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SEPTEMBER 2026



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Ronel Hentschel

EDITOR
David Arkin

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Brandi Calhoun

ADVERTISING & MARKETING
Vicky Mashaw
Megan Walsh
Karen Washburn
Tyler Washburn

COVER, ADVERTISING
AND EDITORIAL DESIGN
Meredith Hancock

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ON THE COVER

Washington Parent Picks Winners & Finalists announced!

THE RESULTS ARE IN!

Our readers have spoken.



WASHINGTON PARENT PICKS WINNERS & FINALISTS



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3 THINGS TO KNOW THIS MONTH



BRANDI CALHOUN,
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Fall into the perfect season

From an 18K digital world at ARTECHOUSE and a free chalk art festival in Old Town to a beloved farmers market's new home at The Wharf, here are three DMV experiences worth putting on your September calendar.

This month's issue is full of great ideas, things to do this fall and fun family experiences you won't want to miss. The DMV's art, culture and outdoor scene is in full swing, so we've rounded up several ways to soak it all in throughout the pages — but these are the top 3 things you definitely won't want to miss this issue!

PHOTO COURTESY OLD TOWN NORTH ALLIANCE



Chalking up the sidewalks at Old Town North's Chalk-A-Block

Alexandria's Old Town North Alliance brings back its free, family-friendly street-art celebration from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sept. 19 (rain date is Sept. 20) at the newly completed TideLock waterfront, 1055 N. Fairfax St., Alexandria, VA. Now in its third year, Chalk-A-Block pairs professional chalk artists with dedicated community chalk zones where kids and adults alike can create their own masterpieces alongside art therapists from River Grove Therapy. Add in live music from The Okays, local makers, a judged "Best in Show" award and a "People's Choice" vote, plus food from neighborhood spots like Hank's Oyster Bar and Lula's on the Potomac, and you've got a laid-back fall afternoon that's easy to reach right along the Mount Vernon Trail.

PHOTO COURTESY RRP/PHOTOS



Stocking up at Farmers Market SW's new Wharf home

After a decade at 4th and M Street SW, the beloved Farmers Market SW has found a scenic new home at The Wharf's M Street Landing plaza, just steps from the water. Every Saturday, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. through Nov. 21, families can browse locally grown produce, pasture-raised meats and eggs, fresh baked goods, coffee, jams and prepared foods from area farmers and small businesses — with the market continuing to accept SNAP/EBT and Produce Plus benefits. It's an easy, low-key way to spend a weekend morning with the kids: grab breakfast from a vendor, wander the stalls, then let the little ones stretch their legs along the waterfront afterward.



PHOTO COURTESY ARTECHOUSE DC

Diving into ARTECHOUSE's new SUBMERGE Project

ARTECHOUSE DC, tucked just off the National Mall, is resurfacing this September with its most ambitious exhibition yet. Premiering Sept. 11, SUBMERGE Project transforms the gallery's floor-to-ceiling canvas into a 280-degree, 18K digital world, anchored by a 45-minute show called Beyond the Render. Thirteen artist teams — including Emmy winners Emily Yang and Maciej Kuciara — contribute 14 short, immersive works, from underwater realms to futuristic dreamscapes, plus 18 hands-on installations where visitors can shape AI-generated imagery with voice and gesture. It's the kind of only-in-DC outing that turns kids who think they're "not into art" into instant fans.

EDUCATION

Learning to “adult”

From financial planning and social skills coaching to independent living, here are the DMV’s top life skills courses for teaching young adults what school doesn’t always cover.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

Your teenager can navigate four social media apps at once but can’t figure out how to open a bank account. Sound familiar? It’s not a knock on today’s kids — it’s a gap in what we’ve taught them. Building a budget, doing laundry, making small talk with a stranger: these aren’t skills people are born with; they’re skills someone has to teach. And for a lot of families, there’s simply no time in the day between homework, activities and everything else.

That’s where life skills classes come in. Around the DC area, a growing number of programs are stepping in to teach exactly what school (and sometimes home) doesn’t: how to manage money, hold a conversation, set a table or simply get through a day with more confidence and less stress. Some are polished corporate-style workshops; others are free, state-funded lifelines for kids who need extra support. We rounded up a mix of both — so whether your child needs a crash course in dining etiquette or serious help building daily routines, there’s a program nearby worth a look.



WHERE YOUR TEEN CAN LEARN IMPORTANT LIFE SKILLS

Kaizen Life Skills

Designed to give kids a sense of pride as they journey into adulthood, Kaizen offers courses in conflict management, financial planning, college preparation and community service.

- **Address:** 2001 L St. NW, Suite 500 PMB, No. 50561, Washington, DC
- **Cost:** Not published; the nonprofit relies on corporate and community sponsors
- **Good to know:** Kaizen Life Skills has served 275 young adults since 2016. Partner and volunteer opportunities are also available.

Sprintzeal Social Skills Training

Offering a mix of online and in-person classes, Sprintzeal guides students through social exercises — active listening, assertiveness, conflict resolution — to help them make a strong first impression on potential friends and employers. Worth noting: this is a general corporate training company (they also teach PMP, Six Sigma and IT certifications), not a youth-specific life-skills nonprofit.

- **Address:** 601 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC (classroom sessions; live-online option available from anywhere)
- **Cost:** Live online: \$695; in-person classroom: \$1,475
- **Good to know:** One reviewer praised the class structure and flow and noted strong group participation in a weekend session. The course carries a 4.4-star rating on Google.

The Etiquette Institute of Washington

A great way to learn classic manners, The Etiquette Institute of Washington can help kids go from fast-food fans to fine-dining experts ready to charm and impress everyone they meet. Programs include Civilitéé Teens, Poised & Polished for children and youth-group sessions.

- **Address:** 1155 F St. NW, No. 1050, Washington, DC
- **Cost:** Varies by program — the Junior Diplomats/Teen Ambassadors course, held at The Jefferson Hotel, runs \$150 (sibling discount available)
- **Good to know:** The institute holds a 5-star rating from 18 reviewers, with one reviewer calling their investment in the class “well worth it.”

Project LIFE

Helping young adults overcome barriers to independent living, Project LIFE guides students through everything from getting a license to forming a personal budget so they can succeed on their own two feet. It's a Virginia Department of Social Services-funded program with a Northern Virginia regional office. Categories include housing, health and nutrition, money management and more.

- **Address:** Regional program, no single walk-in address; call (800) 292-0305 for more information
- **Cost:** Free
- **Good to know:** This is a state-funded resource rather than a paid business. Eligibility is required for some courses.

CONTINUED...

The Social Skills Center

This course covers all aspects of social skills development, including relationship management, self-confidence and problem-solving. Classes work through a mix of individual therapy and group guidance based on each student's needs.

- **Address:** 2960 Chain Bridge Road, Suite 200, Oakton, VA, and 13885 Hedgewood Drive, Suite 245, Woodbridge, VA
- **Cost:** Not published; the center accepts select insurance plans and requires an initial consultation
- **Good to know:** The Oakton location carries a 3.7-star rating from three reviewers, with one parent saying their child's three years of group and individual sessions were overwhelmingly positive.

Social Grace

Getting students ready for adulthood by teaching everything from relationship-building to executive-function coaching, Social Grace's diverse array of programs and events help neurodivergent individuals of all ages get ready to face the world.

- **Address:** 3100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 200, Arlington, VA
- **Cost:** Cost varies by program
- **Good to know:** From testimonials posted on socialgrace.com, one parent said her daughter built more genuine friendships through the program than at school or in the neighborhood, and another credited the team with helping teachers better understand and connect with her sons.

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Prince George's County public schools guide

BIGSTOCKMONKEY/BUSINESSIMAGES

Your guide to the best public schools in PGC, including those with specializations in STEM and foreign language.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

Choosing a public school for your child shouldn't feel like a gamble. Prince George's County offers a surprising range of options — from language immersion and STEM academies to dual-enrollment programs that let students graduate with college credit already in hand. We've rounded up 10 standout schools across the county, each with its own specialty, so you can find the fit that actually matches your child's interests and goals.

This list was made based on information gathered from trusted educational resources online, like school rating websites, official school websites and educational forums.

1. Academy of Health Sciences at Prince George's Community College

The first middle college program in Largo, Academy of Health Sciences students typically graduate with an associate's degree with a focus in Health Sciences or Teaching. The school also offers a variety of STEM-focused after-school clubs to help students build their higher education resumes.



"This school has prepared me for college and some aspects of the real world. It is built for students who have goals and intentions for where they want to go and are focused on elevating and being the best for their future self," one alum said.



A tip for students: 84% of students and parents agree that students at this school are competitive academically, so students should be prepared to push themselves and take advantage of internship options and extracurricular activities.



Address:
301 Largo Road, Largo



District:
Prince George's County Public Schools



Noteworthy attributes:

- 9-12 middle college high school
- Advanced health courses
- Chinese language courses
- Internship options

2. Eleanor Roosevelt High School

Eleanor Roosevelt High School emphasizes personal responsibility, trust and compassion. The school offers a locally designed service-learning program that incorporates science, social studies and independent community service.



“Eleanor Roosevelt has so much [sic] opportunities and clubs to really find your people and find your interests,” a student wrote.



A tip for students: 77% of students say kids at this school are involved in school activities, so looking into clubs and extracurricular activities on campus early is a must.



Address:
7601 Hanover Parkway, Greenbelt



District:
Prince George's County Public Schools



Noteworthy attributes:

- 9-12 public high school
- Science and technology programs available
- Work-based learning programs
- Dual enrollment options

3. College Park Academy

Focused on personalized learning, College Park Academy gives students the opportunity to earn up to 60 college credits while learning at their own pace. Rather than only punishing poor behavior, College Park uses a positive behavior incentive system to encourage and reward good actions.



“The faculty always was and is kind. They’ve helped me get through the day, day by day. Inspiring me to do my best even when it is hard,” a senior wrote.



A tip for students: A student poll found that 100% of students and parents surveyed agree that the teachers genuinely care about the students, so there’s no need to be afraid to ask your instructor for help when necessary.



Address:
5751 Rivertech Court, Riverdale



District:
Prince George's County Public Schools



Noteworthy attributes:

- 6-12 public charter school
- Signature programs
- AP Seminar and AP Research
- Top Prince George's County school according to U.S. News & World Report

4. Oxon Hill High School

A welcoming environment that transforms students into productive citizens, Oxon Hill High School mixes traditional learning with unique immersive experiences. Every other week, students can participate in Engagement and Achievement activities to learn about different fields and programs.



“They have a lot of activities and their school is very diverse. Students get along with others and connect well with staff,” a student wrote.



A tip for students: Student reviews on education platforms highlight that preparation and organization are key to navigating the active school environment.



Address:
6701 Leyte Drive, Oxon Hill



District:
Prince George's County Public Schools



Noteworthy attributes:

- 9-12 public high school
- Specialized academies
- Air Force training available
- Recently expanded student wellness center

5. Chesapeake Math and IT Academy

This STEM based charter school offers unique opportunities for high schoolers to participate in advanced science projects and internships. Lower school programs also give students a leg up in STEM fields through specialized instruction and after school programs.



“Being a student at Chesapeake Math & IT Academy has pushed me to aim higher in both academics and personal growth. From the moment I started here, I knew that this school sets high expectations not just for grades, but for character and effort too,” an alum wrote.



A tip for students: 40% of students and parents agree that there are plenty of clubs and organizations for students to get involved in. A recent reviewer stated that some clubs need a one-time donation, so make sure to ask when signing up for extracurriculars so there are no surprises.

Address: 14800 Sweitzer Lane, Laurel

District: Prince George's County Public Schools



Noteworthy attributes:



- 9-12 public charter high school
- Sister school to Chesapeake Science Point
- Partnerships with local colleges and universities
- Individualized instruction



CONTINUED...

6. Charles Herbert Flowers High School

Charles Herbert Flowers High School collaborates with students, teachers and parents to create a path for excellence. This school helps college and career readiness through programs ranging from Advanced Placement to Air Force training.



“My experience at Charles Herbert Flowers High School has been positive overall. The best part of the school is the supportive teachers, diverse student body, and opportunities to participate in sports and extracurricular activities,” an alum said.



A tip for students: Charles Herbert Flowers HS offers specialized programs that many schools in the area don't, like the Science & Technology or Aerospace Engineering & Aviation Technology. Students who are interested in these fields should take advantage of these programs.



Address:
10001 Ardwick-Ardmore Road, Springdale



District:
Prince George's County Public Schools



Noteworthy attributes:

- 9-12 public high school
- Dedicated tutoring and extracurricular support time
- Varied extracurriculars
- Experienced administration

7. Glenarden Woods Elementary

An encouraging environment where hard work is valued as much (if not more) than innate talent, Glenarden allows students to grow. Challenges are treated like a part of learning and mistakes are considered a part of educational development.



“So, the teachers there are fantastic, I remember that in one year we had like 3 teachers with PhDs. The attitude in the classroom is great. The school starts teaching you about social issues and bullying from the very beginning of second grade, which really engraves these concepts into your mind after 4 years,” an alum wrote on GreatSchools.



A tip for students: 75% of students and parents agree that the teachers give engaging lessons, so students should be prepared to take extensive notes. Don't be afraid to raise your hand in class!



Address:
7801 Glenarden Parkway, Glenarden



District:
Prince George's County Public Schools



Noteworthy attributes:

- 2-5 public elementary school
- Gifted and talented programs available
- Many creative projects
- Uses New Mathematics Standards

8. Heather Hills Elementary

This school prioritizes social-emotional support to ensure students are prepared to take on any challenges that may come their way. Small group instruction and writing courses help kids develop the most essential elementary skills.



“Great small community school, very quaint, excellent learning program. I was very impressed with the rate that my daughter learned new content and all the special activities the school performed in,” a parent said on GreatSchools.



A tip for students: According to the latest available handbook, students can earn ClassDojo points (earning a monthly certificate of achievement) or earn the designation of Student of the Month, highlighting students who go above and beyond expectations.



Address:
12605 Heming Lane, Bowie



District:
Prince George's County Public Schools



Noteworthy attributes:

- Grades 2-5 public elementary school
- Gifted and talented programs available
- Maryland Green School
- Before and after care



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9. Capitol Heights Elementary

A challenging environment that fosters children's individual gifts, Capitol Heights Elementary offers many enrichment programs so students can explore new skills and interests.



"CHES is a well-rounded school, combined with academics, arts, great staff. We experienced our first year of public school here and it was a great decision," a parent wrote on GreatSchools.



A tip for students: The student-to-teacher ratio is 11:1, giving students a better advantage to a more personalized learning experience. Don't be afraid to take advantage of that opportunity!



Address:
601 Suffolk Avenue, Capitol Heights



District:
Prince George's County Public Schools



Noteworthy attributes:

- K-5 public elementary school
- Excellence in Gifted and Talented Education Award recipient
- Dual language Spanish program
- Arts Integration program

10. Dora Kennedy French Immersion School

An incredible place to develop language skills with gifted and talented programs, Dora Kennedy French Immersion School allows students access to higher level language learning at a public school.



"Dora Kennedy is an amazing school. My 4th grader is nearly fluent in French after 4 years there. He also is excelling in math and science (which he learned about all in French). The Administration is consistent and we could not be more pleased with our experience," a parent said.



A tip for students: This is a language immersion school so be prepared for the challenge of learning your basic studies in two different languages.



