



## Relocation Guide to Washington, DC

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*IOR makes every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide is as current as possible. If you notice errors, or information which is no longer accurate, please contact us immediately so that we may correct the issue.*

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## WELCOME AND OVERVIEW



Washington, DC, formally the District of Columbia and commonly referred to as Washington, "the District", or simply DC, is the capital of the United States. The signing of the Residence Act on July 16, 1790, approved the creation of a capital district located along the Potomac River on the country's East Coast. As permitted by the U.S. Constitution, the District is under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Congress and is therefore not a part of any U.S. state.

Founded on July 16, 1790, Washington, DC is unique among American cities because it was established by the Constitution of the United States to serve as the nation's capital. From its beginning, it has been embroiled in political maneuvering, sectional conflicts and issues of race, national identity, compromise and, of course, power.

The choice of Washington's site along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers resulted from a compromise between Alexander Hamilton and northern states who wanted the new federal government to assume Revolutionary War debts, and Thomas Jefferson and southern states who wanted the capital placed in a location friendly to slave-holding agricultural interests. George Washington, the first president and namesake of the city, chose the site and appointed three commissioners to help prepare for the arrival of the new government in 1800. The full development of Washington as a monumental city, however, did not come until a hundred years later when the McMillan Commission updated its plan to establish the National Mall and monuments that most visitors to Washington now know.

The centers of all three branches of the federal government of the United States are in the District, including the Congress, President, and Supreme Court. Washington is home to many national monuments and museums, which are primarily situated on or around the National Mall. The city hosts 176 foreign embassies as well as the headquarters of many international organizations, trade unions, non-profit organizations, lobbying groups, and professional associations.

## Washington DC Overview

- [Official Website of the District of Columbia](#)
- [Mayor of the District of Columbia](#)
- Population: 646,449 (2013 estimate)
- Land Area: 159.0 km<sup>2</sup> (61.4 sq mi)
- [DC Department of Parks and Recreation](#)
- [DC Public Library](#)
- [Weather Today in DC](#)

## History

- [Washington, DC History Network](#)
- [Historical Society of Washington, DC](#)

## Recommended Reading (in print and available on [Amazon](#)):

- Washington, DC Then and Now
- Lost Washington, DC
- [Lonely Planet DC](#) (Regional Travel Guide)
- Day Trips from Washington, DC: Getaway Ideas for the Local Traveler
- The Kids Guide to Washington, DC (Kid's Guides Series)

## Tipping & Sales Tax

When you eat in a restaurant in America, you are expected to leave your server a tip, as it is not included. In a bar, café, or modest restaurant, 15% of the total bill is acceptable. However, in an upscale restaurant (fine dining), a tip calculated on 20% of the total bill is the norm. In some restaurants, if you have a party of six or more, the tip is included in the bill.

## What to See, Sightseeing Tours, Value

### Packages and Passes, Tourist Information

- [Washington, DC Official Visitor's Guide](#)
- [Information on attractions](#)
- [Tours](#)

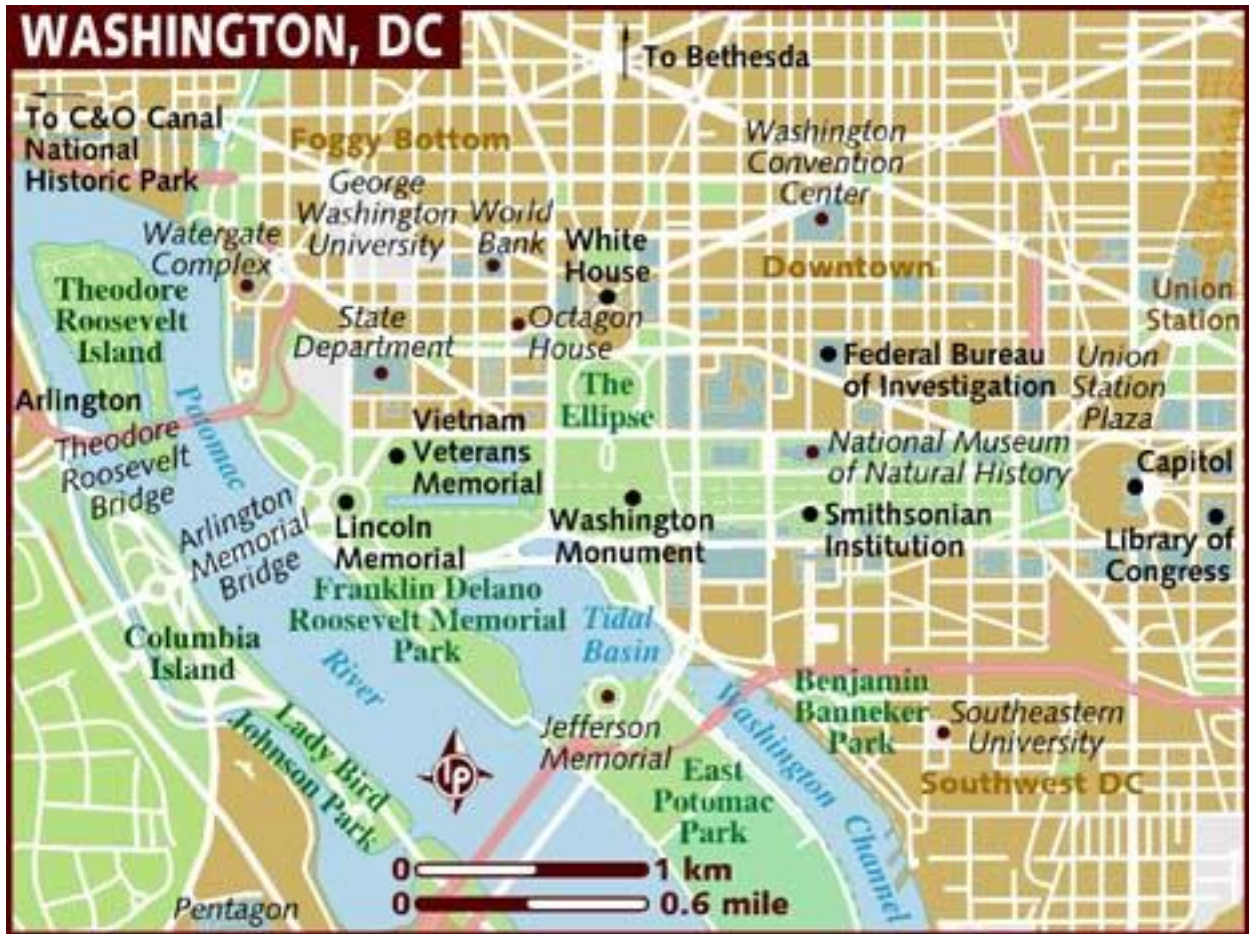
### Where to Find Arts & Entertainment

- [Washington Post](#)
- [Washingtonian Magazine](#)
- [DC Metro City Search](#)
- [Culture Capital](#)
- [Cinema listings and schedules](#)

### Where to Eat

- [Make online restaurant reservations](#)
- [Metropolitan Washington Restaurant Week](#): Restaurant Week is a member-based program designed to promote the restaurant industry and drive traffic to participating establishments during a typically slow time of year. For ten days, diners can enjoy value pricing for lunch and/or dinner at dining establishments throughout the city.
- [DC Eater](#) (Food Blog)

Map of Washington, DC



**HOSPITALS**

**IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY  
DIAL 911  
For  
FIRE, POLICE & AMBULANCE**

Language line: If the person calling 911 is unable to speak English, they can tell the operator what language they speak. The 911 Operator will have an interpreter on the line within one minute to assist with the translation.

They will ask for the following information so keep this page close to your phone:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

**If you accidentally call 911, please do not hang up.** The police will automatically be dispatched to your home to make sure there are no problems. Explain to the Operator the call was an accident.

