

# 10 Tips for Visiting Smithsonian Museums with Children



## Before You Come . . .

### ✓ Plan Ahead

When you visit the Smithsonian, you are visiting the largest museum complex in the world. The Smithsonian is composed of the National Zoo and 19 national museums; 17 are in the Washington, D.C., area. Smithsonian museums are free and most are open 10 AM-5:30 PM daily; the Anacostia Community Museum is open 10 AM-5 PM; the American Art Museum and Portrait Gallery—collectively known as the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture—are open 11:30 AM-7 PM. Summer hours are determined annually. All are closed December 25.

Plan ahead by ordering a free “Planning Your Smithsonian Visit” packet. Write: **Smithsonian Information**, Smithsonian Institution, SI Bldg., Rm. 153, MRC 010, PO Box 37012, Washington, DC 20013-7012. Or call 202-633-1000 (voice/tape) or 202-633-5285 (TTY) Monday-Friday 9 AM-5:15 PM and Saturday 9 AM-4 PM. Or visit our Web site at [www.smithsonian.org](http://www.smithsonian.org) where you can find helpful information or send an e-mail to [info@si.edu](mailto:info@si.edu). Note: To request this flyer in alternative formats, please contact Smithsonian Information (allow several weeks for processing).

Museums are usually less crowded during the weekdays in the early mornings, when they first open. Families are usually fresher at that time of day, too.

### ✓ The Smithsonian Adventure

Make your visit to the Smithsonian an adventure for your children by talking about the things they will see before coming. A bedtime story about dinosaurs, insects, pandas, presidents, or the Wright brothers builds excitement!

### ✓ Walk, walk, walk

Ten of the museums span from 3rd to 14th Streets between Constitution Avenue and Independence Avenue, approximately one mile (1.6 km). Because you will do a lot of walking, bring comfortable clothing and shoes!

### ✓ Ride, don't drive

Because on-street parking is extremely limited, use Metro to visit the Smithsonian. Metrorail stations are convenient to most Smithsonian museums and the National Zoo. The D.C. Circulator buses (Note: The purple route runs on weekends only.) is another option to get around. For routes and schedules, visit the Web at [metroopensdoors.com](http://metroopensdoors.com) or [dccirculator.com](http://dccirculator.com).

#### **Information subject to change without notice.**

Dates and times for interactive areas, discovery rooms, and public programs vary. Confirm by calling Smithsonian Information 202-633-1000 (voice/tape) or 202-633-5285 (TTY); or check at any museum information desk. Web address: [www.smithsonian.org](http://www.smithsonian.org). E-mail: [info@si.edu](mailto:info@si.edu)

# After You Arrive. . .

## ✓ First stop—Smithsonian Information Center

Make the **Smithsonian Information Center** (1000 Jefferson Drive, SW; **open daily 8:30 AM-5:30 PM**), located **in the Castle**, your first stop. To help you plan your itinerary, watch a 10-minute video overview on Smithsonian museums. In addition, most museums have an information desk where you can have your questions answered by an information specialist and obtain a free copy of the booklet *goSmithsonian* and various other brochures.

## ✓ Children first



After determining what each person wants to see, let everyone—children and adults—choose a destination. Allow older children to review maps and museum floor plans in *goSmithsonian* and plan the route. Remember to check the whereabouts of rest rooms, water fountains, Museum Stores, and cafes!

Young children's attention span can be very short and they may find a security officer, a long flight of stairs, or a decorative foundation more interesting than the exhibitions you had in mind. Visit the exhibitions or galleries that the youngest children want to see first. If everyone's still in good humor, then adults can visit what they want to see. Stop and look at any exhibition that catches your children's fancy, even if it's not in your plan. Encourage their interests. If you are traveling with preschoolers, plan to spend no more than an hour in any one museum.

## ✓ Do you know . . . ?

Another way to keep a child's interest is to talk about the exhibitions you are visiting. For example, at the Air and Space Museum, talk about the evolution of flight and the wonders of science and technology in space exploration. At the American History Museum, talk about the legacy and preservation of the Star-Spangled Banner. At the Natural History Museum, talk about the natural sciences: dinosaurs, rocks, insects, and sea life. To further engage their interest, encourage children to use their imaginations. For example, pick a theme,

such as animals, when visiting an art museum—African Art, American Art, Hirshhorn Museum, or Freer or Sackler Gallery — and have the children find paintings and sculptures that include animals; ask them to compare the animals and explore how each artist created them. When visiting the Portrait Gallery, find a portrait of a person they recognize and talk about ways a portrait reflects the time period in which the person lived.

