

100 Free (or Nearly Free) Things to Do in Washington DC

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PERFORMANCES

1. Consider “Saturday Morning at the National,” **National Theatre’s** free performance series designed for the whole family. Shows range from puppet and magic shows to showcases of music and ballet. Seating is limited and tickets are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis 30 minutes prior to showtime. Check website for performance schedule.
2. Take in a free performance at **The Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage** every evening at 6pm. This summer's lineup includes notable acts like Sweet Honey in the Rock, The U.S. Army Chorus, The Manhattan Transfer and many others.
3. Feel the beat of a local tradition: head to **Meridian Hill Park** on Sundays (weather-permitting) between 3 and 9pm to hear the famous drum circle, a fixture in the park for more than 40 years that brings together people together from all different backgrounds to hear drum beats and watch African dancing. For a hands-on experience, bring your own drum to join in.
4. Check out free, live music at the **National Gallery of Art** on Sunday evenings at 6:30pm. Concerts feature choral, Afghan, opera music and more, and are held in the West Building (6th St. & Constitution Ave, NW entrance). Seats are available on a first-come, first-serve basis starting at 6pm. No entry after 6:30pm.
5. Head over to George Washington University's **Lisner Auditorium**, where throughout the year, free shows are sprinkled throughout the performance calendar. If you’re lucky, you’ll catch a live performance by the United States Air Force Band’s Jazz Ensemble.
6. Get half-priced, day-of-show or advance sale tickets for theater seats at Signature Theatre, the Kennedy Center, Folger Theatre, Imagination Stage and more online at **TICKETPLACE.org**, run by the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington DC. Or, stop by their booth (7th St between D & E Streets, NW) to purchase tickets in person. It's open Wed. through Fri. from 11am-6pm; Sat. from 10am-5pm and Sun. from 12pm-4pm.
7. Experience culture at the **National Museum of the American Indian**, where free programming from storytelling and dance festivals to music performances by Native composers and classical musicians is available to audiences of all ages. Check website for performance schedule.
8. Get a taste of the Bard for a great value at the Harman Center of the Arts. Patrons 35 and under can see the **Shakespeare Theatre Company’s** productions of plays including “Romeo and Juliet”, “The Way of the World,” and more for just \$10/ticket. An allotment of these discounted tickets is released every Tuesday morning during show season starting at 10am.
9. Keep your wallet full with **Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company's** "Pay-What-You-Can" tickets for the first two performances (usually Monday and Tuesday) of every main stage subscription series production. Tickets are sold at the theatre 90 minutes prior to showtime. Two per person, cash or check only. Check the individual show calendars for specific dates, times and locations.
10. Enjoy free, live jazz at the **Smithsonian American Art Museum's** "Take Five!" performance series. It usually takes place on the third Thursday of each month, and the museum's café stays open so guests can enjoy beer, wine and light snacks during the performance. Visit Americanart.si.edu for more information.

FAMILY-FUN FREEBIES

1. Watch the **National Zoo's** conservation efforts first-hand and pay a visit to Tai Shan, only the third panda to be born and thrive in the U.S.
2. See the stars in **Rock Creek Park** at the only planetarium operated by the National Park Service.
3. Explore an exhibition and create a related art project to take home through the **Freer & Sackler Gallery's** Imaginasia family programming.

