

travel



HAWAII'S BACKYARD

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SIGNS OF HAWAIIAN LIFE >> E8
LAS VEGAS ADVISOR >> E8

Capital moments

The nation's heart is as rich as ever in history and museums, with hipper fringe neighborhoods and food culture

By Julie L. Kessler
Special to the Star-Advertiser

WHEN the invitation arrived for my law school class 30th reunion, I realized it was time to face the music. Not to mention a potential barrage of wrinkles, graying hair and larger waistlines. Returning to Washington, D.C., for several summer days, I viewed it through middle-age eyes — now sporting 1.0 readers — but happily without 20-something angst, pressure-cooker-style Socratic method professors or career-altering exams.

In some ways Washington has not changed much. It still possesses some of the world's best museums with architectural marvels old and new and memorializes history with sculptures of military and political heroes on many corners. There also remains an abiding, deep sense of patriotism among those who live and work there.

Where it thankfully has changed is that now several neighborhoods once on the fringe, such as Adams Morgan, have graduated to fully hip. Others such as nearby Bethesda — once a sleepy Maryland suburb just a few metro stops from downtown — have been developed into chic, walkable neighborhoods with cafes, restaurants and local businesses surrounding the metro. And finally for foodies, interesting restaurants in D.C. are now thankfully the norm.

The bed

I hung my hat at Washington's Ritz-Carlton. Despite having 300 rooms, this hotel feels intimate. It was the perfect choice, located one block to historic Georgetown; in walking distance to the National Mall, Smithsonian Museums, White House and several great restaurants; and three blocks from my alma mater.

Recently renovated, with elegantly chic — but not stuffy — public areas, the Ritz possesses museum-quality art. Beautifully appointed, spacious

Please see CAPITAL, E6



JULIE L. KESSLER / SPECIAL TO THE STAR-ADVERTISER

Life imitates art at the Washington, D.C., Ritz-Carlton hotel, which contains several pieces of museum-quality art — and some fresh fruit. With the Capitol and Washington Monument in the background, a woman visited the Lincoln Memorial on Wednesday.



E6 >> HONOLULU STAR-ADVERTISER >> SUNDAY 8/20/17*

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CAPITAL

Continued from E1

rooms have incredibly luxurious bedding, electrical outlets strategically built into graceful marble nightstands, and a bathroom fit for Josephine as she primped for Napoleon.

The lobby's Quadrant Bar with weekend live music is an inviting spot for visitors to unwind over wine while Washington movers and shakers ply their craft over dirty martinis, shaken, not stirred. And the Ritz's signature service — polite and professional but not overbearing — is refreshingly maintained throughout the property. The ninth-floor Club Level provides breakfasts, salads and happy-hour hors d'oeuvres, excellent wines and a nightly dessert bar sure to satisfy hardened chocoholics.

The piece de resistance for location and convenience is the attached Equinox Club. Ritz-Carlton's elevators go directly from guest room floors to the massive club's lobby. With a sparkling pool and 110 weekly classes, including Pilates, tai chi, kickboxing, yoga and spinning, there is something for everyone, and it partially assuaged my guilt after late-night reminiscing with classmates over good food and wine.

The meals

I had many great meals over several indulgent days. One favorite was the West-end Bistro next door to Equinox. Another was Barrel & Crow, two blocks from Bethesda's metro stop. And, of course, Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak & Stone Crab near the White House.

Seated outside at Westend Bistro's patio, we were wowed by sous-chef Tyler Kineman's Hawaiian Kanpachi Crudo beautifully decorated with edible flowers, baked burrata with herbed pesto, and a perfectly cooked, 60-day-dry-aged ribeye so flavorful and tender that my knife was nearly unemployed. The truffle fries had me saluting those pups and pigs responsible for locating those fantastic French fungi. Though satiated, I tried the pineapple ice, an elegantly presented shave ice dessert melange — bringing memories of Matsumoto's — sporting coconut pearls, kiwi, dragon fruit and rich hibiscus syrup.

At Bethesda's Barrel & Crow, mixologists pour great martinis to complement people-watching at this neighborhood eatery with a cool, easygoing vibe. Steaming mid-Atlantic crab beignets and delicious hanger steak completed the evening. Naturally, I stopped next door where Henry's Sweet Retreat sold scrumptious chocolate-covered orange peels.

At Joe's, while many dishes were tasty, nothing quite satisfies like their signature stone crab. It's a must.

The finds

Part of the Smithsonian, the Renwick Gallery is often overlooked. Commencing in 1899, the ornate building served as the U.S. Court of Claims. Falling into disrepair over the years, it was nearly demolished but saved by



PHOTOS BY JULIE L. KESSLER / SPECIAL TO THE STAR-ADVERTISER

A sculpture of the Hindu goddess of knowledge Dewi Saraswati, with three students seeking knowledge and wisdom, stands in front of Indonesia's embassy in Washington, D.C. Above, artist Janet Echelman's knotted and braided fiber with programmable lighting at the Renwick Gallery was inspired by the data recorded as the March 11, 2011, tsunami rippled across the Pacific Ocean toward Japan.