## ✓ More than meets the eye

There's much to see and do at the Smithsonian. If your child becomes restless, suggest a change of pace. Ask at any museum information desk about a discovery room or a hands-on exhibition area (free, timed passes may be required), special performances, musical events, storytelling sessions, or workshops.

## ✓ The Computer Age

You'll find interactive computers in many Smithsonian exhibitions. Visit the Air and Space Museum's *How Things Fly*, Natural History Museum's *Geology, Gems, and Mineral Hall* or the *Sant Ocean Hall*, and Postal Museum's *What's in the Mail for You!*

## ✓ Time out!

Take frequent breaks—especially with preschoolers. Visit the Museum Stores, which have a nice selection of children's books, especially at the Natural History Museum. See an IMAX® film at the Air and Space Museum or Natural History Museum. Attend a performance at the Discovery Theater in the S. Dillon Ripley Center. If you enjoy the outdoors, have a family picnic on the National Mall, visit the outdoor habitats surrounding the American Indian Museum, or stroll through one of our gardens: Natural History Museum's Butterfly Habitat Garden to look for colorful butterflies during the summer; the Ripley Garden with its serpentine wall between the Hirshhorn Museum and Arts and Industries Building; the Folger Rose Garden, including the Keith Fountain to the east of the Castle; and the Victorian garden to the south of the Castle.



# Some Fun Things To See and Do at the Smithsonian

Here's a short list of some of the ongoing exhibitions and events popular with children of all ages that you may want to enjoy with your family.

---

The **Arthur M. Sackler Gallery**, located in the Haupt Garden on Independence Ave., SW, presents Asian art from ancient times to the present. *ImaginAsia* (for ages 8-14 with adult) is a popular year-round activity, on selected days, where families explore an exhibition and then create an art-related project.

The **Carousel on the Mall**, located near the Smithsonian Castle, is a perfect break from museums. It operates daily, weather permitting; hours vary seasonally, fee.

The **Discovery Theater**, located in the S. Dillon Ripley Center, features a range of programs year-round, including mimes, musicians, and puppeteers for young audiences. Call for schedule and fees at 202-633-8700.

The **Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden**, located at 7th St. and Independence Ave., SW, houses international modern and contemporary art in a cylindrical pink granite building. Teen and youth workshops, offered several times a year, introduce young visitors to the world of contemporary art.

The **National Air and Space Museum's** two facilities presents the history of aviation and space exploration and technology. At its **flagship building on the National Mall** at Independence Ave. and 7th St., SW, Einstein Planetarium shows are offered throughout the day (fee). A paper-airplane contest explores the basic scientific principles behind flight; times are posted at the *How Things Fly* entrance. View more aviation and space artifacts, such as the Shuttle Enterprise at its **Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center** in Chantilly, Virginia, near Dulles Airport. Both facilities offer daily shows of large-format IMAX® films (fee).

The **National Museum of African Art**, located in the Haupt Garden on Independence Ave., SW, introduces youth to African literature through its storytelling program *Let's Read about Africa*.

The **National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center**, located at 14th St. and Constitution Ave., NW, brings the history of science, technology, society, and culture of America to life. Visit

Spark!Lab and the exhibition *Invention at Play*, both offer interactive and engaging activities.

The **National Museum of Natural History**, located on Constitution Ave. at 10th St., NW, is a fascinating resource on people and the natural world. Look for dinosaurs, the Hope Diamond, and an array of animals in the *Mammals Hall* and *Sant Ocean Hall*. Explore the Discovery Room (an interactive area), see live butterflies in the Butterfly Pavilion (fee), or watch a large-format film—on nature and adventure—in the Johnson IMAX® Theater (fee).

The **National Museum of the American Indian**, located at 4th St. and Independence Ave., SW, presents the life, arts, culture, and history of the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere. Enjoy the Grandfather Rocks and cascading waterfall (northwest corner) as you approach the entrance. Inside, be sure to visit the doll and animal sections of the *Window on Collections* exhibition and send a postcard from the Resource Center.

The **National Postal Museum**, located next to Union Station on Massachusetts Ave. and 1st St., NE, provides an illuminating perspective on American history through postal history from Colonial times to the present. Highlights include priceless rarities and various modes of mail delivery—from the Pony Express, to dog sleds, to airplanes. For good luck, rub the nose of Owney, a bronze replica of the mutt that won the hearts of the Railroad Mail Service.

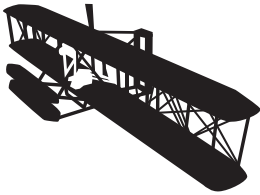
The **National Zoological Park** is approximately 20 minutes (by Metrorail on the Red Line) from the National Mall, at 3001 Connecticut Ave., NW. More than a thousand animals live at the Zoo. Stop by one of the learning labs or take in an animal demonstration. Highlights include the giant pandas, *Amazonia* (a tropical rain forest), *Kids' Farm*, and *Asia Trail*.