4. See the National Mall with **DC by Foot**, a walking tour company that gives free, kid-friendly tours (gratuuity recommended) infused with games, fun facts and trivia.
5. Take pictures with Fala, the famous presidential pooch, at the **Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial**.
6. Make money (or see money made) with a free tour of the **Bureau of Engraving and Printing**.
7. Explore the beautiful grounds of the **National Cathedral**, the sixth largest cathedral in the world, and then take a Gargoyle Tour (\$5/ages 10+), and see how these whimsical creatures reflect history in stone. There's even one fashioned after Darth Vader.
8. Play pilot in a mock cockpit at *America by Air*, an exhibition on permanent display at the **Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum**.
9. Walk among living butterflies at the **National Museum of Natural History's** Butterfly Pavilion (adults \$6/children \$5). Tuesdays are free, but timed-entry tickets are required and are available at the Butterfly Pavilion box office beginning at 10am each Tuesday.
10. Teach kids about history at the newly renovated **National Museum of American History**. The redesigned attraction reopens Nov. 21 and will offer visitors a rare look at the original "Star-Spangled Banner," the flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the national anthem.
11. Check out the latest performance at the Smithsonian's family-friendly **Discovery Theater**. Shows range from tap dance performances to puppet show workshops, and tickets are always under \$10.
12. Let kids roam free at **Friendship Park** (aka Turtle Park), DC's most popular playground, located in the city's Van Ness neighborhood. Little ones love the huge sandbox (always full of toys).
13. Take a ride on DC 's clean and safe **Metrorail** system to give kids a taste of a train ride, and a break from the summer heat. Day Passes cost just \$7.80 and the Metro travels all over the city.
14. Fly a kite next to the **Washington Monument** for a great family photo.
15. Give kids an inspiring lesson in freedom with a stop at the **National Archives Building** to view the Emancipation Proclamation followed by a visit to the **Lincoln Memorial**.

MUSTS FOR HISTORY BUFFS

1. Sit in the lobby of the **Willard InterContinental Hotel** to imagine history unfolding. The hotel is where Julia Ward Howe wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," where President Ulysses S. Grant popularized the term "lobbyist" and where Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote his renowned, "I Have a Dream" speech.
2. Have a heart-to-heart with Honest Abe at the **Lincoln Memorial** then walk along the Reflecting Pool to experience the solemn **WWII Memorial**.
3. See the original Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights at the **National Archives**, then stick around to research your own family's immigration records.
4. Check out the **Library of Congress'** new and interactive elements, like the re-creation of Thomas Jefferson's original library. While you're there, use your investigative skills where you may come across one of the free lectures, concerts, exhibits, and poetry readings that are held regularly.
5. Visit **Arlington National Cemetery** to see the Changing of the Guard ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns.
6. Watch history being made by sitting in on a ground-breaking **Supreme Court** ruling.
7. Trace the names of loved ones lost at the **Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Wall**, a place of deep reflection for many visitors.
8. Test your history knowledge at the **National Portrait Gallery**, where the nation's only complete collection of presidential portraits outside the White House is located.

9. See America's story told through stamps at the **National Postal Museum**. Then walk across the street to 100-year-old **Union Station** to get inspired by its beautiful architecture.
10. Get out into DC's neighborhoods to learn about history beyond the National Mall by experiencing **Cultural Tourism DC's** free self-guided walking trails. They are marked with illustrated signs revealing the stories behind Washington's historic neighborhoods.

DC OUTSIDE

1. Experience the serenity of the monuments by taking a jog at sunrise.
2. Make a power play and start a game of Frisbee on the **National Mall**, or a game of volleyball at one of the pits at **Potomac Park**.
3. Grab your coat, scarf and hiking boots to trek your way down the **C&O Canal Towpath**, which traces the Potomac from Georgetown to Cumberland, MD.
4. Head to **Gravelly Point**, a park area off the George Washington Memorial Parkway, to watch the planes take off from Reagan National Airport.
5. Let DC's green space surprise you with a visit the **National Arboretum**. While you're there, take in the beautiful fall colors and see the pillars from the original U.S. Capitol that was burned during the War of 1812.
6. Browse through the **National Gallery of Art's** Sculpture Garden to take in art on view and fresh air at the same time. The garden features seating for visitors - so stay for a while to rest and reflect on the works on view.
7. Rarely travel without Fido? Bring him to **Lincoln Park** on pet-friendly Capitol Hill to make nice with the neighborhood's four-legged friends.
8. Spend just \$5 to explore nature in **Great Falls Park**, 800 acres of beautiful parkland right outside DC consisting of beautiful green space, cascading rapids and several 20-foot waterfalls.
9. Enjoy a veritable feast for the senses each Sunday at the Dupont Circle **FRESHFARM Market**. During peak season, there are more than 30 farmers offering items including fruits and vegetables, meats, cheeses, fish, baked goods and more. Market hours are 9am-1pm April thru December; 10am-1pm January thru March.
10. Discover a hidden treasure in **Montrose Park**, located between Dumbarton Oaks Park and Rock Creek Park (R St. NW, between 28th and 32nd Sts.), and make sure to stroll along Lovers' Lane - a beautiful 18th-century cobblestone path.