Other Important Numbers:

CLOSEST CONSULATE OFFICE \_\_\_\_\_  
PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN \_\_\_\_\_  
WORK PHONE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

[POISON CONTROL](#) (800) 222-1222

[ANIMAL POISON CONTROL](#) (888) 426-4435

**Other Important Numbers:**

- DIAL 311 to reach any District of Columbia agency, or to request a City Service (such as replacing a broken street-lamp or removing an abandoned vehicle).
- [Find your Embassy in DC](#)

**Hospital & Clinics:**

- [DC Health and Human Services](#)
- [General DC Hospital Directory](#)
- [General Children’s Hospital Directory](#)



### **Veterinary Clinics Greater DC Area**

- [Veterinarians by Neighborhood](#)
- [Washington Humane Society](#)

### **Pharmacies**

There are several major pharmacy chains in DC, found on nearly every block on commercial streets. These pharmacies are also general stores and carry a large selection of cleaning, house care, pet care, and other supplies. Click on “Store Locator” and enter your zip (postal) code to find the pharmacy near you. Many pharmacies are open 24 hours. Check for hours of operation.

- [Walgreens](#)
- [CVS](#)
- [Rite Aid](#)



## HOUSING

A lease is an agreement that outlines the obligations of the owner and the tenants of a house or apartment. It is a legally binding document, so it is important for you to know the exact terms of the lease agreement before you sign it. Please do not sign a lease without reviewing it with your IOR DS Consultant.

### Types of rental properties

- **Apartment**

An apartment is rented from a company or individual that owns the property. Apartment buildings are usually multistory with people over, under and beside each other with common hallways or walk ways. Apartments are often rented from a company or individual in the form of an individual lease with no bearing on the other tenants of the building (besides noise complaints, property damage, etc.)

- **Studio Apartments**

A studio apartment is basically a one room apartment with sleeping, dining and kitchen all in one room plus a full bathroom. A “convertible” or “alcove” studio may have a nook or area which can be sectioned off separately for sleeping.

- **Condominium**

A condo is a communally owned estate and the owners share the ownership of the common areas such as grounds and hallways. Condominiums may be apartment style buildings or town house type buildings, but condo owners do not usually own the land. Condo owners are required to pay monthly common maintenance charges; although these might be reflected in your rental rate (it is important to clarify this with your landlord).

- **Townhouse**

A Townhouse is a kind of structure where the individual properties are flush against each other with tiny front and back “yards” and shared walls between them. Almost always they are multistory single family. Usually townhouse owners own the property under their townhouse.

- **Single Family Houses**

Single-family houses are free-standing rental properties that are habited by one person or a family. As you do not share this rental space with any other tenants, single-family homes offer the most amount of privacy. Homes also often come with a parking spot and/or garage space, but may require that you handle certain maintenance items (i.e. your lawn, minor repairs, etc.)



## Rental Agents

In most situations, your IOR DS Consultant will partner with a local realtor in order to access to the most current and extensive property listings as well as the realtor's expertise in preparing and negotiating leases. This agent receives a commission for their assistance, in most US locations this commission is paid by the Landlord, not the tenant. Your IOR DS Consultant will discuss this with you.

## Renter's Rights

[The Fair Housing Act](#) protects tenants who lease or rent property against discrimination. If you think your rights have been violated, you may write a letter to or call the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) office nearest you. You have one year after the alleged violation to file a complaint with HUD, but you should file as soon as possible. While you can generally expect the same service from landlords, it's important to know your state's laws. Each state and most major cities have their own tenant rights, laws and protections. [Here](#) are DC's. You can also visit the [HUD website here for a full guide to renters' rights by states](#).

If any defects occur in your rental property that make it uninhabitable, your landlord has a duty to fix them. While some apartments let you make online requests for repairs, as well as provide a phone number you can call for "emergencies," always make sure you document your request in writing. The landlord will then have a certain amount of time to make those repairs.

## Privacy

You have the right to privacy. While the landlord does own the property, they cannot access it anytime they want. All states have laws stating renters have a right to privacy while renting. Pretty much the only time the landlord can come into your rental without permission or notice is when they're responding to an emergency that threatens injury or property damage.

Any other time the landlord wants to enter your apartment, they need to have your permission and in most cases give you 24-hours' notice before entering.

## What to expect from the landlord:

In most states, you are legally entitled to:

- Safe structural elements including floors, walls, roofs, and secure doors and windows.
- Privacy as described above.
- Functional electrical, plumbing, heating, and air conditioning systems.
- Working hot and cold water.
- Exterminating infestations of rodents and other insects.
- Access to trash receptacles.
- Landlords cannot discriminate based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or disabilities.
- Some apartment buildings come with laundry and dryer machines in the basement.<sup>3</sup> Water, electricity, and gas bills are up to you to pay. **Your IOR DS Consultant will assist you with this process.**

### **Utilities and Appliances**

Your IOR DS Consultant will assist and provide you with information on connecting your utilities. It is possible some will be included in your rent, but typically most are not.

If you are moving from Europe to North America, you might be surprised at the relatively large size of the kitchen appliances in your accommodation, especially the refrigerator! It may also surprise some expats that properties are rented **with** appliances. In the US it is standard for properties to include a refrigerator, stove, and oven. Properties may also include a dishwasher, microwave, washer and dryer depending on the location, size, and price point.

**\*\*Note that you will need a social security number in order to register and pay for utilities\*\***

### **Recycling**

Ask your IOR DS Consultant about the recycling arrangements and requirements. While domestic waste disposals are common in North America, recycling bins are not always present even if such services exist. Washington DC does provide recycling to residents. Information is [here](#).

### **The Lease Process**

#### **Review your housing budget with your IOR DS Consultant**

Your IOR DS Consultant can help you understand what kind of property you can afford. You also need to take into account that you may be responsible for some of the utility costs of your rental.

#### **Know what you want**

What are you looking for in a property? Do you want a studio or a single bedroom? Maybe you want to rent a single family home? Do you need the property to come with appliances, including washer and dryer? Do you want it to be close to school or your work? Do you want it to be within walking distance of retail, like grocery stores or coffee shops? Are you looking for a child friendly area?

Keep in mind that outside of the city center in major cities, there is not much public transportation and most locals drive everywhere.

#### **Identify potential apartments**

IOR offers home finding services to aid you in this process. Your consultant may work with a local broker who will help to organize appointments and visit properties. They will also assist in the rental application and the leasing process.

**Common Abbreviations and Acronyms used in rental housing listings**

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>24-hr mtn</b>	24-hour emergency maintenance
<b>AC or A/C</b>	Air conditioning
<b>Appls</b>	Appliances
<b>Apt</b>	Apartment
<b>BA</b>	Bathroom
<b>BR</b>	Bedroom
<b>Bsmt</b>	Basement
<b>CAC</b>	Central air conditioning
<b>DA</b>	Dining area
<b>Det</b>	detached
<b>Dk</b>	Deck
<b>DR</b>	Dining room
<b>Dw (D/w)</b>	Dishwasher
<b>Eff</b>	Efficiency
<b>EiK</b>	Eat-in kitchen
<b>Fin bsmt</b>	Finished basement
<b>FDR</b>	Formal dining room
<b>FHA</b>	Fair Housing Act
<b>FMR</b>	Fair market rent
<b>FP</b>	Floorplan
<b>Gar</b>	Garage
<b>H/A</b>	Handicapped accessible
<b>H/W</b>	Hardwood floors
<b>Hi ceil</b>	High ceilings
<b>HVAC</b>	Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>LA</b>	Living area
<b>LR</b>	Living room
<b>MBR</b>	Master bedroom
<b>MBTH</b>	Master bathroom
<b>Neg</b>	Negotiable
<b>Ofc</b>	Office
<b>OSP</b>	Off-street parking
<b>Pkg</b>	Parking
<b>PM</b>	Property manager (management)
<b>Pvt</b>	Private
<b>Pwdr rm</b>	Powder room (1/2 bath)
<b>RE</b>	Real estate
<b>Renov</b>	Renovated
<b>Rf</b>	Roof
<b>Rm</b>	Room
<b>SF</b>	Single-family
<b>SFA</b>	Single-family attached
<b>SFD</b>	Single-family detached
<b>Sp, PI (S/p)</b>	Swimming pool
<b>Sq. ft</b>	Square feet
<b>Th (T/H)</b>	Townhouse
<b>Vw (vu)</b>	View
<b>W/A</b>	Wheelchair accessible
<b>W/W</b>	Wall-to-wall carpeting

## **Visit**

Make the decision process as efficient as possible by visiting as many potential properties as you can in one or two days. Try to go sometime during the week if possible. Your IOR DS consultant will work with you to set an appropriate schedule and to ensure that the properties you visit meet your needs as closely as possible.

