



Seasonal Attractions in The Capital Region USA

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Presidents' Day Ushers in Winter Shopping Bargains and Travel Discounts

First U.S. President George Washington was born in 1732 in Westmoreland County, Virginia. Today, Americans celebrate Washington's birthday on February 22 and again on a Federal Holiday called Presidents' Day. This mid-winter national holiday guarantees shopping and lodging bargains along with resort deals. In the right years, Valentine's Day coincides with the President's Day holiday weekend, doubling the romance of a cosy winter getaway.

If you'd like to follow the Virginia lifestyle of George Washington, you can make a nice countryside trip of visiting the George Washington Birthplace National Monument (www.nps.gov/gewa) in Westmoreland County on the way to the Chesapeake Bay; Ferry Farm (www.kenmore.org/ferryfarm_homepage.html) on the Rappahannock River near Fredericksburg; the City of Alexandria (www.funside.com), and his home Mount Vernon, (www.mountvernon.org/) just south of Washington. Virginia was home to eight U.S. presidents and the residences of most of them are open to the public for tours of the homes and grounds.

By George, irony has it that while U.S. President Richard Nixon established the national Presidents' Day holiday to honour all presidents, he was dishonourably impeached for crimes of spying on the Democratic Party during the infamous Washington "Watergate Affair." Today, the Presidents' Day holiday falls each year between President Abraham Lincoln and George Washington's birthdays, but the American tradition of honouring George Washington, the man who stood for honesty and integrity, reigns supreme. U.S. citizens still refer to Presidents' Day as "George Washington's Birthday."

Ocean Breezes and Mountain Lakes, You're Never Far From Water in the Capital Region USA

Take a long walk on an impeccably groomed beach and enjoy the free evening entertainment choices available in places such as Virginia Beach, (www.vbfun.com), one of the world's longest resort beaches. In Maryland, Solomon's Island, with its upscale boutiques and eateries, and Ocean City, (www.ococean.com), replete with amusements and shopping galore, are terrific places to join the party crowd. Pull off the road and hike along wooded trails beside inland rivers that begin in the Appalachian mountain chain. You may even want to go underground to listen for the constant dripping of water from limestone stalactites formed over millions of years. If you follow the headwaters of Virginia and Maryland's mighty rivers eastward, you'll reach the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean. In less than four hours' driving you can cover the distance between mountains and ocean, rivers and bay.

No matter which water spot you choose, take the time to stay and play. With a variety of outdoor options, the Capital Region is a place for sailing, kayaking, canoeing, water skiing, and parasailing. Water-centered feasts are a big part of the culture here so if you're the sporting type, try crabbing and fishing for the coveted saltwater rockfish, or catching a delectable mountain trout from a fast, clear hillside stream. (Temporary fishing licenses are available for purchase.)

Early settlers used the rivers as their highways, and today, you'll find every kind of water-going vessel imaginable, from dug-out canoes to sail boats, cruise ships and cargo carriers. Hop aboard nearly any of these, including a Civil War era ship in the Baltimore harbour, a retired naval aircraft carrier at the National Maritime Center (www.thenmc.org) in Norfolk, or a sailing vessel that'll take you to the lighthouses in the Chesapeake Bay. (www.BayGateways.org). Paddle your own canoe, kayak or sail from one of the hundreds of marinas in the region.

Washington, DC has one of the most unusual boat tours in the area -- a wacky amphibious vessel that travels on land and in water, led by the DC Ducks, a tour company with a sense of humour.

Virginia and Maryland have thousands of miles of inland waterways and shores, including family-oriented lakes where power boating hobbyists rule. Western Maryland's Garrett County is a paradise for freshwater pursuits, and here there are seven lakes, with seven distinct recreation areas. One is more than 3,000 acres in circumference and 12 miles long.

