

# Washington, D.C., for Younger Kids



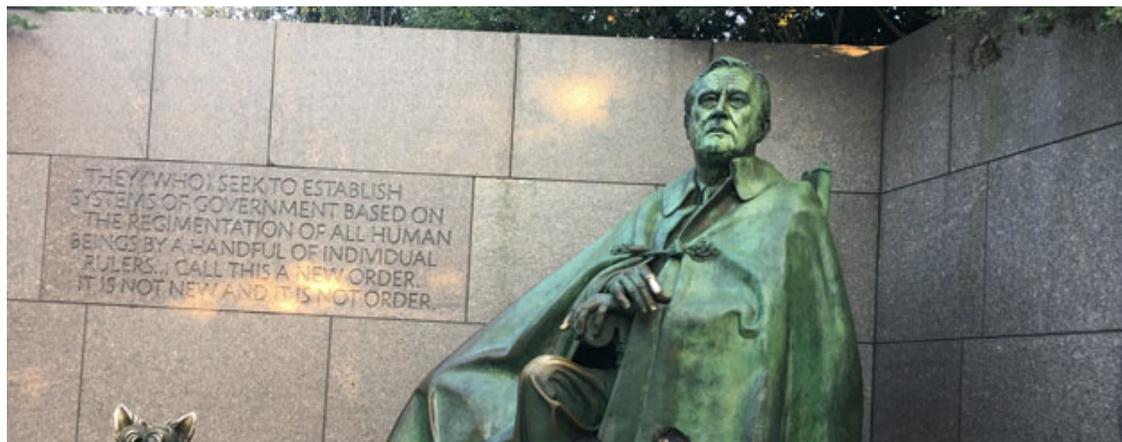
With many historical venues and lots of walking required, a trip to Washington, D.C., seemed risky. Turns out, it's a great place to take young kids.

By [Judy Koutsky](#) April 28, 2017

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Most people think of Washington, D.C., as the quintessential eighth-grade graduation trip. The kids are old enough to understand (some, if not all) of the history, and with all the walking involved, they have the stamina for truly exploring the region. But last spring, when my boys were 6 and 8, in kindergarten and second grades, we thought perhaps a trip to our nation's capital wasn't a bad idea, especially given the tumultuous political election we'd just lived through. Could a trip there be educational and fun for two high-energy, short-attention-span kids? We decided to find out.

We stayed at the River Inn, in large part because it's affordable and centrally located: It's near Georgetown, the Metro, and a mile away from the National Mall. Plus, the property has kitchens in all rooms and there's a giant Whole Foods five minutes away (where we went daily). The staff at the hotel was extremely friendly and super knowledgeable; I was constantly asking their opinion on where to go and when. It's not a fancy property, but for my family of four, it was a good fit.

Turns out many people from the Northeast (and from our town) were in D.C. for spring break. Each family we talked to toured our nation's capital in a different way. Some did only one activity each day or focused on one area during their stay. We are a full-speed-ahead family, and so we make the most of every visit, which often means packing in as much as possible. Here's what we did during our four-day trip to our nation's capital.

## The International Spy Museum

Even before heading to D.C., I had heard of this museum. It's one of the few for which you have to pay to get in (it's not a Smithsonian) and the \$20 ticket price (for adults; kids are cheaper) can be tough to swallow for a family. Despite the price, the lines are long, a sure tip-off that this museum is popular. While much of it was above my kids' heads (the idea of government spies was fictional in their mind), my younger son said this was his favorite museum of all that we visited.

## The Newseum

This was hands-down my favorite. Like the Spy museum, you have to pay to get in, but it was not super crowded. A highlight of the six-floor Newseum was the exhibit about the Berlin Wall, featuring an actual piece of the wall; my kids were fascinated by the idea that a city could be walled in and people were not free to leave. We also saw Pulitzer Prize-winning photographs, and the exhibit about Civil Rights was especially interesting to my kids. I feel like we all got an education from this museum.

## The National Zoo

The star attraction here is the pandas, and they were well worth the line to see. The zoo is free since it's part of the Smithsonian, and there's not a line to get in, just to see the pandas, which is also free. Both of my kids loved seeing these cuddly, cute creatures, and we spent a chunk of time simply watching them. The zoo is a good way to take a break from all the history and science museums.

