



Grand and fascinating museums, most of them offering free admission, await your family trip to Washington D.C.

Photo by Gina Vercesi

# Let's Go To ... Washington D.C.

By Gina Vercesi

“Are Sasha and Malia in there right now?” “How come FDR didn’t want anyone to know he was in a wheelchair?” “Do you think that guy with the umbrella could be a spy?” “Why is everyone so excited to see that diamond?” These are some of the questions that spilled from my three girls throughout a recent visit to Washington, D.C. and their curiosity continued to be piqued all weekend.

With its iconic monuments and memorials, a profusion of amazing museums, fascinating historical sites and funky neighborhoods to explore, Washington, D.C. is a quintessential family destination. And what better time of year to head to our nation’s capital to pay tribute to the country’s leaders past and present than in February when we celebrate the birthdays of two distinguished presidents? With so much to do and see around town, it can be tough to narrow down your choices. The key to a successful D.C. visit is to focus on a handful of places and activities making for a more relaxed experience and, subsequently, happier kids and parents. Just know that you’ll see more the next time!

## THE NATIONAL MALL

Home to the world-renowned Smithsonian Institute, several inspiring memorials, a whimsical carousel and the U.S. Capitol, the National Mall is the primary stop on most people’s D.C. itineraries. There are 11 Smithsonian museums around the Mall and some are more kid-friendly than others. The National Air and Space Museum and The National Museum of Natural History followed by the National Museum of American History and the National Museum of the American Indian are

best for engaging younger visitors. Plan to spend the morning in one museum and the afternoon in another and really take your time exploring each one. If you try to add any more to the schedule it’s bound to be exhausting.

To help clear your head from museum overload, the Hirshhorn Museum’s sculpture garden is a good place for the kids to have a romp and the National Gallery of Art has an outdoor ice rink with skating sessions beginning every hour through March 16. The National Carousel near the Smithsonian Castle is another favorite destination with 58 horses to choose from and rides for \$3.50.

In addition to the museums, there are a number of monuments and memorials around the Mall and nearby Tidal Basin and each one is worth a stop. Of these, only the Washington Monument requires tickets, which you can obtain free of charge on the morning you wish to visit or in advance for a fee online. Our favorites were the FDR Memorial and the new Martin Luther King Memorial. We loved standing in the spot on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial where Dr. King gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech in August 1963.

It’s important to note that the Mall is enormous and requires a lot of walking. That said, there are ways to minimize the time you spend on your feet. The hop-on, hop-off trolley, complete with a narrated tour, offers 20 different stops throughout the city, many of these around the National Mall, and allows you to re-board as many times as you’d like throughout the day. Wanting a bit more adventure during our autumn trip, we booked a monuments tour with Bike and Roll DC. It was a fantastic way to see nine major sites, including the White House, which can only be viewed from afar,

and our guide was extremely knowledgeable. Bike and Roll’s tours start again for the 2015 season on March 8.

## OTHER MUSEUMS AND ATTRACTIONS

Beyond the Mall, Washington, D.C. boasts a wealth of other places to explore. Make your own stamps at the United States Postal Museum, adopt a secret agent persona at the International Spy Museum, watch our money being made at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, or see the original Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights in the National Archives Museum. When it’s time for dinner, a walk along M Street in Georgetown will give you plenty of options and allows you to check out this bustling college neighborhood.

*Gina Vercesi is a freelance writer who enjoys travelling with her family.*

## When You Go...

Washington, D.C. is about a 4 1/2 hour drive from Westchester. Once in the city, you don’t need your car as you can get everywhere you will want to go by foot, Metrorail (the D.C. subway), or taxi (which can be more cost effective than the Metrorail for a family of four). Most of the major attractions in D.C. are free of charge including the Smithsonian Museums and the National Zoo.