



Photographs By Susana Raab for The New York Times

36 Hours in Washington, D.C.

By **HELENE COOPER**

WASHINGTON is suddenly hip again, infused with the heady double-barreled combination of a new crowd of idealistic young political worker bees, who actually believe they can change the world, and the arrival of America's first black president. It's even cool to wave the Stars and Stripes. And in the honeymoon months of the **Barack Obama** presidency, before the country's marriage to its new president undergoes the usual souring, a trip to the nation's capital is just the ticket. Why, it would almost be unpatriotic not to visit.

Friday

6 p.m.

1) EARLY HOUSE PARTY

Hobnob with the Beltway arrivistes at **Eighteenth Street Lounge** (1212 18th Street NW; 202-466-3922; www.eighteenthstreetlounge.com). Enter through the door next to the Mattress Discounters — there's no sign outside — take the stairs and voila! A multilevel row house, with room after room of velvet couches and fireplaces, awaits you. There's a back deck for spring and summer after-work cocktails, and the crowd is a mix of Yes We Can activists and Middle Eastern and European **World Bank** types.

8 p.m.

2) EAT LIKE OPRAH

Take a taxi to Capital Hill, to **Art and Soul Restaurant** in the Liaison Hotel (415 New Jersey Avenue NW; 202-393-7777; www.artandsoul.com). Oprah Winfrey's former chef, Art Smith, owns this restaurant, and it is command central for big **inauguration** parties. Yes, you've already had a cocktail, but you're not driving, so be sure to try the margarita, Perfected at the bar before sitting down to eat. The menu will remind you that, yes, Washington is a Southern city — don't even think of missing the Chesapeake Bay fry to start. It's a combination of deep-fried seafood — clams, calamari, shrimp, oysters with, of course, okra. Land and Sea hoecakes (with blue crab, beef and brie) are ridiculously good. If you're still hungry, then go for the pork chop with red-eyed gravy. And the babycakes — miniature coconut and chocolate cupcakes. Dinner for two, with cocktails, wine and dessert, is about \$140.

10 p.m.

3) FREEDOM WALK

With luck, you did not wear the five-inch Prada heels tonight, because you're about to walk off that pork chop as you head down the National Mall. Your destination is the **Lincoln Memorial** (www.nps.gov/linc), with ole Abe backlit at night. Washington's monument row is always best viewed at night, when the tourists are gone and the romantics are strolling arm in arm. On election night, the Lincoln Memorial was an emotionally charged spot: **Illinois** was sending another of its sons to Washington. Since then, the monument — long the first destination for African-American visitors to Washington — has become almost a retreat, as residents and visitors alike come to read the inscription “With malice toward none, with charity for all” and to ponder America the Beautiful.

Saturday

9 a.m.

4) MORNING SIT-IN

Breakfast at [Florida Avenue Grill](#) (1100 Florida Avenue NW; 202-265-1586), a soul food institution, is a dip into the past, evoking the feel of lunch counter sit-ins and the civil rights movement. The place has been serving greasy and delicious Southern cooking since 1944. Buttery grits, [Virginia](#) ham, biscuits and gravy, even scrapple — all surrounded by photos of past Washington bigwigs as various as Ron Brown, the former Commerce Secretary, and [Strom Thurmond](#), the former [South Carolina](#) Senator. Mr. Obama might have to keep his shirt on if he follows his predecessors here.

10 a.m.

5) 1600 PENNSYLVANIA

We know. It's the ultimate in touristy. But come on, it's the [White House](#) (1600 Pennsylvania Avenue; 202-456-7041; [www.whitehouse.gov](#)). To schedule a public tour, first you'll need to find nine friends to come with you. Then call your Congressional representative to schedule. (Not sure who? Go to [writerep.house.gov](#).) These self-guided tours — which are allotted on a first-come-first-served basis about one month before the requested date — allow you to explore the public rooms and the [gardens](#). Sorry, you won't be able to check out the indoor basketball court Mr. Obama might put in, but you will get to see the East Room, the Diplomatic Reception Room and the dining room where they have those swanky state dinners.

Noon

6) HELLO, BETSY

No, not that Betsy ... there are no star-spangled banners at [Betsy Fisher](#) (1224 Connecticut Avenue NW; 202-785-1975; [www.betsyfisher.com](#)). This stylish and funky boutique is port of call for those deputies in the new [Obama administration](#). (Mr. Obama's transition spokeswoman, [Stephanie Cutter](#), gets her [Diane von Furstenberg](#) dresses there.) The owner, Betsy Fisher Albaugh, always has cocktails and wine on hand to occupy the men who invariably are dragged into the store.