Address:
9850 Good Luck Road, Seabrook



District:
Prince George's County Public Schools



Noteworthy attributes:

- K-8 magnet school
- Language focused
- Maryland Green School
- Digital school library

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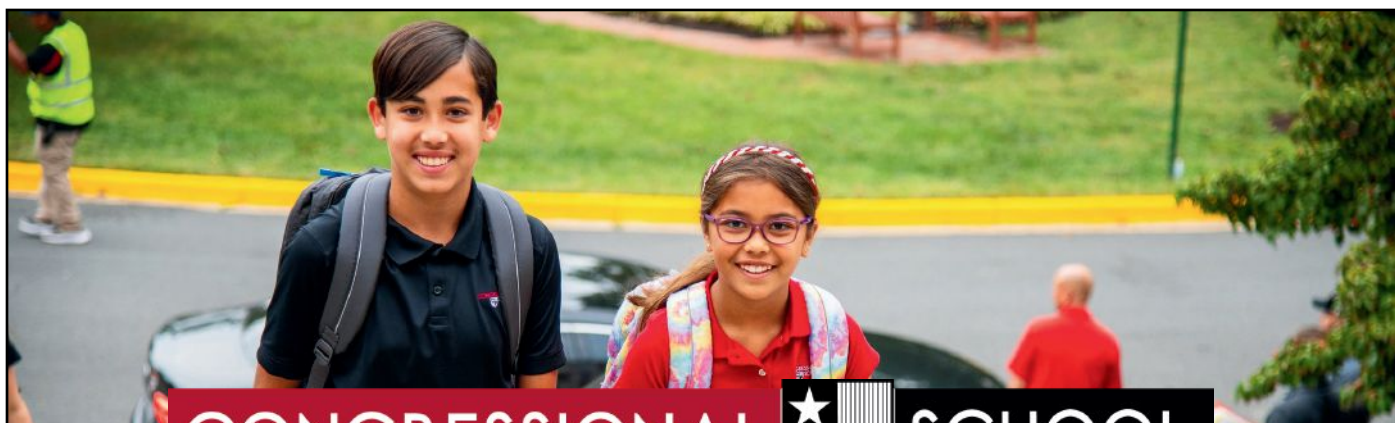


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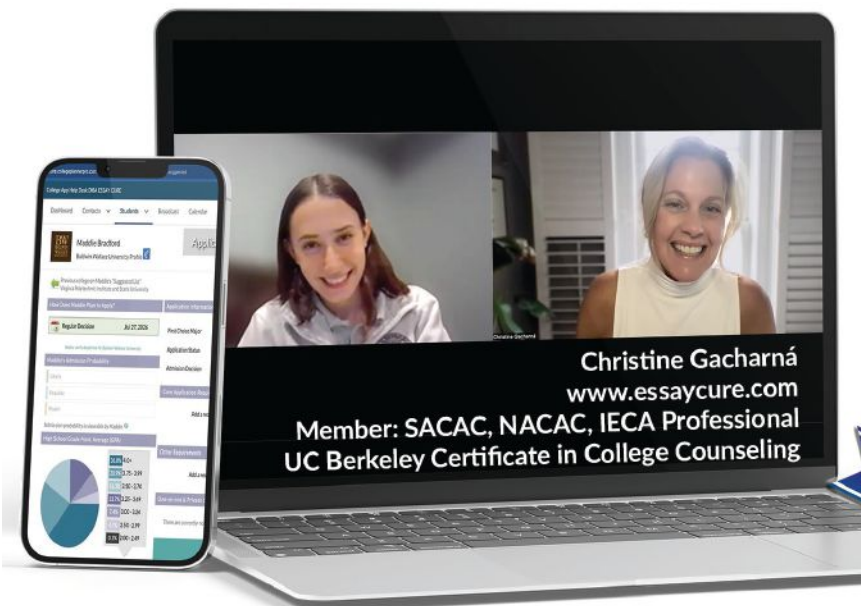


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Imagination Stage..... Finalist

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Milestones4Kids Travel Day Camp Finalist
The Siena School Finalist
Camp Accomplish Finalist

DAY CAMPS D.C.

StringTime Winner
National Children's Theatre Finalist
The Theatre Lab Finalist

DAY CAMPS MD

Christ Episcopal Preschool Summer Winner
TLC The Treatment and Learning Centers Finalist
Calleva Finalist

DAY CAMPS VA

Tiny Dancers Winner
Always in Motion Ninja & Parkour Finalist
Ideaventions Academy Finalist

SLEEPAWAY CAMPS

Alice Ferguson Foundation Winner
Camp Accomplish Finalist
Brainy Ridge Inc. Finalist

SPORTS & RECREATION CAMPS

Always in Motion Ninja & Parkour Winner
Pentagon Mixed Martial Arts Finalist
Fitwize 4 Kids Ashburn Finalist

STEM CAMPS

Ideaventions Academy for Math and Science. Winner
Alice Ferguson Foundation Finalist
Mad Science of DC Finalist

THERAPEUTIC RECREATION CAMPS

MOCO Movement Center Winner
TLC - The Treatment and Learning Centers..... Finalist
Brainy Ridge Inc. Finalist

CHILD CARE

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CHILD CARE CENTERS

COMPTON CHILDREN'S ACADEMY CENTREVILLE ... Winner
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CHILDREN WITH LEARNING & OTHER DIFFERENCES

ADHD & EXECUTIVE FUNCTION COACHING & CONSULTING

Washington Psychological Wellness Winner
TLC The Treatment and Learning Centers Finalist
Learn Thrive Grow Academic Support Finalist

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Washington Psychological Wellness Winner
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Arbit Counseling..... Finalist

AUTISM SPECTRUM RESOURCES

Washington Psychological Wellness Winner
TLC The Treatment and Learning Centers..... Finalist
Arbit Counseling Finalist

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

TLC - The Treatment and Learning Centers Winner
MOCO Movement Center Finalist
Milestones4Kids Finalist

OUTREACH & TRAINING

Washington Psychological Wellness Winner
TLC The Treatment and Learning Centers Finalist
The Point Occupational Therapy Finalist

SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY

Children's Innovative Therapy Group (CITG) Winner
TLC - The Treatment and Learning Centers Finalist
MOCO Movement Center Finalist

CONTINUED ...



CHILDREN WITH LEARNING & OTHER DIFFERENCES (CONTINUED)

THERAPEUTIC RECREATION

Washington Psychological Wellness **Winner**
MOCO Movement Center Finalist
Arbit Counseling Finalist

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

BASEBALL/SOFTBALL/T-BALL

Northern Virginia Girls Softball Association **Winner**
Bethesda Big Train Finalist
Overtime Athletics Finalist

BASKETBALL

The St. James Basketball **Winner**
Howard Youth Basketball Alliance Finalist
DMV Rebels Basketball Club Finalist

CHEER & GYMNASTICS

Fitwize 4 Kids **Winner**
Emilia's Acrobatics, Gymnastics & Cheerleading Finalist
Chantilly Academy Gymnastics Finalist

CLIMBING

DC Boulderling Project **Winner**
Tree Trekkers Finalist
The St. James Finalist

COOKING CLASSES FOR KIDS & FAMILIES

Tiny Chefs **Winner**
Romp n' Roll Finalist
Young Chefs Academy Finalist

DANCE

Tiny Dancers **Winner**
Maryland Youth Ballet Finalist
Metropolitan Ballet Theatre (MBT) Finalist

FENCING

Rockville Fencing Academy **Winner**
Cardinal Fencing Academy Finalist
Fencing Sports Academy Finalist

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The St. James Hockey	Winner
Cabin John Ice Rink--Montgomery Parks	Finalist
Skatequest	Finalist

MARTIAL ARTS

Onekick Martial Arts	Winner
Pentagon Mixed Martial Arts	Finalist
Capitol Martial Arts Academy	Finalist

MUSIC

Chevy Chase Arts Academy	Winner
Musicfully	Finalist
Potomac Music	Finalist

SOCCER

Golden Boot Soccer	Winner
Overtime Athletics	Finalist
Soccer Academy	Finalist

PERFORMING ARTS CLASSES

Tiny Dancers	Winner
Acting for Young People	Finalist
National Children's Theatre	Finalist

SWIMMING

Pozez JCC Fairfax	Winner
SwimLabs Swim School	Finalist
Potomac Marlin's	Finalist

VISUAL ARTS CLASSES

Craftspace	Winner
VisArts	Finalist
The Art League	Finalist

FAMILY FUN

AMUSEMENT & WATER PARKS

The Adventure Park at Sandy Spring	Winner
Billy Beez Manassas Mall	Finalist
Jolly Roger Amusement Park	Finalist
Massanutten Resort	Finalist

ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

National Zoo	Winner
Clark Elioak Farm	Finalist
Ever After Alpaca Farm	Finalist

BOWLING

Bowlero	Winner
Uptown Alley	Finalist
Pinstripes	Finalist

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FAMILY FUN (CONTINUED)

CAMPING & GLAMPING

Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park Williamsport **Winner**
Camp Accomplish Finalist
River Riders Harpers Ferry Campground Finalist

DAY TRIPS

National Arboretum **Winner**
Mount Vernon Estate & Gardens Finalist
AnnMarie Sculpture Garden & Arts Center Finalist

FAIRS & FESTIVALS

VisArts' Rockville Arts Festival **Winner**
National Cherry Blossom Festival Finalist
Melwood's EGGstravaganza Finalist

FRIENDLY FARMS

Butlers Orchard **Winner**
Clark's Elioak Farm Finalist
Cox Farms Finalist

GYMS, SPORTS & RECREATION VENUES

Always in Motion Ninja & Parkour **Winner**
Fitwize 4 Kids Ashburn Finalist
The St. James Finalist

INDOOR PLAYGROUNDS

Always in Motion Ninja & Parkour **Winner**
Wonder Childhood Discovery Finalist
DC Boulderling Project Finalist

MINI-GOLF

Burke Lake Park/ Fairfax County Park Authority ... **Winner**
Adventure Park USA Finalist
Monster Mini Golf Chantilly Finalist

MUSEUMS & HISTORIC SITES

National Gallery of Art **Winner**
National Air and Space Museum Finalist
National Building Museum Finalist
National Postal Museum Finalist

PARKS

National Gallery of Art's Sculpture Garden **Winner**
Wolf Trap Finalist
Meadowlark Botanical Gardens/NOVA Parks Finalist
Annmarie Garden & Arts Center Finalist

PICKLEBALL & PADEL

HoCo Pickleball Club **Winner**
Luber Run Finalist
Padel Up, Sterling Finalist



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RESORTS

Massanutten Resort	Winner
Gaylord National Resort	Finalist
Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay	Finalist

SKATING RINKS

Skate N Fun Zone	Winner
City of Bowie Ice Arena	Finalist
SkateQuest	Finalist

STORY TIMES

Library of Congress	Winner
Fairfax County Public Library	Finalist
National Postal Museum	Finalist

THEATERS & PERFORMANCE VENUES

Acting for Young People (AFYP)	Winner
The Little Theatre of Alexandria	Finalist
Olney Theatre Center	Finalist

VACATION DESTINATIONS

Deep Creek	Winner
Massanutten Resort	Finalist
Busch Gardens	Finalist
Gaylord National Resort	Finalist

FOODIES

CATERING

Nourish Culinary	Winner
Silver Spoon Caterers	Finalist
Windows Catering	Finalist

COFFEE SHOP

Neighbor's	Winner
Cafecito	Finalist
Compass Coffee	Finalist

CUPCAKES, CANDY & SWEETS

Heidelberg	Winner
Georgetown Cupcakes	Finalist
The Swiss Bakery	Finalist

FAMILY-FRIENDLY RESTAURANTS

Samantha's Restaurant	Winner
Pollo Rico	Finalist
2 Amy's	Finalist

ICE CREAM

Sarah's Handmade Ice Cream	Winner
Toby's Homemade Ice Cream	Finalist
Bruster's Real Ice Cream	Finalist

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activities and outings are
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FOODIES (CONTINUED)

OUTDOOR DINING

Ruthie's **Winner**
Lone Oak Farm Brewing Company Finalist
Sweetwater Tavern Merrifield Finalist

PIZZA

Pines of Rome **Winner**
2Amy's Finalist
Stracci's Finalist

KIDS' STUFF

BOOKSTORES

The Novel Refuge **Winner**
Politics & Prose Finalist
Capitol Hill Books Finalist

CHILDREN'S CLOTHES & SECOND HAND

Mon Chouchou Baby & Child **Winner**
Rhea Lana's of Falls Church Finalist
Princess Awesome Finalist

HAIR SALONS FOR KIDS

Cartoon Cuts **Winner**
Cookie Cutters Finalist
Sharkey's Cuts for Kids Finalist

TOY STORES

Potomac River Kids **Winner**
Child's Play Toys and Books Finalist
Dancing Bear Toys and Gifts Finalist

LET'S PARTY

ENTERTAINMENT

Princess parties of D.C. **Winner**
Glass Palace Parties Finalist
The Fantastical Character Company Finalist

PARTY PLANNERS

The Fantastical Character Company **Winner**
Jamie Kramer Events Finalist
Sweet Memories by Design Finalist
Princess Parties of DC Finalist

PARTY VENUES

Tiny Dancers **Winner**
Always in Motion Ninja & Parkour Finalist
Party ala Kart Finalist

SUPPLIES & DECORATING

Nova Parties **Winner**
Sweet Memories Finalist
Teepee Jamboree Finalist

LOVE OUR PETS

PET ADOPTION & RESOURCES

Friends of Homeless Animals **Winner**
Lost Dogs and Cats Finalist
Howard County Animal Control and Adoption Center Finalist

PET HEALTH

Bradley Hills Animal Hospital **Winner**
Howard County Animal Hospital Finalist
Tango Animal Hospital Finalist

PET SUPPLIES

Tango Pet Depot **Winner**
Wag n Wash Finalist
Clipper's Canine Cafe Finalist

PARENT EDUCATION & SUPPORT

COACHING & RESOURCES

Washington Psychological Wellness **Winner**
Mamistad New Moms Finalist
TLC - The Treatment and Learning Centers Finalist

PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS

Washington Psychological Wellness **Winner**
MOCO Movement Finalist
Mamistad New Moms Finalist
TLC - The Treatment and Learning Centers Finalist

PARENT TIME

DATE NIGHT

Georgetown Piano Bar **Winner**
Library of Congress "Live! at the Library" Finalist
Immersive Gamebox Finalist

GETAWAY WITHOUT THE KIDS

St. Michaels **Winner**
Salamander Resort Finalist
Boar's Head Resort Finalist

GIRLS OR GUYS NIGHT OUT

Georgetown Piano Bar **Winner**
Fairfax Symphony Orchestra Finalist
ARTECHOUSE Finalist

SPAS

King Spa **Winner**
Silk Rose Spa Finalist
Hand and Stone Spa, Olney MD Finalist

WORKOUTS FOR PARENTS

Pentagon Mixed Martial Arts **Winner**
Sky Zone Woodbridge Finalist
The St. James Performance Club Finalist



PHOTOGRAPHY & PORTRAITS

FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHY & PORTRAITS

Nataly Danilova Photography **Winner**
 Alexia Ballantine Photography Finalist
 Blessed People Productions Finalist

NEWBORN PHOTOGRAPHY & PORTRAITS

Nataly Danilova Photography **Winner**
 Alexia Ballantine Photography Finalist
 Amidst The Chaos Photography Finalist

PREGNANCY & BABY

BABY GEAR, GIFTS & NURSERY

Nataly Danilova Photography **Winner**
 Snugglugg Finalist
 Just Between Friends Finalist

INFANT & PREGNANCY MASSAGE

Birth You Desire **Winner**
 MOCO Movement Center Finalist
 Nurturing Touch and Wellness Finalist

MIDWIVES, OB/GYNS & DOULAS

Birth You Desire **Winner**
 Metropolitan Doula LCC Finalist
 Inova OB/GYN Fair Oaks Finalist

NEW MOMS' MENTAL HEALTH

Dr. Emma Basch & Associates **Winner**
 Washington Psychological Wellness Finalist
 Be Hive Wellness Finalist
 Arbit Counseling Finalist

PRENATAL/POSTPARTUM CLASSES

Birth You Desire **Winner**
 Arbit Counseling Finalist
 Metropolitan Doula, LLC Finalist

SLEEP CONSULTANTS

Birth You Desire **Winner**
 Susan's Sleep Solutions Finalist
 Sleep Solutions By Christine Finalist

SCHOOLS & EDUCATION

CHARTER SCHOOLS

AppleTree Schools **Winner**
 BASIS Charter Schools Washington, DC Finalist
 Phoenix Nova School Finalist

COLLEGE CONSULTING

Christine Gacharna, The Essay Cure **Winner**
 Learn Thrive Grow Academic Support Finalist
 Prep Matters Finalist

COLLEGE ESSAY COACHING

Christine Gacharna, The Essay Cure **Winner**
 Learn Thrive Grow Academic Support Finalist
 TLC - The Treatment and Learning Centers Finalist

EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT & TESTING

Washington Insight Solutions **Winner**
 TLC-The Treatment and Learning Centers Finalist
 Dr. Diana Dahlgren Finalist

FOREIGN LANGUAGE & IMMERSION PROGRAMS

Merritt Academy **Winner**
 St. Ambrose Catholic School Finalist
 BASIS DC Finalist

HOMESCHOOL PROGRAMS

Avatar Learning Program **Winner**
 St Ambrose Finalist
 Embark Center for Self-Directed Education Finalist

MONTESSORI SCHOOLS D.C.

