

FAMILY ROUTE · WASHINGTON, DC

WASHINGTON MADE EASY FOR FAMILIES

The ultimate Washington, DC travel guide for families: a simple, hands-on route with children.

Pick a neighborhood cluster, match sights to your kids' ages and the weather, and leave room for a stroller nap and a playground break.

Monuments · free museums and open lawns · rainy-day plans

AT A GLANCE

Your guide, in one glance

Check these family patterns first, so your Metro rides and monument visits fit your crew.



First-time visitors

Pick one headline monument or museum a day, then add a shaded lawn or playground stop.



Little ones under 6

Keep walks short, favor flat stroller-friendly paths, and choose museums with dedicated kids' zones.



Mixed-age crews

Pair one large Smithsonian museum with an easy Mall walk or a riverside stop everyone enjoys.



Rainy-day plan

Keep one indoor museum or play space near your route as a backup plan.

ORIENT YOURSELF

Washington, DC at a Glance

Plan around one neighborhood cluster a day, so little ones do not spend hours on the Metro.

ZONE	WHAT'S THERE
National Mall	Smithsonian museums, the Capitol-to-Lincoln walk, and wide lawns for running and picnics.
Capitol Hill	Free Capitol and Library of Congress visits, plus a shaded park for a snack break.
Georgetown & Waterfront	Riverside paths, the C&O Canal towpath, and easy ice cream stops for the family.
Penn Quarter & Chinatown	Indoor play options, casual lunch spots, and short walks between family attractions.
Dupont Circle & Adams Morgan	Quirky street murals, cafes, and a relaxed evening pace after a busy museum day.
Foggy Bottom & West End	Lincoln and Kennedy memorials nearby, plus quiet spots for strollers and naps.
Practical tips	Stick to one or two Metro lines, and build in time for snacks, naps, and rush-hour crowds.
Transit & airports	Use the Metro for longer hops, walk the Mall for short ones, and book a stroller-friendly ride from Reagan National.

Which major attraction fits your family?

DESTINATION	WHY IT WORKS
Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History	Dinosaur fossils and the Hope Diamond; a great pick for hot or rainy days.
National Air and Space Museum	Rockets, planes, and flight simulators; a big-kid favorite that is free to enter.
Smithsonian National Zoo	Giant pandas and lions on sprawling hills; go early while the air is cooler.
National Mall and Lincoln Memorial	Open lawns, the reflecting pool, and monuments on one easy stroller-friendly walk.
U.S. Capitol	Timed tours with a dome view; book the earliest slot for smaller legs.
Planet Word	Playful word rooms and interactive play that suit school-age kids.
Mount Vernon	George Washington's estate with gardens and a riverside walk for a half-day outing.

Before you book, check each attraction's official site for current hours, timed tickets, height limits, and closures.

THE BIG LIST

15 Must-Visit Family Attractions

1. **National Air and Space Museum** for rockets, planes, and a flight simulator.
2. **Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History** for fossils and the Hope Diamond.
3. **Planet Word** for interactive word rooms that older kids enjoy.
4. **Smithsonian National Postal Museum** for mail trains and a hands-on story of delivery.
5. International Spy Museum for gadgets and code puzzles for older kids.
6. National Archives for the Declaration of Independence and a kid-friendly discovery room.
7. Ford's Theatre for a short ranger talk on Lincoln's story.
8. National Building Museum for its Building Zone, a giant indoor play space.
9. Mount Vernon for George Washington's gardens and a riverside walk.
10. Washington Monument for an elevator ride and a skyline view; book timed tickets.
11. National WWII Memorial for fountains and a short, stroller-friendly loop.
12. National Museum of the American Indian for hands-on exhibits and family-friendly food.
13. Washington National Cathedral for gargoyles and a scavenger hunt for kids.
14. Old Post Office Pavilion for a clock-tower view over downtown.
15. Kennedy Center for roof terrace views and family matinee shows on weekends.

Before you go, check age guidelines, timed-entry slots, stroller rules, and closures on official sites.

LOWER-COST DAYS

15 Free & Budget-Friendly Places

Pair one paid highlight with a free stop, and the day stays relaxed and affordable.

01 **Smithsonian National Zoo** with free entry, pandas, and shaded hillside paths.

02 **United States Botanic Garden** for free indoor tropical rooms.

03 **U.S. Capitol** for free timed tours and dome views.

04 **Library of Congress** for free tours and a stunning reading room.

05 **National Mall and Lincoln Memorial** for open lawns and the reflecting pool.

06 **National Museum of American History** for free hands-on exhibits.