Among the more accessible recreational lakes in Virginia are Lake Anna, just south of Washington near Fredericksburg; Mountain Lake - a natural alpine lake near Blacksburg; Douthat State Park, near the mountain resort and golf complex - The Homestead (www.thehomestead.com/index2.asp); Smith Mountain Lake (www.visitsmithmountainlake.com) outside of Roanoke and Sherando Lake, near Waynesboro and Charlottesville. All are equipped with lodging and camping facilities.

If it's high-speed, manmade thrills you seek, try out any of the water parks in the Capital Region. Complete with slides, wave pools, tubing rivers and wading pools, these spots are close to urban areas and offer fast, fun relief from the heat.

Ski and Golf the Same Day in the Capital Region USA

Yes, it's possible to ski and golf the same day in the Capital Region USA. Wintergreen Resort, (www.Wintergreen.com), about 45 minutes from Charlottesville, Virginia, is a 12,000-acre wooded wonderland with ski and snowboarding slopes, award-winning mountain and valley golf courses and alluring spa options. Wintergreen's state-of-the-art snowmaking equipment allows the resort to open ski slopes and golf courses simultaneously. Located just off the Blue Ridge Parkway, America's favourite scenic byway, the resort is close to wineries, antique shops and horseback riding.

The Capital Region offers beginner and advanced ski slopes, and when you want to kick off your ski boots, lodging choices range from condos to luxury hotel accommodations. The Homestead (www.thehomestead.com) in Hot Springs, Virginia, has one of the top golf courses in America (The Cascades). In addition to skiing, The Homestead offers a variety of gaming pursuits, from clay shooting to billiards, tennis to bowling, from hiking to fishing, horseback riding and more. The handsomely designed pool here is fed by natural hot springs.

Maryland's Wisp Resort (www.skiwisp.com/) at Deep Creek Lake, in what is known as the land of the seven lakes, often runs appealing promotions. Virginia resorts are known to offer free skiing during the month of March.

Massanutten Resort, (www.massanutten.com) near the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, maintains a slope with a 1,110-foot vertical drop and has installed a trademarked moving sidewalk. Bryce Resort (www.Bryce.com) offers an action-packed snow tubing park in addition to its five ski and snowboarding slopes.

Autumn Colours in the Capital Region USA

Crisp autumn breezes sweep into the Capital Region each September bringing cool nights to warm, Indian summer days. Accompanied by spectacular leaf change often lasting into November, the canvas resembles an Impressionist painting of fall foliage -- dotted with variant hues of reds, golds, oranges, greens, yellows and purples.

Blessed with more national and state parkland than most areas of the country, the Capital Region preserves vast landscapes for the pleasure of citizens and travellers alike. Enjoy the scenic drives here -- they are among the most beloved in America.

Autumn is harvest time in the Capital Region and locals celebrate with special events centered around everything from grape crushing and wine tasting at vineyards to apple butter making during pick-your-own fruit days at the orchards. In an unbelievable turn of nature, the region's vast corn fields are transformed into seasonal recreational palaces -- as farmers have caught onto the maze craze where they sculpt intricate labyrinthine paths from the eight-foot-tall crops.

If you enjoy casual, back-to-nature experiences, the Capital Region offers many choices, including romantic cabins, some with fireplaces. You can camp by the ocean or by a mountain stream - way back in the woods, or in a fully-equipped campground with lots of amenities. Make your National Park reservations (<http://reservations.nps.gov/>) before others discover coveted spots. Be sure to obtain a permit, too at national or state parks -- it's a legal requirement. For more information: Virginia State Parks (www.state.va.us/dcr/parks) Maryland Park Service (www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands)

For luxury lovers, there are plenty of resort choices in spectacularly beautiful mountain and seashore settings. These sought-after establishments afford high-end lodging replete with spas, sporting activities and great dining options.

If you're into spectator sports, fall is a great time to enjoy professional football, collegiate football and horse racing in the Capital Region USA.

Explore the Secret Gardens of Washington DC and the Capital Region USA

Washington's best kept secrets are its exquisite gardens and parks designed for the pleasure of residents and visitors. DC's long, park-like avenues double as a massive garden ornamented with classical architecture and beautiful sculpture, but that's just the beginning.