## **What to do once you're there**

As you look at the rental unit, be sure to ask a lot of questions. While you should keep small concerns to yourself about the unit while looking at it, feel free to ask the landlord or apartment manager any questions you might have that will help in your decision. Here are some possible questions you may consider asking:

- What's the monthly rent?
- Are any utilities included with the rent?
- How much is the security deposit?
- When is rent due? Do you have auto-pay?
- What's the make-up of the other tenants? Are they mainly younger students? Married couples with families? Older folks?
- What's the parking situation like? Do you pay for a parking spot?
- Do you take care of small maintenance issues or am I responsible for some of the repairs in the property?
- Am I able to re-paint the walls or make other modifications?

Again, be friendly and polite when you ask these questions.

## **The Application**

The next step in the leasing process for an apartment is to submit a rental application for the property you want. The manager or landlord will be able to give you the application as well as anything else that they may need to have filled out. Your IOR DS Consultant will assist with this process. For a single family home there will likely be a rental application.

You will need your passport, Social Security number, Visa, and proof of employment. Some landlords may charge you an application fee which may range between \$20 to \$400 dollars, depending on the landlord. This could be a combination of an application fee and move-in fee.

Once you've done this, it can take up to a few days to hear back from the property manager. Once your application has been approved the lease approval process will begin with IOR and likely your employer.

## **Signing the lease**

DO NOT SIGN THE LEASE until your IOR DS Consultant has reviewed it in full and given their approval.

The lease is a binding contract, so it is very important to pay attention as a leasing agent goes over it with you. It is perfectly normal for you to take your time and read all the fine print for yourself. If you

are working with an IOR DS Consultant, make sure to talk with them and receive approval before signing. You will also be given a copy of the lease to take with you and keep for your records, but it is very important to know everything included in your lease from the start.

Some things to look for in a lease:

- Term of the lease and any important dates such as when the rent is due.
- Extra fees for parking spaces or storage, garbage collection, and pets.
- Information regarding utility providers and whether you or the landlord is responsible for those bills.
- Notification requirements in case of renewal.
- Requirements/responsibilities of the tenants to do routine repairs such as lawn maintenance, cleaning or notification of repairs.
- Clauses that allow the landlord to change the terms of the lease after it is signed.
- Restrictions that would prevent you from living normally or comfortably in the home.

Sometimes landlords will ask for a security deposit before you sign the lease. This is normal, but you shouldn't pay in cash. Make sure all payments are made out as a check or money order just in case.

### **What to expect from the lease**

Most leases in the United States include the following or a variation thereof:

- Your employer requires that all leases include a Break Clause in case you are transferred for work or for personal reasons.
- Contracts will often be for periods of a year or more.
- Minimum stay. Typically three fourths of your lease contract time. If you choose to move out before this date, you will lose your security deposit. If you move out afterwards, you are still required to give a specified number of days notice.
- Security Deposit. Landlords will expect you to leave them with a deposit (usually about one to two month's rent) that they will hold for the duration of your lease. You will receive your security deposit back at the end of the lease provided you don't break any specific clauses in your lease, such as moving out without proper notice, not paying rent, causing damages to the property, etc.
- Landlords should not be given unchecked access to your apartment. If there isn't anything in your lease about landlord's rights to enter the leased premises, suggest the following clause:

*Entry by the Landlord. Landlord or his agent will not enter Tenant's home except to deal with an emergency; to make necessary or agreed repairs; to supply necessary or agreed services; or to show the unit to potential purchasers, tenants, or repair persons. Unless there is an emergency, Landlord will give Tenant at least 24 hours' written notice of the date, time, and purpose of the intended entry and will schedule entries during normal business hours, Monday–Friday.*

Most landlords will be hard-pressed to say no to such a reasonable clause. If the landlord refuses, it's a sure sign that he won't be reasonable in other respects, too. Continue on in your housing search.

### **Moving In**

On your selected move-in date, after the lease has been signed and deposits have been paid, you should be given your keys and more than likely a move-in form to fill out. Your IOR DS Consultant will assist you with an initial walk through of your apartment. Look for dings in the walls, cracked windows, or other irregularities and report them on this form. This will indicate that these things were there before you moved in and you will not be held responsible for them at the end of the lease term.

### **Get Renter's Insurance**

Renter's insurance covers any loss to your personal property due to robbery or accidents. It also covers any damage you might cause to other tenant's property. For example, let's say your washing machine springs a leak and water seeps through the floor and ruins your neighbor's antique dresser. Renter's insurance would cover that.

Renter's insurance will cost approximately about \$15-125 a month, less if you tack it onto another policy (like auto) you have with an insurance company. A few popular options are [Allstate](#) and [StateFarm](#)

When relocating internationally, your children's education is of great concern. IOR eases this concern by exposing you to the various school options available for your child and helping you to work within the framework of options to find the best solution for your family.

### I. **Overview and Philosophy of the United States Educational System**

In most U.S. locations you will have the choice of sending your children to either a public or private school. A public school must accept your child for enrollment if you live within its designated district. A private school may have a general curriculum similar to that of public schools, but may or may not accept your child depending on availability of space, your child's prior academic history, language ability in English, or the result of entrance exams. Private schools charge a fee, which can be quite high. If you are considering private school, be sure you have a clear understanding of your employer's policy regarding reimbursement. In the U.S. approximately 85% of the children attend public schools for ages 5 to 13, and approximately 93% of the children attend public school at the high school level. Many, though not all, private schools are parochial, or religiously affiliated schools.

A third option called 'charter school' is sometimes available. Charter Schools are similar to public schools in that they are free, non-religious, publicly funded, and are held to state and federal academic standards. Each charter school is governed by its own local school community, which often includes parents and teachers - rather than a district. This freedom allows teachers to be more innovative, and communities to shape their local school. Charter schools can set their own hours and adjust their curriculum to fit their student needs, and give teachers the opportunity to experiment with next-generation teaching models including technology and the virtual classroom. Charter schools typically admit students by random lottery and do not restrict enrollment based on location, academic achievement, or other factors private schools may consider.

Most Americans, regardless of their level of education and income, send their children to public schools. Because each town or community typically has its own school system funded by local municipal taxes and state revenues, residents in an area with a higher tax base can usually be assured of quality public education. IOR is very conscientious about placing assignees and their families in areas with good public school systems.

Private schools do not receive state revenue, although they may be entitled to assistance with transporting students and providing for special needs such as speech therapy and assistance of the learning disabled. Private schools are funded through tuition paid by the student's parents. Typically, there are additional fees for books, uniforms, and school supplies, and the parents are usually solicited for additional charitable donations. There may also be book or activity fees at public schools.



The public education system in the U.S. is administered by local and state government, rather than by the federal government. Each state has a board of education which sets policy for all school districts and standards which all students must achieve. In addition, each local district has a board of education which sets local policy and curriculum within the parameters set forth by the state.

School districts can provide specialized programs and services for children with special needs. The general philosophy of education in the United States is to educate the entire diverse, ethnically mixed population with equal educational opportunity for all, while serving the educational needs of the individual student.

If you choose public education for your child, the particular school your child attends is determined by the school district boundaries containing your residential address. The school may or may not be within walking distance to your home. Generally, if the distance to the school is greater than one mile, the school district provides bus transportation to and from school. For those children who do not live far enough away from the school for bus service but are too far to walk comfortably, parents may have the option of paying for bus transportation, or they may choose to drive their children to and from school. Very often parents form 'car pools', sharing the responsibility of driving groups of children.

Generally private schools do not have residential boundaries for their students' families. In most cases, parents rely on car pools to ease the burden of transporting their students to and from school. In selecting your home, consider the driving distance and time to and from the private school.

Ultimately, the school your children attend is determined by your residential address, so it is a good idea to include visits to potential schools and properties in your pre-trip visit. Your pre-trip visit will consist of selected sample houses in a variety of communities, along with information, or perhaps visits, to the appropriate schools. However, there may be a limited selection of homes available within each community. It is possible you may find a school you like, but there may not be any available housing options within that school's enrollment radius. We will show you housing in school districts with proven academic standards, but be aware there are cases when certain schools are unavailable due to housing concerns.