INTERNATIONAL DC

1. Get a taste of Little Rome with a visit to the myriad Roman Catholic institutions located in the Brookland neighborhood of DC, including the **National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Franciscan Monastery and Garden, Catholic University** and the **Pope John Paul II Cultural Center**.
2. Take pictures near the Chinatown Friendship arch at the corner of 7th & H Sts, NW, then head to **Tony Cheng's** for dim sum priced under \$8.
3. Jump at the chance to pay as little as \$5 to hear lectures at the **Alliance Francaise de Washington** and brush elbows with others who love European culture.
4. Head to 16th Street to tour the **Mexican Cultural Institute**, a neighborhood jewel in Columbia Heights, where you'll be inspired by the latest exhibition of visual art by Mexican artists (open Mon.-Fri. from 10 am-1 pm and 3 pm-6 pm).
5. Go to the **Goethe Institut** in Penn Quarter to learn all about German culture, and see the work of German artists in the gallery.

ECONOMICAL EATS AND CHEAP HAPPY HOURS

1. The hand-written sign above the register in **Ben's Chili Bowl** says that loyal supporter Bill Cosby is the only customer who can eat for free. But you can still eat for cheap at this city staple, where the famous chili half smoke is just \$4.95.
2. Head over to **Julia's Empanadas**, where a variety of hand-made, freshly-baked empanadas are served for less than \$5.
3. Need to grab a bite but don't have time for a sit-down meal? Enter "**On the Fly**," a fleet of eco-friendly SmartKarts serving reasonably priced food from restaurants throughout the city. The "Kart" at 7th & F Streets, NW serves food from city favorite Rocklands Barbeque & Grill, and a pulled chicken sandwich is under \$5.
4. **PS 7's** doesn't cut corners when it comes to after-work specials. The fine dining restaurant offers its beer of the day for \$2.50, its red, white and sparkling wine of the day for just \$4/glass and many small plates in the lounge for under \$10.
5. The 100% wind-powered **Austin Grill** is a family-favorite offering Tex-Mex "grub" in a fun atmosphere. Kids eat for free on Tuesdays, while Fajitas-for-Two are just \$20 every Monday.
6. Eat organic at **Johnny's Half Shell**, where James Beard award-winning chef Ann Cashion's mini-burgers and mini Asian tuna sandwiches are just \$2.50 and her fried oysters and gumbo are \$6 each during happy hour.
7. Watch the chef make noodles in the window of **Chinatown Express** before ordering a big bowl for yourself for under \$5.
8. Less than \$10 will get you falafel and twice-fried fries until 4am on weekends at **Amsterdam Falafelshop**. They even offer a choice of wheat or white pitas, and they don't use spoons, forks or plates in an effort to reduce waste.
9. Mix with the interns and young professionals that work on Capitol Hill at **Hawk and Dove**, where you can feast on free snacks between 4 and 7pm, and domestic drafts for \$1.95.
10. Even sushi has a happy hour in DC. Try **Café Asia**, where Nigiri is \$1/piece and maki rolls are discounted. Also try **Lotus Lounge**, where beer, wine, sushi rolls and dumplings are just \$5 during happy hour Tuesday through Saturday.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

