

Washington DC: Food scene

Words by Kate Parham

**THERE'S BEEN AN AWAKENING IN WASHINGTON DC,
AND IT WILL SEND YOUR TASTE BUDS INTO OVERDRIVE.**

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WALKABOUT: 14TH STREET

One of DC's most buzzed-about neighbourhoods is the 14th Street corridor, where a new restaurant opens nearly every month. Simply walk up the street and you'll find everything from tortillas to oysters and cosy wine bars.

At **Estadio**, authentic Spanish tapas and homemade gin and tonics anchor the restaurant, while **Pearl Dive Oyster Palace** specialises in traditional Southern fare with a twist (think oysters on the half-shell with Yuzu-Mirin and crawfish etouffée). Don't miss the spicy mala dishes at unassuming **Great Wall Szechuan House**.

WITH A HOST OF ETHNIC RESTAURANTS, GLOBAL EATERIES, AND CHEFS FROM AROUND THE WORLD, the USA's capital city sits poised for a foodie adventure you won't soon forget.

This month marks the 57th Presidential Inauguration in the United States. If the 2008 Inauguration is any indication – nearly two million people travelled to Washington DC to witness the first African American president take office – the USA's capital city better be ready. To host, to tour, and, most importantly, to feed. Considering how far the District has come in the last decade, when only a handful of restaurants offered anything beyond steak and potatoes, it's clear the city has become an international dining destination.

For starters, there are over 160 foreign embassies in town; not to mention 13.5% of DC's population is foreign-born.

Since everyone wants a taste of home, they bring their food with them. Looking for a Peruvian restaurant serving up rotisserie-style chicken? Try **El Pollo Rico** in Arlington, VA. How about ceviche? Look no further than **La Limeña** in Rockville, MD. Choosing where to eat has never been more exciting, and while some cities may have larger ethnic neighbourhoods, Washington DC has variety, and, most notably, specificity. Cuisines within a cuisine. Sure, you can get Asian food at **Asia Nine**, but why stop there? Snag a table at **Toki Underground** for steaming bowls of spicy ramen, or **Sushi Taro** for incredibly fresh sushi, or **Little Serow** for family-style North-eastern Thai that will leave your eyes watering from the spice.

That's not to say there aren't any ethnic pockets. Interestingly, most of the ethnic communities exist in the suburbs of DC (see **R&R Taqueria** in Elkrigde, MD for bold, authentic tacos), but if you head over to 9th and U Street, you'll find yourself in Little Ethiopia. In fact, DC is home to more Ethiopian restaurants than any city outside of Africa. Grab the *injera*, a slightly spongy flatbread, and scoop up some *wat*, a delicious meat and legume stew seasoned with chillies and spices. Try local favourite **Dukem**, where meals are offered at three levels: mild, medium, and hot, or **Ethiopic**, where the vegetarian sampler platter reigns supreme. Or check out **Habesha Market**, open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The cafeteria style and affordable prices will put you at ease, but the espresso and flavours will blow your mind.

While the smaller, family-owned spots are certainly authentic and delicious, there are also a host of upscale, modern eateries specialising in ethnic cuisine that should not be overlooked. Take **The Source**, for example. Led by executive chef Scott Drewno, this modern Chinese restaurant serves up some of the best dumplings in town. "When we opened five years ago, everyone wanted bread; it was what they expected from a fine dining restaurant," says Drewno. "But we gave them green beans [marinated in soy and chillies]. It was challenging at first, but eventually people started to venture out and try new things." Now **The Source** is perhaps best known for their *ahi* tuna cones and lacquered duck. When Drewno's not cooking, you can often find him at **Ming's** in the city's small Chinatown. **New Big Wong**, also in Chinatown, is another local favourite.



BY THE NUMBERS

2,035
The number of restaurants in DC in 2010, up from 1,400 in 2001.