Visit the newly renovated U.S. Botanic Garden (www.usbg.gov) while you're touring the U.S Capitol and the nearby Smithsonian museums. Established by Congress in 1820, it's the oldest botanic garden in North America. Take a trip to the east bank of the Anacostia River and find refuge in the Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens, (www.nps.gov/kepa) home to more than 100,000 water plants, including ferns, lotuses and exotic water lilies.

Ten acres at the Dumbarton Oaks (www.doaks.org) estate in Georgetown are graced with terraced gardens and a Lovers Lane Pool. The 2,800-acre Rock Creek Park (www.nps.gov/rocr) stretches from the Kennedy Center into suburban Maryland and is a nature lover's refuge. Pleasure seekers enjoy hiking along any of the 29 miles of footpaths or bicycling, playing golf, listening to concerts and even riding horses -- there are 13 miles of bridle paths here.

If you are visiting Washington, DC in April, don't miss the annual National Cherry Blossom Festival, (www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org) celebrating the gift of 3,000 cherry trees from the city of Tokyo to the people of Washington, DC in 1912.

The close-in environs of Virginia and Maryland offer many lovely options for garden tours. Sherwood Gardens in Baltimore's lovely Guilford neighbourhood is open daily from dawn until dusk and admission is free. In April, more than 80,000 tulips bloom here and experts say the garden is at its best Mother's Day each May. The Ladew Topiary Gardens (www.ladewgardens.com/index2.html) in Monkton, Maryland north of Baltimore is known around the world for its topiary and flower gardens. You can visit 15 thematic "garden rooms" on 22 acres of this 250-acre property. The Garden Club of America described it as "the most outstanding topiary garden in America."

Every April, Virginia celebrates the oldest and largest Garden Week (www.vagardenweek.org) tour in the U.S. with more than 250 private and public homes and gardens open to the public. At

any time of year, visitors can enjoy the historic gardens of George Washington's Potomac River estate, Mount Vernon, (www.mountvernon.org) or make an off-the-beaten path visit to another nearby Potomac River estate, Gunston Hall, whose gardens contain only plants and shrubs found in colonial times.

Capital Region USA Breeds the Best Horses

The Capital Region's fascination with horses goes way back to the first English settlement in America at Jamestown. Horse fever thrives today at spring and autumn steeplechase events, prominent American flat races such as Maryland's Preakness, (www.preakness.com) polo matches, carriage racing, fox hunting, dressage and a host of western-style competitions. The Chincoteague Pony Swim (www.assateagueisland.com/ponyswim/ponyswim.htm) on the Eastern Shore of Virginia and Maryland remains one of the most popular summer events in the region.

In 1610, three years after putting up camp at Jamestown, English settlers brought horses to Virginia, bred them with the American Indians' shorter, stockier horses, and produced the first American Quarter Horses. In the 1730s, Britons bred long-legged Arabian and Turkish horses with their English stock, creating the first Thoroughbreds. Bulle Rock, the very first product of this experiment in lighter, faster race horses, was shipped from England to a farm in Hanover County, Virginia near Richmond, establishing the bloodline for the American Thoroughbred. The year was 1730.

By the late 18th-century, the most famous English race horse, Diomed, was imported to Virginia after winning the definitive national British classic race at Epsom Downs in 1780. America's equine records reveal that every World Grand Champion Walking Horse traces its blood line back to Diomed. Superior blood lines run an equine blue in Virginia - home to the world-famous Triple Crown winner, Secretariat, who, like Bulle Rock, lived in Hanover County.

If being in the saddle means more to you than watching some of the world's top beasts meet their competition for big prizes, trail rides are readily available at places like Rock Creek Park (www.nps.gov/rocr) in Washington, DC, Shenandoah National Park (www.nps.gov/shen) and Wintergreen Resort (www.wintergreenresort.com) in Virginia, and Catocin Mountain Park (www.nps.gov/cato) in Maryland.

For more information go to www.capitalregionausa.co.uk

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