

Family Fun In DC

Traveling to the annual meeting in America's capital can be an educational, cultural experience, and a veritable playground for your spouse and children. June abounds with things to do in Washington DC, and it's a great time to take in the best of this sophisticated, vibrant city where history seems to come alive—from monuments and inspiring memorials to museums. Whether by foot, car, Metrobus, Metrorail, or Tourmobile, this city is easy to navigate.

However, with a population of approximately 572,000 in Washington DC proper, and so much to see and do, this amazing city can seem very intimidating. Try to make the city your own by devising a tour that touches your children's lives and takes in a bit of all that DC has to offer. Here's a companion guide for your journey:

General Information

This city is graced by historical sites and magnificent views; even the streets are aglow at night. Washington DC seems to have been designed for walking, so walking shoes and comfortable clothing are a must when exploring. Visit www.washington.org or call (800) 422-8644 for basic tourism information. The indoor spaces are air-conditioned, so bring a light jacket. Travel light as well, since all belongings are hand-checked and inspected at every entrance.

On-street parking is extremely limited; check posted hours on street signs. For more information, call the DC Department of Public Works, (202) 727-5000.

Unless you are staying at a hotel situated in the city, Metrorail, Metrobus, or the Tourmobile are the safest, cleanest, and most efficient ways to get around. For an interactive trip planner for the bus and rail, use The Ride Guide at www.wmata.com, or call (202) 962-1576. For \$5, visitors can buy a one-day travel pass good after 9:30 a.m. on weekdays and all day on weekends. Call (202) 637-7000 or visit www.metroopensdoors.com.

Information Please

Two blocks from the White House and two blocks from the National Mall, in the Ronald Reagan International Trade Building, is the Washington DC Visitors Information Center. Here you will find an all-in-one multimedia shop for fast information about Washington. You will find an interactive kiosk, maps, tickets, and sightseeing, hotel, and restaurant information. From this center, children can e-mail a postcard back to your home, and watch "Destination DC," which explores our nation's capital.

The Smithsonian Institution National Mall and Museums

Between Constitution & Independence Aves. SW
(202) 485-9880
www.nps.gov/nama

There are many options here to add to your adventure, with 14 Smithsonian Museums and the National Zoological Park to choose from and so much to see. A cultural powerhouse, the National Mall offers a park-like setting for our nation's most famous buildings. The US Capitol building, perched on Capitol Hill, rises above this area. Most of the museums are open daily, 10 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Also, the museum shops are a great place to learn as you search for souvenirs. The museums will have something to interest every child.



DIGITAL STOCK

Smithsonian Information Center (The Castle)

1000 Jefferson Dr. SW
(202) 357-2700
www.si.edu/visit

We suggest starting your vacation at the Smithsonian Castle, the first of the Institution's many museums, open from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The four-acre Enid A. Haupt Garden's seasonal carpet of flowers decorates the castle, a Romanesque-style structure made of ruddy sandstone. Inside it contains information and visual aids on programs, exhibits, and special events. A child-friendly touch-screen program with information about the Smithsonian is in the castle, along with free brochures, two electronic wall maps, and multilingual information specialists to help you customize your visit. Check out two orientation theatres, a scale model of Washington's monumental core, and even the crypt of founder James Smithson. It helps to know which exhibits are geared to children, like the little South Tower Room.



National Air and Space Museum
7th St. & Independence Ave. SW
(202) 357-2700

www.nasm.si.edu

The National Air and Space Museum has 23 numbered galleries which tell the story and history of flight, as well as the science and technology of aviation and space. In Gallery 109, "How Things Fly," we found more than 50 interactive exhibits that taught the principles of flight: lift, drag, weight, and thrust. Also, there are on-floor skill-building activities and engaging demonstrations.

A must-see is the Wright Brothers exhibit, which celebrated (in October 2003) the 100th anniversary of the first flight at Kitty Hawk, NC. Children can find out how these two bicycle mechanics with little scientific training were able to invent the first airplanes, look at three of the Wright Brothers' airplanes, and see for themselves how alike or different the planes were, especially compared to a marvel like Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis, also on display.

Tours are offered from the Welcome

Centers by knowledgeable guides, called docents. They usually last one to two hours and provide a good overview of the collection.

With an admission charge, you can watch two cosmic shows at the Albert Einstein Planetarium: "Infinity Express: A 20-Minute Tour of the Universe" and "The Stars Tonight." Also for an extra fee, you can experience the Lockheed Martin IMAX Theatre, which shows several large-format films each day.

Two permanent exhibits worth walking through are Explore the Universe, and Voyage—A Journey Through Our Solar System, which is outdoors (pick up a free copy of the Outdoor Exploration Guide, or visit www.voyageonline.org).

