

The background of the page features a bokeh effect of out-of-focus lights in various colors (yellow, white, blue, orange) against a dark night sky. This central image is framed by thick, curved borders in blue and white at the top and bottom.

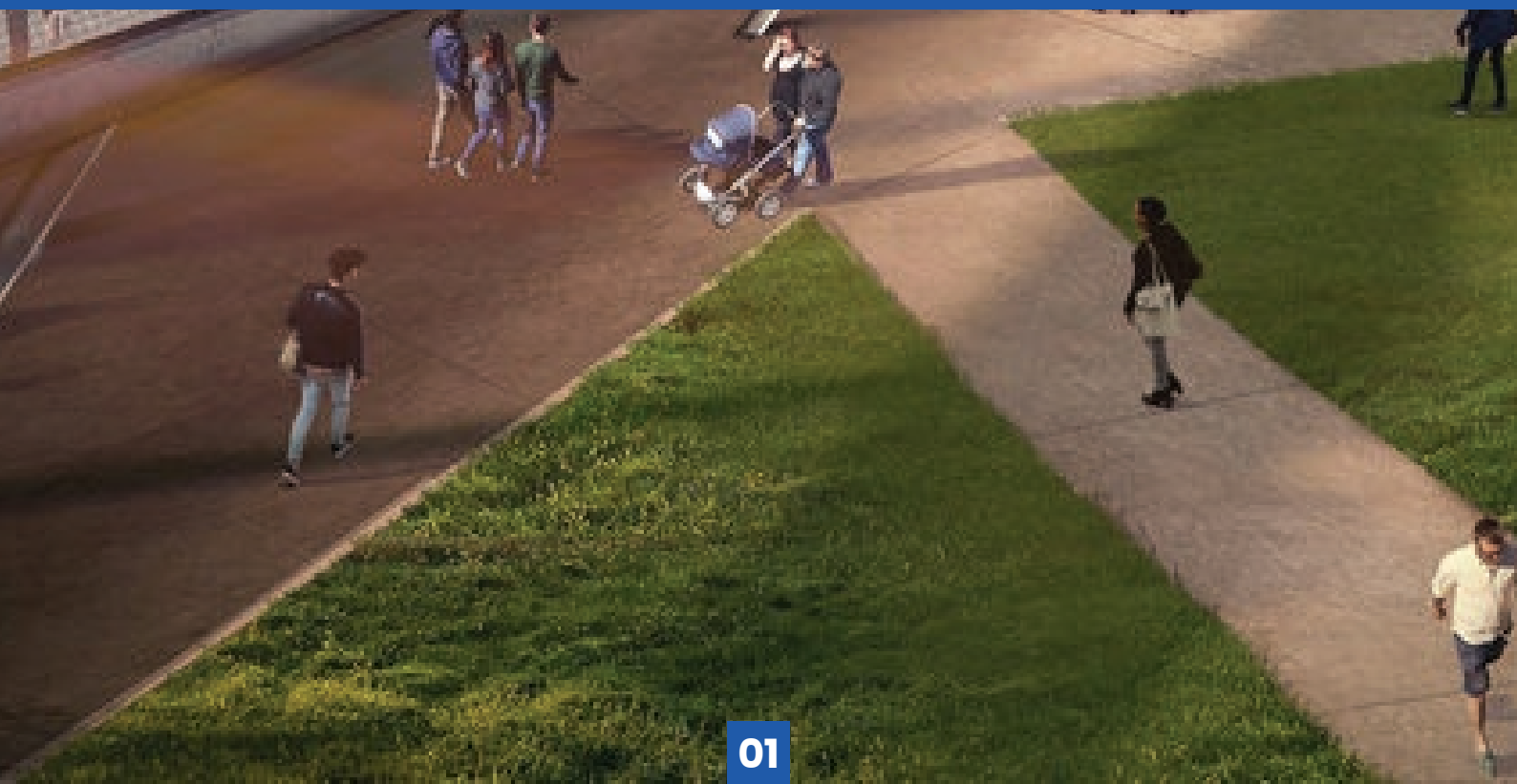
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ACTIVITY RESOURCE GUIDE



LEARN ABOUT THE NATIONAL MALL FROM THE EXPERTS

Nearly everyone who comes to D.C. plans to stroll around the city's famous National Mall and Memorial Parks. While the monuments, from the Lincoln to the Vietnam War memorials, are free anyway, you might not know that the National Park Service offers free tours at most of these sites on the hour. Park rangers will even take you on free walking and bike tours; check the daily schedule to find out when.