If you are considering a private school, you may wish to visit it as well as a public school to compare. It would be advisable, however, to first determine if the private school has space available for your child. Additionally, you will want to know the amount of tuition and fees for the school, as that may be a factor in your decision.

## II. Academic Standards

### A. Curriculum:

The overriding objective of elementary and secondary education, public or private, is to prepare students for higher learning and future employment. Each school district or private school will have a unique curriculum which meets the above overriding goals.

#### Elementary School:

The elementary years (kindergarten through fifth grade) focus on fundamental academic skills, language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics in addition to introduction to technology, art, music, physical education, and sometimes foreign languages. Students' personal development is energized through emphasizing strong work habits which provide a positive feeling toward learning.

#### Middle School:

Middle School helps children in early adolescence (sixth through eighth grade) transition from elementary to high school and from childhood into young adulthood. The structure of the school day includes contact with several teachers who specialize in their subject matter; students usually move from one classroom to another. Curricular content focuses on expansion of skills in math, science, reading, writing and social studies. Further exploration of foreign languages, practical and fine arts, music, health, physical education and computer literacy are also provided. Middle school students are able to enhance their formal education by participation in school sponsored adult supervised competitive athletics and a variety of clubs and special interest groups.

#### High School:

The premise of elementary and middle schools is to prepare students for the academic, social, and physical challenges of high school. All high schools maintain defined academic requirements for graduation, however great flexibility of classes is usually available within this framework. Most schools provide more challenging academic courses entitled honors or advanced placement which award college credit to successful students. High school extracurricular and athletic activities are more competitive than those found at lower levels and often provide talented students with opportunities continue this activity in college or university.

### B. Grading Systems/Assessment of Child Progress

Schools typically report students' progress to parents with written report cards, which may be either mailed or carried home by the student. Many schools also set one or two days aside each semester for parent/teacher conferences. These conferences are an opportunity for parents to meet with their children's teachers and hear the teacher's evaluations of their student's performance in school. At the elementary school level, where children usually have one primary teacher, a teacher conference may last from fifteen minutes to an hour in length. At the middle school and high school levels, you may meet with your child's teachers for a period of five or ten minutes. If you need additional time with the teacher, you may schedule a follow-up visit

allowing time for a more complete discussion. It is a good idea to participate fully in teacher conferences. Your children's teachers may be able to provide valuable insight regarding your children's academic and social adjustments. Should there be concerns, they may be able to assist you with helpful suggestions of additional resources to contact.

### **C. Standardized Testing**

Challenged to prepare students for higher learning and future employment, all school districts and private schools utilize standardized testing to measure student progress over time and compare themselves to national standards. Such tests are prepared by national groups of parents and educators as well as business and academic leaders. Tests vary from state to state, but typically students in prescribed grade levels (for example, grades 3, 6, 8 and 10) are tested in the areas of reading, mathematics, writing science and social science. Colleges and universities use the ACT and SAT tests to measure incoming student abilities; the results of these tests are nearly as important as high school grades when students apply for entrance into US colleges and universities.

## **III. Definition of School Groupings**

### **A. Pre-School or Nursery School**

In the U.S., 3, 4 and some 5 year olds have the opportunity to attend a pre-school under a private system. These schools can be located in a local school, a church, or an independent free standing building. Pre-school is not publicly funded and is fee-based. Typically children are grouped by age. Most of the schools are play-based, although different philosophies of formal education can be found. Typically, 3 year olds attend 2 half days a week and 4 year olds may attend 3 half days a week. Some preschools also serve as day care centers for families in which both parents work. Typically reading is not taught in pre-school, although a few programs can be found which include reading fundamentals. Concentration of learning is on small and gross motor skills, and basic academic readiness skills. Some pre-schools offer a full-day Kindergarten option for those parents who work. The public school kindergarten programs are typically only half day programs with no before or after school care. If a Kindergarten program is offered it follows the state curriculum guidelines, and teaches pre-reading and math skills.

### **B. Elementary School**

Elementary school provides education for children ages 5 to 11, Kindergarten and Grades 1,2,3,4 &5. While kindergarten at age 5 is not required, most families send their children to kindergarten. Elementary school is the beginning of publicly funded school. In the U.S. children are grouped by age and advanced in school by age. There are usually opportunities within the grade for different levels of learning, with opportunities for advanced learners and remedial learners. The public elementary school is usually neighborhood based and the source of playmates for your child. In the U.S., pre-reading skills are introduced in kindergarten (age 5) along with early math skills. Formal reading begins in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade (age 6). Studies have shown that while children learn to read at different ages, the difference between early and late readers

is not a predictor of reading skills by about the age of 8 or 9 years old. In addition to reading and math, elementary school also has a broad base of writing, science, social studies, art, music, computer, personal development and physical education. Only in a few schools will a 2<sup>nd</sup> language be introduced at the elementary level. English as a Second Language (ESL) is offered starting at the elementary level in the public school. Parents are allowed to visit the schools, and there are many opportunities for parents to volunteer their skills, particularly at the elementary school. Parents may approach teachers and administrators with suggestions and concerns with their child. Usually the personnel are willing to consider changes if they feel it would be in the best interests of the child. With a child coming to a new country and sometimes starting a new language, feel free to talk to the school if you think something could be done to ease your child's adjustment. The school day is from approximately 8:30a.m. to 3:00p.m. with recess (playtime break) and a lunch break at the school.

### **C. Middle School**

Middle school provides education for children ages 11 to 14, grades 6, 7 & 8. The children attend school in a different location and in the public school system several elementary schools will combine into the same middle school. A middle school is usually 2-4 times the size of the elementary school. Middle school is considered the transition between elementary school and high school and from childhood to young adulthood. Because of this philosophy, U.S. students at this age level are all introduced to the same academic curriculum. The school day is structured differently with the children changing class rooms and teacher with each subject. There are 6-8 different class periods daily. Within the grades children may be separated by academic ability in classes, particularly math and English. Often an introduction to foreign languages is offered. For those who choose, the student may have the option to complete one year of high school foreign language during middle school. If your home country requires more advanced language development at this age, you may want to consider outside supplemental language instruction. Middle school is a time when extracurricular activities such as theatre, music, sports and clubs become important activities in adolescent life.

### **D. High School**

High school provides education for children ages 14 to 18, grades 9, 10, 11 & 12. It is the final level of education before the university, community college, or trade school. The terms Freshman (9<sup>th</sup>), Sophomore (10<sup>th</sup>), Junior (11<sup>th</sup>) and Senior (12<sup>th</sup>) are also used to identify grade level. At the high school level the student has more specific choices of course work. Each district has a set of minimum graduation requirements, which will include courses in English, math, science, social studies, physical education and a combination of foreign language, fine arts and practical arts. Within this framework the student has various choices from more remedial levels, average levels, and more advanced levels. If a student is prepared for the material, by the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade a student may have the opportunity to take a college level course for advanced credit in the U.S. university system. In high school competitive sports are offered along with theatre, orchestra, instrumental and vocal music and clubs. Your child will have an opportunity to meet more U.S. children by participating in a school extracurricular activity. Each

school district has 1 or more high schools with 800-2500 students. A student's high school performance may determine the type of university or higher education program they pursue upon graduation. During high school national tests are given to determine the student's potential to advance to various higher education levels.

If your child anticipates returning to your home country to continue higher education within your university system, you might want to consider the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. This program is recognized internationally for entrance to universities. In contrast to the typical high school college preparatory curriculum, the IB semester consists of fewer subjects, studied in greater depth and with a bilingual proficiency. Developed in Switzerland, the curriculum was intended as a secondary education program which could be utilized and accepted worldwide. Not all US schools will offer an IB curriculum.

#### **E. Post-Secondary Education**

While most families on international assignment do not bring their older children (19 years+) for education in the U.S. we include a brief description of the US university system. Some form of post-secondary education is available to those U.S. students who seek it. Each state offers a public university system which the tuition is partly subsidized by the state for state residents. Residency of at least 1 year is necessary. Some are medium to large institutions (with undergraduate and graduate level programs). Some can be quite competitive for admission while others may not be competitive at all. Student's admission to the university is in part determined by their high school academic performance and course selection and as well as the results of a national standardized test (SAT or ACT). Post-Secondary is the educational level that students in the U.S. study subjects in great depth and select their majors and career choices. Graduate level programs on the master level, professional level, and PhD level are pursued after completing the 4 years of undergraduate studies.