TOTH Montessori **Winner**
 Montessori School of Chevy Chase Finalist
 Little Flower Montessori Finalist



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SCHOOLS & EDUCATION (CONTINUED)

MONTESSORI SCHOOLS MD

The Nature School at Montessori Living **Winner**
Rock Creek Montessori School Finalist
Oneness-Family School Finalist

MONTESSORI SCHOOLS VA

Sunset Hills Montessori School **Winner**
Fiore Montessori Finalist
Parkside Community Montessori Finalist

PRESCHOOLS D.C.

Lowell School **Winner**
St. Columba's Nursery School Finalist
Montessori School at Goose Creek Preserve Finalist

PRESCHOOLS MD

Christ Episcopal School **Winner**
Katherine Thomas School Finalist
Julia Brown Schools Finalist

PRESCHOOLS VA

Pinecrest School **Winner**
St. Ambrose Catholic School Finalist
The Griffin Academy of Westminster School Finalist

PRIVATE SCHOOLS DC

Sidwell Friends School **Winner**
Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School Finalist
Georgetown Day School Finalist

PRIVATE SCHOOLS MD

Christ Episcopal School **Winner**
The Katherine Thomas School Finalist
Fusion Academy Rockville Finalist

PRIVATE SCHOOLS VA

Ideaventions Academy for Math and Science **Winner**
Saint Ambrose Catholic School Finalist
Westminster School Finalist

SCHOOLS FOR NEURODIVERGENT CHILDREN

The Katherine Thomas School **Winner**
The Newton School Finalist
Lab School of Washington Finalist

STEM PROGRAMS

Ideaventions Academy for Math and Science **Winner**
Christ Episcopal School Finalist
Avatar Learning Center Finalist

TEST PREP & TUTORING

TLC - The Treatment and Learning Centers **Winner**
Learn Thrive Grow Academic Support Finalist
Loudoun Test Prep Finalist

STAYING HEALTHY

ADOLESCENT MEDICINE

Washington Psychological Wellness **Winner**
Arbit Counseling Finalist
Julie Baron and Associates Finalist

DENTISTS & ORTHODONTISTS

VK Pediatric Dentistry **Winner**
Harmony Pediatric Dentistry Finalist
Chevy Chase Pediatric Dentistry Finalist

EYE DOCTORS

Warby Parker **Winner**
Eye Doctors of Washington Finalist
Dr. Laurie Wenger, Potomac Eye Surgeons Finalist

HOSPITAL & URGENT CARE FACILITIES

Total Access Pediatric Urgent Care **Winner**
Children's National Hospital Finalist
Medstar Georgetown Finalist

MEDICAL SPECIALISTS

Washington Psychological Wellness **Winner**
Arbit Counseling Finalist
Total Access Pediatric Urgent Care Finalist

MENTAL HEALTH D.C.

Dr. Emma Basch & Associates **Winner**
Washington Psychological Wellness Finalist
Gunzberg and Associates Finalist
Arbit Counseling Finalist

MENTAL HEALTH MD.

Washington Psychological Wellness **Winner**
TLC - The Treatment and Learning Centers Finalist
Heller Psychology Group Finalist

MENTAL HEALTH VA.

Washington Psychological Wellness **Winner**
Arbit Counseling Finalist
Good Company Therapy Group Finalist

PEDIATRICIANS

Arbit Counseling **Winner**
Dr. Nana Adu-Amankwa MD Finalist
Potomac Pediatrics Finalist

PHYSICAL THERAPY

MOCO Movement Center **Winner**
Arbit Counseling Finalist
MMA & Sports Rehab Finalist



WELL-BEING

MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS

Washington Psychological Wellness **Winner**
 Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax Finalist
 Arlington Meditation Finalist

PILATES

Epiphany Movement Center **Winner**
 Better Body Finalist
 Fuse Pilates Finalist
 RTR Pilates Finalist

YOGA

Talk Yoga **Winner**
 Potomac Flow Yoga Finalist
 Blue Bird Sky Yoga Finalist



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PARENTING



*Graham Cole
as a Camper in
"A Midsummer
Night's Dream"
2019 at Folger
Shakespeare*

The ensemble director who teaches teens to fail

Director Graham Cole explains how building a show from scratch, live, teaches teens quick thinking and confidence they can't get from a script.

BY TIFFANY BLACKWELL

IN THIS SECTION

- What to Read: Exploring and caring for national parks 30
- How to know when you're overparenting 32
- The Dr Is In: A pediatrician's back-to-school health guide 34
- Ask Washington Parent: What are the Laws for Vaping and E-Cigarettes for Teens in the DMV? 36



*Traveling Players
Comedy Ensemble 2025*

Graham Cole didn't set out to become a teacher of comedy — he set out to make things up as he went along, and never really stopped. Now, as director of Traveling Players Ensemble's Comedy Ensemble, he's spending his summer teaching teens that the scariest part of improv — not knowing what happens next — is also the most freeing.

Cole is an alumnus of Traveling Players Ensemble himself and a cast member of the very ensemble that would eventually become the modern Comedy Ensemble. He holds a Bachelors of Fine Arts in acting from Elon University, where he captained the school's Instant Laughter improv troupe, and has spent the years since building a career in improv, comedy and collective creation — including work with The Alden's UnRuly Theatre Project.

Cole says he'd been performing and improvising for as long as he could remember, but it wasn't until he arrived at Traveling Players that he realized theater — and specifically comedy — could be treated as a craft rather than just "playing pretend."

"I have a very academic mind, and so having specific technique and theory applied to what I had always viewed as 'merely' playing pretend and making up stories really opened my perspective to what that kind of work could be," Cole said. That realization sent him chasing more chances to build his own technique, both as a performer and, eventually, as a teacher.



Graham Cole

Much Ado About Nothing 2019



Failing in public, on purpose

Improv asks teenagers to do something that tends to get harder, not easier, with age: fail in public. However, Cole doesn't quite see it that way. In his view, a performance really only falls flat when a performer stops caring about what they're doing, while everything else is just vulnerability, which is a different, more useful kind of scary.

"Improvvisers are asked to be creative, make bold choices and commit to absurdity," Cole said. "That's an ask that can be really scary, but it's also immensely freeing and fun once you get to the other side of it." He starts every group by introducing them to that fun and freedom first, before easing into the more intimidating parts of spontaneous creation.

Strangers on day one, an ensemble by the end

With a cast of near-strangers on day one, they don't stay that way for long. One of the ensemble's earliest rehearsals is dedicated to team-building exercises that force the group to solve a problem together before they're ever asked to improvise together. Comedy Ensemble isn't built around a fixed curriculum but instead around whoever shows up. The first week is spent exploring a range of comedy styles and formats, from the short-form games familiar to fans of "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" to longer-form storytelling. After that, it's up to the ensemble to decide what direction the final show will take.

"After that, it's up to the ensemble to decide what styles and formats they want to incorporate into our performance, and we spend the rest of our rehearsal time building what that performance will be together," Cole said.

The skill that matters more than memorizing lines

While some parents may think that acting just means memorizing lines, Cole argues the memorization and blocking are the easy part. The harder skill — the one improv trains directly — is quick thinking, active listening and spontaneous collaboration, without a script to fall back on.

"You have to come up with all of that yourself, and you don't have the luxury of making those choices before you perform them," he said. Those are skills, he added, that matter "for all kinds of performance, as well as any field where you might encounter something unexpected — which is to say: all of them."

Shakespeare in the Woods



In a world where teens can plan, edit and curate almost everything about how they present themselves, Cole sees real value in a skill that allows for none of that.

"There's so much pressure to always be polished, a well-thought-out product ready for consumption," he said. "Improv forces you to be spontaneous, unplanned and unprepared... when you present an audience with something you've just made up in that moment, completely unedited, you're saying that even that unfiltered version of yourself and your creativity is worthy of being seen."

A show that's never the same twice

After two weeks of building material, the group will spend its final week actually touring. For this past session, it performed four shows outside of camp, two at other camps and two at larger festivals alongside other Traveling Players ensembles. Unlike other ensembles at camp, which often know their final show going in, Comedy Ensemble builds its show from scratch, live, in front of its own director.

"Even after we know the formats our show will be built out of, it's still different each time we perform," Cole said. "The topic or theme of each game we play is inspired by our audience, so the show is never the same no matter how many times it's performed."

While Cole says he doesn't expect every camper to walk away chasing a future in improv or performance, that's not really the point. What he hopes they take with them, alongside the quick wit and punchlines, is confidence in uncertain circumstances, a better sense of how stories work and permission to enjoy an unpolished product.



Comedy Ensemble 2024 Rehearsal

Exploring and caring for national parks

BIGSTOCK/ICPHOTOS.VT

From lyrical picture books and a Magic Tree House adventure in Yosemite to a graphic novel history of the National Park Service, these reads will have kids ready to explore before National Public Lands Day

BY MARY QUATTLEBAUM

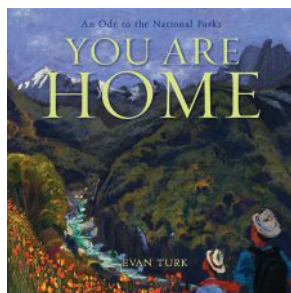
National Public Lands Day on Sept. 26 gives Americans a chance to say thank you to our many parks. Held every year on the fourth Saturday in September, it's long been recognized by the National Park Service as "the nation's largest single-day volunteer effort."

Tots to age 8

"You Are Home"

By Evan Turk
Atheneum, 2019, \$18.99

Evan Turk's stunning pastel illustrations and lyrical text convey the beauties, large and small, of our magnificent National Parks. Kids will linger over Shenandoah's sleeping chipmunk and thrill to Biscayne's "teeming reefs of the ocean floor." They will gasp at Zion's vast sandstone cliffs and



Hawaii's volcanoes. This is truly a book of the heart for Turk. His author's note mentions fond memories of childhood visits to sites with his dad, who was in the Park Service. And he did much of the book's art on location at the 20 parks depicted. Turk's note ends with praise for those, now and in the past, whose grappling with "pollution, climate change and politics" protects the parks for the future.

"Natural Wonders"

By Kathryn Benson, Meg Cook and Marianne Murphy
edclub, 2026, \$12.99

Talented authors immerse youngsters in the park experience by centering a child character (rather than a knowledgeable, more objective adult). Kathryn Benson, Meg Cook and Marianne Murphy deftly weave intriguing facts into a narrative about Hazel's various



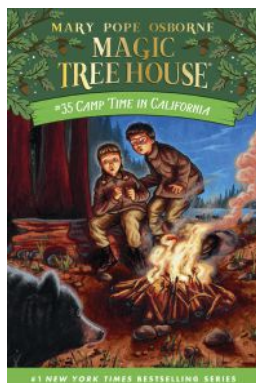
adventures. She spots elk in the Great Smoky Mountains, explores Kentucky's dank Mammoth Caves and marvels at Sequoia's giant trees. Cheery art augments the text's tone of playful wonder and the learning through visual details. In the back, multi-sensory activities extend the fun and invite thoughtful investigation.

Tweens

"Magic Tree House: #35 Camp Time in California"

By Mary Pope Osborne, illustrated by Ag Ford
Random House, 2021, \$13.99

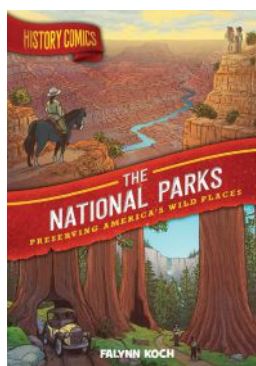
Now 40 books strong, the bestselling Magic Tree House series continues to work its time-traveling magic. Central to all the books is the tree house portal to historical events for two contemporary siblings. This time, Jack and Annie find themselves in Yosemite, an unspoiled wilderness in the early 1900s. They soon join the camping trip of a jovial cowboy and an older man called John of the Mountains. On the expedition, the kids brave a snowstorm and sketch squirrels, butterflies, huge trees and stars. At the end of the book: surprise! Their adult companions are revealed as President Teddy Roosevelt and the great naturalist John Muir. The kids discover, too, that they have helped in the preservation of Yosemite as a national park. As they prepare to return to modern America, Jack and Annie hear something amazing. "More and more sounds filled the evening air...the strange, whirring voices of all the living things of Yosemite. The wind stirred the voices together, blending them into one timeless, wordless song." It is "Nature's song," an incredible gift.



"History Comics: The National Parks"

By Falyynn Koch
First Second, 2022, \$19.99

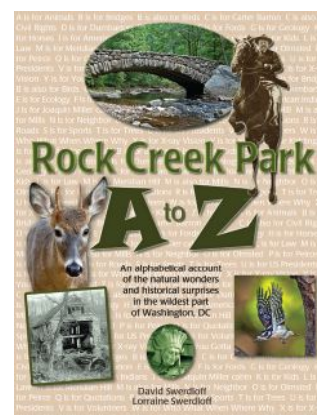
Ever wonder how certain national parks came to be? This lively graphic novel offers a fascinating peek behind the scenes at key figures and the politics involved. A bald eagle and a Sasquatch serve as good-humored guides throughout. They spotlight the women-led preservation of Colorado's Mesa Verde in 1906 and the creation of the National Park Service in 1916. They highlight the contributions of African American Buffalo Soldiers and backcountry chef Ty Sing to the early care of the parks. And they explore ongoing issues, including the unmaking of parks and the need to protect endangered predators such as wolves. While researching this unique take on history, author/artist Falyynn Koch visited 48 national parks.



"Rock Creek Park A to Z"

By David Swerdloff and Lorraine Swerdloff
Swerdloff Books, 2016, \$18.90

Want to explore one of the oldest national parks? This family guide offers an alphabetical tour of D.C.'s 1,754-acre Rock Creek Park. Readers might wend through "A" (Animals) and "B" (Bridges) or skip around to "O" (Olmsted), "S" (Sports) and "Z" (Zoo). Along the way, they learn about barred owls, Eastern painted turtles and Dunbarton Bridge and its bison statue. They discover the key role played by Frederick Law Olmsted and his landscape architect sons in Rock Creek Park and the National Zoo. And they might even make plans to hike, bike, run or ride horses on the park's many trails. For years, David and Lorraine Swerdloff, the husband-and-wife creators of the book, lived adjacent to this oasis in the city. Their love of the park is evident in their careful research, spirited writing and array of photos, maps and illustrations.

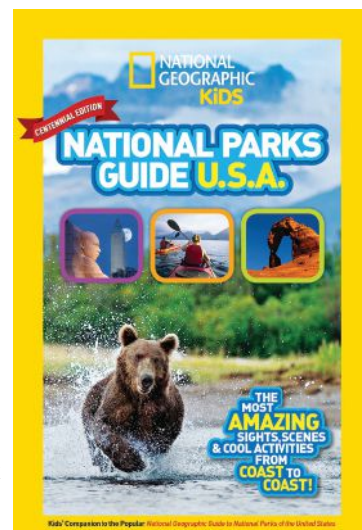


Teens

"National Parks Guide U.S.A."

By Sarah Wassner Flynn and Julie Beer
National Geographic Kids, 2016, \$14.99

Glaciers, hot springs, stone hoodoos — all can be found in national parks and in this comprehensive guide. Well-designed spreads and sidebars provide information on park location, when established, size, unique features, fun facts and what to do. Full-color photos capture majestic views (snow-covered mountains, waterfalls) and wild denizens (bighorn sheep, California condors). Maps give a sense of scale and key locales, to help with planning.



Mary Quattlebaum lives in Washington, DC and is the author of 30 award-winning children's books, most recently "Queen Elizabeth II," an early reader biography. She teaches in the graduate program in writing for children at the Vermont College of Fine Arts and is a popular school and conference speaker. maryquattlebaum.com

How to know when you're overparenting, and what to do about it

If you're tracking everyone's schedule, making every decision and nagging everyone to follow through, a parenting expert says it might be time to hand off more — and here's how to do it

BY COLLEEN REED

“Every morning, we are late getting out the door for school and work. It takes forever to wake up my kids, then we rush to get ready and help them find their stuff for school.”