2 p.m.

7) GO REPRESENT

It took six years to complete, but the [U.S. Capitol Visitor Center](#) (Capitol Hill; at the east end of the Mall; 202-225-6827; [www.visitthecapitol.gov](#)) finally opened last month. The subterranean center is meant to relieve the bottleneck that used to serve as the entryway for visitors to the Capitol. It does that and more, although the reviews have been mixed; some critics say it assumes a life of its own that is too separate from the Capitol itself. See for yourself — you can book a tour via the Web site, or just show up and wander around. The center has a rotating display of historic documents that can range from a ceremonial copy of the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery to the speech President Bush delivered to Congress after the Sept. 11 attacks.

7 p.m.

8) PARTY CHASER

O.K., enough with the federal touring, it's time to hang out with the real Washingtonians. Head to the always hopping U Street Corridor, and plop yourself on a stool at [Local 16](#) (1602 U Street NW; 202-265-2828; [www.localsixteen.com](#)), a popular Democratic hangout. There are multiple lounges and, best of all, a roof deck, where you can see the city lights while you sip your predinner watermelon martini. A lot of Democratic fundraisers habituate the place, so don't be surprised if there's a private party in one of the rooms.

8:30 p.m.

9) POLITICAL DISH

Have dinner a few blocks away at [Cork Wine Bar](#) (1720 14th Street NW; 202-265-2675; [www.corkdc.com](#)), which might have the best fries in town. The owners, Khalid Pitts and Diane Gross, are friends of Barack (well, Mr. Pitts is director of political accountability with the [Service Employees International Union](#), which endorsed Mr. Obama, and Ms. Gross has worked with the Democratic political establishment for years). The menu includes both small and big bites, from marinated olives and cheeses to duck confit and sautéed kale. And for goodness' sake, don't forget those fries! They are tossed with garlic and lemon. In fact, order two helpings. Dinner for two with wine, around \$60.

10:30 p.m.

10) SMOKE-FILLED ROOM

Puff away the rest of your evening at [Chi-Cha](#) (1624 U Street NW; 202-234-8400; www.latinconcepts.com/chi-cha), a hookah lounge where you can smoke honey tobacco out of a water pipe and sip late-night cocktails. The eclectic crowd dances to rumba and slow salsa into the wee hours, and there's always a diplomat in a corner couch doing something inappropriate — avert your eyes, enjoy your hookah and sway to the beat. You could be in Beirut. O.K., let's try that one again. You could be in [Marrakesh](#). Well, maybe Marrakesh with Brazilian [music](#). If you want to keep the night going, stop by [Ben's Chili Bowl](#) when it's at its busiest.

Sunday

8 a.m.

11) RIVER IDYLL

Washington is known for beautiful mornings along the Potomac River, and a perfect way to see it is from a canoe. [Thompson Boat Center](#) (2900 Virginia Avenue NW; 202-333-9543; www.thompsonboatcenter.com), just where Georgetown meets Rock Creek Parkway, offers canoe rentals starting at \$8 an hour and \$22 a day. Paddle up the river, and you might catch a Senator (or a Saudi prince) having coffee on the patio of his stately home.

12:30 p.m.

12) LIFT YOUR VOICE

[St. Augustine's Roman Catholic Church](#) (1419 V Street NW; 202-265-1470; www.saintaugustine-dc.org), which calls itself “the Mother Church of Black Catholics in the United States” is one of the oldest black Catholic churches in the country. The 12:30 Sunday Mass combines traditional black spirituals with gospel music. The place has been rocking with particular fervor since Election Day 2008.

THE BASICS

[Hotel Palomar](#) (2121 P Street NW; 202-448-1800; www.hotelpalomar-dc.com) is a Kimpton boutique hotel in the heart of Dupont Circle. Rates start at \$150.

[Hotel Monaco](#) (700 F Street NW; 202-628-7177; www.monaco-dc.com), also a Kimpton hotel, is in the Penn Quarter neighborhood across from the [National Portrait Gallery](#) and near the [International Spy Museum](#). Rooms from \$180.

[Hotel Tabard Inn](#) (1739 N Street NW; 202-785-1277; www.tabardinn.com) is a budget alternative (some rooms share a bathroom) filled with charm; think Old England not far from the White House. Rooms with shared bath start at \$113; with private bath, \$158.

