



Smooth Traveler: There is Always More in Baltimore.

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Baltimore is known as "Charm City," and believe me, the designation is well deserved. It is a very special blend of small town warmth and big city services and attractions. The city's past is ever present in its museums and neighborhoods, the restaurants and hotels are world class, most sites are within close proximity of each other and best of all, for a city its size, Baltimore has a generous sprinkling of unique, some might even say quirky, attractions.

Lord Baltimore received a land grant, in 1632, from King Charles I and in 1633 the initial group of colonists sailed to what is now Maryland and named the colony after its founding proprietor. The colony was established at the point where the Chesapeake forms a natural harbor and owes much of its growth to the merchants and farmers who wanted to establish a viable port at the location where the distance to the Caribbean was the shortest because the Baltimore harbor is the westernmost of the northern ports. The official founding of Baltimore dates from 1729.

Residents fought in the American Revolution and in 1788 Maryland became the 7th state to ratify the Constitution, but it is not until the War of 1812 that Baltimore earns its first indelible spot in the country's history. The 43-acre Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, 2400 East Fort Avenue, was the site of the events of September 1814.

The British, after torching Washington, DC, moved to attack Baltimore by both land and water. The star-shaped fort, named in honor of Washington's Secretary of War, James McHenry, was the city's principle defense. The attack began in the wee hours of September 13, 1814 and continued relentlessly for 25 hours. A combination of cannon fire, sunken vessels and a chain stretched across the harbor, repulsed the invaders.

Francis Scott Key, who witnessed the bombardment from a truce ship moored in the Chesapeake, was moved to write "The Defence of Fort McHenry" after witnessing the fact that an enormous flag, sewn by Mary Pickersgill, continued to wave over the fort. The poem, renamed "The Star-Spangled Banner," would be set to the melody of a British drinking song, "Anacreon," and would become our national anthem in 1931.

In 1925 the fort became a national park and in 1939 it was named a "National Monument and Historic Shrine." It remains the only site in the United States with this dual designation. On October 15, 1966 it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and traditionally, when a new flag is created it is first flown over Fort McHenry.

While Baltimore is filled with sites and attractions that provide visitors with all sorts of insights and experiences, I love the museums most. The selection is mind-boggling and no matter what your interests you can indulge them, from the atypical Historical Electronics Museum (1745 West Nursery Road) and the National Museum of Dentistry (31 S. Greene Street) to the more traditional Baltimore Museum of Art (10 Art Museum Drive) and National Aquarium (501 E. Pratt Street). There are always enough new venues and expanded or changing exhibits to make each visit to the city a fresh experience. This trip I decided to visit both my favorite and the most recent

additions to Baltimore's cultural landscape.

The National Great Blacks In Wax Museum, Inc., 1601-03 E. North Avenue, is a crown jewel among a collection of awesome gems. It is always my first stop and, though I have visited many times throughout the years, it is a consistently outstanding educational experience and one that I feel should be mandatory for everyone seeking to understand the African American journey.

The museum was the first African American wax museum in the nation and the first wax museum in Baltimore. Founded in 1983 by Dr's. Elmer and Joanne Martin, it was created to preserve, promote and showcase African American culture and history through the presentation of life-sized figures in settings that highlighted the achievements and historical impact of individuals, groups and movements. Originally housed in a 1,200 sq. ft. facility, it quickly became apparent that a larger space was needed and in 1985 the museum moved to its current location. The three-story, 30,000 sq. ft. edifice is comprised of a former firehouse, a mansion and two apartment buildings. The attendance, that had been limited to several thousand by necessity, has grown to more than 300,000 per annum.

Tours begin in the lobby with the standing figures of Carter G. Woodson, founder of Negro History Week and W.E.B. Dubois, while Bessie Coleman Flies aloft in an airplane and Hannibal sits astride an elephant. Before continuing into the galleries a selection of audio tours are available. There are versions for adults, children ages two through eight, an audio description for the visually impaired and descriptive text for the deaf.