“How do I get my family to use the family calendar I created? It is color-coded for each person, and everything is organized. They seemed excited when I made it, but now I just feel like I’m nagging them.”

“My kids complain about the dinners I make and insist on having pasta instead.”

“My son has two baseball games this weekend, plus a birthday party. I need to buy the gift and do a load of laundry Saturday night, so his uniform is clean for game two.”

Feeling overwhelmed as a parent? You are not alone. Parental burnout is real. You may feel stuck managing everyone’s schedule, even resentful that it all falls on you. It’s important to realize that you aren’t the only one feeling that stress. It’s worth stepping back to consider how to lighten the load — for your sake and your family’s.

Start with a question: What decisions do I actually make for this family?

The Parent Encouragement Program offers a webinar on planning family meetings in which parents build a long list: meal planning, screen time, chores, family events, homework,

extracurriculars, wake-up times and bedtimes, appointments.

How do they feel at the end of this exercise? Parents often say they feel overwhelmed, stressed, and frustrated when their plans are not followed. Tracking everything, deciding everything, and motivating everyone to follow through is exhausting.

Could you be “overparenting” — carrying more than you need to?

It is a fair but uncomfortable question. Of course, you love your child and want a safe, cheerful home. But your stress is a signal worth listening to:

- Kids grow fast. Keeping up with each developmental stage — and their growing need for independence — is a lot to deal with.
- A parent’s job changes over time. New parents manage every need, but by the time kids become teens, parents have become mentors preparing them for adulthood.
- As kids develop, the balance shifts between what you do for them and what they’re responsible for. Power struggles and stress often signal it is time to hand off more.

That’s not a failure. It’s a chance to recalibrate.

So how do you lighten the load?

Take your list of decisions, talk with your partner about which ones to hand off, then bring the family in on it. Frame it as a shared growth opportunity, not a guilt trip.

Step 1: Name the problem, not the person. Take the morning issue. The problem is “Insufficient sleep” or “Left violin at home,” not “You always make me late for work.” Naming the problem instead of the person keeps shame and defensiveness out of it.

Step 2: Solve it together. Give kids real ownership. Break it into pieces: research how much sleep they need and adjust bedtime; shop for an alarm clock; talk through backpacks (what needs to be packed and when). Ask for their ideas on making mornings easier. With your guidance and collaboration, they will take on more responsibilities.

Step 3: Bring humor and confidence. Expect things to go well, and notice when they do, even small wins. Humor helps. Let the funniest, most playful person in the family lead.

One mom of three teens said her kids kept ignoring their alarms, so now she karokes an ‘80s song in the hallway every morning at 7 a.m. When they complain, she says: “You wouldn’t be hearing it if you were in the shower!” Her mornings are a lot less stressful now.

Here is the freeing part: remember that you have options. You do not have to accept the status quo of carrying it all yourself. The next time you feel stuck and overwhelmed, try seeing it as an invitation: a chance to help your child build independence and confidence to take care of themselves.

Colleen Reed is Program Director at the Parent Encouragement Program (PEP) in Kensington, MD. She is a certified parent educator and has been leading programs since 2014. For more information about classes, visit PEPparent.org.



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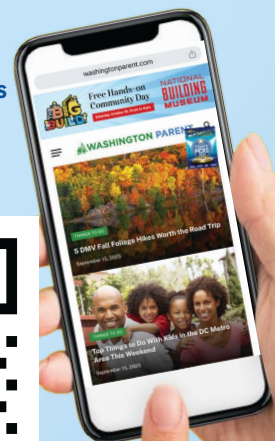


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A pediatrician's back-to-school health guide

A Kaiser Permanente pediatrician outlines the health priorities every family should tackle before the first bell — from vaccines and sleep schedules to nutrition, bullying and dropping grades

BY AZADEH SAMI, MD

August marks our peak season for annual checkups as families proactively get their health requirements taken care of before the fall. Parents thumb through letters received from school about vaccine requirements. And I talk to parents and kids about vaccines, sleep, mood, focus and nutrition. As a board-certified pediatrician at Kaiser Permanente, I want to highlight the key health and emotional issues that every family should keep on their radar as they head into the school year.

Check your vaccinations

One of the most important steps parents can take before the school year begins is making sure their children are up to date on vaccinations. But if the school year has already started, don't panic. Schedule an appointment with your child's doctor to get immunizations up to date.

Vaccines protect not just your child, but the whole classroom and the community.

Starting kindergarten: DTaP, polio, MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) and varicella (chickenpox), which are essentially boosters of infant vaccines, plus all recommended infant vaccines before entering school.

Ages 9-11: HPV (Gardasil). HPV is commonly associated with sexual transmission, but we vaccinate early because the immune response is strongest at this age. Vaccination is about protecting against certain cancers later in life, not about anything happening now.

By age 11: Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) and the first meningococcal vaccine.

Around 16: The second meningitis vaccine is critical before kids head into college dorms or other close group living, where meningitis can spread fast and hit hard.

These life-saving vaccines have been given to children for decades. Many parents are concerned about long-term side effects, but serious side effects are extremely rare. Most children only experience minor, temporary side effects such as soreness at the injection site or mild body aches. The benefits of vaccination far outweigh these short-term side effects.

The sleep debt your kid is already carrying

By the end of summer, most kids are running on a bedtime that's an hour or two later than the school year allows — and that debt doesn't pay itself off on the first day of class. Sleep drives mood, focus and academic performance more than anything else parents can control.

Start easing into a school-year routine a couple of weeks before school starts. This means shifting bedtime one hour earlier every couple of days or each week until your child is back to an appropriate bedtime for the school year. If you missed this window, don't panic. Make small adjustments to your child's sleep schedule during the first weeks of school. I recommend approximately nine to 10 quality hours of sleep each night for school-aged children. Quality sleep means sleeping through the night with minimal interruptions.

How do you know if your child is running on empty? The signs look different by age:

- Kindergarten (5-6 years): your child is still napping in the afternoon most days.
- Elementary school: your child seems tired all day, has trouble focusing, or frequently naps after school.
- Older kids: your teen seems unusually grumpy or struggles with their homework.

If you see any of the above signs, let your child's pediatrician know.

Talk to your children about their sleep and encourage good sleep hygiene: no phones close to bedtime, sleeping in a cool, dark room, and having a wind-down routine an hour or so before lights out.

An extra note about phones: Research has shown that the blue light emitted from phone screens can suppress melatonin — a hormone that rises around bedtime and helps promote sleep — which is why I often advise patients to avoid screens for at least one to two hours before bedtime. Also, when limiting screens before bed, children are more likely to spend adequate time in the deeper, more restorative, stages of sleep. Set guidelines, rules and have them physically give you the phone at a certain time each night, such as 8 p.m. Kids will get upset with these rules, but they are necessary to avoid falling into a complete technology dependency.

How to address bullying

Academic success is important, but a child's social and emotional well-being matters just as much. Unfortunately, bullying remains a challenge for many students.

Research shows that around 24% of kids will experience bullying in their K-12 years in school, and cyberbullying has only made it harder to spot; cyberbullying doesn't stop when the school day ends. If you give your child access to phones and social media, make sure they don't have unrestricted access.

Watch for a shift, not just a bad day:

- Being more withdrawn in social interactions and peer interactions.
- Showing a clear change in personality: a normally chatty kid goes flat, or a normally easygoing kid gets defensive fast
- Becoming fixated on or critical of one part of their appearance, sometimes traceable to a comment online or comments from peers.

These changes do not necessarily mean your child is being

bullied, but they may indicate that something is affecting them emotionally or socially. Try to build trust with your children so they come to you when problems arise.

When grades slip: Ruling in and ruling out

The first signs of a problem at school are rarely a bad report card. You may see your child losing interest in schoolwork, becoming frustrated with assignments, or expressing negative feelings about a particular class or teacher.

If their grades are dropping despite effort, try ruling out factors such as ADHD, learning differences, sleep problems, anxiety and other health concerns. Teachers are often the first to recognize when a child is struggling academically.

One useful test: Is the struggle everywhere, or just in one class? For example, if they perform well in English but struggle significantly in math, that may indicate a learning disability.

In this case, I encourage you to talk to your pediatrician and work with your child's school to explore evaluation and support options. Early identification and help can make a significant impact on how the child succeeds academically.

Pack nutritious lunches

Good nutrition fuels learning, concentration, physical activity and overall health. The eating habits you teach your kids can influence their choices for years to come.

Set the tone inside the household for how you want them to eat, because that will affect what foods they choose when you no longer pack their lunch.

Make lunches colorful! Kids are drawn to bright colors and variety. Skip the highly processed, prepackaged snacks (chips and crackers) whenever possible and pack more whole foods.

A salad with ranch dressing and cherry tomatoes on the side, hummus and carrots, or a turkey sandwich, are all good examples of healthy lunches or snack options.

If your child ate the sandwich and left the salad untouched, don't give up. Repeated exposure to healthy foods can help children become more comfortable with trying them over time. You may need to try a dozen times before one sticks.

The bottom line

The transition back to school is more than buying a backpack and organizing schedules. The start of the new school year is an opportunity to establish healthy habits. Vaccines, sleep, open communication, monitoring academic progress and meals that fuel a school day help set your children up for success inside and outside the classroom. If something feels off about your child's physical, emotional, or developmental health, don't wait for the next well visit. Reach out to your child's doctor so we can help your child start the school year on a strong note.

Dr. Azadeh Sami, MD, is a board-certified pediatrician with the Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group. She sees patients at the Kaiser Permanente Fair Oaks Medical Center.

PHOTO BY: MID-ATLANTIC PERMANENTE MEDICAL GROUP



What are the laws for vaping and e-cigarettes for teens in the DMV?

From bans on flavored products and sales near schools to steep fines for retailers, DC, Maryland and Virginia have more protections in place than many parents realize — here's what to know.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

As e-cigarettes and vape products become more common in schools and among young people, many parents feel anxious about what their children are exposed to. For parents of young adults 18 and older, it may feel as though there is nothing to stop them from obtaining these products. However, federal and local laws restrict the sale and marketing of e-cigarettes to people under 21, and understanding those laws can help parents recognize potential violations.

Washington, DC

The minimum age to purchase tobacco products nationwide is 21, but enforcement laws differ by jurisdiction. In DC, selling tobacco products, including electronic smoking devices, to anyone under 21 is prohibited. Sellers must also request identification when they have reasonable cause to believe a purchaser is under 30. Violations can result in penalties, including suspension or revocation of a retailer's license.

It is also illegal to sell electronic smoking devices within a quarter mile of a middle or high school in the District. DC law provides penalties for violations, and businesses can face escalating fines.

DC also regulates tobacco vending machines rather than banning them outright. District law limits where licensed tobacco vending machines may be located, including certain establishments where access is restricted to people 21 and older or where machines are positioned and monitored in accordance with the law.

In 2022, the District also banned the sale of flavored tobacco products, including flavored electronic smoking devices. Research has found that flavors can play a significant role in young people's initial use of these products. In a 2015 study published in JAMA, 81% of youth who had ever used tobacco reported that the first product they used was flavored.

Maryland

Maryland prohibits retailers from selling tobacco products, including electronic smoking devices, to anyone under 21. Retailers

must verify the age of customers younger than 30. Clerks and license holders who violate the law can face criminal fines of up to \$500 for a first offense, \$1,000 for a second offense within two years and \$3,000 for subsequent violations within a two-year period, according to the Maryland Department of Health.

Maryland also restricts certain flavored electronic smoking devices. A policy first announced by the Maryland comptroller in 2020 directed licensed retailers to stop selling certain flavored disposable electronic smoking devices. Regulatory and enforcement authority now rests with the Maryland Alcohol, Tobacco, and Cannabis Commission, which continues to enforce the policy, according to the Maryland Department of Health's Tobacco 21 law guide.

Maryland also bars the sale of electronic smoking devices through vending machines unless the machine is located in an establishment that people under 21 are prohibited by law from entering.

Virginia

In Virginia, people under 21 are prohibited from possessing covered tobacco products, with limited exceptions, including possession as part of certain employment or approved medical research. Products possessed in violation of the law may be seized.

Virginia also prohibits the knowing sale of nicotine vapor products to anyone under 21. Violating the law can carry a civil penalty of \$500 for a first offense and \$2,500 for a second or subsequent offense within a three-year period. Repeat violations can also result in the suspension or revocation of a retailer's tobacco license.

Virginia prohibits the sale of tobacco products, including nicotine vapor products, through vending machines. For certain remote retail sales, Virginia law also requires age verification and delivery procedures intended to prevent sales to people under 21. Sellers must use an approved age-verification method, and qualifying deliveries must be accepted by a person who is at least 21.

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THINGS TO DO

Pumpkins, corn mazes and fall festival fun await

From elaborate fun tunnels and five-acre corn mazes to historic neighborhood walks and a DC Print Fair, here are the best fall festivals and events for families across the DMV this season.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

IN THIS SECTION

- 13 free activities for DMV families this fall 42
- Leaf-peeping with littles 45
- Fall for these seasonal pumpkin flavors 46
- Kids eat free! 48
- An in-cider's look at local apple cider 50
- Pick the perfect pumpkin at these Maryland and Virginia farms 53
- All aboard the best fall rides in the DMV 56
- DC Kids Calendar 58



PHOTO: JIMBLE P. NET



The air is getting crisp, the leaves are starting to turn and fall festival season in the DMV is officially here. Whether your family wants to get lost in a five-acre corn maze, pick the perfect pumpkin straight from the patch, wander through DC neighborhoods on a guided walking tour or watch a pig race on a Virginia farm, this season has something worth bundling up for. Here are the best fall events and festivals across DC, Maryland and Virginia — from now through Halloween and beyond.

FEATURED FALL FUN

In this section, Washington Parent's advertising partners share their top fall activities for 2026.

Signature Theatre

This fall, Signature offers classes for all ages, from elementary school through high school graduation — including one-on-one College Audition Prep. Whether your student is just beginning or looking to advance their skills, there's something for everyone. Younger students can join Theater Makers (ages 6-11) to build confidence through games and movement, while kids age 11-14 can dive into Musical Theater Fundamentals. See the full lineup on their website.

Don't miss The Secret Garden, the Tony Award-winning musical beginning Dec. 8 — perfect for a family outing or school field trip.

- **Date:** Classes begin in September
- **Location:** Education Studios, 2784 S. Arlington Mill Drive, Arlington, VA
- **Phone:** (703) 820-9771
- **Best ages:** 6 and up
- **Reservations:** Cost varies based on class
- **Website:** SigTheatre.org/Classes



PHOTO COURTESY SIGNATURE THEATRE

MORE FALL FUN

This section features some of the best fall activities in the DMV and are based on public reviews and parenting forums.

WASHINGTON, DC

DC State Fair

Highlighting the arts and culinary talent of people across the District. The fair is held in a different neighborhood every year to highlight the unique offerings of that area. This year, the celebration will be held downtown between K Street and Anthem Row, at 800 K St. NW, Washington, DC.

- **Date:** Sept. 6
- **Best ages:** 6 and up
- **Reservations:** Free to attend
- **Time needed:** Three to four hours
- **Setting:** Outdoors



PHOTO COURTESY DC STATE FAIR

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CONTINUED...



WalkingTown

Whether you're a transplant family or have lived in the District all your life, there's always more to learn about a historic city like DC. WalkingTown is an eight-day event exploring neighborhoods throughout DC through walking tours. Tour guides, historians and local experts guide walkers through all eight wards, granting them a glimpse into the past and future of DC culture.

- **Date:** Sept. 19-26
- **Best ages:** 10 and up
- **Reservations:** Tour Registration will open on Friday, September 4, 2026.
- **Time needed:** Tours are approximately two hours long
- **Setting:** Outdoors

African American History Museum 10th Anniversary Celebration

Celebrate a young DC staple this fall by visiting the National Museum of African American History and Culture's 10th anniversary weekend celebration. This four-day event will feature surprise activities and events honoring the museum, its history and the people who brought it to life.

- **Date:** Sept. 24-27
- **Best ages:** 9 and up
- **Reservations:** Registration/ticket details vary; check the event schedule.
- **Time needed:** Approximately two hours
- **Setting:** Indoors

DC Fall Print Fair



PHOTO COURTESY DC FALL PRINT FAIR

A celebration of creativity and storytelling, the DC Print Fair celebrates local artists who create bold and intricate screen prints. Fair organizers will select some of the best creators in the District to showcase their work at this season's event, where visitors can admire and purchase prints.