### **IV. Life in Schools**

#### **A. Atmosphere**

It is valuable to visit your child's school to understand the academic and non-academic atmosphere that prevails. Administrators or counselors are happy to serve as tour guides and should always be contacted in advance. Do not be alarmed if your visit takes place during the lunch hour if the children seem a bit rambunctious. Students in American public schools generally enjoy a great deal of personal freedom in the cafeteria, on the playground, and in the halls before and after class. They are supervised by teachers or members of the school staff, but they generally are more relaxed in the lunch room and in the halls. If you are visiting on a rainy day, you may observe "indoor recess" in the gymnasium which could be noisy. Rest assured that when they are in the classroom, students do settle down and work quietly and diligently. Some classrooms are more informally arranged than others. For instance, some teachers prefer to have the children's desks in a circle rather than in rows. Teachers will sometimes assign group projects, where several students work together and are thus not seated at their desks during a part of the classroom period. Teachers are expected, however, to have good control of

their classrooms. Private school policy regarding these issues of personal freedom varies. Some private schools function as the public schools do, while others may have a more closely supervised approach. Again, it is always a good idea to visit the school so that you are comfortable with that particular school's management style.

### **B. Parental Involvement**

In addition to participating in parent/teacher conferences, most American schools encourage parents to become involved in the volunteer activities of the school. Most schools have a "PTA" (Parent Teacher Association) or "PTO" (Parent Teacher Organization). These organizations usually work with the school administration, dealing with issues such as student safety, communication to parents, academic concerns, etc., as well as fundraising and planning special programs to enhance the school experience for the student population.

Getting involved with the PTA or PTO is a great way to become well informed about your child's school. It also provides you with an opportunity to meet and really get to know other parents. There will probably be a choice of committees on which you could work; you do not have to commit to a leadership role. Some volunteer opportunities may involve actually working in the school, volunteering in the school library on day a week or one day a month for example. Be sure to alert the school administration that you would like to get involved, and ask for the name and phone number of the head of the parent volunteer organization at the school. Parent volunteers are usually welcomed and encouraged at all levels at all schools, both public and private.

### **C. Extracurricular Activities**

A well-rounded education requires that students learn their academic subjects as well as develop socialization skills and learn nonacademic skills. Belonging to a group can be a rewarding connection with peers and a good way to develop self-confidence. These are the reasons that schools, public and private, provide numerous extracurricular activities from which their students can choose to participate. At each level of education the opportunities and choices increase. For example at the elementary school level, all students are introduced to art, music, drama and a variety of athletic experiences. At the middle school level, students have required courses in some of the above areas but are provided opportunity to participate in after school activities of their choice. For example, competitive football, soccer, swimming, track, lacrosse, basketball etc. In addition many clubs allow students to pursue other interests, for example, computers, drama, fine arts, forensics, jazz band, photography, yearbook and student council. Almost universally, each activity or club is sponsored by adults, using specialized instruction, who demonstrate a working knowledge of the activity and a desire to teach children. An even greater variety of extracurricular experiences are available at the high school level, many of which help students identify strengths, talents and interests which may direct them to future colleges, vocations or avocations.

#### **D. Facilities**

All schools maintain facilities other than classrooms which enhance or support their educational mission.

##### **Libraries and Media Centers**

Libraries are universally available and are accessible to students throughout the day and often after hours. Libraries often contain a “media center” which maintains and makes available other types of educational materials including computers and software, audio and video tapes, slides, sound sequences, projectors and recorders of various types for use individually or in groups. The wide availability of computers and access to the internet has provided almost unlimited opportunities for students and teachers to obtain information that can enhance and facilitate learning.

##### **Fitness Facilities/Gymnasium**

Fitness facilities, or ‘gyms’ as they are typically referred to, are supplied by almost all schools in the United States. Gyms often consist of a large indoor court with various sports equipment. They are open during lunch hours and for specific hours before and after school for athletes or students who wish to exercise. Many gyms will be accompanied by a weight room and a locker room with a shower. Students are sometimes expected to use these communal showers following Physical Education classes or general use of the gym’s facilities.



## SCHOOLS

### Public Schools in DC

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) consists of 111 of the 238 public elementary and secondary schools and learning centers located in Washington, DC. Within DCPS, schools are classified as either a “neighborhood school” or a “destination school.” Neighborhood schools are elementary or secondary schools assigned to students based on his or her address. Destination schools are feeder-schools for elementary or secondary institutions from a school a student is already attending. Since the fall of 2009, students may choose a destination school, regardless of their neighborhood location. Locations of all of the schools and the neighborhood divides can be found on the [DCPS website](#).



### Charter Schools in DC

A charter school is a publicly funded independent school established by teachers, parents, or community groups under the terms of a charter with a local or national authority. The [D. C. Public Charter School Board \(PCSB\)](#) was created in 1996 by an amendment to the D. C. School Reform Act of 1995 as a second, independent authorizer of public charter schools. The PCSB regularly evaluates D. C. public charter schools for academic results, compliance with applicable local and federal laws and fiscal management, and holds them accountable for results. The PCSB can close charter schools that fail to meet the goals established in the charter agreement between the PCSB and the school.

Click [here](#) to sort DC Public and Charter Schools with dual language programs.

### Public Schools in Metro DC Area

The public school system in Washington, DC is a large school system, however, with the exception of a few elementary schools in the NW neighborhoods these schools are not generally chosen by international transferees for their children.

However, both Maryland and Virginia have top rated public school systems in the United States – [Montgomery County Public School System](#) (Maryland) and [Fairfax County Public School System](#) (Virginia) and the [Falls Church City Public School System](#) (Virginia). Public Schools in the US are free of charge and any student residing within a school’s boundary will be admitted. Children are transported to school either by car, school bus (free of charge) or they walk.

Both Montgomery County and Fairfax County have schools within the system which offer the IB diploma program. For more information on the International Baccalaureate program and schools that offer the IB degree see [www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org).

### **Maryland Public Schools**

Maryland Public Schools are organized into 24 local education agencies, which coincide exactly with the 24 Maryland Counties. Within each County, schools are organized in High School clusters in which Elementary and Middle schools feed into specific High Schools. There are 30 High Schools in Montgomery County. Attendance is determined by residential address. The following High School clusters in Montgomery County are the most popular with international transferees:

- [Winston Churchill HS Cluster](#)
- [Thomas S. Wootton HS Cluster](#)
- [Walt Whitman HS Cluster](#)
- [Richard Montgomery HS Cluster](#) (This HS has IB Middle Years and IB Diploma)
- [Poolesville HS Cluster](#)
- [Bethesda-Chevy Chase HS Cluster](#) (IB Program in this cluster)

### **Virginia Public Schools**

Northern Virginia, a commuter suburb to Washington, DC has eighteen Education Divisions, each coinciding with County and City/Town boundaries. Northern Virginia has approximately 160 Elementary, 29 Middle and 25 High schools, instructing over 200,000 students. Attendance is normally determined by residential address. The following Education Divisions are considered the most popular with international transferees. Each division consists of several elementary schools, a few middle schools and the high school listed below:



- [Yorktown HS](#) (Arlington)
- [McLean HS](#) (Fairfax Cluster 1)
- [Langley HS](#) (Fairfax Cluster 1)
- [W.T. Woodson HS](#) (Fairfax Cluster 3)
- [Madison HS](#) (Fairfax Cluster 2)
- [Oakton HS](#) (Fairfax Cluster 8)

[Falls Church City Public School System](#) has a High School which offers the IB Diploma Program – [George Mason High School](#).

