

On an unseasonably cloudless autumn evening, as my flight makes its final approach to Ronald Reagan Airport, a blur of the American capital's biggest tourist attractions flash past my window.

The Washington Monument thrusting into the night sky like a giant's toothpick casually discarded on the National Mall; the pearly dome of the Jefferson Memorial, with its mirror image shimmering on the millpond waters of the Potomac's Tidal Basin; and within what feels like touching distance mere moments before we land, the squat, angled fortress of the Pentagon.

For those travellers not summoned here by the business of American government, these attractions (and the numerous others like them) are the primary reason to visit Washington DC. And indeed, the pomp and pageantry and endless gleaming colonnades of white Georgia marble are reason enough. The soothing idealism of the founding fathers and those who followed in their footsteps feels irresistibly close here – a reminder of what America could be, even when reality doesn't align.

Yet for all this star-spangled splendour, Washington rarely tops holiday wish lists. It's all too easily dismissed as a place only student field-trippers and armchair politicians will enjoy. In more recent times, a so-called Trump slump has further threatened travel as the new administration's extreme policies turn off potential holidaymakers.

But for those unmoved by its shrines to American greatness, its collection of free-to-enter Smithsonian museums, its architecturally erratic Downtown (a peculiar mix of drab office blocks and grandiose attempts at Georgian neoclassicism) and, not least, its current ruling class, an alternative DC is offering fresh incentives to visit. On the northern edge of the NoMa District, just off the major traffic artery of New York Avenue, a former stockyard and industrial zone is nearing the end of a metamorphosis. A foil to the polish of Washington's centre, the Union Market District is home to an edgier, achingly cool combo of converted warehouses, trendy boutiques, dive bars and street-food diners, where legacy businesses such as A Litter's, the oldest Italian deli in the city, neighbour creative agencies and new-build apartments.

Driving the renaissance of this buzzy

TRAVEL UNITED STATES

# Defying the Trump slump

An alternative side to Washington DC is fighting back against a dip in international travel to the US, writes Maxim Boon.



enclave is a community of entrepreneurs, restaurateurs and artists who you might reasonably assume would have an easier time making their mark on less dour destinations like San Francisco, New York or Los Angeles. However, as retro fashion store owners Libby Rasmussen and Rajni Rao of Vintage, Vintage, Vintage point out, Washington's starchy reputation is an increasingly far cry from the truth. "While the idea of a typical DC person is someone dressed in a Capitol Hill suit, there's actually a really rich style scene here,"

Rasmussen says as we stand amid rail upon rail of colourful, unique garments from yesterday.

"You get a taste of that when you walk into the store on a Saturday or Sunday," Rao adds. "You're going to see the most fashionable people you can imagine. It's really turning expectations of what Washington wears on its head."

Bucking DC norms has also shaped the area's dining boom. Once a wholesale warehouse, which fell into disrepair during the 1990s, the District's namesake

Union Market was renovated into a sprawling food court in 2012, with its exterior walls repurposed as the canvas for various street art creations. While Downtown or the historic quarter of Georgetown rely on soulless chains or stuffy, wood-paneled dining rooms where politicians and diplomats can drop fabulous sums on a meal, Union Market serves up wordy and innovative fast-casual cuisine, minus the punishing price tag.

Even at 10.45 on a Monday morning, this feasting ground is a hive of activity. Replacing the sartorial status quo of Washington's elite is a more comfortably dressed, hipster-coded crowd, lining up for their mid-morning caffeine fix or late breakfast.

Washingtonians are typically Left-leaning – more than three quarters of the population identify as Democrat – and here, both businesses and their customers proudly wear this political heart on their sleeves. A case in point is Union Market stalwart Immigrant Food, which launched in 2019 in response to the first Trump presidency's anti-immigrant agenda. Not only does its menu of international-fusion fare reflect the multiculturalism that thrives in every corner of the US, but its staff and leadership are also all first- and second-generation Americans, underscoring that this is a country built by hardworking folk from elsewhere.

With Donald Trump back in the Oval Office, Immigrant Foods co-founder and chief operating officer, Tea Ivanovic, believes there's never been a more important moment for a diner like hers to exist in Washington.

