


Going Out Guide

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Smithsonian closed? Here's what to do instead.

By Fritz Hahn, Maura Judkis and Stephanie Merry | September 30 at 2:54 pm

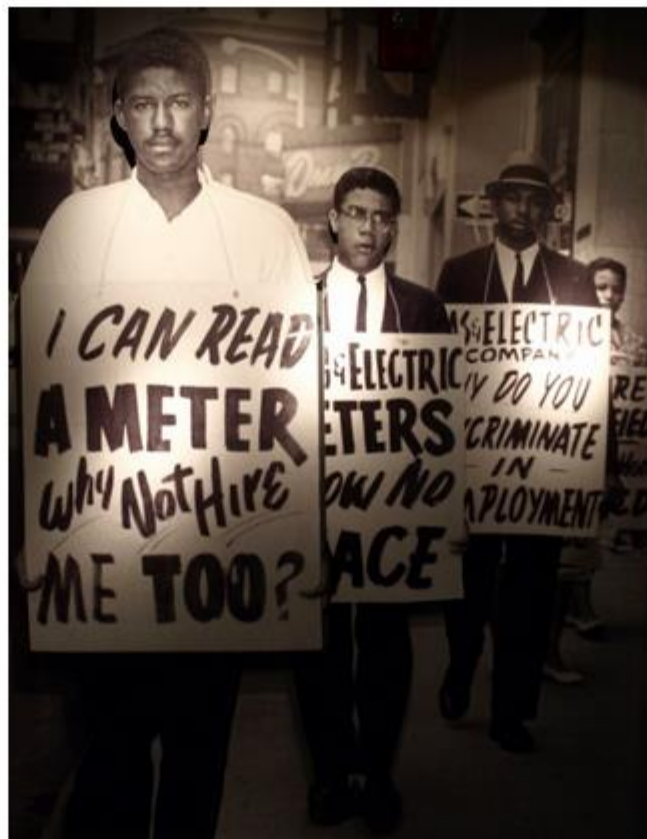
The government shutdown has the potential to [disrupt a lot of things](#) -- government workers' earnings and federal services, for example -- but it's also a precarious situation for your weekend plans. That goes double if you have out-of-town visitors coming to the District during the affected time period: Many of the city's best attractions, like the Smithsonian museums and the National Zoo, will be shuttered. What will you do with your disappointed nieces and nephews? Where will you take Great Aunt Mary, who traveled all this way?

But the Washington area is so much more than the Mall. For every shuttered museum or park, we've offered up an apt substitute that is privately-run, thus avoiding the shutdown. They may not be free, like the Smithsonian are, but they offer new and different cultural or historical experiences, especially for seasoned Mall-goers. Or at least they'll get you and your kids out of the house.

Anacostia Community Museum

Alternatives: [The Banneker-Douglass Museum](#) or [Alexandria Black History Museum](#).

The Anacostia Community Museum takes a community-focused look at African-American history. So do the Banneker-Douglass Museum in Annapolis, which traces the African-American experience in Maryland from colonial days through Harriet Tubman and Matthew Henson, and the Alexandria Black History Museum, where current exhibitions honor local activists and explore the impact of slavery in the area.



The Banneker-Douglass Museum tells the story of African-Americans in Maryland from the founding of the colony through the present day. (Photo by Lavana Ramanathan/The Washington Post)

The Freer and Sackler Galleries

Alternative: [The Textile Museum](#)

The next best thing to the museums that specialize in Asian art is a trip to the soon-to-relocate Textile Museum, where the current show, "Out of Southeast Asia: Art That Sustains," spotlights intricate Indonesian designs, colorful Laotian skirts and talented batik artists.

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Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden

Alternative: [The \(e\)merge Art Fair](#)

Those who head to the Hirshhorn for edgy contemporary art can find work that is even more au courant at this weekend's [\(e\)merge Art Fair](#), which convenes more than 80 local, national and international galleries at the Capitol Skyline Hotel, where guest rooms become exhibition spaces and the courtyard and pool are a stage for performance art. Admission is \$15. If the shutdown lasts past the weekend, you can always head to the [Corcoran](#).

National Air & Space Museum/Udvar-Hazy Center

Alternative: [College Park Aviation Museum](#)

The College Park Aviation Museum is a great way, even under normal circumstances, to avoid the crowds at the Air and Space Museum downtown. With crafts for kids, interactive displays, flight simulators, planes to climb on and yes, a goodie bag for the little ones at the end of the visit, you might even forget you would normally be at work. Admission: \$4; \$3 seniors; \$2 students.

