

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

50 Activities

Washington, DC

A Family Activity Guide

Free museums • Timed passes • River woods • The walk nobody measures

FREE SAMPLE · PAGE NUMBERS REFER TO THE FULL GUIDE

What's Inside

- **Before You Go** — 7 venues — 4
  What needs booking, and what you walk into
- **By Season** — 7 notes — 5
  What is open, what shortens, and when the blossoms come
- **Getting Around** — 7 notes — 6
  Metro fares, children travelling free, parking and real distances

01 **Free & Worth Your Time** — 8 activities — 10
The monuments, the documents, the dome and the Supreme Court

02 **Outdoor Adventures** — 8 activities — 17
An island, Great Falls, a canal towpath and open parkland

03 **Sports & Recreation** — 6 activities — 24
A ballpark, a trail and ice on the Mall

04 **Zoos, Gardens & Nature** — 8 activities — 30
A free zoo, gardens and room to explore

05 **Museums & Learning** — 7 activities — 37
Smithsonian museums, Planet Word and the National Building Museum

06 **Family Entertainment** — 7 activities — 43
A 1921 carousel, a spy mission, an observation wheel and free performances

07 **Hidden Gems** — 6 activities — 49
A postal museum, monastery, historic mill and cathedral

08 **Where to Eat** — 4 picks — 55
Four food stops, plus museum cafés on the Mall

09 **Five Itineraries** — 5 plans — 56
The Classic Washington Day, The Green Day, The Bad Weather Day, The Three-Year-Old Day, Monuments, Flight & Spies

© 2026 KidPaths
Photo and artwork credits: kidpaths.com/credits



FROM THE EDITOR

Small legs, a long Mall and a lot of free doors

Picture the second afternoon. The children have walked farther than they ever do at home, someone needs a bathroom, and the museum you meant to see wants a pass you didn't book. Washington is wonderful with children, and it rewards a little planning.

Most of the headline attractions cost nothing: the Smithsonian museums, the monuments, the National Zoo. A family can fill four days here and pay for little beyond parking, food and fares. The catch is the small print. A few museums need a free timed-entry pass and most do not. The Washington Monument elevator needs a timed ticket. The Capitol runs guided tours only.

> *"In most cities the question is what you can afford. In Washington it is what you can get into, and when."*

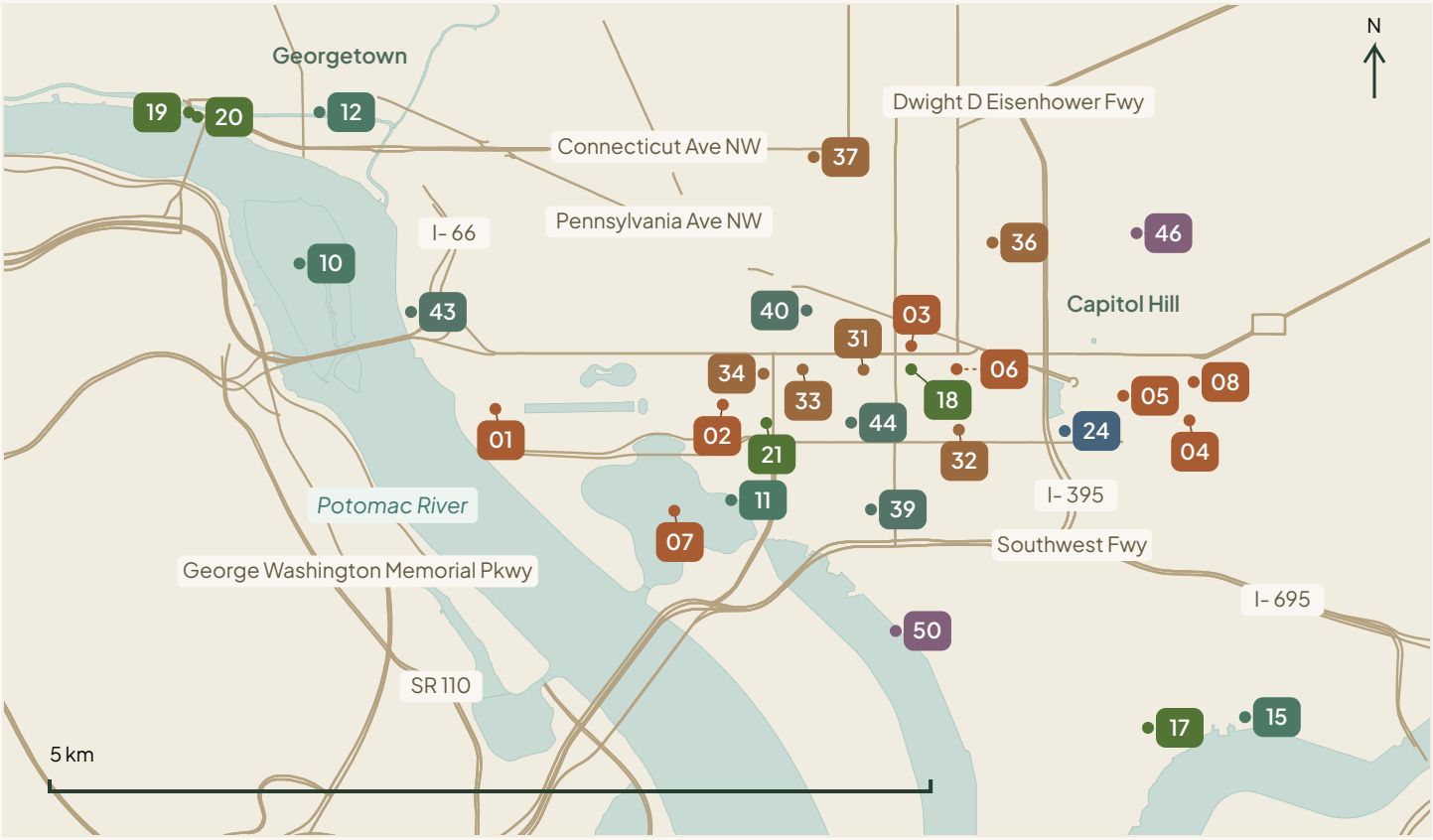
This guide is organised around that. Every entry leads with why a family would choose it, then the one detail that could change the decision. Pick two or three things a day, skip the rest without guilt, and leave room for a long lunch. Fifty outings, seven sections, five paced itineraries and three maps.