Jacqueline Kennedy. It was then donated to the Smithsonian by Lyndon B. Johnson's order and dedicated to art in 1965.

Temporary exhibits frame the first floor and included a marvelous June Schwarcz enamel exhibit and a retrospective of ceramic's radical figure Peter Voulkos. Upstairs, the permanent uber-cool "connectivity" collection reflects a response to the changing technological environment. I found the name a misnomer. While modern, it was relatable, even for one as techno-

logically challenged as I am. Favorite exhibits included an evening gown made entirely of glass, a pillow made of marble, and a remarkable grandfather clock that appeared to be draped in a flowing sheet but actually was intricately carved blond wood — serving to remind me of Anais Nin's words that "We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are."

Having visited most D.C. museums over the years, the two most emotionally moving are the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the newly opened National Museum of African American History and Culture. Though NMAAHC permits a few walk-ins weekday mornings, tickets are sold out through September 2017.

The NMAAHC was crowded when I visited, but still it was evident that this is one of the Smithsonian's finest curated museums. Older history and slaves' movements are on basement levels, with more recent history on upper levels, including a perspective on

Louisiana's State Penitentiary at Angola — the largest maximum-security prison in the U.S. — currently with more than 6,000 prisoners. The social and political contributions displays of the mid-20th century onward, such as on Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American woman elected to Congress and first from a major party to run for U.S. president, were so informative that it made a cursory visit impossible. While many Smithsonian visitors spend on average 90 minutes, here many stay several hours.

There are also a number of worthwhile smaller museums reflecting a bygone era, all walking distance from the Ritz-Carlton.

The Anderson House, completed in 1905, originally owned by career diplomat Larz Anderson and wife Isabel, is now a National Historic Landmark. This European-style palace with grand rooms and gardens contains magnificent furnishings and art, including two rising sun crests in the foyer, several pieces of Japanese lacquer, Chinese porce-

TRAVEL

SUNDAY 8/20/17 >> HONOLULU STAR-ADVERTISER >> E7



Kanpachi Crudo with edible flowers at Washington, D.C.'s Westend Bistro, top. Above, the formal dining room at the Dumbarton House — the only Federal-era house in Washington open to the public.

lains and Buddha images, all from his tenure as U.S. ambassador to Japan.

The nearby Dumbarton House is the only fully furnished Federal-era house and museum in Washington open to the public. Its first resident, Joseph Nourse, served as the U.S. Treasury's first registrar under six U.S. presidents; he is known as America's first civil servant.

A few blocks away the National Museum of American Jewish Military History's displays reflect the significant contributions Jews have played in the U.S. military from colonial days to the present, often in the face of enormous anti-Semitism. Visit the Hall of Heroes downstairs containing American Jewish Medal of Honor recipient displays.

My final stop around the corner was the Phillips Collection, the nation's first modern art museum, containing a superb collection of de Kooning, Klee, Mondrian and Renoir's masterpiece "Luncheon of the Boating Party." There are also excellent children's exhibits on the Great Migration of African-Americans from the

South to the North and child-centered docent tours.

The lessons learned

Washington remains our nation's heart and pulse. While, thankfully, politicians and parties come and go, what remains is a vibrant city with remarkable museums, international culture and a dynamic restaurant scene. Viewed now through mature adult eyes — albeit donning those blasted readers — and with the camaraderie of old(er) and dear friends with whom I had shared so much, I was again reminded how fortunate I and a handful of Hawaii students were in following Daniel K. Inouye's footsteps to his alma mater and the nation's capital. Though many years had passed, Inouye's wise words still rang true: "History is an excellent teacher, provided we heed its lessons." Indeed, And Washington is a great place to do just that.

Julie L. Kessler is a travel writer, attorney and legal columnist based in Los Angeles and author of the award-winning book "Fifty-Fifty: The Clarity of Hindsight."

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>> **Where to stay:** The Ritz-Carlton, 1150 22nd St. NW, Washington; RitzCarlton.com; 202-835-0500; wonderful property perfectly situated near Georgetown. Doubles start at \$322.

>> **Where to eat:** Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak & Stone Crab, 750 15th St. NW, Washington; Joes.net; 202-489-0140. Iconic restaurant steps from the White House with the best crab in town. **Barrel & Crow**, 4867 Cordell Ave., Bethesda, Md.; BarrelandCrow.com; 240-800-3253. Innovative American cuisine in a hip atmosphere a five-minute walk from Bethesda metro station. **Westend Bistro**, 1150 22nd St. NW, Washington; WestendBistroDC.com; 202-974-5566. Excellent dishes with culinary flair in D.C.'s trendy West End. Lovely outdoor patio. Delicious gluten-free and vegetarian options.

>> **Where to go:** For information and operational hours on all 19 museums and galleries under the Smithsonian stewardship, see si.edu/museums. For those in the Dupont-Kalorama Museums Consortium, including Anderson House, Dumbarton House, Phillips Collection and the National Museum of American Jewish Military History, all within walking distance of each other, see dknmuseums.com.

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