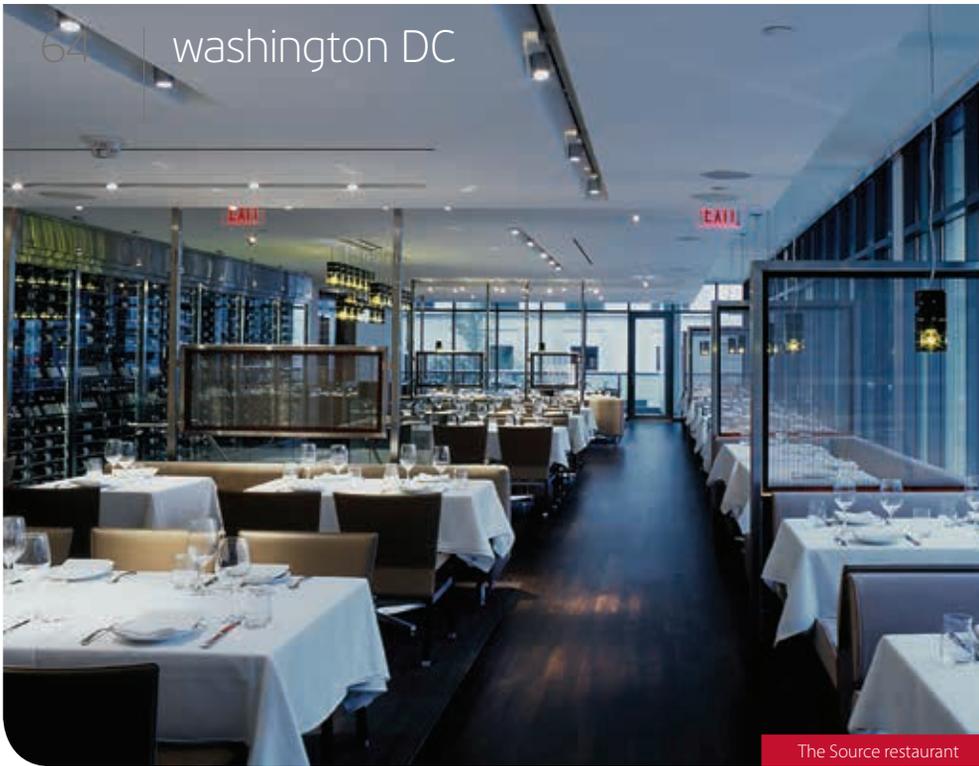
49,200
The number of people employed in DC restaurants in 2012.

US\$2.6 billion
The projected revenue for DC restaurants in 2012.

84,000
The number of foreign-born people living in DC as of 2011, up from 58,887 in 1990.

→ While DC is the heart of the Washington Metropolitan Area, the region also includes parts of Maryland and Virginia.

→ Chefs such as Alain Ducasse, Eric Ripert, and Michael Mina, are flocking to the District to open restaurants.



The Source restaurant



Executive Chef Scott Drewno

Chef Anthony Chittum also recognised DC's growing diversity. It's why he's opening a new ethnic restaurant: **Iron Gate** will specialise in rustic Italian and Greek cuisine, a genre that while prevalent in DC is rarely done well, according to Chittum. Three Italian places that do it right: **Fiola** (don't miss the *burrata* with San Marzano tomatoes and basil pesto), **Bibiana**, and **Palena** (Chittum's favourite). For Greek, try **Greek Deli & Catering** in Dupont Circle (the *avgolemono*

soup is a standout) or **Zaytinya** for a modern interpretation.

In his time off, Chittum often finds himself at **Rasika**, a contemporary Indian restaurant known for its *tawa* (griddle), *sigri* (barbecue), and Tandoori dishes. *Palak chaat*, a decadent combination of crispy spinach, yogurt, tamarind, and dates, is easily the crowd favourite. If you're unfamiliar with any of the dishes, let your server guide the experience. "We have knowledgeable staff, so asking lots of questions about unfamiliar spices or ingredients is wise," suggests Ashok Bajaj, the owner. "Let the waitstaff know if you have food allergies, or don't enjoy bright or hot spices."

Whichever restaurant you choose, one thing's certain: you'll be transported to an entirely different place, where ingredients and spices may vary, but a good meal is inevitable. What other city can promise that? 🍴



MUSEUM DINING

Another fun way to experience the various ethnic cuisines in DC is to museum hop: At the **National Gallery's Garden Café** the food changes with the exhibits, or you can have Russian tea at **Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens**. Don't miss **Mitsitam Café** at the **National Museum of the American Indian**, where five food stations depict regional specialities, like traditional fry bread and corn totopos.



Chef Anthony Chittum



Dim sum

Washington DC, USA → Distance from Doha: 11,120 km → Flight time: 14 hours, 35 minutes → Frequency: Daily flights