"Our restaurant serves as a counterpoint to divisive rhetoric. The reality is that immigrants have been, are, and will continue to be a driving force behind the success of America," she says. "It's crucial for businesses like ours to remind people that America is a nation of immigrants and that those stories are integral to what makes this country great. Especially now."

A short stroll from Union Market I find La Cosecha, a Latin-American-themed retail and dining mall. With the sun (more or less) over the yardarm, it seems churlish to refuse a shot of tequila at Andra "AJ" Johnson's Latino cocktail bar. Serenata. Instead of the typical shot glass, however,

Main: Buses performing for visitors at Union Market's bustling dining precinct. PHOTO: JOY ASCICO



TRAVEL SOUTH AFRICA

# Wild life

Tom McIlroy finds himself unprepared for the spectacle of an African safari.

The pre-dawn darkness is still heavy as the porter knocks on my door. Sliding open a butler's hatch, he deposits a tray with aromatic coffee and homemade biscuits, calling out gently to make sure I'm awake.

It's just after 5am at the Ngala Tented Camp, on the edge of the Kruger National Park, South Africa's largest wildlife sanctuary. Only occasional bird calls and a gentle breeze break the silence. From the understated luxury of one of the camp's nine tented suites, I emerge into the cool morning air to hop into a waiting four-wheel drive.

Adventure beckons, and the sun isn't even up.

So begins the daily ritual at Ngala, set on the banks of the sandy Timbavati River. Named for the local Shangaan language word for lion, the camp sits on private concession of 14,700 hectares, managed by luxury travel operator &Beyond.

Soon expert guide Marcus Khoza and wildlife tracker Ernest Godi are directing our small group across a patchwork of tracks and open veld, the incredible landscape emerging as we race first light.

Minutes into the drive they fall silent. Just a few metres ahead, a lion walks across our path, pausing briefly to inspect us. After the engine is cut and we take photos, the lion passes within touching distance and disappears into the bush on the banks of the dry river bed.

Your correspondent has been lucky to travel to some remarkable places around the world. But here, almost every time I climb aboard our open-top vehicle, I'm left humbled by what we see. Nothing has prepared me for the spectacle of safari. The scale of the landscape and the wildlife is as immense as the place is beautiful. Ngala's team tracks animals including Africa's big five – lions, rhinoceros, elephants, leopards and buffalo – across the park, taking visitors as close up in the wild as it's possible to be.

In the next few days, we'll see a herd of around 30 elephants, including a calf younger than two weeks old, ambling through the bush eating grass and the leaves of trees a stone's throw from our vehicle.

We'll watch a pride of lions, including one of only four known white cubs in

the wild, the product of a rare genetic mutation, relaxing in the morning cool. The pride roams between Ngala and the wider Kruger National Park.

With no fences to stop their movement, the landscape is teeming with wildlife, and we see giraffes, impala, hyenas, zebra and wildebeest on every drive. In the trees above, there are some 400 species of birds.

Ngala Tented Camp, first opened in 1999, was closed for refurbishing after flooding last year. It began welcoming guests again in October following six months of work. To mitigate against future flooding, some of its infrastructure has been rebuilt higher above the ground, and the substructure for the gym and spa areas, which both overlook the river, have been reinforced.

The renovation brief, says Debra Fox of Johannesburg-based architectural designer Fox Browne Creative, was for a sensitive rethink of the original camp – maintaining its aesthetic and identity and its links to nearby Ngala Safari Lodge and Treehouse. "We sought to focus the redesign on the 'under canvas' language for which the lodge has become so well known," she says.

The tent interiors have been updated, and new shaded salas and stone outdoor bathrooms added. "We wanted the new elements to uplift and enhance the guest experience without taking away from the simplicity and authenticity of the original concept," says Kevin Pretorius, managing director of &Beyond's South African lodges.

Dotted around the camp and surrounded by trees and shrubs, each suite provides complete seclusion. Inside, contemporary and traditional African elements include Shangaan embroidery and handmade pottery, with earthy tones chosen to match the river bed and

environment. Some afternoons it is hard to leave this cool, comfortable oasis – except that there is more wildlife to encounter.