### **Private Schools in DC**

Many of DC's private schools require that students complete an entrance exam, which must also be financed by parents. In late September, there is usually an annual "Private School Preview", a free event where parents can learn more about specific schools, their admission requirements, and their philosophies of education. Otherwise, the best method for finding out about private schools in an area is word of mouth, and by visiting the school in person. Click [here](#) for a list of private schools in Washington, DC

### International Schools in DC

*Washington International School (PreK-12)*

3100 Macomb Street NW

Washington DC 20008

(202) 243-1800

<http://www.wis.edu/>

*British International School of Washington (PreK-12)*

2001 Wisconsin Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20007

(202) 829-3700

<http://britishschoolofwashington.org/>

*Lycée Rochambeau (PreK-12)*

9600 Forest Rd

Bethesda, MD 20852

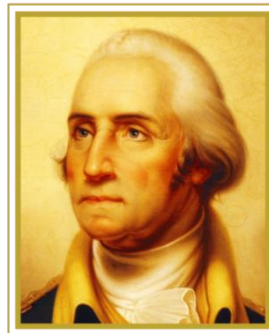
(301) 530- 8260

<http://www.rochambeau.org/>



### Colleges and Universities

- [American University](#)
- [Catholic University of America](#)
- [Corcoran College of Art and Design](#)
- [Gallaudet University](#)
- [Georgetown University](#)
- [George Washington University](#)
- [Howard University](#)
- [Johns Hopkins University](#)
- [University of the District of Columbia](#)



THE GEORGE  
WASHINGTON  
UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON DC

## BANKING

Banks and other financial institutions, such as credit unions, offer a variety of services. These services include:

- checking and saving accounts
- credit and debit cards
- online bill pay
- loans
- insurance
- financial planning

Banks in the United States are insured by the Federal Government for deposits up to \$250,000 per depositor per bank. The bank or credit union will display the letters FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation) as proof.

### Checking and Savings Accounts

To open a checking or savings account you will need the following information:

- Two forms of picture identification including but not limited to your passport, driver's license, or work ID.
- Social security number. If you have not yet received your social security number, the bank can open an account with a W8 Temporary Tax ID form (available at the bank). You will need to call the bank with your social security number once it arrives in the mail.
- Local mailing address. You may use your office address as your mailing address, but be prepared to call your bank branch as soon as you have your permanent address.
- Letter of Employment
- Cash for the initial deposit can range from ~\$25-\$150 dollars.

### Checks

More businesses and banks are offering online or automatic bill paying options. However, you may still need to pay some bills by mail. **NEVER SEND CASH!** You will want to order at least the minimum quantity of checks. This will cost a set fee that the bank will charge you. The checks will be pre-printed with your name, address, telephone number and account number and will be mailed to your home.

### ATM or Debit Card

The most popular way of obtaining cash is by using an ATM (Automated Teller Machine) card, also referred to as a debit card. ATM's are located in most banks, malls, airports, grocery stores, and in many other public places. You will be given a PIN (Personal Identification Number) for using your card. It is important that you memorize this number and not keep written record of it with your card in order to protect your account. Most ATM's will take all cards, but many banks will charge a service fee for using another bank's ATM. Through the ATM you may deposit, transfer, and withdraw funds. There will usually be a limit to the amount of money you can withdraw in any 24-hour period.

## **Credit Cards**

For many international transferees, the lack of a US credit history can be a challenge. In most cases, you will not be approved for a US credit card initially. One suggestion to assist in building your US credit history is to open a **secured credit card**. With approval from the bank, you can put a certain amount of money in a savings account that will remain in the account. The secured credit card would have a credit limit equal to the amount deposited in the savings account. You will need to use your secured credit card and make the minimum monthly payments; you may also pay in full the amount due. After 9 months or so, if the bank sees that you have a good payment record, they may approve you for a regular credit card.

## **Security**

Always pay attention to the other people around you at an ATM. Do not use the machine if you are suspicious of someone's behavior. It is safer to find another ATM or to come back later. Do not put your PIN number in with anyone close enough to see it.

Credit card theft is another increasing problem. In order to protect your card from being abused, never give your credit card or credit card number to a service provider you have not called. Another precaution is to destroy or shred copies of receipts and bills. Criminals will not hesitate to dig through the trash to find a copy of your credit card number.

## **Major US Banks**

Below is a list of links to some of the larger US banks. Not every bank is represented in all US locations, in some cases you may find that the local bank is a better option for you than some of the larger banks. Your IOR DS Consultant can help you in selecting a bank by sharing the various options available locally, as well as the products they offer to support expatriates.

- [Bank of America](#)
- [Chase](#)
- [Citibank](#)
- [HSBC](#)
- [TD Bank](#)
- [US Bank](#)
- [Link to Yellow Pages Washington DC Banks](#)

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION/DRIVING

### DRIVING

There are 1,500 miles (2,400 km) of streets, parkways, and avenues in the District. Due to the freeway revolts of the 1960s, much of the proposed interstate highway system through the middle of Washington was never built. **Interstate 95**, the nation's major east coast highway, therefore bends around the District to form the eastern portion of the Capital Beltway. A portion of the proposed highway funding was directed to the region's public transportation infrastructure instead. The interstate highways that continue into Washington, including **Interstate 66** and **Interstate 395**, both terminate shortly after entering the city. Within the city, you can find convenient street or garage parking with [Parking Panda](#). The online marketplace offers access to local parking garages and lots. Simply log on and reserve your spot ahead of time. Prices vary based on location and date.

The city of Washington was designed on a grid. At its center is the US Capitol. The streets running north and south are numbered, and the east-west streets are lettered beginning at the Capitol and extending in both directions. Click [here](#) for the rest of this article (A Crash Course to Driving in DC- from the Washingtonian).

### PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

#### Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

The [Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority](#) (often abbreviated as WMATA and commonly referred to as Metro) is a tri-jurisdictional government agency that operates transit service in the Washington Metropolitan Area. WMATA was created by the United States Congress as an interstate compact between the District of Columbia, the State of Maryland, and the Commonwealth of Virginia.



WMATA operates the Washington Metro, the city's rapid transit system, as well as Metrobus. Both systems serve the District and its suburbs. Metro opened on March 27, 1976 and presently consists of 86 stations and 106.3 miles (171.1 km) of track. With an average of about one million trips each weekday, Metro is the second-busiest rapid transit system in the country. Metrobus serves over 400,000 riders each weekday and is the nation's sixth-largest bus system. The city also operates its own DC Circulator bus system, which connects commercial areas within central Washington. In addition to ongoing operations, WMATA participates in regional transportation planning and is developing future expansions of its system. These projects include an extension of Metrorail to Dulles Airport, street car lines in the District and northern Virginia, and light rail in suburban Maryland.



## Rail

[Metrorail](#) provides safe, clean, reliable transit service for more than 700,000 customers a day throughout the Washington, DC area. The system is the second busiest in the United States, serving 86 stations in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. The Metrorail system has five color-coded rail lines: Red, Orange, Blue, Yellow, and Green. The layout of the system makes it possible to travel between any two stations with no more than a single transfer.

- [Schedules](#)
- [Fares](#)



## Metrobus

[Metrobus](#) provides more than 400,000 trips each weekday serving 11,500 bus stops in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. Metrobus is the sixth busiest bus agency in the United States, with a fleet of more than 1,500 buses operating on 325 routes.

- [Timetables](#)
- [Fares](#)
- [NextBus](#)

## DC Circulator

[The DC Circulator](#) is a bus system that connects commercial areas within central Washington. DC Circulator buses are similar to shuttles since they operate on a predictable fixed route and schedule, and run between the city's main attractions and most popular neighborhoods for visitors.

- [Schedules](#)
- [Fares](#)

## Amtrak

[Union Station](#) is the city's main train station and services approximately 70,000 people each day. It is Amtrak's second-busiest station with 4.6 million passengers annually and is the southern terminus for the Northeast Corridor and Acela Express routes. Maryland's MARC and Virginia's VRE commuter trains and the Metrorail Red Line also provide service into Union Station. Following renovations in 2011, Union Station became Washington's primary intercity bus transit center.



## Airports

Three major airports serve the District. [Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport](#) is across the Potomac River from downtown Washington in Arlington, Virginia and primarily handles domestic flights. Major international flights arrive and depart from [Washington Dulles International Airport](#), 26.3 miles (42.3 km) west of the District in Fairfax and Loudoun counties in Virginia. [Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport](#) is 31.7 miles (51.0 km) northeast of the District in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.



## Taxi

Taxi service is plentiful and economical in DC. In fact, DC has one of the highest taxi-to-citizen ratios in the country, with more than 6,000 taxis servicing the city. Taxis use a metered system just like every other city in the country. (The once-controversial zone system was dropped in favor of the universal meter system in June 2008.)