Kit
EDITOR, KIDPATHS WASHINGTON, DC

The Mall & central DC

Numbers identify outings below. Dots mark locations; dotted lines connect displaced number labels. Tap a name or page number to read the outing.

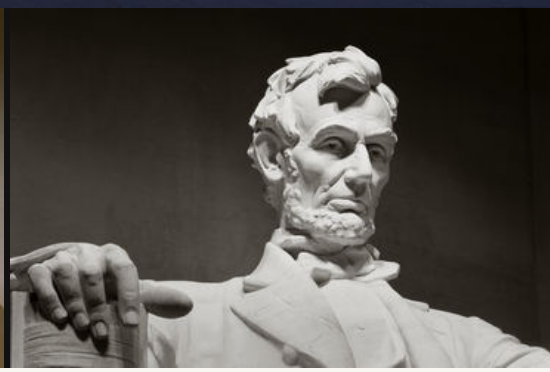


01	The Lincoln Memorial and the Reflecting Pool	p. 12
02	The Washington Monument	p. 13
03	The National Archives Museum	p. 13
04	The Library of Congress	p. 14
05	The United States Capitol	p. 14
06	The National Gallery of Art	p. 15
07	The Tidal Basin Memorial Walk	p. 15
08	Supreme Court of the United States	p. 16
10	Theodore Roosevelt Island	p. 20
11	Tidal Basin Paddle Boats	p. 20
12	C&O Canal Towpath at Georgetown	p. 21
15	Anacostia Riverwalk Trail and Yards Park	p. 22
17	Washington Nationals at Nationals Park	p. 26
18	Ice Skating at the Sculpture Garden Rink	p. 27
19	Capital Crescent Trail by Bike	p. 27
20	Kayaking from Key Bridge Boathouse	p. 28
21	A Capital Bikeshare Loop of the Monuments	p. 28
24	United States Botanic Garden	p. 33
31	National Museum of Natural History	p. 39
32	National Air and Space Museum	p. 40
33	National Museum of American History	p. 40
34	National Museum of African American History and Culture	p. 41
36	National Building Museum	p. 42
37	Planet Word	p. 42
39	International Spy Museum	p. 46
40	National Children's Museum	p. 46
43	The Kennedy Center and the REACH	p. 48
44	Discovery Theater	p. 48
46	The National Postal Museum	p. 52
50	The Wharf Recreation Piers	p. 54









01 • FEATURED VENUE • SECTION 01

The Lincoln Memorial and the Reflecting Pool

Best for 3–12 | National Mall | Free

★ 4.8 (54,000+ reviews)

Start with the statue, then look back across the Reflecting Pool. The Lincoln Memorial works as a focused stop, with the chamber above and a separate exhibition space beneath it. Decide which experience fits your family before adding more stops.

The chamber is free to visit. Inside are the seated Lincoln statue, the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural Address, with murals above. Choose a short passage to read together rather than turning the visit into a history lesson. Outside, the steps offer a view along the Reflecting Pool.

The undercroft is a separate visit beneath the memorial. Its interactive exhibits explain the building's construction and its place in American history and civil rights. Timed tickets are required; advance reservations carry a one-dollar service fee per reservation. Decide whether to add it before planning the rest of the day.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Korean War Veterans Memorial are nearby. Choose one if your family wants another stop, then leave room for a break. A shorter visit with time to talk about what children noticed can work better than trying to finish every memorial in one outing.