Our group goes on two game drives a day, one in the morning punctuated with a coffee stop and one, with sundowner cocktails, that lasts into the early evening. Guide Marcus Khoza, who's been with &Beyond for 18 years, tips a splash of spirits to the ground. "For our ancestors," he explains, before we sip our gin and tonics, overlooking a watering hole full of bathing hippos.

Meals back at the camp feature a rolling menu of locally sourced produce. Afternoons are for relaxing. At the heart of the camp are a large pool and deck, a stylish gym and spa treatment room, generous bar and dining areas, spaces for relaxation and



AJ fires a stream of the agave firewater directly into my waiting mouth with a miniature retro gasoline pump, counting out the seconds, "one, two, three, four, five".

Serenata is one of dozens of rainbow-allied venues across Washington preparing to welcome international revellers next month for World Pride 2025 – the roaming LGBTQ festival last held in Sydney in 2023. Although the Trump administration's shocking assaults on LGBTQ protections and its escalating hostility towards certain travellers arriving in the US will no doubt be giving pause to those who intend making the trip.

This caution is not without reason. The advice from Equality Australia, which updated its United States travel warning on



Top: Street art on the walls of the Union Market. Above: Browsing at Vintage, Vintage. PHOTO: TONY POWELL

April 14, is that visiting carries serious risks that should be considered before planning any travel. The warning particularly applies to travellers who hold a passport with a gender X marker; have identity documents with gender markers different to those assigned at birth; or have a track record of LGBTQ activism or other political activity.

"People are facing real threats of visa refusal, detention or deportation," says Equality Australia legal director Heather Corkhill. "Entry to the US will come down to the border protection officer on the day, who is operating in an explicitly anti-trans political environment. LGBTQI people are grappling with a great deal of uncertainty and fear."

Despite the risks, AJ insists Washington remains the right place for World Pride.

"Right now, being proud of who you are is an act of radical resistance in and of itself," they say. "Pride was born out of government-imposed hostility on a small street in New York City [police brutality that led to the Stonewall riots of 1969 in Greenwich Village]. This year, the entire world has an opportunity to stand united in the capital city of the United States and be proud of who they are."

This defiant spirit – found throughout the Union Market District – seems connected to a continuum of social justice that DC has always been a platform for; from abolition and desegregation to gay liberation and a woman's right to choose. It's not merely an example of flourishing urban renewal but a model for the kind of diverse, dynamic, non-homogenised communities that are actively under threat in America today. And this is just the most timely example. Look beyond this city's monuments and museums, and you'll find many neighbourhoods like Union Market have existed here.

"DC was formerly known as 'Chocolate City' – it's a very black city, a very queer city, a very inclusive city," adds Rasmussen. "Washington's identity gets stamped by one small subgroup of people: the Capitol Hill types that are here for a term or two working for the president or whoever in the administration. But they're not the real DC. What's happening here [in Union Market], that's the real DC." **L63**

The writer was a guest of Destination DC.

safari boutique stocked with luxury goods.

One afternoon we follow a leopard near the camp. Perched at the front of the vehicle, Ernest Godi uses a mix of hand signals and instructions to the guide and driver, watching the movement of the birds above and the tracks on the ground below to work out where it might be.

A few times, we leave him behind to explore on foot, armed only with a radio – striking fear in the hearts of us guests. "I am OK with the lions," he laughs. "But the leopards..." He taps his chest like a beating heart. "The leopard looks into your soul."

A short drive from Ngala, we visit &Beyond's community partner Wild Impact, which runs the Hardworkers' Crèche for local children, and meet small-

business entrepreneurs who are part of the Hustle Economy program. Along with the Bohlabela Craft Centre, these organisations benefit from profits made at Ngala and reinvested in development. As with its mission to care for the environment, Ngala is helping to build a sustainable local community.

We're welcomed back to the camp with cocktails and another incredible dinner. Elephants walk along the riverbed nearby as we settle in for an evening of world-class hospitality in this small slice of paradise.

Tomorrow, before the sunrise, adventure beckons again. **L64**

The writer was a guest of &Beyond.



Top left: The poolside area at the camp, where guests can unwind. Left: One of the refurbished suites at Ngala. Above: A close encounter with a pride of lions. PHOTO: JOSH VAN DER PLOEG



DESIGN FURNITURE

# Sitting pretty

Clement Meadmore's furniture is back in business, writes Stephen Todd.

