



Must See

Sights for You and Your Family at the Crossroads of D.C.

by Elizabeth Conte and Virginia Bryant

Washington, D.C., our nation's capital, certainly sits squarely at the crossroads of the nation. As an international city that represents a diversity of ethnic cultures and complements the surrounding localities of Maryland and Northern Virginia, D.C. also serves as the crossroads for a region and for the world. If you and your family will be visiting the greater D.C. area for the first time, there are many sights and attractions you won't want to miss, and with a little pre-planning you'll be able to make the most of your time at the Crossroads!

The District of Columbia offers an abundance of activities, many of which are accessible by Metro, D.C.'s subway system. (A ride through Metro's tunnel system in the District, on the above-ground tracks in the suburbs, and under the Potomac River to Virginia, is a treat for the kids in and of itself!) Many "must-see" sights are appealing to children of all ages. In addition to more than 3000 exotic animals, the **National Zoological Park** houses the famous giant Chinese panda Hsing-Hsing. The Zoo, accessible via Metro's Red Line, also features the "Amazonia" rain forest, Zoolab, a Bird

Resource Center, and the Reptile Discovery Center with a number of hands-on activities.

Families could easily spend an entire vacation visiting the **Smithsonian Institution museums** at the east end of the National Mall. Start at the Visitor's Center in the Castle Building. Then take a ride on the Carousel, or see a children's musical or puppet show at the Discovery Theater in the Arts & Industries Building. You can view dinosaur fossils, fabulous jewels, and an insect zoo at the Natural History Museum and salute the original Star Spangled Banner while watching its stars and stripes being carefully restored at the Museum of American History. The Air and Space Museum boasts historical exhibits of all types of air and space crafts, from Kitty Hawk to NASA, in addition to its planetarium shows and Imax movies. Much to the kids' delight, there are numerous gift shops to find in the Smithsonian museums displaying treasured souvenirs.

Be sure to include a jaunt over to **Union Station**, which is located near Capitol Hill. Union Station, which services Amtrak as well as local trains to Maryland and Virginia, has been beautifully refurbished and offers shopping, restaurants, a food court, movie theaters, and various special exhibits. Within walking distance of the Station is a landmark not to be missed, the **United States Capitol**. Also nearby are the **National Postal Museum**, featuring stamps dating back to Colonial

Times as well as a Pony Express exhibit, and the **Capital Children's Museum**, which features numerous hands-on exhibits.

As the July weather in D.C. is generally hot-to-scorching, plan to cool off and get a duck's-eye view of the City by riding a **paddle boat** on the Potomac at the Tidal Basin. You can then begin your tour of the famous monuments and memorials, beginning with the **Jefferson Memorial** on the south side of the Basin, hiking west

to view the newest memorial to **Franklin D. Roosevelt**, north to the **Lincoln Memorial** and the **Vietnam Veterans Memorial**, and then finally east to the Washington Monument, which is currently surrounded by renovation scaffolding, but is still accessible. While the monument is under renovation, a special interpretative center is open to the public, offering virtual-reality observation deck views of the city and beyond.

From the Mall you can head downtown to the **National Aquarium** in the Commerce

Department, which features an interactive touch tank and over 250 species of fish, and the **Old Post Office Pavilion**,



URLs for sites mentioned

Smithsonian Institution, including the National Zoological Park, and National Postal Museum: <http://www.si.edu>

Capital Children's Museum: <http://www.ccm.org>

National Park Service site covering the Mall monuments, Old Post Office Pavilion, White House, and C & O Canal: <http://www.nps.gov>

National Geographic Society Explorers Hall: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/explorer/index.html>

Old Town Alexandria: <http://ci.alexandria.va.us/oha/oha.html>

Mount Vernon: <http://www.mountvernon.org>

Potomac Mills Mall: <http://www.potomac-mills.com>

Kings Dominion: <http://www.pkd4fun.com>

Six Flags America: <http://www.adventureworld.com/indexa.html>

Baltimore Aquarium: <http://www.aqua.org>

where you can ride a glass elevator to the top of the 315 foot clock tower for a really spectacular view of the City!

What visit to our nation's capital would be complete without a visit to the **White House**? Self-guided tours are available in the mornings, Tuesday through Saturday. To get tickets plan to arrive at the White House Visitor Center by 7 a.m. at the latest on the morning you wish to tour, or contact your Congressperson before leaving home to obtain reserved tickets. Have the afternoon free? Check out the Explorers Hall exhibits at the **National Geographic Society**, which offers a simulated orbital flight, "Earth Station



One." Try one of the many exotic restaurants in Georgetown, or hop on board a replica canal boat in **Georgetown** for a relaxing mule-drawn ride on the **Chesapeake and Ohio Canal**, while listening to a park ranger dressed in period clothing explain the history of the canal.

Across the Potomac, and accessible by Metro, is **Arlington National Cemetery**, where you can see the grave sites of John F. and Jacqueline Kennedy, among other notables, and visit Arlington House, home of Robert E. Lee. You can also take Metro to **Old Town Alexandria**, which is paved with cobblestones and chock full of historic landmarks. Farther out, but accessible by bus, is George Washington's home, **Mount Vernon**. The teenagers in your family will love to go shopping at **Potomac Mills Mall** in Dale City, Virginia, which is one of the largest outlet malls in the country (bring your hiking boots for this one!). Are your teens interested in amusement parks? Check out the local tours in the Preliminary Program for the tour to **Paramount's Kings Dominion**, the home of VOLCANO, the Blast Coaster.

Much closer to D.C., in Largo, Maryland, and primed for its grand opening in May 1999, is **Six Flags America**, which seeks to entice the adventuresome to try the new thrill-seeking roller coaster, The Joker's Jinx. For an alternative fun and worthwhile day trip, take Amtrak from Union Station north to Baltimore for a visit to the **Baltimore Aquarium**, which features a dolphin show and walk-through rain forest.

When planning your schedules, keep in mind that, in contrast to the museums, some of the open-air memorials and monuments are accessible at night and many of the sightseeing bus and trolley tours run after dark as well. With a little planning and a lot of energy, you and your family can experience many of the "must-see" sights that Washington, D.C., at the Crossroads has to offer!



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