07 Georgetown Waterfront Park for splash areas and river views.

08 C&O Canal towpath for a flat, stroller-friendly walk.

09 Rock Creek Park for shaded trails and a nature center.

10 National Gallery of Art for free galleries and family art activities.

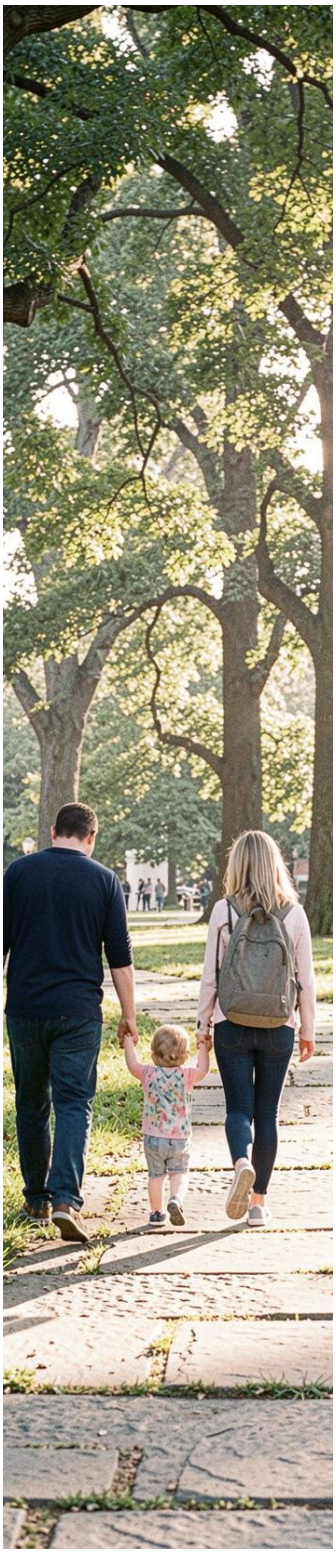
11 Hirshhorn Museum's sculpture garden for free outdoor art.

12 Old Town Alexandria waterfront for a free stroll and ice cream.

13 Theodore Roosevelt Island for free forest trails and boardwalks.

14 Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens for summer lily ponds.

15 Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial for a free, shaded garden walk.



A Washington local day: a slow lawn, a playground, and a snack break.

OFF THE BEATEN TRAIL

8 More Local Favorites & Hidden Gems

1. National Arboretum for free Capitol Columns and wide meadows.
2. Meridian Hill Park for cascading fountains and a terrace for play.
3. Glen Echo Park for a vintage carousel and kids' art workshops.
4. Anacostia Community Museum for free local history exhibits.
5. Old Stone House in Georgetown, the city's oldest standing building, with a small garden.
6. Dumbarton Oaks Park for terraced gardens and a nearby playground.
7. Eastern Market for weekend stalls and breakfast treats.
8. Great Falls Park in Virginia for rocky overlooks; older kids only on the trails.

Choose one neighborhood per day; a short walk and a snack stop keep little legs happy.

WEATHER BACKUP

Rainy-Day & Indoor Picks



For little scientists

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, **Planet Word**, and the hands-on labs at the National Building Museum.



For transit and show fans

Smithsonian National Postal Museum for mail trains, plus a family matinee at the Kennedy Center.



For grown-ups

Leave a cushion in the schedule: snacks, a dry set of clothes, and one indoor highlight instead of rushing between neighborhoods.



For the littlest ones

Indoor play zones, a neighborhood library storytime, and a quiet hotel-room nap break.



For a brief break in the rain

Union Station's food hall and Great Hall for a warm, covered snack stop.

Check each museum's official website for timed entry, indoor options, and current hours before you head out.

BEFORE YOU GO

DC Area Map, Pitfalls & Source Notes

Washington, DC Area Map

ZONE	HIGHLIGHTS
National Mall	Smithsonian museums, Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, National WWII Memorial
Capitol Hill	U.S. Capitol, Library of Congress, Union Station
Georgetown & Foggy Bottom	C&O Canal, Georgetown Waterfront Park, Kennedy Center
Penn Quarter & Chinatown	National Archives, Ford's Theatre, Planet Word
Across the river	Mount Vernon, Old Town Alexandria, Great Falls Park

Common Planning Mistakes

1. Squeezing several Smithsonian museums into one day with little ones.
2. Forgetting that some Metro stations have long walks or stairs, so plan a stroller route.
3. Missing the timed-entry window for the Washington Monument or the Capitol.
4. Underestimating summer heat on the open Mall without shaded rest stops.
5. Assuming every museum is open on federal holidays.
6. Having no plan B for rain, storms, or heat.