre at 12th and U Streets, N.W. (green line Metro, U Street/Cardozo stop) has rejuvenated this street tremendously. Walk east from the Metro to the Lincoln Theatre. If you are not attending a concert, just look at the beautiful exterior. This theatre once hosted the best entertainers in America and was second only to the clubs in Harlem. Walking west from the theater, in just a few blocks, you will come to some of the funkier clothing, secondhand junk, and coolest night spots in D.C. Try the Russian food at State of the Union. After way too many glasses of wine and not just a few vodkas, a friend and I threatened to steal the statue of Lenin off of the bar one night. They said that if we could lift it we could take it. It is still there. You will find jazz and coffee, and rock and retro, and drinking places of all sorts. Crowds tend to be young and mixed, straight and gay, all races, men and women. Places are scattered, but stay open late. If you don't know the area, after dark stay west of 15th Street and take a taxi back to your hotel.

## Adams Morgan

18th Street from Florida Avenue/U Street to Columbia Road is the center of Adams Morgan. This is the yuppie-cum-adventurer center of D.C. There are a few shops (actually, there are some very good deals possible at the at the three or four antique dealers here) but this is where one comes to EAT! There are ethnic restaurants galore. Everything and anything is here:

Caribbean, Cajun, French, Asian of all sorts, Latin American and Spanish, West African and Ethiopian, Italian, Cuban & American food. DO NOT DRIVE here—parking is impossible unless you pay one of the guys who stand in the spaces until you do. The Metro is a walk, so take a cab. Have them drop you off at the corner of 18th and Columbia Road and walk from there. Go into Millie & Al's for a beer. This is an oldtime neighborhood tavern that has survived when many other such places have come and gone. La Fourchette and Café Lautrec have some of the most reasonably priced French food in the city. They sit like sisters, side by side, on 18th Street, each with their own devoted clientele. Avoid the great yuppie-dom of Cities. Very pricey and waaaay tooo gimmicky. You can't be sure if they are more interested in the atmosphere or the food but most of the time both suffer. If you want to try Ethiopian, go to Meskerem or the Red Sea, both on 18th Street. At Meskerem you will sit on cushions on the floor and eat at a traditional Ethiopian table. Do not put the table lid on your head like a sombrero, no matter how tempting. While not as traditional, I think the food is a little better at the Red Sea. Also, do not ask for forks, dig right in with the injera like the best of them. At 11:00 p.m. many of the Ethiopian restaurants become discotheques, so watch your timing. Meridian Hill/Malcolm X Park (see above) is in this same area.

## Dupont Circle

Dupont Circle is the center of Gay D.C. From P to S Streets, N.W., and from 17th to 22nd Streets, N.W., there are gay people and businesses everywhere. The older section, west of Dupont Circle fountain between 21st and 23rd Streets has Mr. P's and the Fireplace (30s+ crowd) and dance clubs Badlands and Omega for the disco bunnies at heart. If you worship the sun, P Street Beach (22nd and P) is the place to be on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. On the 17th Street side of the Circle (Dupont Circle is the only traffic circle referred to as "the Circle" and everyone knows where you mean), there are more bars, but you really must try two restaurants here—not so much for the food, but for the ambiance. Trio's and Annie's Paramount Steak House are D.C. landmarks. Trio's was known for cheap eats and big-haired sassy waitresses. The prices have risen and most of the waitresses are gone—but, you still

might get to meet Margo, the inspiration for Wayland Flower's puppet Madam. If she's there (now, behind the cash register instead of waiting tables), you'll know. She still wears a gray streaked bouffant hair-do. Annie's is the place to be seen late (open 24 hours Friday and Saturday) or early (Sunday brunch) at some point over the weekend. It is wait, wait, wait (no reservations) for a table on every night of the week. But, the wait is fun. Everyone is friendly and the drinks are big and strong at the bar. The food is reasonably priced and the portions are HUGE! JR's is, currently, the dominant bar on 17th Street. It is, however, full of twenty-somethings that won't even let you NEAR the back of the room if you don't "fit in." Enough said.

Also in the Dupont Circle area are two museums that do not get as much attention as the Smithsonian but deserve a bit of your time if you can work them in. First is the Phillips Gallery (21st and Q, N.W.) and the second is the Textile Museum (2320 S. Street, N.W.). Both are private collections (there is an admission fee) and both are very much worth a visit. The Phillips can be crowded, depending on the show, and you must call (202/667-0441) and verify the Textile Museum's hours.

## Shopping Spree

Forget about the shops in downtown D.C. Most of the really good stores are out and away in the suburbs. There are two places to go that are reachable by Metro. One is in Virginia the other in Maryland, so you can very easily make this a multi-state (and one District!) meeting. Take the orange or blue line Metro to Pentagon City and visit the Fashion Center (Nordstrom's, Macy's, and about 100 other stores). Or, take the red line Metro to the Friendship Heights stop. Here you can check out just about everything (over 100 shops in a six block stretch) from Neiman-Marcus and Saks to Filene's Basement.

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