**Quentin Meadmore remembers** visiting his father in New York in the early 1970s when he was 15. At the time, Clement Meadmore was one of the most acclaimed sculptors in what was then a hotbed of modern art.

"Because he was 'Clement Meadmore the celebrated artist,' I was welcome everywhere," says Quentin, who recalls being taken to jazz bars, gallery openings and discotheques, and having encounters with Andy Warhol and Barnett Newman, the American abstract expressionist who was one of his dad's heroes and greatest influences.

Staying in his dad's loft-style apartment and studio in Manhattan, the young Quentin would lounge about on his father's signature leather Sling chairs, which were designed in 1963 and ended up being the last piece of furniture he created.

"I loved sitting back and blasting my Led Zeppelin records when he was out," says Quentin, who was born and raised in Melbourne, where his father was from. "I couldn't do that while he was home since with Dad it was always jazz and more jazz. He was obsessed."

While an original Sling chair – formally known as Model 248 – is a rarity today (they pop up on Istdibs occasionally) the style has recently been put back into production by Melbourne manufacturer Grazia & Co under the watchful eye of Quentin and his daughter Jade.

Grazia & Co has also relaunched Meadmore's Corded seating series, first released between 1951 and 1953 and

including a dining chair, armchair, high stool and reclining chair. Also revived are a family of Calyx lamps, the lights that earned Clement a Good Design Award the year they were first released, in 1954.

All the distinctly mid-20th century work has been "reimagined" for today. The metal chassis of the furniture is now executed in polished stainless steel instead of toxic chrome, and is easy to buff to a mirror finish. The Cord chairs are now made with marine-grade rope, which is durable enough for outdoor use and functionally chic for inside. The gangly lamps – standard or desktop models – have been subtly adapted to meet Australian safety standards and to take advantage of low-voltage LEDs. These are now available in the original zesty lemon colour as well as a range of Australian landscape-inspired hues.

"When we saw Grazia & Co's work, we were blown away by the quality. We had also been impressed by how authentic their Featherston designs were, which they relaunched a few years earlier," says Jade.

"Everything is made as locally as possible – if not in Melbourne, at least in Australia. We trusted that they would do the work justice in the same way that Clem would have wanted if it were him doing it himself."

Clement Meadmore was born in the Victorian capital in 1929, the year of the devastating Wall Street crash that coalesced into the Great Depression. (Austerity – marked by lean lines and pared-back materials – would define the Meadmore aesthetic.) His father ran a hobby shop, and it was here that young Clement became "interested in constructing things", as he later put it. He enrolled in aeronautical studies then industrial design at Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT University) which also offered a sculpture unit. After graduating in 1949, he designed furniture, married artist Enid Cameron (his first wife, Quentin's mother) and began dabbling in sculpture.

Throughout the '50s and into the early '60s, Clement continued to develop his craft, which Quentin says "speaks to a particular mid-century aesthetic but resonates as authentic Australian design."

But a slew of misattributed or knock-off Meadmore designs had begun to flood the market. "Other companies in Melbourne had begun to make his furniture for him, but they also took it upon themselves to make furniture in the style of Clement Meadmore. That resulted in disillusionment and contributed to his decision to leave Australia for good."

Dean Keep, a lecturer at Swinburne University and co-curator of the 2018 NGV exhibition *Clement Meadmore: The Art of Mid-century Design* calls these imitation pieces "Mead-less" as a distinction to real "Mead-more" work.

Clement moved permanently to New York in 1963, and his monumental abstract sculptures could soon be found in public spaces around the world.

Jade remembers her grandmother Enid taking her to picnic at the base of her grandfather's famous Dervish sculpture, which holds pride of place on the Southbank promenade, just behind the Melbourne Arts Centre.

"She wanted to make sure that I knew who Clem was and what he was about," says Jade. "So, I always had a sense of him. While the sculptures are undeniably breathtaking, the real connection came through his furniture." **L65**



Top: Clement Meadmore's corded lounge, now back in production by Grazia & Co. Right: Quentin Meadmore and his daughter Jade. PHOTO: DANNY SMITH