National Arboretum

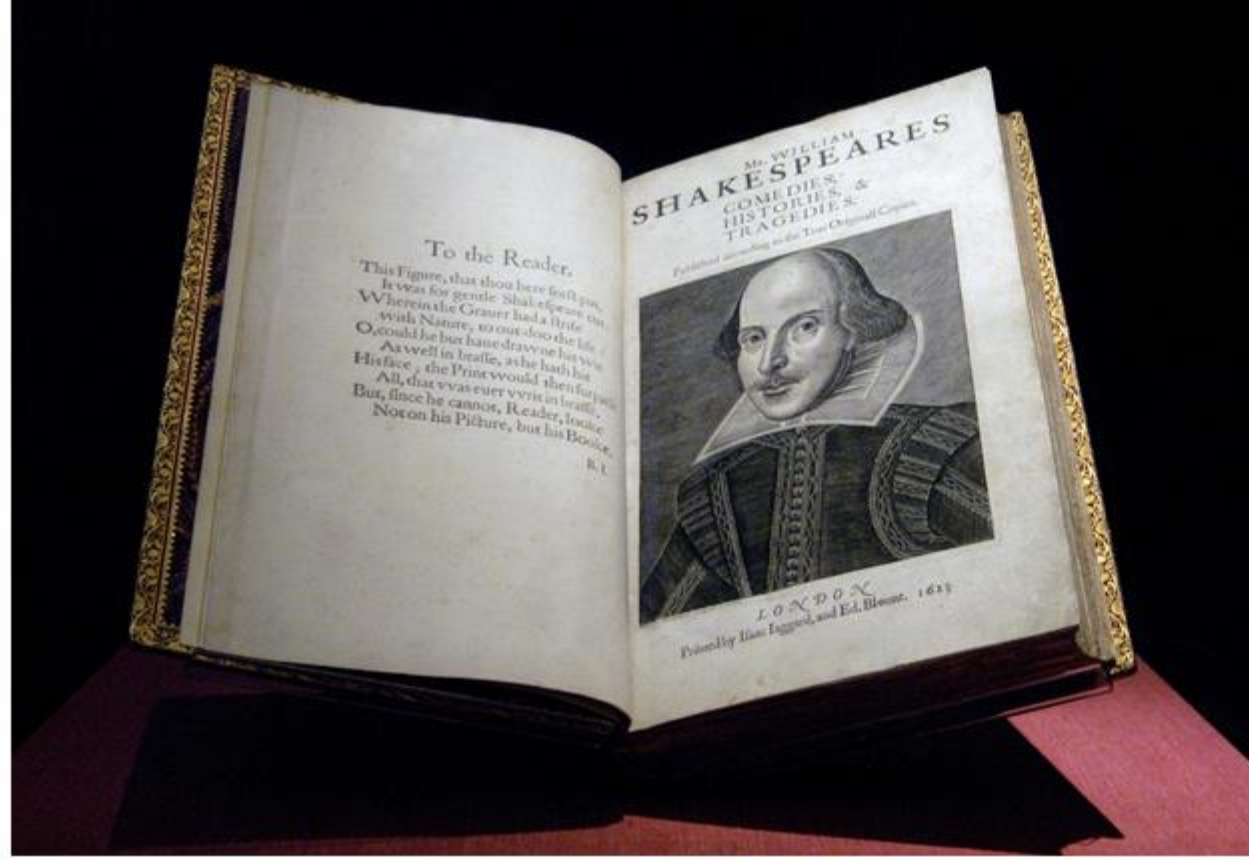
Alternative: [Brookside Gardens](#)

Want to spend time outside enjoying this gorgeous weather? Brookside Gardens has many of the attractions you'd find at the National Arboretum, including a Japanese Garden, a Butterfly Garden and the tranquil Aquatic Garden. The gardens, located in Wheaton Regional Park, are open from sunrise to sunset.

The National Archives

Alternative: [The Folger Shakespeare Library](#)

While it doesn't have the same American focus, the Folger Shakespeare Library is another repository for important, historical documents. "Here Is a Play Fitted," a new exhibition which opens Tuesday, looks at a number of Shakespeare's plays, chronicling how scripts have been altered by different theater companies over the years. The show also features set and costume designs, playbills and reviews.



The Folger Shakespeare Library owns 82 copies of Shakespeare's First Folio -- the largest collection in the world. (Sarah L. Voisin/The Washington Post)

The National Gallery of Art

Alternative: [The Phillips Collection](#)

The National Gallery may be bigger, but the Phillips Collection is where modern art got its start in the District. The museum was founded in 1921, 20 years before the National Gallery opened its doors. So, spend some time with the Phillips's permanent collection in lieu of a trip to the NGA's west building, and linger in the Rothko Room as an alternative to the east building.