- **Date:** Nov. 7-8
- **Best ages:** 11 and up
- **Reservations:** Free to attend, print costs may vary
- **Time needed:** Approximately one hour
- **Setting:** Indoors

MARYLAND

Gaver Farm Fall Fun Fest

Get back to the barnyard with your little animal lover at Gaver Farm, where you can meet goats, bunnies, ducks, donkeys, alpacas and a host of other furry friends. In addition to traditional fall activities, free hayrides are provided to and from fields where families can pick their own pumpkins, sunflowers and apples.

- **Date:** Sept. 4-Nov. 1
- **Best ages:** 4-12
- **Reservations:** Children under the age of 2 are free; tickets are up to \$20.50 per person on September weekends; up to \$32.95 per person on October weekends and \$14.50 per person on weekdays.
- **Time needed:** Two to three hours
- **Setting:** Outdoors

Montpelier Farms Fall Festival

Home to over a dozen kid-focused activities, the Montpelier Farms Fall Festival features classic activities like corn mazes and hayrides in addition to new traditions like the giant pumpkin bounce and red barn twister. Families can also make time to stop by a public bonfire or staged photo area to make autumn memories that last forever.

- **Date:** Sept. 12-Nov. 8
- **Best ages:** 4-12
- **Reservations:** Tickets available online
- **Time needed:** Two to three hours
- **Setting:** Outdoors

Summers Farm Fall Festival

Summers Farm encourages families to put their phones away and get lost this fall by visiting their five-acre winding corn maze. For kids less interested in wandering, Summers Farm has barnyard animals, simulated bull riding, zip lines, a round bale roller and more exciting outdoor activities in addition to the more relaxed pumpkin picking event.

- **Date:** Sept. 26-Nov. 1; special events may extend hours, check the calendar online
- **Best ages:** 4-12
- **Reservations:** Tickets available online, prices range from \$15-\$30
- **Time needed:** One to two hours
- **Setting:** Outdoors

VIRGINIA

Pumpkin Village at Leesburg Animal Park

Elevate your trip to the zoo with a visit to Pumpkin Village. In addition to pony rides and animal feeding, visitors can visit hay tunnels and jump on moon bounces before bonding at the family game zone with some cow roping and giant Jenga. All visitors are entitled to free face painting, pumpkin cookies and cider.

- **Date:** Sept. 19-Nov. 8
- **Best ages:** 3-13



PHOTO COURTESY DC STATE FAIR

- **Reservations:** Ticket pricing is TBA
- **Time needed:** Two to three hours
- **Setting:** Outdoors

Cox Farms Fall Festival

A magical experience, Cox Farms Fall Festival hosts intricate "fun tunnels" and slides designed to resemble treetops, castles, mountains, dinosaurs and volcanoes. But your visit doesn't have to be all play and no work; visitors have a chance to try out real farm chores while hoisting bales of straw and pumping water.

- **Date:** Sept. 19-Nov. 8
- **Best ages:** 6-12
- **Reservations:** Tickets \$15-\$30 depending on date, only available online
- **Time needed:** Three to four hours
- **Setting:** Outdoors

Burke Nursery Fall Farm Market

Taste the season at Burke Nursery with seasonal jams, spices, fruits and vegetables. At the farm market, kids can pick out their own pumpkin to carve jack-o'-lanterns or for a homemade pumpkin pie. On the weekends, the market offers pony rides and apple cider donuts.

- **Date:** Open daily in October
- **Best ages:** 2-16
- **Reservations:** Entry is free, pumpkins and other products come at different prices
- **Time needed:** One to two hours
- **Setting:** Outdoors

Great Country Farms Fall Harvest

Home to pumpkins specially grown for carving or baking, Great Country Farms elevates the annual pumpkin picking tradition with cider donuts, pig races and marshmallow roasting. Special events are held every weekend during the festival to help families appreciate and enjoy the season. Note: Weekend and holiday admission is higher than normal rates. Gate admission also rises and varies by weekday or weekend.

- **Date:** Sept. 19-Oct. 31
- **Best ages:** 3-13
- **Reservations:** Tickets start at \$12 for children, \$14 for adults; children 2 and younger are free; pumpkins cost extra
- **Time needed:** Two to three hours
- **Setting:** Outdoors



13 free activities for DMV families this fall

From fall foliage on the National Mall to free festivals in Northern Virginia and Maryland, here's how to make the most of autumn in the DMV without spending a cent.

BY MIRANDA SIMPSON

While getting into the fall spirit can be as simple as watching reruns of "Gilmore Girls" with a cup of apple cider, leaving the house to experience fall in the DMV is definitely worth it. The humidity drops, the leaves turn orange, pumpkins appear everywhere and that classic fall scent fills the air.

Best of all, families can find plenty of ways to enjoy the season for free. From scenic trails and Smithsonian museums to festivals and neighborhood celebrations, here are 13 ways to make the most of fall in Washington, DC, Maryland and Northern Virginia without spending a dime — or with tips for visiting for free when fees apply at certain times.

WASHINGTON, DC

1. Stroll the National Mall and see fall foliage

The National Mall is a beautiful spot to experience fall foliage. Monuments and memorials surrounded by autumn leaves make for one of the most memorable seasonal views in DC. Fall can also be a comfortable time for families to explore the Mall on foot and stop at favorite monuments along the way.

- **When:** All season
- **Address:** National Mall, Washington, DC
- **Best for:** All ages
- **Cost:** Free
- **Setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate
- **Reservations:** Not required

2. Visit the Smithsonian museums

On unpredictable fall days, Smithsonian museums offer families an indoor getaway with free admission. Popular choices include the National Air and Space Museum, National Museum of

Natural History and National Museum of American History. The Smithsonian's National Zoo is another family favorite.

Admission is free, but don't mistake free for reservation-free. The National Air and Space Museum in DC, National Museum of African American History and Culture and National Zoo currently require free timed-entry passes. Check the Smithsonian's current visitor information before heading out.

- **When:** All season
- **Address:** Various locations in Washington, DC
- **Best for:** All ages; different museums suit different age groups
- **Cost:** Free; passes are required at select locations
- **Setting:** Indoor; National Zoo is primarily outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate
- **Reservations:** Required at select Smithsonian destinations

3. Take a fall hike in Rock Creek Park

Rock Creek Park is one of DC's best places to watch the seasons change. Miles of hiking trails wind through wooded areas that turn shades of red, orange and gold during fall.

Families should note that the Rock Creek Park Nature Center and Planetarium building is currently closed until further notice for remediation. Check the National Park Service calendar for ranger programs and other activities being offered elsewhere in the park.

- **When:** All season
- **Address:** Rock Creek Park, Washington, DC
- **Best for:** All ages; easy to moderate trails are available



- **Cost:** Free
- **Setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate on weekends
- **Reservations:** Not required

4. Listen to jazz during DC JazzFest



PHOTO COURTESY DC JAZZ FESTIVAL

DC JazzFest returns Sept. 2-6, bringing performances to venues across Washington, DC. Families who want to enjoy the festival for free can listen to performances from the Wharf Street promenade during the festival's Wharf weekend.

Keep in mind that access to performances on District Pier, Transit Pier and at indoor venues requires tickets, so check the festival schedule before making plans.

- **When:** Sept. 2-6
- **Address:** Various locations in Washington, DC
- **Best for:** Families with kids 5 and up
- **Cost:** Free listening opportunities are available from the Wharf Street promenade; ticketed performances are also offered
- **Setting:** Outdoor and indoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate to high
- **Reservations:** Not required for free listening opportunities

5. Celebrate local talent at the DC State Fair

The DC State Fair showcases local talent and creativity through contests, demonstrations, entertainment and community activities. It's a chance for kids to experience a citywide celebration inspired by traditional state fairs without leaving DC.

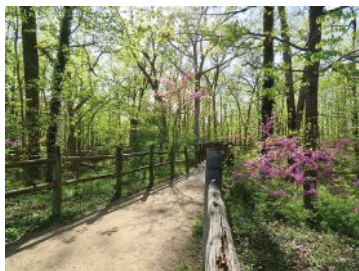
- **When:** Sept. 6
- **Address:** Anthem Row, 800 K St. NW
- **Best for:** All ages
- **Cost:** Free
- **Setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate
- **Reservations:** Not required

NORTHERN VIRGINIA

6. Explore the George Washington Memorial Parkway and Mount Vernon Trail

The George Washington Memorial Parkway follows the Potomac River through Northern Virginia, offering scenic views and access to parks and overlooks along the way. Families can also bike, walk or run along the approximately 18-mile Mount Vernon Trail, which stretches from George Washington's Mount Vernon to Theodore Roosevelt Island.

- **When:** All season



BIGSTOCK/KIMAGUNSON

- **Address:** George Washington Memorial Parkway
- **Best for:** All ages; great for families with bikes
- **Cost:** Free to use the Mount Vernon Trail
- **Setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate on fall weekends
- **Reservations:** Not required for the trail

7. Take a fall hike at Bull Run Regional Park

Bull Run Regional Park in Centreville offers miles of free trails through some of the most beautiful wooded terrain in the region. The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail runs along the creek, offering perfect scenic family hikes. Check NOVA Parks for current entrance-fee rules before visiting.

- **When:** All season
- **Address:** 7700 Bull Run Drive, Centreville
- **Best for:** All ages
- **Cost:** For visitors from outside NOVA Parks member jurisdictions, current entrance fees are \$8 per vehicle Monday through Friday and \$10 per vehicle on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.
- **Setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Low to moderate
- **Reservations:** Not required

8. Browse DePaul's Urban Farm

DePaul's Urban Farm in Vienna is a local stop for plants, produce and other farm-market finds. Families looking for a casual fall outing can browse the farm and see what's available for the season without paying an admission fee.

Seasonal products and activities can change, so check with the farm for its latest fall offerings before making a special trip.

- **When:** Check current hours before visiting
- **Address:** 2599 Chain Bridge Road, Vienna
- **Best for:** All ages
- **Cost:** No general admission fee; purchases are optional
- **Setting:** Indoor and outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Low to moderate
- **Reservations:** Not required

9. Spend the day at Art on the Avenue

Art on the Avenue turns Alexandria's Del Ray neighborhood into an outdoor arts festival featuring hundreds of artists along with entertainment and activities.

- **When:** Oct. 3
- **Address:** Mount Vernon Avenue in Del Ray, Alexandria
- **Best for:** All ages
- **Cost:** No general admission fee; purchases are optional
- **Setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate to high
- **Reservations:** Not required

MARYLAND

10. Walk or bike the Sligo Creek Trail

Sligo Creek Trail in Montgomery County is a paved trail that winds through wooded creekside scenery, with playgrounds and picnic areas along the way. It's an easy option for families looking for a free fall walk or bike ride.

CONTINUED...

THINGS TO DO

- **When:** All season
- **Address:** Multiple access points along Sligo Creek Parkway
- **Best for:** All ages; good for strollers and bikes
- **Cost:** Free
- **Setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Low to moderate
- **Reservations:** Not required

11. Visit Seneca Creek State Park on a fee-free day

Seneca Creek State Park in Gaithersburg offers woodland hiking trails and views around 90-acre Clopper Lake, making it a scenic place to spend a fall day.

- **Note:** Maryland Department of Natural Resources charges day-use fees on weekends and holidays from April through October. To keep this outing free, plan a qualifying weekday visit or check whether your family qualifies for free entry under one of the state's exemptions or passes.
- **When:** All season; visit on a fee-free day for a no-cost outing
- **Address:** 11950 Clopper Road, Gaithersburg
- **Best for:** Kids 4 and up
- **Cost:** Free on qualifying days; entrance fees apply on weekends and holidays through October
- **Setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Low to moderate
- **Reservations:** Not required

12. Walk the C&O Canal Towpath

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park's towpath stretches 184.5 miles between Georgetown and Cumberland, offering families plenty of opportunities for a fall walk or bike ride along the historic canal.

- **When:** All season
- **Address:** Multiple access points in Maryland and Washington, DC
- **Best for:** All ages; some flat towpath sections can work well for families
- **Cost:** Free at most park locations; Great Falls Tavern entrance fees apply
- **Setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate on peak fall weekends
- **Reservations:** Not required

13. Go birding at Patuxent Research Refuge

Patuxent Research Refuge in Laurel encompasses thousands of acres of protected wildlife habitat and offers opportunities for hiking and birding. Fall migration can make the season an especially interesting time for families to look for birds and other wildlife.

Because refuge facilities, trails and access can be affected by closures or changing conditions, check the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's current visitor information before your trip.

- **When:** All season, subject to current refuge access
- **Address:** 10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop, Laurel
- **Best for:** Kids 4 and up; especially good for nature and birding enthusiasts
- **Cost:** Free
- **Setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Low
- **Reservations:** Not required



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Leaf-peeping with littles

Stroll through scenic gardens and rugged hiking trails to enjoy the fall sights this autumn.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

Summer gets the family road trips and the fireworks, but fall has its own quiet magic — crisp air, golden light and trees putting on a show that's easy to miss if you're not looking for it. In a city built around monuments and museums, it's easy to forget that some of DC's best family moments are hiding in plain sight: a walk through a canopy of turning leaves, a scavenger hunt for the reddest maple, a hot cider after an afternoon outdoors.

Whether you're chasing foliage with toddlers in a stroller or teenagers who'd rather be on their phones, these spots across the District offer a reason to get outside together before the cold really sets in.

Battery Kemble

A historic and captivating trail, Battery Kemble winds through a beautiful forest and is a great place to see the foliage with your family, walk the dog or let kids explore.

- **Time commitment:** One to two hours
- **Cost expectation:** Free
- **Practical tip:** Pack bug spray.

Glover Archbold

Connecting to several other trails and local roadways, Glover Archbold Trail is a convenient way to view foliage and wildlife close to home.

- **Note:** All paths as rugged dirt trails and major streets bisect the park and require careful crossings; bicycles are prohibited.
- **Time commitment:** About two hours
- **Cost expectation:** Free
- **Practical tip:** The trail intersects with several others and has multiple potential routes, so check trail maps in advance to determine which path is best for you.

Tregaron

An oasis in the urban desert, Tregaron Conservancy is home to some of the city's most beautiful foliage and wildlife. The conservancy hosts an iconic lily pond, over 300 trees and unique native grasses and wildflowers.

- **Note:** There are no bathrooms on-site.
- **Time commitment:** About two hours
- **Cost expectation:** Free to visit
- **Practical tip:** Tregaron hosts several activities on the property, including tai chi and yoga.

Great Falls

Located just outside the capital, Great Falls' beautiful rapids are accented by falling leaves and golden foliage. Home to a variety of rare plants and animals, Great Falls is a wonderful spot for nature watching in addition to sightseeing.

- **Time commitment:** Two to three hours
- **Cost expectation:** \$10-20 per person
- **Practical tip:** The park is cashless, so make sure you have your cards and digital wallets ready.

C&O Canal Towpath

This historic trail from DC to Maryland is perfect for a bike ride or hike. Check out some of the historic sites, eye-catching waterfalls and an impeccable view of the Potomac River. Consider pitching a tent at one of many campsites to see the foliage in multiple lights.

- **Time commitment:** Two to three hours
- **Cost expectation:** Free at most park locations; Great Falls Tavern entrance fees apply
- **Practical tip:** On the Maryland side, the trail lets out near the Brunswick Heritage Museum.

Hillwood Estate

Hillwood Estate's gardens are specially designed to bloom in both the spring

and fall. Stroll through the greenhouse, Japanese gardens, lunar lawn or French Parterre to view the beautiful leaves and collections of art.

- **Time commitment:** About two hours
- **Cost expectation:** Suggested donation of \$5 for children, \$20 for adults
- **Practical tip:** Even if the weather isn't good for a garden visit, you can visit the museum and gallery indoors.

Meridian Hill

Once an aristocrat's mansion and the home of President John Quincy Adams, Meridian Hill Park is home to some of the most scenic brown and golden leaves in the city. As you examine the foliage, take some time to walk past one of North America's longest cascading fountains.

- **Time commitment:** Around two hours
- **Cost expectation:** Free
- **Practical tip:** Many areas of the park have been recently renovated, so stop by soon even if you've already been.