## Transportation “App” Options

Several web based phone applications to secure a driver are available throughout the area. The driver knows your approximate location based on your phone GPS. Payment is automatic through the app and fares may be cheaper than a taxi.

- [Uber](#)
- [Lyft](#)

## By foot

A 2011 study by Walk Score found that Washington was the seventh-most walkable city in the country with 80% of residents living in neighborhoods that are not car dependent.

## Map Websites

- [Google Maps](#)
- [Expedia](#)
- [MapQuest](#)

## AAA Travel Protection

AAA is a membership organization that offers benefits such as roadside service and towing, discounts on car products and services, maps, reference materials, etc.

Call 1-800-352-5382 for additional information and cost. [www.aaa.com](http://www.aaa.com)

## LOCAL REGISTRATIONS

### Social Security Procedures

[United States Social Security Administration](#)

1-800-772-1213

U.S. Social Security Administration Office  
1905 9th St NE  
Washington, DC

Upon arrival in the United States, employees holding work visas will be required to apply, in person, for a Social Security number. The Application for a Social Security Card (SS-5) can be used by anyone who has never been issued a card, needs a replacement card or has changed his or her name. Your IOR Destination Services Consultant will assist you with this process and can answer any questions you might have.

### **THIS SERVICE IS FREE.**

To get an original number and card, you'll need to complete an Application for a Social Security Card ([Form SS-5](#)), and show the following documents IN PERSON at the local social security office.

- Passport
- [I-94](#)
- Work Visa
- Any other documents received by US Immigration

If all of your information is confirmed, your Social Security card will arrive in the mail in approximately 2-4 weeks. Several days after you have successfully completed the application process, you may be able to take your identification with your receipt, back to the Social Security office to inquire about your Social Security number before you receive your card. Your IOR Destination Services Consultant will assist you with this process.

### **L-2 Visa Employment Opportunity Law Changes**

The L-2 visa allows the dependent spouse and minor, unmarried children of qualified L-1 visa holders to enter into the U.S.

Changes took place on July 27, 2006 that apply to spouses of L-1 Visa holders in the US on an L2 Visa. Prior to that date, spouses on L-2 Visas were not permitted to obtain a social security card and were denied the right to be employed in the US. The law change now permits L-2 Visa holders (spouses only, not dependent children) to work on a full-time basis in the U.S. with proper employment authorization from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

The L-2 Visa holder must apply for a social security card in addition to applying for an Employment Authorization Document before they can begin employment.

### **Social Security Numbers**

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has issued guidelines, which permit E-1, E-2, and L-2 spouses to obtain Social Security Numbers without having to first obtain employment.

Authorization Documents (EADs) from the CIS. They must show proof that their spouse is in E-1, E-2 or L-1 status, and present an original marriage certificate, in the native language. However, before they are authorized to work, they must obtain an EAD. [The new SSA guidelines are online here.](#)

Employment Authorization Document (EAD): L-2 Visa holders can apply for this document utilizing USCIS Form 1-765, Application for Employment Authorization. They must provide the following forms of identification: valid passport, 1-94 Arrival-Departure Document, Marriage Certificate from home country, two identical, and color photographs taken within 30 days of application. Currently, the process from application to EAD issue takes 3 to 4 months. The L2 Visa holder may also engage in full-time study in the US. A dependent child still may not apply for an EAD card except in cases of severe hardship. Local offices are open Monday thru Friday 9am to 4pm.

**\*\*Notice\*\*** Social Security offices are closed on all US Federal holidays.

## OBTAINING A DRIVER'S LICENSE/STATE ID CARD

In the US, a driver's license or ID card is issued by each individual state and not by the federal government. Since there is no national identity card in the USA, and many Americans don't have a passport or carry around a birth certificate, a driver's license issued by your state is often the only official piece of identification for many citizens. Since 9/11, you will need to show a valid driver's license or State ID card to enter many big office buildings. It is advisable to get a DC driver's license or a DC Identification Card so that you can leave your passport in a safe location at home.

Non-US citizens who possess a valid, unexpired, out-of-country driver license may obtain a DC driver license while maintaining their out-of-country driver license. A DC driver license may vary for non-U.S. citizens, depending on visa classification. The written test is required for non-US Citizens who possess an out-of-country driver license. The road test is not required for those who have a valid, unexpired, out-of-country driver license. You do not have to relinquish your out-of-country driver license to the DC DMV.

You have 30 days from the date you establish residency in DC to obtain your DC driver's license. Once you feel confident that you have studied the [Driver's Manual](#) and know the material well, then you can proceed with the process. You will need to bring the following original documents:

- 1. Passport**
- 2. Visa**
- 3. I-94**
- 4. Lease(s)**
- 5. Documents used to secure your Visa (such as I-129S or I-797 or other documents)**
- 6. Social Security Card, signed**
- 7. Valid and current Driver's Licenses from your home country**

You cannot make an appointment to take the written test. The DMV is open from 8:15am -4:00pm and administers the written knowledge test from 8:15am-3:00pm.

The DMV locations where you can test for your driver's licenses are as follows:

### **Penn Branch Service Center**

3220 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20019

### **Rhode Island Service Center**

2350 Washington Place, NE, Suite 112N  
Washington, DC 20018

### **Southwest Service Center**

95 M Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024

If you won't be driving, you can apply for your DC Identification card. You would simply have to bring the following **original** documents with you to the DMV. There are no tests involved.

- 1. Passport**
- 2. Visa**
- 3. I-94**
- 4. Proof of Residency (Signed Lease and utility bill etc.)**
- 5. Documents used to secure your Visa (such as I-129S or I-797 or other documents)**
- 6. Signed Social Security Card**

[DC DMV website](#)

Your Destination Services Consultant will also assist you with the proper procedure.

## LIVING AND SHOPPING

### TV, Cable, Telephone, and Internet

The main service providers for TV cable, landline telephone and internet all offer combination packages. They are in stiff competition with each other, so special offers change monthly, sometimes even weekly.

- [AT&T](#)
- [Comcast](#)
- [DirectTV](#)
- [Dish](#)

### Mobile Phones

There are four major wireless carriers in the US.

- [AT&T Wireless](#)
- [Verizon Wireless](#)
- [Sprint](#)
- [T-Mobile](#)

### Shopping Centers and Malls

- [DC's Shopping Districts](#)
- [Hagerstown Premium Outlets](#)
- [Leesburg Corner Premium Outlets](#)
- [Mazza Gallerie](#)
- [Reston Town Center](#)
- [Union Station](#)

### Food Shopping

- [Safeway](#)
- [Whole Foods](#)
- [Giant Food](#)
- [Trader Joe's](#)
- [Eastern Market](#)
- [Rodman's](#)
- [DC Farmers Markets](#)

### Computers, Electronics, Cameras

- [Best Buy](#) is a national chain. Apart from sales, their [Geek Squad](#) repairs PC computers.
- [Staples](#)
- [Apple Stores](#)

### Housewares and Furniture

- [Bed Bath & Beyond](#)
- [Ikea](#)
- [Home Depot](#)
- [Crate and Barrel](#)
- [Furniture Envy](#)
- [Pottery Barn](#)
- [Williams-Sonoma](#)
- [Rooms to Go](#)
- [The Container Store](#)



## RECREATION

### Arts and Culture

- [Art Museum of the Americas](#)
- [Corcoran Gallery of Art](#)
- [Folger Shakespeare Library](#)
- [Freer and Sackler Galleries](#)
- [German American Heritage Museum](#)
- [Hirshhorn Museum](#)
- [The Kreeger Museum](#)
- [Museum of Natural History](#)
- [National Gallery of Art](#)
- [National Museum of African Art](#)
- [National Museum of American History](#)
- [National Museum of the American Indian](#)
- [National Museum of Women in the Arts](#)
- [National Portrait Gallery](#)
- [Newseum](#)
- [The Phillips Collection](#)
- [Smithsonian American Art Museum](#)
- [The Society of the Cincinnati](#)
- [Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building](#)
- [Touchstone Gallery](#)



