

Winter in Washington is a wonderful time of year. The city is always beautiful, but when clad in a fresh new snowfall, it becomes a winter wonderland. Another good reason to visit Washington in winter is that the city is not jammed full of tourists, as it is in the other seasons. Additionally, winter prices are lower at hotels, restaurants, stores and all other places in the Capital city.

Please note that all prices in Washington for Inauguration festivities on January 19, 20 and 21, will skyrocket! If you contemplate a visit to Washington just as a winter tourist, don't be there on those very expensive days and nights, unless you can stay with a sympathetic relative or friend.

My remembrance of Washington goes back many, many years. My first winter visit was in January 1942 with my high school senior class. I recall seeing for the first time government buildings, the White House, Supreme Court, Smithsonian, the Capitol, FBI headquarters and the three memorials to Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln.

However, one memory stays clearly with me after all these years. The Pearl Harbor attack had happened just weeks earlier, and as our bus went by various government buildings, we saw GIs holding rifles with bayonets on guard at many of the building entrances. On the flat, snow-covered roofs above us were more soldiers manning machine guns. All wore the old World War I helmets, and the weapons were of the same era. Nobody considered how those few GIs with their outdated equipment could have fought off any enemy attack.

We saw very few other visitors during our visit to snowy Washington in the winter of 1942, making our tour of the historic streets and government buildings an almost ghostly journey. When we went to the top of the Washington Monument and looked out over the city as more snow added to the eerie scene, our thoughts of admiration were mixed with the uncertainty of our own futures.

With a year, almost every one of the 160 seniors of our high school class who had visited Washington were serving in World War II. Twenty-seven classmates never came home, except those who are buried in nearby Arlington National Cemetery.

There have been many other occasions since WWII when I've visited Arlington, and I recommend it as a winter destination, especially for those who have family members resting there. It is most peaceful and beautiful when it wears a white coat of new-fallen snow. With yet another war taking more young lives today and the ranks of World War II veterans shrinking, chances are you'll see a military funeral when you're there. It's a tragic time, of course, but also a profoundly dramatic experience. Whenever I'm in Washington, I still bring flowers to the graves of several high school classmates in Arlington.

While you're in Washington, and the winter gloom gets to be too much, you'll find some glorious spring and summer blooming at the US Botanic Garden on the Mall across from the Capitol. My

favorites are the beautiful variety of orchids, all in bloom as if they were on a tropical Pacific Island. It's a glass-enclosed conservatory of hundreds of varieties of plant life, originally established in the early 1800s when American representatives brought back exotic plants from all over the world. The present building was erected in 1931, and offers a warm, pleasant, scent-filled excursion that makes visitors forget the cold weather outside.

Of course, no visit to Washington is complete without a day spent at "America's Attic", the Smithsonian, along with its dozen next-door subsidiaries, including the Natural History and Air and Space Museums. Everything is there, including Judy Garland's ruby slippers to FDR's cape to Charles Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis. If you visit Washington with kids, the Smithsonian is a wonderful, hands-on playground for them.

Theater in Washington rivals Broadway in its variety of venues and types of entertainment. Of course, at the heart of it all is The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts at 2700 F Street NW. While you're on your winter visit to America's Capital, check the schedule of happenings at the Center, and you can be sure you'll find something for your taste on just about every afternoon and evening. Then you can get away from the cold streets and into a warm Shakespeare drama, steamy Verdi opera or hot rock musical event.

I've just touched on a very few of the hundreds of winter wonderland sights, sounds, tastes and experiences you can enjoy in Washington. Go there in the months when most tourists stay home to be surrounded by two and a half centuries of American history, or just enjoy a snowy stroll or a quiet dinner in one of the city's many great restaurants.