EXPLORE THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

One of the best things about visiting the city is its abundance of free museums. The Smithsonian Institution operates not one but 17 museums in the D.C. Metro area that offer free admission. Many of these are on the National Mall—including the Natural History Museum, American History Museum, the Air and Space Museum, and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden—but there are more spread out across the city and beyond.

HEAR THE DRUM CIRCLE AT MERIDIAN HILL PARK

Off the normal tourist track, the drum circle at Meridian Hill Park is one of the city's longest-running traditions. For 50 years, men and women have been gathering at this National Park Service-run park on Sundays in the summer, bringing their own instruments to join in, or just listening to the percussion while they sprawl out for a picnic on the park's grass.

GAZE INSIDE THE WASHINGTON NATIONAL CATHEDRAL

Just north of Georgetown, the Washington National Cathedral is one of the more recognizable landmarks in Washington after the monuments and memorials on the Mall. Presidents have both worshipped and been remembered here since then Bethlehem Chapel first opened in 1912. The National Cathedral is free to visit for spiritual purposes or to worship; tours, however, are free on Sundays.





TREK THROUGH ROCK CREEK PARK

The oldest urban park in the National Park Service system, Rock Creek Park spans more than 2,000 acres in Northwest D.C. It's got hiking trails, picnic grounds, an amphitheatre with a summer concert series, bicycle paths, a tennis center, ranger-led programs, a nature center, a planetarium, and more.

VISIT THE ANIMALS AT THE NATIONAL ZOO

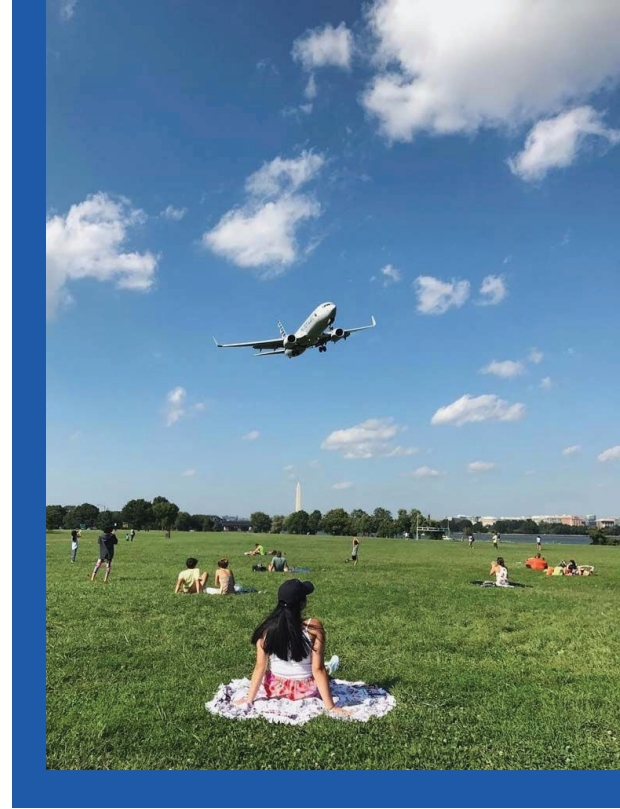
Another key member of the Smithsonian Institution is the National Zoo, located in the southern end of Rock Creek Park. This is where Washingtonians flock to visit the ever-popular pandas, elephants, lions, tigers, and gorillas, as well as the orangutans who travel over the heads of visitors on a system of cables and towers called the O Line.

SEE THE BONSAI TREES AT THE U.S. NATIONAL ARBORETUM

For a quick fix of nature and beauty, the U.S. National Arboretum is a great little getaway within the city. Stroll around the colorful azalea gardens in the spring, or the holly and magnolia garden in the fall and winter. The Bonsai & Penjing Museum has one of North America's largest collections of bonsai trees, and the official trees of all 50 states are represented in the National Grove of State Trees.

WATCH PLANES LAND AT GRAVELLY POINT & HAINS POINT

Reagan National Airport is hands-down the best and most convenient airport for flying into D.C., and it also provides one of the area's fun, free pastimes: watching planes take off and land. The most popular spot for watching planes is Gravelly Point, located just next to the airport in Arlington, Virginia. You can also see the planes from Hains Point, located on the other side of the Potomac River at the tip of the East Potomac Park.