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## National Air and Space Museum

This is the most-visited museum in Washington, D.C., and for good reason. We spent several hours taking in the various aircraft and space exhibits, plus we saw an IMAX movie. The kids loved this museum (and the IMAX); it's well worth a full afternoon or day.

## National Museum of Natural History

We saw another the IMAX movie here and also spent time at the must-sees: the Hope Diamond and plenty of dinosaurs and mammals from around the world. For younger kids, make sure to take them to the Butterfly Pavilion, the O. Orkin Insect Zoo, and Q?rius, the hands-on lab that has a dedicated junior section for those ages 10 and younger. Also, Objects of Wonder focuses on a bunch of weird stuff that kids find fascinating, such as a hunk of whale earwax.



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## Big Bus Hop-On Hop-Off Tours

Even though we walked nearly 20,000 steps a day (it was fun to watch the numbers climb on our Fitbits!), having the option to jump on the bus and rest for a while was great. Also, I really appreciated the narrative on the bus. Everyone gets a set of headphones and sets the dial to their language preference. We took the bus to the zoo, to Arlington National Cemetery, around the National Mall and Tidal Basin, and toured much of D.C. that way.

## Arlington National Cemetery

While some families avoid this stop, we thought it was an important one to visit. We went straight to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to watch the changing of the guard. My kids found this very fascinating: The guards change every 30 minutes. Then we slowly walked back and talked about soldiers and war at the level that was appropriate for them. Kids today know about these topics—how can they not, with what's in the news every day?—and discussing it with them in a way they understand allowed them to ask questions and created an open dialogue.

## Washington Nationals Baseball Game

My kids love sports; me, not so much. But even I got into the energy of a Nationals game. The crowd was so energetic that it was simply contagious. Plus, there are playgrounds on-site for kids who can't sit still for hours. Before hitting the game, we stopped at a Shake Shack across the street from the park and feasted on burgers, fries, and shakes. Due to the location of the restaurant, pretty much everyone was going to the game, so the excitement started even before we entered the ball field. We went to an evening game, and it was a great way to spend a warm night, after walking all day.

## Monuments and Memorials of Washington, D.C.

The weather in DC the week we went was beautiful and perfect for walking. We visited many memorials--Lincoln, Washington, Jefferson, Martin Luther King Jr., Franklin Delano Roosevelt--and this was actually one of my favorite things that we did. Simply being outside in such a beautiful setting and surrounded by inspiration quotes from great leaders appealed to and inspired each of us.

## Firefly Restaurant

Most of our dining while in Washington, D.C., was on-the-go. Truth be told, my kids are not great at sitting down for long periods of time, but I wanted to try Firefly since I had heard that it's built around a large indoor tree, which sits in the middle of the room, and is known for its family-friendly atmosphere and comfort food. Verdict: The pot roast is divine, definitely a favorite dish. Ingeniously, they give all children cookies to decorate as soon as they sit down. My boys took the project seriously and gave serious thought to where they were putting the sprinkles and chocolate chips. No iPads were needed to entertain them, and I was able to have adult conversation while the boys were preoccupied. Then when the food arrived, our waiter took the cookies away to be baked and brought them back for dessert. My kids thought this was the best restaurant ever!

Turns out, there is plenty to do and see in Washington, D.C., for young kids. We enjoyed our visit so much, we are thinking about coming back next year.

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For more information on our nation's capital go to [Destination DC](#).



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Judy Koutsky is an award-winning writer and editor and her work has appeared in over 30 publications, including Conde Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure, Redbook, Parents, Scholastic, and Prevention. She writes often about travel, parenting, health, and lifestyle. Follow her @JudyKoutsky or visit her website JudyKoutsky.com.

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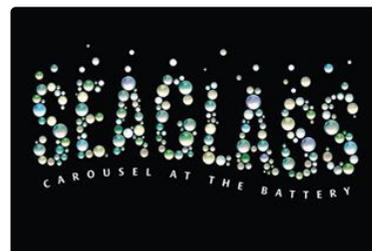
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