### Historic Sites, Monuments, Memorials

- [African American Civil War Memorial and Museum](#)
- [Air Force Memorial](#)
- [Arlington National Cemetery](#)
- [Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial](#)
- [Frederick Douglass National Historic Site](#)
- [Ford's Theatre](#)- site of Abraham Lincoln's assassination, also an operational theater
- [Jefferson Memorial](#)
- [Korean War Veterans National Memorial](#)
- [Library of Congress](#)
- [Lincoln Memorial](#)
- [Marine Corps Memorial Iwo Jima Statue](#)
- [Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial](#)
- [Mount Vernon](#)
- [National World War II Memorial](#)
- [Supreme Court of the United States](#)
- [U.S. Capitol and Capitol Visitor Center](#)
- [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#)
- [Vietnam Veterans Memorial](#)
- [Washington Monument](#)
- [White House](#)



## Entertainment and Performing Arts

- [9:30 Club](#)
- [AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center](#)
- [Arena Stage](#)
- [Atlas Performing Arts Center](#)
- [Dance Place](#)
- [DAR Constitution Hall](#)
- [The Hamilton Live](#)
- [The Howard Theatre](#)
- [John F. Kennedy Center For the Performing Arts](#)
- [Merriweather Post Pavilion](#)
- [The National Theatre](#)
- [Strathmore](#)
- [U.S. Army Band](#)
- [Warner Theatre](#)
- [Washington Ballet](#)

## Kid Friendly

- [Discovery Theater](#)
- [Medieval Times](#)
- [International Spy Museum](#)
- [Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum](#)
- [National Air and Space Museum](#)
- [National Children's Museum](#)
- [National Zoo](#)

## Outdoor Recreation

- [Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Park](#)
- [George Washington Carver Nature Trail](#)
- [Great Falls Park](#)
- [Potomac Park](#)
- [Rock Creek Park](#)

## Sports

Washington is one of 12 cities in the United States with teams from all four major professional men's sports and is home to one major professional women's team. The [Washington Wizards](#) (basketball), the [Washington Capitals](#) (hockey), and the [Washington Mystics](#) (basketball), play at the Verizon Center in Chinatown. Nationals Park, which opened in Southeast D.C. in 2008, is home to the [Washington Nationals](#) (baseball). [D.C. United](#) (soccer) plays at RFK Stadium. The [Washington Redskins](#) (football) play at nearby FedExField in Landover, Maryland.



## EXPAT RESOURCES

### Expat Resource Guide

- [www.expatechange.com](http://www.expatechange.com)
- [Expat Community for Washington DC](#)

### Google Translator

- [Translate](#) 90 languages to and from language of choice using iTunes.

### Volunteer Opportunities

- [Volunteer Match](#)
- [United Way](#)

### Parent & Children Resources

- [Mom's Clubs](#) - social groups offering events and outings with mothers and their young children.

### Smart Phone Apps for Travel:

- [Uber](#) : Similar to a taxi service but all web based. Payment also handled online, do not pay or tip driver directly. Uber driver knows your approximate location based on your phone GPS.
- [Lyft](#) : Wherever you're headed, count on Lyft for rides in minutes. The Lyft app matches you with local drivers at the tap of a button. Just request and go.
- [Google Maps](#) : Map by direction
- [Apple Maps](#) : Map by direction
- [Map Quest](#) : Map by direction
- [Waze](#) : Community based traffic & navigation with alternate route suggestions
- [CityMaps2Go](#) : The #1 travel app lets you discover exciting new places. Beautiful photos and insider tips at the touch of a button. You will receive stories about places you like and can instantly save and find them on your maps and in your lists.

### Smart Phone Apps for Communication:

- [WhatsApp](#) : Free local & international Real Time messaging
- [Line](#) : Exchange free instant messages with friends whenever and wherever with one-on-one and group chats. LINE is available on all smartphone devices (iPhone, Android, Windows Phone, Blackberry, Nokia) and even on your PC.
- [Viber](#) : Free text, calling, photo messages and location-sharing with Viber users. No registration, alias or invitations required. Instantly integrates with your own contact list. Best-quality mobile calls using 3G or Wi-Fi.
- [Skype](#) : Stay in touch with your family and friends for free on Skype. Download Skype today to chat and call on desktop and mobile.

**Smart Phone Apps for Local Information/Reviews:**

- [Angie's List](#) : Referrals for doctor, dentist, child care, maid, mechanic, painter, plumber, etc.
- [Yelp!](#) : Find local businesses, restaurants, bars, clubs, events, etc. with map, lists, and reviews
- [Next Door](#) : Neighbors share community events, items for sale, recommendations for babysitters, doctors and handymen, crime reports, ideas about how to improve their neighborhood and more.
- [Meet Ups](#) : Meetups are neighbors getting together to learn something, do something or share something. Cultural groups advertise gatherings here as well.

**Smart Phone Apps for Weather:**

- [WTHR13](#) : Local weather and closings; includes radar and forecast
- [Weather Channel](#) : National and international time, temperature & weather
- [Tornado](#) : Set up tornado alerts & siren

## U.S. IDIOMS

Idioms are words, phrases, or expressions that are not taken literally- they have meaning beyond a literal translation of the words. Idioms are generally used in casual, familiar conversation but can also come up in certain business settings. Here are some examples of commonly used American English idioms:

**better off** - in a more fortunate position

**Big deal!** - So what? That doesn't really matter.

**(to) blow things out of proportion** - to exaggerate; to make more of something than one should

**(to) call it a night** - to stop an activity for the rest of the night

**dime a dozen** - so plentiful as to be nothing special; common

**(to) do the trick** - to achieve the desired results

**(to) give someone the cold shoulder** - to ignore someone on purpose; to snub someone

**(to) get the ball rolling** - to get started

**(to) go back to the drawing board** - to start a task over because the last try failed; to start again from the beginning

**happy camper [slang]** - a happy person; a satisfied participant

**(to) have a heart of gold** - to be very kind and giving

**(to be) head over heels in love** - very much in love

**(to) hit the nail on the head** - to be right

**(to) learn the ropes** - to learn the basics

**(to) lose one's touch** - to no longer be able to do something well

**made of money** - very rich

**needless to say** - obviously

**piece of cake** - very easy

**(to) pitch in** - to help

**(to) pull an all-nighter** - to stay up all night to do work

**rule of thumb** - a useful principle

**(as) sharp as a tack** - very intelligent

**(to) sit tight** - to wait patiently

**(to) stab someone in the back** - to betray someone

**(to) tell someone off** - to scold; to tell someone in strong words what one really thinks

**When pigs fly! [slang]** - never

**(to) twist someone's arm** - to persuade someone; to convince someone

**(to be) up in the air** - not yet determined; uncertain

Many common American idioms come from sports, here are some examples:

**strike out-** to fail or to do poorly at something (*baseball*)

**(to) call the shots-** to make the decisions; to be in charge (*basketball*)

**ballpark-** a guess or an estimate (*baseball*)

**down and out-** lacking money or prospects; penniless or destitute (*boxing*)

**down to the wire-** to the very end or last minute (*horse racing*)

**drop the ball-** to make an error, to miss an opportunity (*football, baseball, rugby*)

**hands down-** with great ease; unconditionally; often (and originally) in the phrase “to win hands down” (*horse racing*)

**(to) have someone in your corner-** to have the support or help of someone (*boxing*)

**(to) hit it out of the park; home run-** to be wildly successful, to do a great job (*baseball*)



To learn even more idioms, visit the following links:

- [Everyday American English Idioms](#) - with example sentences.
- [Useful Idioms for Lower-Intermediate to Advanced Students \(Teacher's Resource\)](#)
- [Idiom Site A-Z](#)
- [Sports Idioms](#)
- [English Language Learning: American English Idioms](#)

## PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Holidays can be confusing as there are national (federal) holidays, bank holiday and state holidays. Verify those in your area with Human Resources at your place of business, especially before planning vacations or weekend get-aways!

[Federal Holidays listed through 2020](#)

[DC Holidays](#)

The following are legal holidays in the United States and need to be treated as such by employers:

- New Year's Day January 1\*
- Martin Luther King Day Third Monday in January
- Memorial Day Last Monday in May
- Independence Day July 4\*
- Labor Day First Monday in September
- Columbus Day Second Monday in October
- Veterans' Day November 11\*
- Thanksgiving Day Fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas Day December 25\*

\*If a holiday falls on a Sunday, the day following is observed as the legal holiday.