GET INSIDE THE EAST WING

Anyone can take a free tour of the White House, though be warned that it takes some planning. American citizens can request free tours through the offices of their members of Congress, and must provide at least 21 days' notice and bring a government-issued photo ID. Foreign nationals can request tours from their embassy in D.C. The tours take you through the East Wing, stopping in the East Room, the State Dining Room, the China Room, the Library, and more.

APPRECIATE A SHAKESPEAREAN PLAY



Every year since 1991, the Shakespeare Theatre Company has sought to share the famous playwright's work with as many Washingtonians and visitors as possible through its Free For All shows. The series highlights classics such as *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Hamlet*, and more over a two-week run at the Sidney Harman Hall. This year, they're celebrating the program's 25th year with a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* running September 1 through 13.



STROLL THE U.S. BOTANIC GARDEN

Tucked among the Smithsonian museums near the Capitol building, the U.S. Botanic Garden features plants from all over the world, from desert-friendly succulents to a tropical rainforest, to regional mid-Atlantic plants. They've got more than 5,000 orchids and a few outdoor gardens that are perfect for a quick rest during a hectic day of sightseeing on the Mall.

STRETCH OUT AND WATCH AN OUTDOOR MOVIE

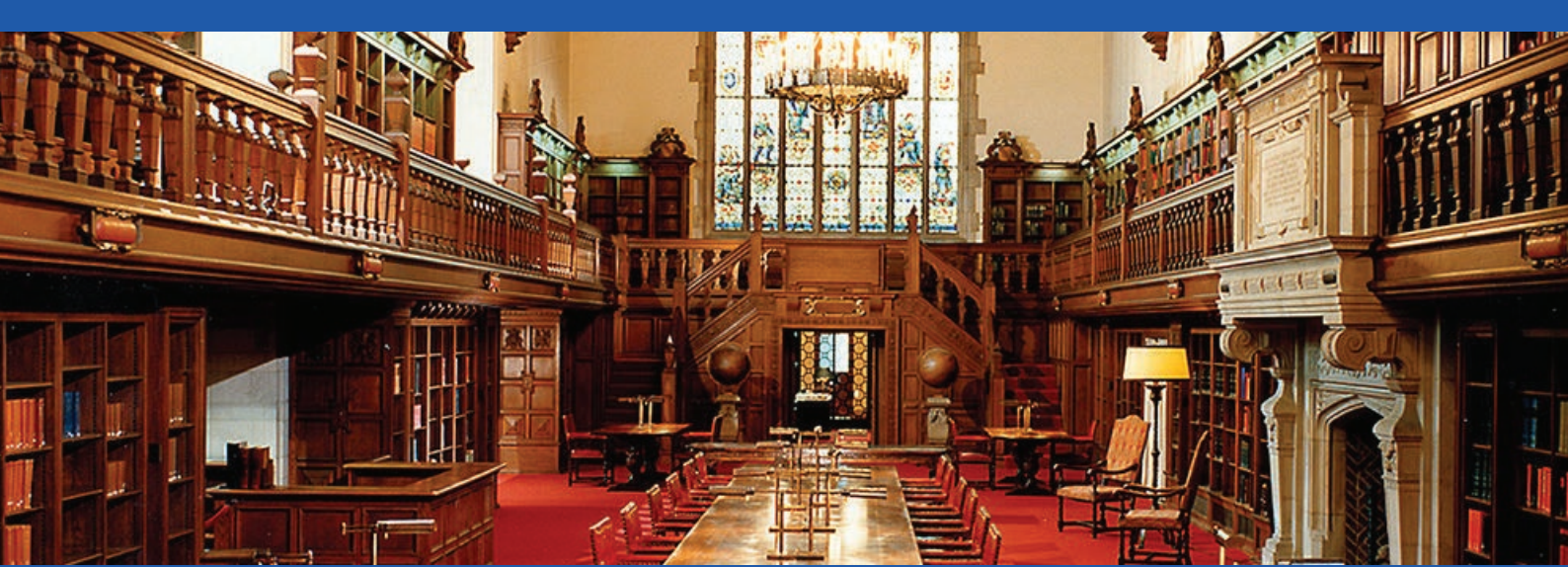
Free outdoor movies are a favorite summer event in the city, with movie screenings slated for public spaces across town. The flagship of these is the 17-year-old Screen on the Green on the National Mall, which generally shows classic movies. For a full list of the other movies screening around town, check out the schedule on DC Outdoor Films.

STAND IN THE ROTUNDA OF THE CAPITOL BUILDING

Just as with the White House tours, visitors can book tours of the U.S. Capitol building through the offices of their Congressional representatives, some of whom lead their own tours of the building. But the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center also offers tours of the Crypt, the Rotunda, and the National Statuary Hall.