1. Stand in the footsteps of great abolitionist **Frederick Douglass at Cedar Hill**, his recently renovated former home. While there, take in a great aerial view of the city. Tours are just \$1.50/person. Make a reservation by [clicking here](#) or call 1-877-444-6777.
2. Spend an inspiring moment at Freedom Plaza, across the street from the **Willard InterContinental Hotel** where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote his famous, "I Have a Dream Speech." Then head over to the Lincoln Memorial to stand in the spot where he delivered it.
3. Explore Cultural Tourism DC's **African American Heritage Trail** to learn about lesser-known sites of significance to DC's black history. Consider the house in **LeDroit Park** where accomplished poet and writer Paul Lawrence Dunbar lived after his marriage to wife Alice in 1898, or The True Reformer Building on U Street, an architectural testament to black economic development. Completed in 1903, it was conceived, financed, designed, built and patronized by African Americans.
4. Stroll through the U Street Corridor to reflect on yesterday's Black Broadway and see the venues (like **Bohemian Caverns**) that played host to musical performances by Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie and more. While you're there, stop at the **African-American Civil War Memorial**.
5. Have breakfast at **Busboys & Poets** on a Sunday morning, or visit any Tuesday night at 9pm to hear spoken word at the venue's open mic night.
6. Experience history through visual art at the **Howard University Gallery of Art**. Located on campus, the Gallery's African American Art Collection is free, and one of the most comprehensive representations of black artists in existence.
7. Consider a cupcake (\$3/each) from **Cake Love**, a black-owned bakery on U Street with an owner that gave up a successful career in law and replaced it with one in baking.

8. Feel the city's soul power at any of DC's many nightspots that offer entry free of charge, including **Marvin** (inspired by Marvin Gaye), **Zola**, **OYA** or **Tabaq Bistro**.
9. Attend a Sunday morning church service at **Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church**, the national church of the AME denomination.
10. A taste for soul food should lead you to **Oohs and Aahs** near **Howard University**, where you can get a soulful meal of ribs with house-made barbeque sauce, macaroni and cheese and collard greens for under \$10.

ARTS AND CULTURE

1. Head to the **National Museum of Women in the Arts**, the only museum in the world dedicated exclusively to recognizing the work of women artists, on Free Community Sundays, the first Sunday of each month.
2. Visit **The Phillips Collection** in Dupont Circle, America's first museum of modern art, where the permanent collection is free of charge (contributions welcome).
3. Follow Georgetown's cobblestone streets to **Old Stone House**, a National Park Service site and the last pre-Revolutionary building standing in Washington, DC on its original foundation.
4. View French paintings of modest size but high-quality in the **National Gallery of Art's** permanent exhibition, Small French Paintings, on view on the ground level of NGA's East Building.
5. Get a behind-the-scenes look at the preservation of art in the **Lunder Conservation Center**. It's the first art conservation facility allowing the public permanent access to views of essential conservation work. There you'll see staff from the **National Portrait Gallery** and the **Smithsonian American Art Museum** hard at work through floor-to-ceiling windows.
6. Take a free docent-led tour at one of DC's many museums and other cultural institutions, including the **National Archives**, the **National Air and Space Museum**, the **Washington National Cathedral** and many more. Before you go, make sure to check the website of each venue for specific details.
7. DC is a celebratory city with many festivals taking place throughout the year. Check **Washington.org's event calendar** for the latest information on the DC's most popular festivals, full of activities and free-of-charge to attend including the **National Cherry Blossom Festival**, the **DC Caribbean Carnival**, the **Smithsonian Folklife Festival** and more.
8. See a show for a reasonable price by taking advantage of **Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company's** "Pay-what-you-can," seats, offered for the first two performances of every main stage production. Tickets (two-per-person) are sold at the theatre 90 minutes prior to showtime.
9. Take a walk off the beaten path and visit the **National Geographic Museum** to check out its free exhibitions that highlight international cultures and natural wonders.
10. Dance your way to **Lucky Bar** in Dupont Circle on Monday nights, where free salsa lessons are offered at 8pm. Then practice the moves with your partner until last call.