The **Smithsonian American Art Museum** and the **National Portrait Gallery**—two museums located at 8th and F Streets, NW—offer family days, workshops, and themed activities for families with children.

# The Smithsonian Quiz for Children

These are some of the popular objects and exhibits that young visitors frequently ask about when visiting the Smithsonian. Can you match them to the correct museum? Fill in the circles on the map with the correct number.

1. Wright Brothers' 1903 Flyer



2. Giant Panda



3. 1401 Steam Locomotive



4. Modern Head sculpture



5. Serpent Mask from Burkina Faso, detail



6. Owney, the Postal Dog



7. Peacock Room, detail



8. Space Shuttle



9. Real Justice sculpture



12. Oglala Lakota Dolls



13. George Washington portrait



14. Monkeys Grasping for the Moon sculpture, detail



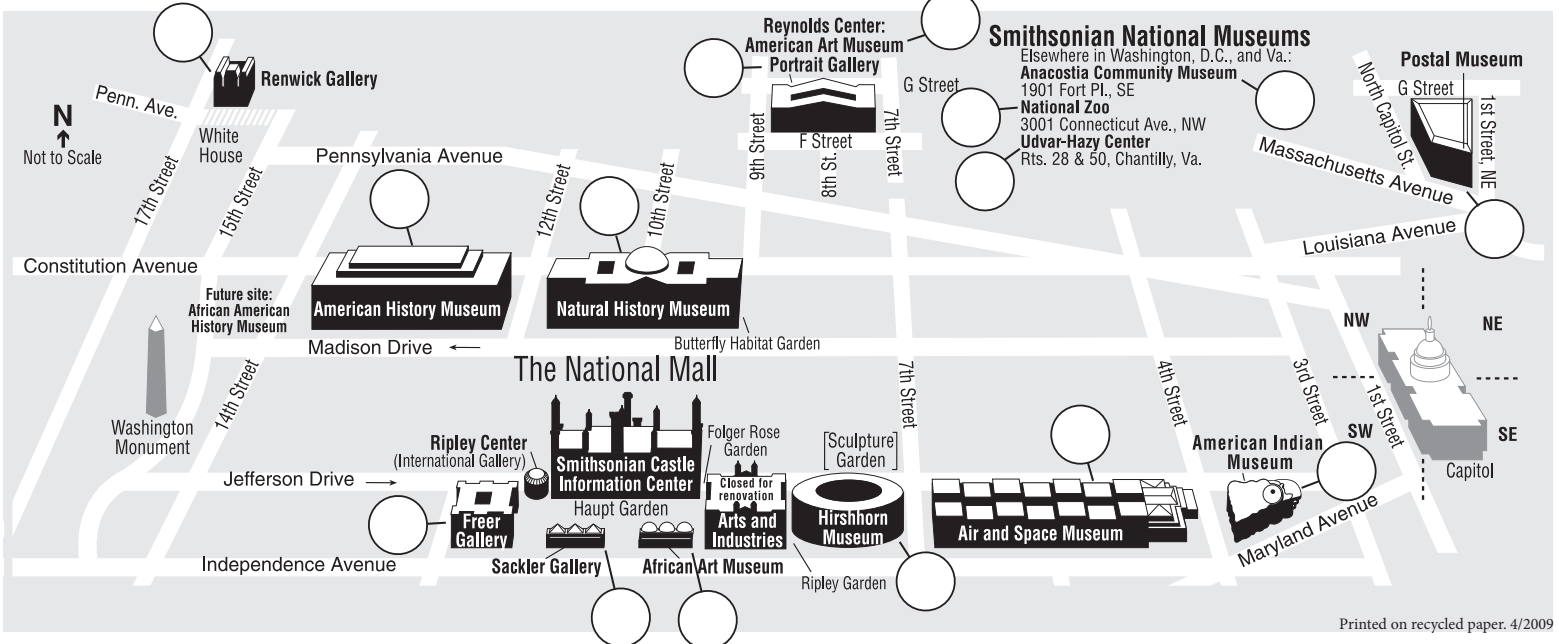
10. Hope Diamond



11. Geometric Mouse sculpture



15. Game Fish sculpture



Printed on recycled paper. 4/2009

- Answers:**
- African Art Museum: 10
  - American History Museum: 3
  - American Indian Museum: 12
  - Air and Space Museum/Mall: 8
  - Anacostia Community Museum: 9
  - Freer Gallery of Art: 7
  - Hirshhorn Museum: 12
  - Natural History Museum: 10
  - Postal Museum: 6
  - Portrait Gallery: 13
  - Sackler Gallery: 14
  - Zoo: 2