In addition, if you have time, the newest facility at the new location, the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, offers more hands-on activities, exciting tours, and artifacts such as the SR-71 Blackbird and the Space Shuttle Enterprise, as well as more than 200 aircraft and 135 spacecraft. The Center is located in Northern Virginia (Chantilly) near Dulles International Airport, approximately 14 miles from the National Mall.

National Museum of American History,
Behring Center
14th St. & Constitution Ave. NW
(202) 357-2700

www.americanhistory.si.edu

The National Museum of American History's Behring Center has something for everyone, including the Hands-on Science Center and the Hands-on History

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One if by Land...

If it's within your budget, your kids will definitely enjoy seeing the city aboard the DC Ducks. DC Ducks offer both land and water tours on a boat with wheels! The DC DUCKS boat with wheels leaves from Union Station daily from 10 a.m. Visit www.dcducks.com, or call (202) 966-DUCK (3825). Also you can purchase tickets on board for the Tourmobile Sightseeing Services, which stops on the Mall, (202) 554-7450, or buy unlimited reboarding passes. However, your family might prefer a walking tour.

Room. Both of these exhibits are closed on Mondays. Children 5 to 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

The inquiry-driven, Hands-on Science Center in the Science in American Life exhibition is a favorite because of its engaging nature. Within the center your children can perform lab activities: test food additives, examine DNA and unravel genes, investigate carbon dioxide, test for water pollution, and explore the use of lasers.

Children can also participate in Exploration Stations, an area that allows children to work on activities that require minimal assistance. Station topics include forensics, mirror molecules, radioactivity, batteries, bulbs, wires, early intelligence tests, and exploring the



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American frontier circa 1850. There are also interactive exhibits involving water distillation, global temperature change, and lasers that can transmit their voices and measure distances.

Free tickets are available, but reservations are required and can be picked up on a first-come, first-served basis at the door. Passes are required for lab experiments, so check for times and sign in early to guarantee a place for your chil-

dren. The hands-on science center is tailor made for children eager for new experiences.

Don't skip the third floor, which features Dorothy's ruby slippers from the Land of Oz, and a vast dollhouse. Also, The Television Stars exhibit hosts a puppet you might remember named Howdy Doody and another that your children will know, Oscar the Grouch.

National Museum of Natural History
10th St. and Constitution Ave. NW
(202) 357-2700
www.mnh.si.edu

In the rotunda of this grand, domed building, children will delight in seeing the world's largest African bush elephant, and exploring and experiencing our earth's wonders and our origins as mammals. It also houses the Insect Zoo, dinosaur fossils, and the 45.5-carat Hope Diamond. Children can see them all up close. The Insect Zoo is a must-see living exhibit, with live micro-

phoned insects. There are more than 125 million specimens, so it's a good idea to plan ahead to see these popular exhibits. The Dinosaur Hall has a special area where children see life as it was in the ancient seas. Located near the north staircase is a children's favorite: a preserved giant squid. Also check out the Hall of Minerals (Geology, Gems, and Minerals exhibit) on the second floor. The information kiosk on the ground floor posts current information, new program presentations, and temporary exhibit news and coming events.

National Zoological Park
3001 Connecticut Ave. NW
(202) 673-4717
www.nationalzoo.si.edu

Here children will find exotic animals, including tigers and a pair of giant pandas. Your children may want to visit the recreated microcosm of the world's largest rain forest in Amazonia. Sponge-Bob fans: the invertebrates exhibit includes the Japanese Giant Spider Crabs. They will see and learn about many endangered species like orangs, gorillas, and golden-maned tamarins. Children can ask zoo specialists about the Zoo's important endangered species breeding program. Although admission is free, there are fees for parking and for purchasing maps. You can schedule a guided tour by appointment.

The National Gallery of Art
6th Street & Constitution Ave. NW (between 3rd and 9th St. NW)
(202) 737-4215
www.nga.gov/kids

The National Gallery of Art looks appealing with its luminous soft pink marble exterior and rounded dome. This is a child-friendly place with film programs, Stories in Art programs, family workshops for both children and grown-ups, free self-guided postcard tours, and a beautiful Sculpture Garden. One trip may turn your children into art lovers. Those interested in registering for workshops should phone (202) 789-3030. For information on programs that do not require registration, phone (202) 842-6880. Visit the children's shop on the concourse level. Other Smithsonian Art Galleries also line the south side of the Mall.

It's a Vacation...and a Field Trip

Contact your child's school and inquire about the Core Curriculum Content Standards as well as the special projects and events planned for the following school year before visiting the museums in Washington DC. Plan on visiting those sections of the museums that convey information related to these curricular goals; this will integrate and enrich your child's experience and help make learning engaging and memorable. This is a great avenue for parental involvement, and is essential to your child's continued progress and development. This is also how parents can support the affective, experiential, and cognitive goals of the exhibits children will visit.

