

Kristie Kellahan *In Washington, DC*

# In the pink with presidents and patriots

Bursting with blooms and alive with history, Washington, DC is a lovely place to visit

Flowers frame the Jefferson Memorial at Washington, DC in spring.

CHERRY BLOSSOM TRAGICS will understand. The anticipation, the excitement, the fear of missing out on peak spring bloom begins in earnest a couple of months before my visit to Washington, DC. I have flower fever.

National Cherry Blossom Festival paints the town pink every spring in the US capital, with hundreds of gorgeous, flowering trees that rival anything you'd see in Tokyo. The festival is held over three weeks in March and April; peak bloom date changes each year. It's been as early as March 15, as late as April 18.

Timing is everything, and I check the DC Cherry Blossom Watch Instagram feed almost daily, hungry for updates on when the notoriously fickle pink buds will burst spectacularly out of their winter hibernation. The petal patron saints must be smiling down on me, because on the day I fly in, the fairy-floss-hued flowers open magnificently, gorgeous against the bright blue sky.

There's no better time than spring to tour the monuments, memorials and world-class museums of Washington, DC. I've joined Collette's five-night Spotlight tour, a fun and active guided tour of the best the city has to offer. Escorted by Natalie Riegel, an effervescent young woman from Alabama with a stage-worthy singing voice, the itinerary leaves plenty of free time to stop and smell the blossoms.

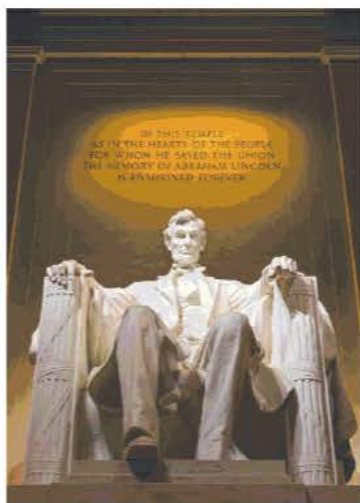
We'll be touring the US Capitol building, climbing the steps to pay our respects to Abraham at the Lincoln Memorial, smiling for a group photo outside the White House and wandering around as many museums and monuments as we can fit in. A day trip out of the city will lead us to Arlington National

**WASHINGTON'S DENTURES, SURELY THE MOST FAMOUS IN AMERICAN HISTORY, ARE ON DISPLAY, FASCINATINGLY MADE FROM IVORY AND ANIMAL TEETH**

Cemetery and Mount Vernon, the most popular historic home in America.

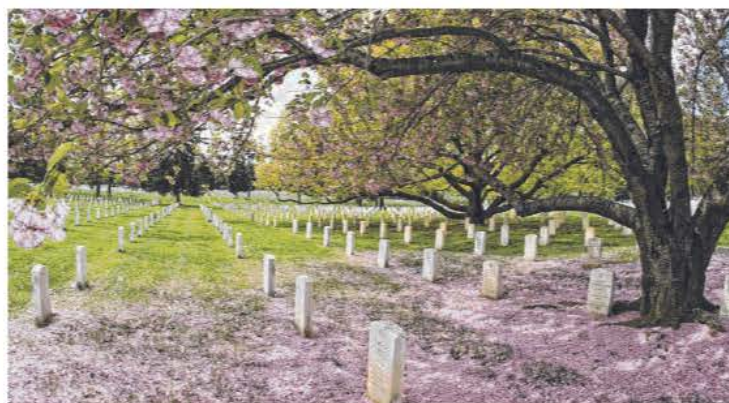
With five nights in one hotel – the well-located Washington Marriott Georgetown – the pace is relaxed, a plus for those of us who have travelled far. We get around in a luxury motorcoach. Most of my fellow participants (42 in total, mostly American couples) say this is their first time to visit the US capital. Even for those of us who have already been to DC, the itinerary promises new discoveries and a deeper understanding of the US story. On my own, I mightn't have made the effort to visit the magnificent National Cathedral or Library of Congress where the historic Gutenberg Bible is displayed. A tour of Ford's Theatre, where Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, might have stayed on my "one day" list. I'm glad I had the chance to do all three.

Americans, in general, are deeply patriotic – a trait that was on display as we traipsed around memorials honouring WWII veterans and the civil rights activism of Dr Martin Luther King. On the day we visit Arlington National Cemetery, several of the tour participants proudly wear service medals and caps identifying themselves as Vietnam War



Visit the iconic Lincoln Memorial that honours the 16th president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln.

Arlington is the final resting place for more than 400,000 active duty service members, veterans and their families.



## GETTING THERE

Hawaiian Airlines flies from major cities in Australia to Washington, DC via Honolulu.  
[hawaiianairlines.com.au](http://hawaiianairlines.com.au)

## TOURING THERE

Collette's five-night Spotlight on Washington, DC tour covers the best of the US capital. To coincide with cherry blossom season, visit in late March or early April.  
[gocollette.com](http://gocollette.com)

## MORE

[washington.org](http://washington.org)

ESCAPE ROUTE

year he died) has been painstakingly restored. Sprawling grounds include a pioneer farm, plus a blacksmith shop and historic distillery. From a wharf at the river, visitors can join 45-minute narrated cruises of Potomac River. At the tomb of Washington and his wife, Martha, the first First Lady, a daily wreath-laying ceremony is well attended.

Mount Vernon's museum and education centre are most interesting. Washington's dentures, surely the most famous in American history, are on display, fascinatingly made from ivory and animal teeth. A 4D theatre shakes and rumbles as scenes from the Revolutionary War are projected. A thoughtful special exhibition on Washington's changing attitudes to slavery attempts to present the facts in a way that respects the stories of those who are no longer here to speak for themselves. It raises more questions than it answers, in a way that feels necessary and enlightening.

Over dinner that night at historic Gadsby's Tavern, where Washington himself is said to have dined, we eat peanut soup and toast the end of a trip well worth taking.

The writer was a guest of Collette