
Stop 1. Washington D.C.

Arrival datetime: Monday April 1, 11:30PM
Sites visited: Washington Mall and Tidal Basin
Accommodations: Marriott at Pennsylvania Ave
and 14th Street
States traveled: New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland,
District of Columbia

Our plan was to visit National Parks, and Washington D.C. has numerous National Monuments and National Historic Site designations run by the park service. Nevertheless, it was a last minute addition. We had deliberately omitted National Parks that are not on the mainland or are on the East coast, especially those that are easy enough for us to get to in a long weekend.

Washington falls into both categories, as does all of New England and most of the Eastern Seaboard, especially Florida as Michael has grandchildren there. Hawaii, Alaska and the US Virgin Islands fall into the former category. We have been to some parks there and we would love to go back. But there are too many on places on the mainland that we had not yet seen.

However, a few weeks before we left, the New York Times travel section had a blurb about the Cherry Blossom Festival. Michael followed up on the Internet and found out that April 1 was likely to be mid-peak. Never having seen peak before, we were driving too close by it to resist.

However, we already had a full schedule. Our first reservation was April 2 on Skyline Drive near Shenandoah. This was also an exception to our two rules of

omission as we have been to Shenandoah, and though a long drive, it is doable on a weekend. But we were seeing Skyline Drive as a gateway to the Blue Ridge Parkway below. We had planned with a book on scenic drives in the United States in one hand so that we could enjoy our drive time as much as our stops wherever possible.

We could not leave too early on April 1 because Michael could not miss opening day at the Mets, a father-son tradition. Thinking we could put up with any accommodation just to spend the night and take a walk among blossoms in the morning, we had scanned the web for a hotel bargain. Our reservation was at a Red Roof Inn on H and 5th. We arrived late to a mob traffic scene. Jennifer jumped out of the car to ask where to park. The front desk clerk was apologetic as there was some kind of “MCI Event” in the area and the garage was likely to be full. Twenty minutes later, we had a space. We went up to our assigned room and surprised a guest who was apparently already checked into it. We went back down to the lobby and were given another room. Within two minutes, we saw a roach. We had few bags and hung them from hangers, thinking we may just get through the night. But then the toilet did



Michael and Jennifer by the cherry blossoms at the tidal basin.

not flush. Michael is a Marriott Miles silver cardholder, so he called 1-800-MARRIOTT and we were saved. They gave us a free upgrade to the concierge floor and were very nice not to scold us for trying to save a few bucks.

Buoyed by a morning news report that the Cherry Blossoms were in full peak, we headed out in search of them. We hit the mall at the corner of 15th and Constitution at 8:30AM. The line to get into the Washington Memorial was already a quarter mile long. The Cherry Blossom Festival has a full schedule of events, including music, dance, theatre, and a parade. However, it does not look like the time just to visit the Capital. We saw lines outside of every museum.

We congratulated ourselves on our plan just to enjoy the Cherry Blossoms and not try to do the whole monument scene. Besides, we had done it many times before. Forgetting where the cherry trees were, we headed toward the reflecting pool. We saw a few buds here and there but no trees in full bloom. We could not resist lingering at the Lincoln and Vietnam Memorials, and from the steps of the Lincoln located a high concentration of blossoms to the southeast. It was beautiful and we would have been satisfied to have seen Cherry Blossoms had this been our only view.

Then our meandering finally ended up at the Tidal Basin. Immediately, we understood the hype. Soft light pink

graceful boughs surrounded us and reflected from treetops above and water below. The spectacle captivated every one of the several thousand people milling about. Everyone was smiling as if they were recently reunited with a long-lost loved one. Strangers were handing each other their cameras. The brilliant smiles were framed with feathery pastel pink garland and pompous marble memorials.

Michael's face flushed with excitement, a perfect all-white smile over a strong square chin. His chiseled face and permanent tan looked like he had spent the past six months on a yacht instead of recovering from chemotherapy. Jennifer's eyes danced in reflection of Michael's relaxed and happy expression. Our expressions were as much relief that we had made it to this day as amazement over the Cherry Blossom spectacle itself.

Miles traveled: 257
Departure datetime: Tuesday April 2, 11:20AM
Departure weather: Sunny 66°