Book Hill

One of many scenic spots in Georgetown, Book Hill Park is home to a variety of flowers, shrubs and trees that bring a relaxing aura to the busy area. Once a reservoir, the Friends of Book Hill coordinated to clear the area of trash and invasive species to create the scenic park you see today.

- **Time commitment:** Around two hours
- **Cost expectation:** Free
- **Practical tip:** When you're finished at the park, stroll around Georgetown's scenic streets and stop by its specialty shops.



BIGSTOCK/ORBAN

Fall for these seasonal pumpkin flavors



From the classic pumpkin spice lattes and doughnuts to vegan bread and marzipan, these shops across Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia are celebrating fall one delicious bite at a time.

BY CAYLA GARDNER

Nothing says fall quite like a pumpkin-flavored treat. Whether you're looking for a pumpkin muffin with your coffee, a freshly baked pastry or the classic pumpkin spice latte, these local bakeries across Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia offer plenty of ways to get in the fall spirit. Many feature limited-time menus, so be sure to stop by before the treats disappear.

Note: Items suggested below are subject to change at each location based on bakery availability.



BIGSTOCK/SPH

WASHINGTON, DC

Three Fifty Bakery

Three Fifty Bakery serves fresh pastries, coffee and vegan baked goods in the heart of Dupont Circle. Its seasonal pumpkin breads (vegan options available) pair perfectly with a handcrafted coffee drinks.

■ **What people are saying:**

"Was incredibly happy that I stopped in here for my first time today. Not only was the pumpkin latte reasonably priced and so delicious, but the vegan baked goods (apple, zucchini and pumpkin breads) were amazing. This will be my new go-to spot in the neighborhood, definitely worth checking out," said one Yelp user.

■ **What to try:** Pumpkin muffin or vegan pumpkin bread

■ **Address:** 1641 R St. NW, Suite B, Washington, DC

■ **Phone:** (202) 629-1022

■ **Cost:** Pastries start under \$5; coffee and espresso drinks range from \$3-\$6.30

■ **Planning tip:** Weekend mornings are the busiest time to visit.



PHOTO COURTESY THREE FIFTY BAKERY

Emissary

Emissary is a DC staple for coffee, brunch and house-made pastries. During the fall, seasonal pumpkin-flavors take center stage with specialty drinks and freshly baked treats.

■ **What people are saying:** "This place is awesome! I went here four times in a three day trip. Their espresso is delicious, and their pourovers too. Good pastries as well -- I liked the almond croissant, the apple turnover, and the pumpkin scone especially," said one customer.

■ **What to try:** Pumpkin spice latte or pumpkin scone

■ **Address:** 2032 P St. NW, Washington, DC; 1726 20th St. NW, Washington, DC

■ **Phone:** (202) 204-4327

■ **Cost:** Coffee drinks range from \$3-\$8

■ **Planning tip:** Grab your coffee to go and take a stroll through nearby Dupont Circle or Embassy Row.



PHOTO COURTESY BAKED & WIRED

Baked & Wired

A Georgetown favorite since 2001, Baked & Wired is known for its small-batch baked goods made from family recipes. While best known for their cupcakes, fall brings a variety of seasonal pastries and breakfast treats.

What people are saying: “The cupcakes are very generously portioned with a light cake batter. The icing is not too thick or overpowering. This time around I had a pumpkin spice cupcake (looked seasonal). Great choice; could taste fall spices like nutmeg and cinnamon with pumpkin in the cake portion. The icing had also a hint of pumpkin flavor as well. Best cupcakes in Georgetown,” said one Yelp reviewer.

- **What to try:** Pumpkin spice cupcake
- **Address:** 1052 Thomas Jefferson St. NW, Washington, DC
- **Cost:** Cupcakes start at \$6.20, breakfast breads at \$6.75 and doughnuts at \$3.50
- **Planning tip:** Expect a 15-to 20-minute wait during busy hours.

VIRGINIA

Bakeshop

Since opening during a snowstorm in 2010, Bakeshop has become a neighborhood favorite for scratch-made pastries and seasonal goods. Stop by to try one of their pumpkin flavored pastries alongside their pumpkin spice latte.

- **What people are saying:** “The pumpkin chocolate bread is soooo good- a must. And best of all they have vegan versions of almost everything I love it,” said a Yelp reviewer.
- **What to try:** Vegan pumpkin chocolate chip loaf
- **Address:** 1025 N. Fillmore St., Arlington; 100 E. Fairfax St., Falls Church
- **Phone:** Arlington: (571) 970-6460; Falls Church: (703) 533-0002
- **Cost:** Baked goods range from \$3-\$7
- **Planning tip:** Check their Instagram to see the pastries of the day.

Heidelberg Pastry Shoppe

This German bakery and delicatessen offers a wide variety of seasonal favorites throughout the fall. Items include pies, cookies, cakes and pastries and the location is a popular stop for Thanksgiving dessert planning. Note: Pumpkin pies are offered October through December only.

- **What people are saying:** “Ordered our Thanksgiving pies from here. We ordered a pumpkin, caramel apple, pecan and cherry. All were wonderful and I plan on ordering holiday pies from here going forward. Also, the grill outside on Saturdays (weather permitting, I think) sounds like a great reason to come back,” said a local customer.

- **What to try:** Pumpkin pie
- **Address:** 2150 N. Culpeper St., Arlington
- **Phone:** (703) 527-8394
- **Cost:** Pies start at \$18.95
- **Planning tip:** Holiday items often sell out, so consider preordering.



PHOTO COURTESY HEIDELBERG PASTRY SHOPPE

MARYLAND

Great Harvest Bakery

Great Harvest Bakery has a plentiful selection of baked goods from sourdough and swirl breads to fluffy muffins and scones. During the fall, you’ll find pumpkin-flavored specialties for the whole family.

- **What people are saying:** “Scrumptious fresh bread! The Great Harvest locations in MD and VA have their own special menu and unique selection of loaves. Glad I made the trek from McLean to Rockville to try Rockville’s specialty loaves - Chocolate Babka, Cinnamon Blast, and Pumpkin Yumkin. Totally worth it,” said one Yelp reviewer.
- **What to try:** Pumpkin Yumkin teacake
- **Address:** 12268 Rockville Pike, Suite A, Rockville
- **Phone:** (301) 770-8544
- **Cost:** Breads range from \$6-\$20; other baked goods range from \$1.50-\$10
- **Planning tip:** Call ahead to see which specialty breads are available each day.

Sunday Morning Bakehouse

Inspired by its name, this bakery gives you the comfort and simplicity of Sunday morning with their seasonal bread and pastries made with only high-quality ingredients. Its fall menu features pumpkin-flavored favorites that pair perfectly with a warm latte. Customers are advised to call ahead for seasonal item availability.

- **What people are saying:** “Went here for breakfast early Sunday morning and I will say it was definitely worth it! The breakfast sandwiches and pastries were amazing! Even though there was a long line when we got there, it went by pretty fast! The pumpkin spice lattes were very tasty,” said one customer.
- **What to try:** Pumpkin doughnut or pumpkin loaf (when available)
- **Address:** 1796 Chain Bridge Road, McLean, VA; 11869 Grand Park Ave., North Bethesda, MD
- **Phone:** McLean: (571) 378-0148; North Bethesda: (240) 669-8202
- **Cost:** Coffee ranges from \$3.50-\$6.25; pastries range from \$3.95-\$5.75
- **Planning tip:** The McLean location offers one hour of garage parking validation.

Kids eat free!

Save on your next family dining experience with these restaurants across Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia offering free kids' meals on select days.

BY CAYLA GARDNER

Family dinner outings can add up quickly, but several restaurants across Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia offer free options for children on select days. Whether you're looking for a quick after-school meal, a weekend brunch or a family dinner, these local spots make it easiest to enjoy a meal together without worrying about the cost. Make sure to check each restaurant's current promotion before you visit, as offers may change.

WASHINGTON, DC

Surfside

Bring the family to Surfside on Mondays after 5 p.m., when kids ages 12 and under eat for free with the purchase of an adult meal. The kids menu includes tacos, burritos, quesadillas, fish sticks, chicken tenders and salmon. Each meal is served with fruit and a choice of lemonade or apple juice.

- **What people are saying:** "I ended up getting a kids meal--steak quesadillas, rice, fruit, and a drink--and honestly, it was perfect. Just the right portion to refuel without slowing me down, and everything was fresh and satisfying," said one customer.
- **Address:** 4200 Wisconsin Ave., Washington, DC
- **Best ages:** 12 and under
- **Cost expectation:** Adult entrees range from \$15.95 to \$29.95
- **Planning tip:** Reservations are recommended for dine-in service.

Nationals Park

For 2026, kids can enjoy a free meal at every Washington Nationals home game. Children ages 12 and under receive a free kids' meal which includes a hot dog, chips and bottled water. Children must be present to redeem promotion. The free kids meal is available at every home game through September.

- **Address:** 1500 South Capitol St. SE, Washington, DC
- **Best ages:** 12 and under
- **Cost expectation:** Tickets start around \$20, with additional food available for purchase
- **Planning tip:** Take Metrorail to the Navy Yard-Ballpark station on the Green Line to avoid parking.



BIGSTOCK/ROMODINKA

Matchbox

Every Tuesday, Matchbox offers one free kids cheese pizza with the purchase of an adult entrée.

- **What people are saying:** "This is a great family friendly option in Penn Quarter. We were looking for someplace that everyone in the family could find something to eat and this fit the bill. My son is obsessed with pepperoni pizza and their kids pizza is 10 inches which is a great size," said a Yelp reviewer.
- **Address:** 521 8th St. SE, Washington, DC; 750 E St. NW, Washington, DC
- **Best ages:** 10 and under
- **Cost expectation:** \$50 for a family meal
- **Planning tip:** Reservations are recommended during peak dinner hours.

Ambar

Children under 7 eat free at Ambar, while kids ages 7-12 receive 50% off their meal. The restaurant's authentic Balkan menu offers a variety of options that even the pickiest eaters can enjoy.

- **What people are saying:** "Great place to get some delicious food. My husband and I went here on vacation with our children and we loved it! The food is unique and delicious and the variety is great! We found enough food options for our kids to eat too," said one customer.
- **Address:** 523 8th St. SE, Washington, DC
- **Best ages:** 12 and under
- **Cost expectation:** Unlimited lunch starts at \$33, brunch at \$38 and dinner at \$50 per person
- **Planning tip:** Reservations last for two hours and require full table participation.



PHOTO COURTESY AMBAR

MARYLAND

Tino's Italian Bistro & Wine Bar

Every Wednesday, kids eat for free with the purchase of an adult entrée of \$15.95 or more at Tino's. The family-run business's dedicated children's menu features pizza, pasta, ravioli, chicken fingers and more.

- **What people are saying:** "Tino's is fantastic and we eat there or get takeout from there at least once a week. The service cannot be beat, every single one of their servers is attentive and kind. The food is wonderful and our kids love it too. Our son is a super picky eater and he loves it there," said one reviewer.
- **Address:** 8775 Centre Park Drive, Columbia
- **Best ages:** 12 and under
- **Cost expectation:** Adult entrées range from \$12.95-\$30.95
- **Planning tip:** Make a reservation if dining after 6 p.m.

Pinstripes

The second Saturday of the month means family time at Pinstripes where kids 12 and under eat free after 3 p.m. Note: This offer runs January through November.

- **What people are saying:** "It was a pleasant event, food was very delicious. We had an amazing waiter. Kid friendly, fast service enjoyed a great evening with my family, certainly revisiting soon," said one Yelp reviewer.
- **Address:** 11920 Grand Park Ave., North Bethesda
- **Best ages:** 12 and under
- **Cost expectation:** Sandwiches range from \$18-\$21, entrées \$21-\$32 and pizzas and flatbreads \$16-\$24
- **Planning tip:** Weekends can be busy because of bowling and private events.

VIRGINIA

Founding Farmers

During the weekend Farmers Market Buffet Brunch, children ages 3 and under eat free, while kids ages 4-12 receive a discounted rate. Brunch runs every weekend from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. and can be buffet style or seated.

- **What people are saying:** "Founding Farmers always has a great selection of food choices! Vanessa was an excellent waitress. She was very helpful with my party of 5 which included three kids. She gave us great options for kids and was very attentive," said a recent customer.
- **Address:** 1800 Tysons Blvd., Tysons; 1904 Reston Metro Plaza, Reston
- **Best ages:** 3 and under
- **Cost expectation:** \$34.99 per adult; \$15.50 for children ages 4-12
- **Planning tip:** Reservations are required for brunch.



PHOTO COURTESY FOUNDING FARMERS

Inca Social

On Monday, kids ages 12 and under eat free with the purchase of an adult meal. Children's dishes include chicken tenders and fries, cheese pasta and salchipapas.

- **What people are saying:** "Great food! The kids' chicken tender were cut like chicharron and so delicious. Arris con mariscos was like a paella. Fresh and crispy yucca. Lively and friendly ambiance. We loved this restaurant," said one Yelp reviewer.
- **Address:** 1776 Wilson Blvd., Arlington; 2670 Avenir Place, Vienna
- **Best ages:** 12 and under
- **Cost expectation:** Appetizers range from \$8.50-\$12 and entrées from \$14-\$29
- **Planning tip:** The Vienna location offers two hours of free street parking.

Hard Times Cafe

On Sundays from 5-8 p.m. kids receive one free meal with the purchase of an adult entrée. The dedicated kids' menu includes favorites like dino nuggets, hot dogs, chili mac, and cheeseburgers.

- **What people are saying:** "The food is excellent, superb service, very chill ambiance! And then if u like beer, sports and pool u got a monster pool hall in the back! I love this place, we bring our two kids here a lot, very family friendly in the main dining room. The chili recipe goes back to the 1890s," said one customer.
- **Address:** 1404 King St., Alexandria
- **Best ages:** 10 and under
- **Cost expectation:** Chili starts at \$6.99 and burgers start at \$8.29
- **Planning tip:** Street parking is available in front of the restaurant.

Lost Dog Café

Kids ages 12 and under eat free with the purchase of an adult meal every Sunday. Menu items include grilled cheese, pasta, ravioli, pita pizza and hot dogs.

- **What people are saying:** "I love their pizza and sandwiches...Very kid friendly, always delicious and great delivery service," said one reviewer.
- **Address:** 1690A Anderson Road, McLean
- **Best ages:** 12 and under
- **Cost expectation:** Sandwiches start at \$12.75, pizza starts at \$13.95 and pasta starts at \$14.95
- **Planning tip:** Visit early on Sundays to avoid the lunch rush.

Copperwood Tavern

On Mondays from 6-9 p.m., diners can get one free kids' menu item per adult entrée. Menu options include grilled cheese, burgers, macaroni and cheese, buttered noodles and grilled chicken.

- **What people are saying:** "The food was great, everything we ordered was good, and the service was friendly and efficient. No complaints at all! It's a solid go-to in Shirlington for good food and a comfortable atmosphere. Parking in the area can get a little tricky at times, but overall it's a great experience every visit," said one Yelp reviewer.
- **Address:** 4021 Campbell Ave., Arlington
- **Best ages:** 12 and under
- **Cost expectation:** Adult entrées range from \$26-\$52
- **Planning tip:** The promotion is available for dine-in guests only.

An in-cider's look at local apple cider

BIGSTOCK/JOINTTEAM

From family-friendly orchards serving handcrafted fresh cider to local cideries serving award-winning hard ciders, these Maryland and Virginia destinations are worth adding to your fall bucket list.

BY CAYLA GARDNER

Nothing makes your fall complete like a cup of fresh apple cider. Folks in the DMV area get to enjoy the wide variety of apple orchards and the unique cider each apple produces. Whether you're planning a family outing, a date weekend or a scenic drive through the countryside, these destinations offer some of the best places to enjoy fresh apple cider in the DMV this fall.

Some cidery background

Cider, hard and soft, has been around for at least a few thousand years. According to manuscripts dating back to 55 B.C., Roman invaders in the British Isles discovered that the Celts made a drink from crabapples. In Colonial America, apples were one of the first and most important crops.

The colonists enjoyed cider as early as the 1600s and ever since then, it's been a drink that brings people together to harvest the fruit, prepare the beverage and enjoy it together. Since water was often unsafe to drink back then, even kids were served a diluted version of hard cider.