You can also reinforce and build your child's knowledge and skills acquired during the school year. Our daughter Carey's second grade class studied the presidency, so we decided to visit the National Museum of History, where they have a permanent exhibit, "The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden." We also snapped a picture of her standing behind the presidential podium while she delivered her presidential speech. Our daughter Maegan (age 10) was soon to study the Wright Brothers, so we were fortunate to be at the grand gallery opening of this exhibit at the Air and Space Museum. Maegan enjoyed the living history presentations and performances, discovery stations, and lots of activities.

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There are a host of other great museums beyond the Smithsonian Institution. Just west of Capitol Hill is the phenomenally popular **International Spy Museum** (admission fee) in the Penn Quarter district, located in the northwest quadrant of Washington DC. There, children will find cunning craftiness, secrets, and espionage. Also dine at the Spy Museum's chic restaurant, Zola.

The National Archives (700 Pennsylvania Ave. NW) is the home of the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence. It offers a state-of-the-art exhibit where these historic documents are spotlighted.

The City Museum of Washington DC is in the heart of downtown, naturally, at 801 K St. NW (www.citymuseumdc.org). Visitors can learn about the fascinating history of the city, including its many eclectic neighborhoods.

Additionally, the **Capital Children's Museum**, located at 800 3rd St. NE, is ideal for children 2–12. There is an admission fee, with children 2 years and younger free. This museum is unique in that it offers more than 30,000 sq. ft. of hands-on interactive exhibits focusing on culture, the arts, and sciences. Children can climb an ancient Mayan pyramid, do science experiments in a real chemistry lab, drive a real Metrobus, explore the art of animation, discover the origins of hot chocolate, slide down a fire pole, surround themselves with a bubble, explore a cave, and more.

The National Aquarium
14th St. & Constitution Ave. NW
(202) 482-2826

Across the street from the White House is the National Aquarium. This aquarium has over 1200 creatures from around the world that your children will love to visit up close such as rare sea turtles, alligators, and tropical crownfish. There are even shark feedings during the week.

The Monuments

This is a prime destination for children because they can touch base with American history. No matter where you walk within the

city, you can orient yourself via the monuments. Compared to any city in the nation, Washington DC offers the most historical structures per square foot. At night the famous monuments and memorials are illuminated. These structures lie between the White House and the Capitol within the north-south cross axis and the east-west cross axis. The Capitol, Washington Monument, and Lincoln Memorial are situated in the east-west axis, while the White House and Jefferson Memorial lie in the north-south axis.

Washington Monument
15th St. & Constitution Ave. NW
(800) 967-2283

The Washington Monument was completed in 1884 to honor President George Washington. From the top of this simple but majestic obelisk visitors can get a bird's eye view of DC. You'll see vast green spaces, all four bridges across the Potomac River, sweeping memorials, majestic neoclassical buildings, and grand boulevards. Don't worry, there's an elevator. This landmark was designed by Robert Mills to be the world's tallest masonry structure.

You may call in advance for tickets, or

A Hot, Cool Vacation

Climate is very important to keep in mind when planning your explorations. The weather and temperature can be big factors in what you see or do. Warm weather usually prevails in DC during June. The monthly temperatures can range from a high of 83° to a low of 56°. You should plan to visit the outdoor monuments during the coolest and driest days. In warmer or wetter weather you can tour the Capitol Building and the Smithsonian Museums.

take a chance and pick up tickets the day of on a first-come first-serve basis. Arrive early, because ticket lines begin forming at 7:00 a.m. for same-day sales.

Jefferson Memorial
South Bank of the Tidal Basin
(202) 426-6822

With its symmetrical lines, the Rotunda of the Jefferson Memorial glimmers above the waters of the Tidal Basin. The architect John Russell Pope was inspired by the domed Pantheon in Rome, and surrounded the 19-foot-high bronze statue of the scientist, philosopher, and president with excerpts from four of his influential writings.

Lincoln Memorial
West Potomac Park at the Foot of 23rd St. NW
(202) 426-6895

A classical Greek temple influenced the Lincoln Memorial's design, a Neo-Classical revival structure. Thirty-six Doric columns ring the building, one for each state of Abraham Lincoln's time. The 20-foot-high statue of our 16th President, seated in his chamber and facing the Capitol, ponders over the Reflecting Pool of the National Mall. Children can stand on the same massive steps that Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his speech "I have a dream" in 1963. From this elevated columned promenade around the memorial, children can view all the way down and across the mall.

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