PEEK AT THE FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY'S COLLECTION

If you're interested in learning even more about Shakespeare, the Folger Shakespeare Library also offers free tours of its collection, reading rooms, and Elizabethan garden. They have free exhibitions inside, like a display of the first collected edition of Shakespeare's plays, and an examination of his life and times. Then, of course, every April brings an open house in honor of the bard's birthday, featuring all manner of special events.



PAY YOUR RESPECTS AT ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

Just across the Memorial Bridge from the Lincoln Memorial lies Arlington National Cemetery, which honors America's fallen men and women of the military. Visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, John F. Kennedy's gravesite, and the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial inside.



WALK THE C&O CANAL TRAIL IN GEORGETOWN

For an especially scenic tour of Georgetown, hop on the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Trail. The canal extends for 184.5 miles into Maryland and West Virginia, but it starts right here in Georgetown, with stretches ideal for running, cycling, and walking along the towpaths and the neighboring historic neighborhood buildings.

HEAR JAZZ IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY GARDEN

Every summer, the National Gallery of Art hosts a concert series in its sculpture garden called Jazz in the Garden. This series welcomes jazz musicians of all stripes—jazz guitar, vocalists, funk, Latin jazz, and more—on Friday evenings from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

TOUR THE KENNEDY CENTER MILLENNIUM STAGE

Though the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is one of Washington's favorite places for a fancy night of culture, it's also one of the city's best spots for a free night of culture. The Millennium Stage hosts a gratis performance every day at 6 p.m., featuring rising and well-known musicians, theater groups, opera, dance—and even free yoga sessions. If you're looking to learn more about the Kennedy Center, there are also free guided tours of its theaters, artworks, and the Hall of Nations.



TRY TO COUNT THE BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

One of the most beautiful buildings in town is the Thomas Jefferson building at the Library of Congress, open since 1897. Free walk-in tours discuss the art and architecture of the building, and the millions of items it holds as the world's largest library, which researchers can access in the building's gorgeous reading rooms. Groups can request tours on the life of Thomas Jefferson or of the museum's musical collections, too.

BRUSH UP ON AMERICAN HISTORY AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Want to see the original Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, and Bill of Rights? Pay a visit to the National Archives, which houses all three as well as exhibit rooms, a theater, and a learning center. Admission is free, as are most of the building's public events, from roundtables on civil rights to lectures on how to get into genealogy.





ADMIRE THE IMPRESSIONISTS AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Located on the National Mall, the National Gallery of Art and its various events are free to the public, as are guided tours of the museum's many collections. These include 18th and 19th century French paintings, Italian Renaissance artwork, modern sculpture and paintings from the likes of Degas, Monet, and Picasso.

WATCH A JUDGE STRIKE THE GAVEL AT THE SUPREME COURT

There aren't any guided tours of the Supreme Court, but they'll do you one better: a chance to see the justices in action. Oral arguments are open to the public free of charge on a first-come, first-served basis. Visitors can also walk around the first and ground floors of the building, and on weekdays can attend free 30-minute Courtroom Lectures, in which docents explain how the Supreme Court works discuss the history and architecture of the building.

CLOCK THE LOCAL PUNK SCENE AT THE FORT RENO CONCERT SERIES

Many Washingtonians have a serious love for the free Fort Reno summer concert series that features local punk bands in a relaxed park in Tenleytown. This past year, the series ran on Monday and Thursday evenings in July, though management difficulties almost forced it to be canceled for the last two years.

SOAK UP THE CITY'S INTERNATIONAL VIBE WITH AN EMBASSY TOUR

Though each of the foreign embassies in D.C. has its own policies on visitation and events, there's one weekend each spring when dozens of them invite the general public for one massive open house. As part of Passport DC, countries including Japan, Belize, Qatar, Ghana, and Costa Rica offer free admission along with exhibitions, performances, and cooking demonstrations that highlight their culture and traditions.

DON'T MISS THE MARKET SCENE

Though you might end up wanting to spend money when you're there, it's free to enter two of DC's major marketplaces. The more than 130-year-old Eastern Market has long been DC's go-to spot for fresh produce and arts and crafts, as well as butchers and prepared items in its indoor food hall. There's also a flea market full of antiques and collectables. Meanwhile, newcomer Union Market has amped up the NoMa neighborhood with produce, butchers, a seafood bar, cheese shop, restaurants and more.

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