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Riding the Rails on the Red Line Explorations With Metro

by Gina Hagler

With Metro trains running through D.C. and the suburbs, it makes a lot of sense to hop on when heading downtown to the Smithsonian. My kids, and I suspect most of their friends, can tell you everything located around the stops nearest the Air & Space Museum. But what is there at the other stops? We decided to pick two and explore.

Bethesda

The Bethesda station may not seem a likely choice, but that was the first on my kids' list. They've been to Bethesda plenty of times by car and know about things to do that are adjacent to the parking lots, but it surprised all of us that there were things we'd never noticed until we arrived by Metro.

The first wonderful event was the escalator that seemed to ride upward forever before reaching the top. My 6-year-old wasn't sure she liked an escalator that was "so tall," but her 10-year-old and high school-age brothers loved it! One more quick escalator ride and we were up at street level before heading west on East-West Highway. I'd never noticed the brick sidewalk until my daughter decided to hop from brick to brick. Not surprisingly, the first things my foodies spotted were Chipotle and La Madeleine. The croissants won out, and we made our first stop of the day.

Just past La Madeleine, we took the steps up to the Woodmont Triangle promenade area. There was something up there for kids of all ages. The younger kids loved the water feature. They all enjoyed the work on display in The Fraser Gallery, and Creative Goldsmiths had interesting jewelry in window displays. The outdoor mosaic sculpture and large pots of pansies and daffodils, along with the other metal sculpture, attracted everyone's interest, because they were interesting to look at and fun to sketch. Out by Wisconsin Avenue, we discovered underwater and tropical creature mosaics inlaid in the sidewalk. For my 6-year-old, this promenade area was the best part of the exploration, because "everything about this is fun. You get to draw pictures and look around."

My 10-year-old was okay with that, but the skywalk over East-West Highway was by far his favorite part. He had a great time just running back and forth above the roadway, pretending he was defending his kingdom. Once we finally settled on the other side of the road, he enjoyed the park-like area between the skywalk and the Metro station. From his point of view, there was plenty to see as he raced above the streets he usually had to wait to cross safely, and he was glad to see there were stores we could visit down on Woodmont Avenue.

The Metro Food Court wasn't open, but we raced by there, too. Our high school is promoting the use of CFL (compact fluorescent) light bulbs, and the kids all noticed these were used in the fixtures around the outside of the building. Once we got to

Bethesda Avenue, we stopped for a bagel and a quick peek in the Apple store before heading into Barnes and Noble. If we'd had more time and stamina, we could have walked a bit of the Crescent Trail. As it was, there were plenty of restaurants and stores in that area, along with a free trolley to take us back to the station with time for a quick snack at Boeymonger on East-West Highway before heading home.

My high school-age son enjoyed himself because it was "kind of nice to be out and walking around and seeing the stuff we usually don't see because we're in the car." The rest of us agreed completely, although with a preschooler along, a stroller might be necessary.

Dupont Circle

The kids settled on Dupont Circle as their second destination. Imagining the galleries and shopping we could do, I was happy to go along. Of course, neither of those activities was what they had in mind, so we opted for walking around instead.

The escalator for the south exit was not as deep as the one in Bethesda, but my 10-year-old son liked that it had "a glass awning to keep us dry in the rain." He was also delighted to see all the places we could eat. In fact, heading down 19th Street, our first stop was Ben & Jerry's, where our new best friend Zenani fixed us up with delicious shakes. From there it wasn't far at all to Olsson's Books & Records. My oldest son thoroughly enjoyed browsing in there.

In the single square block we walked — down 19th Street, across L Street and back up 18th Street to Connecticut Avenue — we spotted a Baja Fresh, Cosi, Ben & Jerry's, Krispy Kreme, Fuddrucker's, Bertucci's and Moby Dick House of Kabob. There was also a Ritz camera store and the Lowes DuPont 5. Sadly, "TMNT" was not playing there, but there was a wonderful statue of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow sitting in the triangle formed by 18th Street/Connecticut Avenue/M Street.

All in all, my kids discovered that just walking around window-shopping and people-watching could be a lot of fun. With kids ranging from early elementary to high school, it's not easy to find activities that have something that interests everyone. The Metro explorations turned out to be a great way to spend time together while getting to know each other a bit better. They've voted we should try a couple of other stations, and see what we can find.

I know our primary focus is going to be on the food choices available, but I'm also happy to know my kids appreciate exploring public spaces and getting into the rhythm of the neighborhood we're visiting. The fun for me is seeing what attracts their attention as we walk around and in listening to what they have to say on the Metro trips there and back. For all of us, it's a chance to get out of the car and see what's special about living in the Metro area.

*Gina Hagler is a
writer in Rockville.*

A clickable map of the Metro system at www.wmata.com/metro/metro/systemmap.cfm

A clickable map of the Bethesda area at www.downtownbethesda.com/guide/dining.php

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