National Museum of African Art

Alternative: [The African Art Museum of Maryland](#)

Masks, musical instruments, textiles and jewelry can be found in Fulton, where the African Art Museum of Maryland houses a collection of traditional and contemporary African artworks and objects. And the best part, for budget-conscious non-essentials? Admission is free.

National Museum of American History

Alternative: [Mount Vernon](#)

The Father of Our Country is given his due at Mount Vernon, where interactive movies and displays on "The Real George Washington" supplement the usual uniforms, artifacts and historic furniture. Besides, the Smithsonian doesn't have a working distillery -- and George Washington's Mount Vernon does. (For those of us whose favorite childhood memories of American History revolved around the train exhibit, the B&O Railroad Museum in Baltimore is the perfect substitute.)



The Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center at Mount Vernon features lifesize statues depicting George Washington at various stages of his life. This one depicts him as a Revolutionary War general astride his horse, Blueskin. (Photo by Dayna Smith/The Washington Post)

National Museum of the American Indian

Alternative: [The Art Museum of the Americas](#)

"Tracing Asian Migration to the Americas through AMA's Collection" at the Art Museum of the Americas looks at the influx of Asian immigrants to Latin America and the Caribbean during the 19th and 20th centuries, and how the new residents altered the landscape of visual art. (Note: There is no replacement for Mitsitam Cafe, quite possibly the best lunch spot on the Mall.)

National Museum of Natural History

Alternative: [The Museum of Unnatural History](#)

Who needs the Hope Diamond when you can explore a cave or examine the long-lost ovlephant -- an owl with a elephant's trunk? Run by the 826DC, a non-profit that teaches writing skills to inner-city children, the Museum of Unnatural History is full of exotic artifacts -- including an interactive cave -- and a shop that sells all the goods an urban explorer could ever need.

National Portrait Gallery

Alternative: [National Museum of Women in the Arts](#)

"American People, Black Arts," a showcase spotlighting Faith Ringgold's work at the Museum of Women in the Arts, showcases nearly 50 depictions of Americans that examine the evolution of race and gender issues during the 1960s. On Wednesday, there will be a free lecture about the show at noon. UPDATE: The museum is waiving its admission fee for furloughed employees in the event of a government shutdown.

National Postal Museum

Alternative: [The Newseum](#)

Trade one form of communication for another with a trip to the Newseum, where you can contemplate the week endlessly dissecting the shutdown. While you're there, head up to the terrace on the top floor for the best view of the Capitol building, and give it your angriest glare. Unfortunately, the museum is on the pricier side for budget-conscious workers -- \$21.95 plus tax.

The National Zoo

Alternative: [The National Aquarium](#) in Baltimore

No, there's no alternative that comes close to seeing the National Zoo's pandas in person -- unless it's coming face-to-face with sharks zipping around the National Aquarium's new \$12.5 million Blacktip Reef exhibition. The giant coral tanks and hundreds of fish will delight visitors of all ages.

The Renwick Gallery

Alternative: [The Sugarloaf Crafts Festival](#)

With the arts & crafts of the Renwick out of reach during a shutdown, the Sugarloaf Crafts Festival this weekend at the Maryland State Fairgrounds does one better: You can actually purchase the decorative arts on display there for your home. Plus, there's food, music, crafting demonstrations, and children's storytelling, all outdoors on a crisp autumn day. Admission is \$8, and the festival moves to Gaithersburg next weekend.

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The Smithsonian Castle

Alternative: [The Brewmaster's Castle](#)

The Smithsonian's Castle looks awesome from the outside, but once you get in, it's a glorified gift shop and information desk. The Brewmaster's Castle, on the other hand, is a fully intact Victorian mansion owned by 20th century beer magnate Christian Heurich. Don't miss the primitive intercom and pneumatic communication system, the hand-carved marble fireplaces, or the basement smokehouse.

Smithsonian American Art Museum

Alternative: [The Corcoran Gallery of Art](#)

The history of American art -- from colonial-era portraits to contemporary work -- is well-represented within the Corcoran's walls. This is the last weekend to see Ellen Harvey's "The Alien's Guide to the Ruins of Washington, D.C.," which looks at the city's monuments and memorials -- many of which will be affected by the shutdown -- through the eyes of an otherworldly being.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Alternative: "[Mindy Weisel: Not Neutral](#)" at the [Kreeger Museum](#)

Honor the memory of the Holocaust with a trip to Mindy Weisel's solo show at the Kreeger. The artist was born in Bergen-Belsen, and her "Paintings of the Holocaust" series speak to her family's loss -- each painting incorporates her father's tattooed concentration camp number. Admission is \$10.



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