Today, of course, hard cider is only for adults, but even its nonalcoholic counterpart is highly sought after when the weather begins to chill.

Where to get your cider fix

The good news is that the DMV area has a wide variety of apple orchards, and each type of apple produces a unique cider. If you want to buy a jug of cider, hard or soft, you can go down to your local market and find a range of options. Sweet, gluten-free, dry, small-batch, organic, whatever you want. But for more of an adventure, plan a trip to a local cidery where they make their own cider from scratch.

Mt. Defiance Cidery & Distillery

Mt. Defiance crafts small-batch hard ciders and spirits in a custom-built barn-style tasting room just outside downtown Middleburg, alongside traditional dry blends, single-varietal ciders, and inventive infusions like fresh ginger and five-pepper. Food trucks are a regular weekend feature, and there's a cocktail loft and patio bar for those who want to branch out beyond cider.

- **Hours:** Noon-4 p.m. Monday (Bottle sales only); noon-6 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday and Sunday; noon-7 p.m. Friday-Saturday
- **Address:** 495 E. Washington St., Middleburg, VA
- **Planning tip:** Outside alcohol is strictly prohibited on the property, and groups of 12 or more need a reservation.

Willow Oaks Craft Cider and Wine

Run by Eric and Lori Rice on their 35-acre certified-organic farm, Willow Oaks crafts farmhouse-style ciders from heirloom apples alongside port-style dessert wines, with several vintages that have taken home Maryland Governor's Cup medals. The cozy tasting room has board games, deck and garden seating, and a welcome mat out for well-behaved, leashed dogs.

- **Hours:** 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday
- **Address:** 6219 Harley Road, Middletown, MD
- **Planning tip:** Maryland law prohibits outside alcohol on-site, so plan to do all your sipping from their menu — and pack a picnic for the food, since they welcome that.



PHOTO COURTESY WILLOW OAKS CRAFT CIDER AND WINE

Doc Waters Cidery

Montgomery County's first cidery, Doc Waters presses its own apples grown right on Waters Orchard for a fresh, tart cider profile, and the open grounds include fire pits, a train play area for kids, and regular live music. Nonalcoholic cider and cider slushies are both on the menu, making this one of the more explicitly kid-friendly stops on the list.

- **Hours:** 4-9 p.m. Friday; noon-8 p.m. Saturday; noon-6 p.m. Sunday
- **Address:** 22529 Wildcat Road, Germantown, MD
- **Planning tip:** Reservations are recommended for igloos, fire pits and private spaces — walk-ins are welcome if space allows, but book ahead for weekend visits.

Lost Boy Cider



PHOTO COURTESY LOST BOY CIDER

Billed as Northern Virginia's first urban cidery, Lost Boy ferments its dry, sugar-free ciders in an open-air 2,000-square-foot tasting room in Alexandria's Carlyle neighborhood, with heritage varieties aged in tequila, gin, and bourbon barrels. Kids and leashed dogs are both welcome, and there's a play area on-site along with regular food trucks.

- **Hours:** 4-9 p.m. Monday-Tuesday; 3-9 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday; 3-10 p.m. Friday; noon-10 p.m. Saturday; noon-9 p.m. Sunday
- **Address:** 317 Hooffs Run Drive, Alexandria, VA
- **Planning tip:** No food menu on-site beyond light snacks, so plan around the rotating food trucks parked out front for a bite to eat.

Corcoran Vineyards & Cider

A small, family-owned winery and cidery near the historic village of Waterford, Corcoran pours its handcrafted hard ciders alongside award-winning wines and dessert wines in a renovated barn, with gazebo and indoor barn seating for tastings. The cidery has produced ciders since 2013, blending a mix of locally grown apple varieties. Note: There is a \$50 minimum purchase per group.

- **Hours:** Appointment only
- **Address:** 14635 Corky's Farm Lane, Waterford, VA
- **Planning tip:** Reservations are especially recommended for groups of eight or more, and pets are welcome on the grounds if you're bringing the whole family (four-legged members included).

Henway Hard Cider

An extension of Bluemont Vineyard, Henway produces hard ciders from apples grown at neighboring Great Country Farms, with a farm-to-glass focus and sweeping Blue Ridge Mountain views from the outdoor seating. The grounds include a stocked pond for catch-and-release fishing and a dog-friendly patio, making it an easy add-on to a Great Country Farms visit.

- **Hours:** 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday-Monday
- **Address:** 18780 Foggy Bottom Road, Bluemont, VA
- **Planning tip:** Henway occasionally hosts 21-and-up events like an after-dark corn maze night — check their events calendar before visiting if you're bringing kids, to make sure your date isn't an adults-only one.

Albemarle CiderWorks

Set on a working orchard in North Garden, just south of Charlottesville, Albemarle CiderWorks presses fresh, unpasteurized cider in season from late fall through early spring, alongside its lineup of heirloom-apple hard ciders like Arkansas Black, Harrison and Virginia Hewes Crab. The tasting room also stocks nonalcoholic beer, kombucha and juice boxes, and a small farm stand sells apples and seasonal fruit when available.

- **Hours:** Noon-5 p.m. Friday-Monday
- **Address:** 2545 Rural Ridge Lane, North Garden, VA
- **Planning tip:** Fresh cider availability varies by season, so call ahead to confirm it's in stock before making the drive — and note that outside alcohol isn't permitted on the property.

Weber's Cider Mill Farm

A Parkville institution since 1908, Weber's is part farm market, part cider mill, and part fall festival grounds, pressing sweet apple cider on-site alongside apple cider donuts, cider slushies, and baked goods from its country bakery. The farm's petting zoo, play area, and seasonal hayrides make it one of the most kid-focused stops on this list, with the fall festival season drawing the biggest crowds.

- **Hours:** PYO is available by appointment; times vary based on produce. Market hours are 9 a.m.-7 p.m. daily.
- **Address:** 2526 Proctor Lane, Parkville, MD
- **Planning tip:** There's a nominal admission fee for the barnyard and activity areas, and fall weekends get busy — arrive early to avoid long lines at the petting zoo and hillside slide.

APPLE CIDER FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

If you love apple cider enough to make a day of it, these festivals and events are worth checking out!

Great Country Farms' Apple Harvest + Corn Maze & Pig Races

Kick off the apple cider season at Great Country Farms' annual Apple Harvest + Corn Maze & Pig Races event, where fresh-pressed cider, award-winning apple cider donuts and cider slushies take center stage. Guests can spend the day exploring the corn maze and stop by the Henway Cider Barn to sample locally crafted hard ciders. On weekends, visitors can watch pig races and cider-pressing demonstrations.

- **Date:** Sept. 1-18
- **Best ages:** 8 and older
- **Cost expectation:** Admission starts at \$14 Monday-Friday and \$18 Saturday-Sunday for ages 3 and up
- **Planning tip:** Purchase tickets online ahead of time to save on admission.

CONTINUED...

THINGS TO DO

Maryland Cider Festival

Join the Cider Association of Maryland for their tribute to cider, held at the Gamber and Community Fire Company carnival grounds. This annual festival brings producers across the state together for a curated selection of hard ciders, artisanal meads and small-batch spirits and celebrates Maryland's rich orchard heritage and thriving cider scene. Mark your calendar for Sept. 12 to taste your way through the very best of Maryland.

- **Date:** Sept. 12
- **Best ages:** 21 and up
- **Cost expectation:** General admission tickets start at \$35; VIP tickets start at \$45 (processing fees not included)
- **Planning tip:** Plan for a designated driver or rideshare, especially if you plan to sample multiple ciders. Parking is available on-site.

Johnny Appleseed Festival and Fall Harvest Days at Weber's Cider Mill Farm

Kick off fall in true Weber's fashion at their 51st Annual Johnny Appleseed Festival, a Parkville tradition over five decades in the making. The two-day kickoff features fresh apple cider, hay rides, a hillside slide, food trucks and a family-friendly spooky walk for the little ones. Once the festival wraps, the fall fun doesn't stop — Weber's rolls straight into Fall Harvest Days, keeping the cider, donuts and autumn activities going for nearly two months.

- **Date:** Sept. 12-13 (Johnny Appleseed Festival); Sept. 14-Nov. 8 (Fall Harvest Days)
- **Best ages:** All ages
- **Cost expectation:** Registration details will be announced soon — check Weber's social channels for ticket information
- **Planning tip:** Arrive early for shorter lines at the hillside slide and hay rides.

LoCo Cider Fest

Celebrate the start of Virginia Cider Week at LoCo Cider Fest, where Loudoun County's mountain view provides the backdrop for a packed day of hard cider tastings, live music, local food vendors and family activities. With scenic countryside, seasonal flavors and plenty of entertainment, this festival is the perfect spot for cider lovers and families alike.

- **Date:** Nov. 14
- **Best ages:** 6 and up
- **Cost expectation:** Children's admission starts at \$16; adult admission starts at \$41
- **Planning tip:** Buy tickets in advance for a discounted price.

When the leaves start dropping off the trees this fall and the kids are going back to school, take a few hours or a day out of your weekend to bring the family to a local cidery, apple orchard or harvest festival. You'll enjoy the fresh air, delicious treats and spending time together.



THE RESULTS ARE IN!

Our readers have spoken.

WASHINGTON Parent PICKS 2026

WASHINGTON PARENT PICKS WINNERS & FINALISTS

SCAN TO SEE the Winners!





BIGSTOCK/ANDY DEAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Pick the perfect pumpkin at these Maryland and Virginia farms

Plan the perfect fall family outing with these farm and pumpkin patches across the DMV featuring hayrides, corn mazes, farm animals and seasonal festivals.

BY CAYLA GARDNER

FEATURED FARMS

In this section, Washington Parent's advertising partners share their top farms to visit this fall.

Clark's Elioak Farm

This seventh-generation Howard County farm is home to a pumpkin patch, a variety of vegetables and a petting zoo. In addition to pumpkin picking, families can visit farm animals, explore the Fairy Forest and enjoy playgrounds and slides.

Clark's Elioak Farm is also home to many of the fairy tale and nursery rhyme attractions from Maryland's Storybook Park — The Enchanted Forest. Starting Sept. 19, the Petting Farm and Pumpkin Patch is open seven days a week through Nov. 8.



PHOTO COURTESY CLARK'S ELIOAK FARM

Don't miss:

- **Sept. 19-Nov. 8:** Pumpkin picking
- **Oct. 24-25:** Halloween costume parades
- **Nov. 7-8:** Pumpkin chucking weekend

Plan your visit:

- **Hours:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Saturday-Sunday



PHOTO COURTESY CLARK'S ELIOAK FARM

THINGS TO DO

- **Address:** 10500 Clarksville Pike, Ellicott City, MD
- **Best ages:** 1-10
- **How long families usually stay:** 2-4 hours
- **Cost expectation:** \$8 admission includes the petting farm, Enchanted Forest attractions, Fairy Forest, play areas and picnic areas; additional attractions range from \$1 to \$15.
- **Planning tip:** Exit onto Route 108 West toward Clarksville and follow the farm signs about 2 miles down the road.

MORE LOCAL FARMS

This section features some of the best farms in the DMV area to visit this fall based on public data and community reviews.

Messick's Farm Market

Messick's Farm Market is a family-owned farm market and agritourism destination in Bealeton, Virginia, known for its farm-fresh produce and seasonal festivals. The farm features hayrides, a barrel train, a petting zoo, a zip line and a corn maze during its fall celebration, alongside year-round attractions like a play area, fire pits and frozen custard.

Don't miss:

- **Sept. 19-Oct. 15:** Fall Festival. The festival runs on weekends through the fall season (and Monday, Oct. 12), featuring a corn maze, hayrides, a barrel train, zip line, petting zoo, candy cannon and Crunchkin painting.

Plan your visit:

- **Address:** 6025 Catlett Road, Bealeton, VA
- **Best ages:** 2-12
- **How long families usually stay:** 2-4 hours
- **Cost expectation:** There's no admission fee to browse the Farm Market itself. Fall Festival tickets are \$16 per person and \$10 for seniors; add-ons like mining kits and duck races are extra. Kids younger than 4 are free.
- **Planning tip:** Purchase tickets online ahead of time — all sales are final, so double-check your date since the event is weather dependent.

Gaver Farm

Gaver Farm, one of Frederick County's most popular farms, has been a fall staple for families since launching its Fall Fun Festival in 2007. Situated on 70 acres, the farm features hayrides, pumpkin picking, barnyard animals and a corn maze.

Don't miss:

- The Fall Fun Festival runs from September to early November, with September weekends offering lower admission prices before peak October crowds arrive.



PHOTO COURTESY GAVER FARM

Plan your visit:

- **Address:** 5501 Detrick Road, Mount Airy, MD
- **Best ages:** 2-12
- **How long families usually stay:** 3-5 hours
- **Cost expectation:** There is no admission fee for the Farm Market, hayrides, food stands or pick-your-own fruits. Fall Fun Fest tickets: Children under the age of 2 are free; tickets are up to \$20.50 per person on September weekends; up to \$32.95 per person on October weekends and \$14.50 per person on weekdays.
- **Planning tip:** Purchase tickets online ahead of time, especially for October weekends.

Weber's Cider Mill Farm



PHOTO COURTESY WEBER'S CIDER MILL FARM

Maryland's oldest working cider mill is also a perfect destination for pumpkin picking. Beyond the pumpkin patch, families can enjoy fresh apple cider, baked goods and seasonal treats.

Don't miss:

- **Sept. 14-Nov. 8:** Fall Harvest Days. The annual festival offers the perfect opportunity for a family outing with seasonal attractions and activities.

Plan your visit:

- **Address:** 2526 Proctor Lane, Parkville, MD
- **Best ages:** 2-10
- **How long families usually stay:** 3-5 hours
- **Cost expectation:** Last year's admission ranged from \$10 to \$16 depending on the date. Tickets typically go on sale in early September.
- **Planning tip:** Purchase tickets online before visiting.

Butler's Orchard

Known for its pick-your-own produce, Butler's Orchard is home to one of Maryland's favorite pumpkin festivals. Families can browse a vast pumpkin selection, visit more than 15 attractions and enjoy a fun family day.

Don't miss:

- Pumpkin season runs Wednesday-Sunday, Sept. 19-Nov. 1, plus Columbus Day.
- Keep an eye out for 2026 Pumpkin Festival dates, which typically take place throughout September and October.

Plan your visit:

- **Address:** 22222 Davis Mill Road, Germantown, MD
- **Best ages:** 6-12
- **How long families usually stay:** 2-4 hours
- **Cost expectation:** Farm admission is \$5. Pumpkin Festival tickets typically range from \$12 to \$20.
- **Planning tip:** Reserve Pumpkin Festival tickets ahead of time. Outside bags, containers and strollers are not permitted in the picking fields.

Green Meadows Farm

Green Meadows Farm is home to nearly 150 farm animals and offers one of the area's most activity-filled pumpkin experiences. Families can enjoy hayrides, pig races, live entertainment and plenty of pumpkins to pick from.

Don't miss:

- **Sept. 30-Oct. 31:** Pumpkin patch season
- **Oct. 16-18, 23-25 and 30-31:** Trail of Jack-O-Lanterns featuring trick-or-treating, illuminated displays and family entertainment

Plan your visit:

- **Address:** 10102 Fingerboard Road, Ijamsville, MD
- **Best ages:** 2-13
- **How long families usually stay:** 2-5 hours
- **Cost expectation:** Pumpkin patch admission is \$18. Trail of Jack-O-Lanterns admission is \$16. Children under the age of 2 are free.
- **Planning tip:** If you're only purchasing pumpkins, let staff know when you arrive and pay for pumpkins individually instead of purchasing admission.

Queen Anne Farm

For over 30 years, Queen Anne Farm has supplied fresh produce to local families. During the fall, the farm opens its pumpkin patch with pumpkins in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors.

Don't miss:

- **Sept. 26-Oct. 31:** Pumpkin patch season and photo opportunities at the farm's popular pumpkin house.

Plan your visit:

- **Address:** 18102 Central Ave., Mitchellville, MD
- **Best ages:** 6-14
- **How long families usually stay:** 2-4 hours
- **Cost expectation:** \$10 parking plus fees
- **Planning tip:** Visiting just before Halloween? The farm offers pre-cleaned and pre-carved pumpkins for purchase on Oct. 30 and Oct. 31.