Insider Tips

- Look for the stone marking Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech at the base of the white marble steps.
- The chamber elevator is to the left of the steps. Check its operating hours before relying on it for an evening visit.
- Allow time for security if you book the undercroft. Its ticket and entrance arrangements are separate from the free chamber.
- Without an advance undercroft ticket, try the same-day kiosk at the Korean War Veterans Memorial. Availability is limited; keep the chamber as your fallback.
- Before adding another memorial, ask each child to choose one thing they want to see. Use that answer to decide the next stop.

ADDRESS 2 Lincoln Memorial Circle NW, Washington, DC 20002 ↗ **HOURS** Open 24 hours daily; elevators and undercroft close evenings

PRICE Chamber free; undercroft advance booking $1 per reservation **DETAILS** Current venue details ↗



02

The Washington Monument

Best for 6–12 · National Mall

Free; timed-entry ticket required for the elevator

★ 4.7 (24,000+ reviews)

WHY GO: **The only place to see the city's plan from inside its own centrepiece.**

The Washington Monument rises more than five hundred and fifty-five feet above the city, with an observation level reached by elevator. The grounds are open daily. Looking down from inside the monument gives children a different view of the streets and landmarks they have been walking past.

THE CATCH: Elevator tickets are timed, scarce, and require security screening fifteen minutes ahead.

> ***Pro tip:*** Advance tickets go on Recreation.gov about thirty days ahead and disappear quickly. If you missed them, same-day tickets are handed out on site from 8:45 in the morning, and arriving before that is realistic.

Allow 1–1.5 hours · Grounds open daily; elevator 9 a.m.–5 p.m., closed some days
2 15th Street NW, Washington, DC 20024 ↗
Current venue details ↗



03

The National Archives Museum

Best for preschool–grade 6 · Penn Quarter

Free; $1 timed-entry ticket optional ★ 4.7 (6,800+ reviews)

WHY GO: **Pair the founding documents with hands-on history for younger children.**

The Rotunda holds the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Add the Discovery Center for a different kind of history stop: its games and activities are designed for preschool through sixth grade, with all ages welcome. Let children choose between dancing with historical films and trying the civic games.

THE CATCH: Timed entry can reduce waiting, but you still need time for security before your Rotunda slot.

> ***Pro tip:*** Reserve a free general admission ticket even if you skip the optional one-dollar timed slot. Keep its barcode handy: children scan it to use the Discovery Center activities at no extra charge.

Allow 1–1.5 hours · Open daily 10 a.m.–5:30 p.m.
701 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20408 ↗
Current venue details ↗

DAY PLAN 02 OF 05

Choose Your Washington Day

Save this for a day when everyone would rather be outside. Bring a car for the transfers, then finish on foot in Georgetown.

ITINERARY 02

The Green Day

Woods, water and a free zoo, with no museum queues at all

8:30 a.m.

Smithsonian's National Zoo

Reserve the free entry pass first, then enter at Connecticut Avenue and walk downhill. Closing is 6 p.m. from mid-March to mid-September, 4 p.m. otherwise.

---- *Drive from the Zoo to Theodore Roosevelt Island.*

12:00 p.m.

Theodore Roosevelt Island

Boardwalk first with young children. Remember the parking lot is reachable only from the northbound George Washington Memorial Parkway.

---- *Drive into Georgetown and park for lunch, then explore the towpath and garden on foot.*

2:30 p.m.

C&O Canal Towpath at Georgetown

Start at Thomas Jefferson Street and follow the towpath as far as everyone feels like walking. Turn back while there is still energy for the garden.

---- *Five-minute walk up to M Street.*

4:00 p.m.

The Old Stone House garden

The walled garden behind the city's oldest structure still on its original foundation is the best free place in Georgetown to make everyone sit down.

MONEY

The Zoo pass and the listed outdoor stops are free. Plan this as a driving day and budget for parking and meals.

Change of plan: If the zoo pass is unavailable, a Rock Creek Park trail and Peirce Mill (weekends) make the same shape of morning. In heavy rain, substitute the National Postal Museum, which is free, uncrowded and indoors.

KidPaths

FREE SAMPLE · WASHINGTON, DC FAMILY ACTIVITY GUIDE

One day is planned. The rest of your Washington, DC trip is in the full guide.

When this plan is done and someone asks what is next, the full Washington, DC guide has every outing, map and day plan in one place, ready on your phone.

50	5	3	61
OUTINGS	DAY PLANS	MAPS	PAGES

- **Both PDFs:** the full print-ready guide, plus the same pages in a smaller file that downloads faster on a phone.
- **Download right after payment.** No KidPaths account needed.
- **14-day refund** if it isn't useful for your trip.
- **$9, one time.** Any tax is shown at checkout.

Get the full Washington, DC guide · $9

kidpaths.com/guides/washington-dc

THE FAMILY ADVENTURE SERIES

Chicago, IL | Denver, CO | New York City, NY | San Diego, CA | Seattle, WA | Washington, DC