AROUND TOWN

1. Stroll up **Massachusetts Avenue** to get a first-hand look at the beautiful architecture of embassies from around the world.
2. Everyone knows that Washington, DC is the United States' "seat of power," but did you know that it's also home to the world's biggest seat? The **"Big Chair,"** in Anacostia happens to be the world's largest. Make sure to check it out - it's free to visit, and serves as a gathering spot for the Anacostia neighborhood.

3. For a great and inspiring aerial view of the city (without the wait you'll find at the Washington Monument), visit the **Old Post Office Pavilion** on Pennsylvania Avenue.
4. Get intellectual by attending a book talk at **Politics and Prose**, a bookstore and coffeehouse in Van Ness. All in-store events are free and open to the public, and they happen multiple nights a week.
5. Take a breath of fresh air while learning about DC neighborhoods on a **Washington Walks** tour. All tours are just \$10/person, and themes range from "Memorials by Moonlight," a nighttime encounter with the National Mall memorials to "The Most Haunted Houses," featuring a look at the Octagon, DC's most ghost-filled residences (according to guides in the know).
6. Have a power lunch for less at **Old Ebbitt Grill**, the oldest restaurant in DC. There, guests can enjoy raw bar items for less than \$10 each since they're 50% off during Oyster Happy Hour, Mon.-Thurs. from 3-6pm and 11pm-1am.
7. Visit **Eastern Market** on weekend mornings to browse the work of local artisans and sample farm-fresh produce and concoctions.
8. Make a late-night stop at **Kramerbooks & Afterwords Café** in Dupont Circle to browse conversation-starting titles, grab a \$6 smoothie pint and hear free live music Wednesday through Saturday nights.
9. Take in the splendor of the **Robert & Arlene Kogod Courtyard** at the **National Portrait Gallery** and the **Smithsonian American Art Museum**. When you're done, walk just a few steps to see the latest exhibitions on display at each of the free museums, which stay open until 7 pm nightly. Need to check your email or confirm a hotel stay while you're out? You're in luck - the Courtyard also offers free Wi-Fi.
10. Visit the 100-year-old **Union Station** to find out why its beautiful architecture and special events make it more than just a train station.

GLBT-FRIENDLY FREEBIES

1. Make sure your voice is on-key for the Monday night **Showtunes Sing-a-Long** at **JR's Bar and Grill**. Entry is free, and pints are just \$3 from 9pm-closing.
2. Browse **Lambda Rising**, a bookstore on Connecticut Avenue serving the gay community since 1974, for an incredible selection of GLBT titles. Check the store's event calendar for information on free author appearances and special events.
3. Catch some rays on a sunny day at **East Potomac** or **Meridian Hill Park**.
4. Grab your cowboy boots and hat and head to **Remingtons**, where line dancing lessons are just \$5/person. And for a taste of how the professionals do it, visit the bar at 10pm on the third Friday of the month to see the **DC Cowboys** (an all-male group of line dancers) kick-up their heels during a high-energy performance.
5. Get your dose of history with a visit to the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** to learn about the dangers of unchecked hatred. While you're there, pay special attention to the section that addresses the Nazis' persecution of homosexuals.
6. Don't want to stray from your workout routine while in DC? Join **D.C. Front Runners**, a running, walking and social club that meets at 9:30am every Saturday at 23rd & P Sts for a brisk walk, or 10am for a fun run followed by socializing.
7. Check out **DC Eagle** on Friday nights, where if you're shirtless, you get to shoot pool for free on Saturdays from 4-8pm.
8. Hang with a predominantly African-American crowd at **The Fireplace**, where Wednesdays means .50 cent rail drinks and domestic beer all day and night.
9. Check out **Homo Hotel Happy Hour** the third Thursday of each month, where gays take over a different hotel bar each month. Admission is free.
10. Grab some friends and watch a sporting event at **Nellie's**, DC's first gay sports bar.