Cox Farms

One of the largest and most popular seasonal events in the Washington, DC area, Cox Farms' annual Fall Festival is the perfect daytime, family-friendly spot filled with giant slides, rope swings, hayrides and other activities for kids. Stop by the festival market on your way out to pick out a pumpkin as a reminder of a day well spent.

Don't miss:

- **Fall Festival:** Sept. 19-Nov. 8. September visits often mean smaller crowds than peak October weekends.
- **Fields of Fear:** Sept. 25-Nov. 7. This haunted event is not recommended for children under age 12.

Plan your visit:

- **Address:** 15621 Braddock Road, Centreville, VA
- **Best ages:** 5-13
- **How long families usually stay:** 5-7 hours
- **Cost expectation:** Tickets range from \$15 to \$30 and must be purchased online.
- **Planning tip:** Outside drinks and prepared food are permitted inside the festival.

Burke Nursery and Garden Centre

If you're looking for pumpkins without spending the entire day at a farm, Burke Nursery and Garden Centre offers a relaxed fall shopping experience. Pick from a variety of pumpkins, gourds, Shenandoah apples, mulling spices and so much more.

Don't miss:

- Pumpkin picking is open throughout October with a wide selection of pumpkins of all shapes and colors.

Plan your visit:

- **Address:** 9401 Burke Road, Burke, VA
- **Best ages:** 12 and under
- **How long families usually stay:** 1-2 hours
- **Cost expectation:** Admission is free. Pumpkins and merchandise are priced individually.
- **Planning tip:** Visit on a weekend if you'd like to enjoy the pony rides and family activity area.

Great Country Farms

Let the Fall Harvest begin at Great Country Farms with apple picking, fresh cider, corn mazes and the farm's popular Oinkintucky Derby Pig Races. Stop by in the fall for pumpkin picking with a wide selection of Virginia's best pumpkins.

Don't miss:

- **Sept. 1-30:** Fall Corn Maze and Apple Harvest
- **Sept. 19 and 26:** Family Flashlight Nights
- **Sept. 19-30:** Fall Pumpkin Harvest Festival

Plan your visit:

- **Address:** 34355 Snickersville Turnpike, Bluemont, VA
- **Best ages:** 6-12
- **How long families usually stay:** 2-4 hours
- **Cost expectation:** Admission varies by dates.
- **Planning tip:** Visit in mid-September for the start of pumpkin season or later in October for the widest pumpkin selection after cooler weather arrives.



PHOTO COURTESY GREAT COUNTRY FARMS



All aboard the best fall rides in the DMV

PHOTO © CANVA

From miniature park trains that have delighted DC families for generations to a steam-powered ride through Amish countryside, here are the best train experiences for kids in the DMV.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

All aboard! If your child is obsessed with trains, or you're simply looking for a fun family outing, this guide to the best train rides for kids near Washington, DC, is your ticket to adventure.

From historic steam engines rolling through scenic farmland to miniature trains chugging along wooded park trails, there's something here for every young conductor-in-the-making.

Burke Lake Park Miniature Train

The miniature Central Pacific Huntington steam engine at Burke Lake Park has been a beloved attraction since 1967, delighting generations of families. Today, a modern version of the classic third-scale replica continues the tradition, offering a smoother, quieter ride with advanced technology under the hood. Kids and adults alike enjoy a scenic 10-minute journey over 1.75 miles of track at speeds up to 12 mph. The train runs efficiently on just four gallons of gas for nearly 26 trips a day. After the ride, visitors can enjoy a spin on the park's carousel, grab a hand-dipped ice cream cone, or take a stroll along a nationally recognized fitness trail. It's a perfect spot for a classic day of outdoor fun.

■ **Location:** 7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station, VA

■ **Phone:** (703) 323-6600

■ **Hours:** Weekends, Aug. 24-Nov. 1, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.; last ride 5:45 p.m.



PHOTO COURTESY FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY



PHOTO COURTESY FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

Cabin John Miniature Train

Located in Cabin John Regional Park, this miniature train offers a scenic two-mile ride through the woods. Operating normally from April through September, it's a favorite for birthday parties and family outings. The park also features playgrounds and picnic areas. For the month of October, the train operates as the Halloween Eye Spy Train, perfect for spooky season with littles!

- **Location:** 7410 Tuckerman Lane, Rockville, MD
- **Phone:** (301) 765-8670
- **Hours:** 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekends in April-September. On weekends in October, plus Nov. 1, the train operates as the Halloween Eye Spy Train, which requires special-event tickets rather than regular admission.

Wheaton Miniature Train & Carousel



PHOTO COURTESY MONTGOMERY PARKS, INC./NCPCC

Situated in Wheaton Regional Park, this attraction features a third-scale replica train and a beautifully crafted carousel, making it a favorite family destination. The train journey includes a trestle bridge and a tunnel, adding a touch of adventure for young riders. Open from April through September, it's ideal for seasonal outings. Tickets are \$4 per ride for both the train and carousel (available May through September), and children under 2 ride free with a paying adult. With affordable pricing and a charming setting, it's a fun and budget-friendly way to spend the day outdoors. Similar to Cabin John, October's train operates as the Halloween Eye Spy Train.

- **Location:** 2002 Shorefield Road, Wheaton, MD
- **Phone:** (301) 563-7545
- **Hours:** 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekends in April-September. On weekends in October, plus Nov. 1, the train operates as the Halloween Eye Spy Train, which requires special-event tickets rather than regular admission.

WORTH THE DRIVE

Ready to go the extra mile? These beloved train rides sit just outside the DC metro area but are popular enough with local families to make the trip worthwhile.

Strasburg Rail Road

America's oldest operating railroad offers a 45-minute steam-powered ride through Pennsylvania's Amish countryside. Kids can enjoy themed rides like "Day Out with Thomas" and the "Night Before Christmas" pajama train. The station also features Cranky Cars, a playground and a gift shop. It's a must-visit for train-loving families. Note: The train's Day Out with Thomas is scheduled for Sept. 11-13 and Sept. 18-20.

- **Location:** 301 Gap Road, Ronks, PA
- **Phone:** (866) 725-9666
- **Hours:** Varies by season; check online

B&O Railroad Museum

The B&O Railroad Museum in Baltimore offers an immersive journey into America's rich railroading past. Families can explore one of the world's most comprehensive collections of historic locomotives and rolling stock. Interactive exhibits and hands-on learning opportunities make it engaging for kids of all ages. A highlight is the 20-minute train ride along the first commercial mile of railroad in the U.S. Special programs and seasonal events — like the Holiday Festival of Trains, featuring festive model train layouts, photos with Santa and the Reindeer Railway ride — make this museum a must-visit for young train fans.

- **Location:** 901 W. Pratt St., Baltimore, MD
- **Phone:** (410) 752-2490
- **Hours:** 10 a.m.-4 p.m. daily

Walkersville Southern Railroad

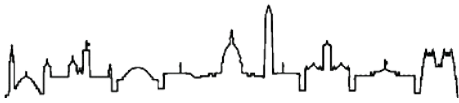


PHOTO COURTESY WALKERSVILLE SOUTHERN RAILROAD

Step back in time with a ride on the Walkersville Southern Railroad, where history and scenic beauty come together for an unforgettable family adventure. Located on the original Pennsylvania Railroad track built in 1872, this heritage railway offers rides in vintage 1920s passenger coaches or open flatcars through picturesque Maryland farmland. Along the way, passengers pass landmarks like a 100-year-old lime kiln and a historic tool house. Trains depart from a beautifully restored turn-of-the-century station, with regular excursions running weekends from May through October. The one-hour-and-10-minute ride is perfect for families, couples and history buffs alike. Throughout the year, special themed events like Super Hero Picnic Train, Snow Cone Express and Mystery Train add extra excitement to this nostalgic rail experience.

- **Location:** 34 W. Pennsylvania Ave., Walkersville, MD
- **Phone:** (301) 898-0899
- **Hours:** Vary based on train excursion

Whether you're seeking a historic steam train experience or a charming park ride, the DC area offers a variety of train adventures for kids. Plan your visit and create lasting memories on these delightful journeys.



DC EVENTS SEPTEMBER 2026

Passport to Patriotism: 250 Years of Diplomacy

- **Now-Oct. 18.** Marking America's 250th anniversary, this exhibition gathers work from more than 30 contemporary American artists on themes of national identity, military service and the American Dream. The draw for families is the American Heroes Student Art Contest, which invited students in grades three through 12 across the country to create original artwork and essays for the anniversary. Kids tend to linger longer when they can see work made by people their own age.
- **Location:** Art Museum of the Americas, 201 18th St. NW, Washington, DC

Theatre in the Park: "Woody Guthrie's American Song"

- **Sept. 4-6.** Reston Town Center stages three free outdoor performances of "Woody Guthrie's American Song" in Reston Town Square Park, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. each night. Garage parking is free after 5 p.m. Better suited to elementary age and up than to toddlers, given the late start.
- **Location:** Reston Town Square Park, 11900 Market St., Reston, VA

"Prince Caspian"

- **Sept. 4-Oct. 25.** The Pevensie children return to Narnia to help the rightful heir claim his throne in this stage adaptation of the C.S. Lewis classic. Performances run most days through the month, with 2 p.m. matinees on many weekend afternoons. A solid pick for families with readers who have already worked through the series.
- **Location:** World Stage Theater, 400 4th St. SW, Washington, DC

Play Date at NMNH

- **Sept. 8 and 22.** The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History runs its monthly drop-in program for young children twice this month, starting at 10:30 a.m. each time. Volcanic Explorations lands on Sept. 8 and Dive into the Deep Sea follows on Sept. 22. Museum admission is free and no registration is required, which makes either date a reliable weekday morning option when the walls start closing in. The program is designed for ages 0-5.
- **Location:** 1000 Madison Drive NW, Washington, DC

NextNOW Fest 2026

- **Sept. 9-11 and 14.** The University of Maryland's season opening arts festival spreads performances and installations across campus over four days, with start times shifting from late morning midweek to early evening on Friday and Saturday. Programming varies widely by day and happens all across campus, so check the daily schedule before you commit.
- **Location:** 2101 Van Munching Hall, College Park, MD

Maryland Seafood Festival

- **Sept. 11-13. Ticketed.** Sixty years on the shore of the Chesapeake Bay, with seafood vendors, craft vendors, live music, Skipjack Heritage Days and children's activities at Sandy Point State Park.

General admission includes a free ride on a working skipjack, and this year's anniversary brings Mama Duck, billed as the world's largest rubber duck. Rain or shine. Children 12 and younger are free.

- **Location:** Sandy Point State Park, East Beach, 1100 East College Parkway, Annapolis, MD

Bethesda Row Arts Festival

- **Sept. 12-13.** More than 180 juried artists turn the Bethesda Row Arts and Entertainment District into an outdoor gallery, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, with Best of Show and category winners announced Sunday morning. The show sits two blocks from the Bethesda Metro on the Red Line, and the Capital Crescent Trail crosses it at Woodmont and Bethesda Avenues.
- **Location:** Bethesda Row, near Elm Street and Woodmont Avenue, Bethesda, MD



PHOTO COURTESY BETHESDA ROW ARTS FESTIVAL

Stonebridge Fall Fest and Chili Cook Off



PHOTOS COURTESY KOJAM EVENTS

- **Sept. 12.** Prince William County's fall festival takes over the streets of the town center starting at 11 a.m., with food and non food vendors, live music on multiple stages, food trucks and community exhibitors. Families can sample chili and



- **Location:** Stonebridge at Potomac Town Center, 15201 Potomac Town Place, Woodbridge, VA

PHOTO COURTESY KOJAM EVENTS

Rosslyn Jazz Fest

- **Sept. 12.** Now in its 34th year, this festival pairs live jazz with food trucks, local vendors and family-friendly activities. This year's lineup includes Plena Libre, Sally Baby's Silver Dollars, Parlor Greens and Dogo du Togo and the Alagaa Beat Band. Bring a blanket and plan to stay a while.
- **Location:** 1300 Langston Blvd., Arlington, VA

Lake Buddies: School is Cool

- **Sept. 12.** September's edition of the Chevy Chase Lake's monthly community series is built around the Eric Energy Science Show. Seasonal activities and family entertainment fill out the morning. An easy two-hour outing that does not eat the whole Saturday.
- **Location:** 8525 Chevy Chase Lake Terrace, Chevy Chase, MD

Kitchen Guild Cooking Demonstration: Underground Railroad

- **Sept. 13.** Riversdale's historic cooks work over the open hearth to explore the Underground Railroad through foodways, connecting 19th century techniques and ingredients to stories of resilience and survival. The living history setting gives older kids a way into difficult history that a textbook does not.
- **Location:** Riversdale Historic House and Museum, 6005 48th Ave.,

Riverdale Park, MD

- **Community Meet ups:** Toddler Tuesdays at Pink Moon
- **Sept. 15.** A monthly meetup for parents in the toddler stage, held the third Tuesday of every month in the playrooms at Pink Moon. No agenda and no pressure, just other adults in the same phase of life while the little ones play.
- **Location:** 7610 Old Georgetown Road, Plaza Level, Bethesda, MD

2026 NCOS International Orchid Show and Sale

- **Sept. 18-20.** The largest orchid show in the Mid Atlantic fills 5,000 square feet with flowering exhibits and vendors traveling from Ecuador, Brazil, Taiwan, Hawaii and beyond. Note the new location this year.
- **Location:** Montgomery County Fairgrounds, Building 6, Hall 3, 16 Chestnut St., Gaithersburg, MD

Family Fun: Chuseok

- **Sept. 19.** The National Museum of Asian Art celebrates the Korean harvest festival with a scavenger hunt through the Peacock Room and Korean art gallery, courtyard story time featuring Korean folk and fairy tales, and pattern puzzles with objects from the hands-on collection. Starts at 11 a.m. No reservation required.
- **Location:** National Museum of Asian Art, Courtyard, Gallery 12, Gallery 14 West Building, Washington, DC

Reston Multicultural Festival

- **Sept. 19.** Reston Community Center and the Reston Town Center Association fill the town center with performances, food and community groups representing the cultures that make up Reston.
- **Location:** Reston Town Center, 11900 Market St., Reston, VA

RisuCon

- **Sept. 26.** Montgomery County's anime and cosplay convention runs vendors, anime screenings, cosplay contests, free themed group photo shoots, a game room with tournaments, an activity room, a cosplay maker space and panels. The event is billed for the whole family, with more than 28,000 square feet of vendor space and free parking at the fairgrounds.
- **Location:** Montgomery County Fairgrounds, 16 Chestnut St., Gaithersburg, MD

Takoma Park Folk Festival

- **Sept. 27. Free.** Six stages of music, a juried crafts show, international food, community nonprofit tables and children's games and activities, rain or shine, make up this family-friendly folk festival.
- **Location:** 7611 Piney Branch Road, Takoma Park, MD

5K Christalis Superhero Run and Walk

- **Sept. 27.** Capes and tights encouraged for a 9 a.m. 5K that welcomes walkers as readily as runners. Proceeds go directly to children in the Christalis programs, which gives families an easy way to talk about why they are out there. Finish here and you are a mile from the Takoma Park Folk Festival when it opens at 10:30 a.m.
- **Location:** 7600 Flower Ave., Takoma Park, MD



PHOTO COURTESY BRUNSWICK RAIL ROAD DAYS

Brunswick Railroad Day

- **Oct. 3-4.** Brunswick Railroad Days returns to downtown Brunswick marking 43 years of celebrating the town's history as a hub of the B&O Railroad. The two-day festival features live music, local artisan crafts, food and model train displays, along with activities for kids and families. It's a community-driven event that spotlights the talent of local performers, artists and artisans.
- **Location:** Throughout Downtown Brunswick, MD



PHOTO COURTESY BRUNSWICK RAIL ROAD DAYS



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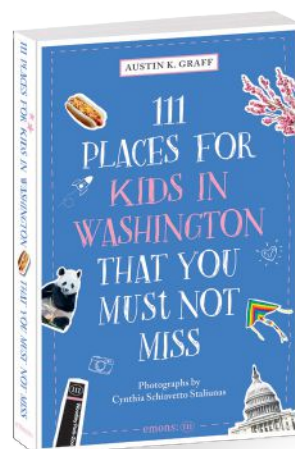
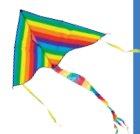
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