The first floor exhibition area opens with a walk-thru, replicated portion of a slave ship that vividly depicts the horror and anguish of the Middle Passage. Thirty dioramas feature such exhibits as "The Magnificence of Africa," "Islamic Africa," "The Underground Railroad," "Revolt and Rebellion," "Modern African Leaders," "Educators," and "The Modern Civil Rights Era."

Four galleries on the second level include "Outstanding Marylanders" and "A Little Child Shall Lead Them." The gift shop, also on this level, has a wonderful selection of books, souvenirs and memorabilia.

"The Struggle Against Lynching: Lessons for Today," on the lower level, is an arresting depiction of the history of lynching in America from 1882 to 1968. The exhibit consists of newspaper clippings, photographs, dioramas, audio and artifacts that graphically relate the stories of the men, and women, who were the victims and the victimizers. The final display, "The Boulevard of Broken Dreams," is designed to force us to examine how we lynch ourselves in modern times through drugs and crime.

The National Great Blacks In Wax Museum is closed on Mondays. I strongly advise that your visit coincide with the opening of the museum in order to be able to see everything. Admission is charged and donations are accepted. (410) 563-3404 www.greatblacksinwax.org

Reginald F. Lewis was an African American entrepreneur who grew up in Baltimore. He attended Dunbar High School where he distinguished himself as a scholar-athlete. In 1961 he attended Virginia State University on a scholarship that he lost due to an injury. He continued by working his way through school, ultimately graduating on the Dean's List. During his final year at VSU he was invited to join a special program at Harvard Law School, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. Based on his performance he was accepted into Harvard Law School prior to applying, the only person to have achieved this honor in the school's history.

Upon graduating in 1968 he joined a prestigious law firm and by 1970 he had founded the first African American Wall Street law firm. As a corporate lawyer he assisted many minority owned companies and in 1983 he founded the TLC Group L.P. He spearheaded the \$22.5-million lev-

eraged buyout of the McCall Pattern Company and made a \$50-million profit upon selling it in 1987. Later that year he purchased Beatrice Foods International for \$985-million and by the early 90's the company's sales topped \$1.6-billion annually.

Throughout his business career Lewis continued to assist others through the Reginald F. Lewis Foundation he instituted in 1983. In 1993, at the age of fifty, Lewis died, but as per his wishes, his foundation donated the largest endowment gift ever made to an African American Museum in 2002 and the museum opened in mid-2005.

The Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, 830 E. Pratt Street, is the largest of its kind on the eastern seaboard and every aspect reflects its cultural mission. The entrance faces the site of a former slave market and a 96-ft. high, Red Wall of Freedom that curves from the exterior of the building into its heart symbolizes the undying spirit and creativity of the people. The remainder of the exterior is a combination of red brick and a 72-ft high black granite wall. The 82,000 sq. ft building consists of 15,000 sq. ft. of exhibition space and an enormous atrium with terrazzo floors.

The Permanent Exhibition galleries focus on three content areas, "Things Hold, Lines Connect: African American Families and Communities in Maryland," "Building Maryland, Building America: Labor and the Black Experience," and "The Strength of the Mind: Black Art and Intellect."

The current special exhibition, "At Freedom's Door: Challenging Slavery in Maryland," is on display through October 28, 2007. It explores the resistance of Maryland's black population to the institution of slavery and the ways in which the state contributed to its continuation.

www.africanamericanculture.org.

The Frederick Douglass-Isaac Myers Maritime Park, 1417 Thames Street, situated in one of Baltimore's most historic and lovely neighborhoods, Fells Point, opened on June 28, 2006. The structure, the oldest, extant industrial building on the waterfront, dating from 1810, contains 12,000 sq. ft of exhibition space. The architectural firm, Zigar/Snead incorporated elements of the existing structure with an artfully designed glass loggia and created an AIA award winning structure.

The park, museum and living classroom are dedicated to two of Baltimore's most prominent, ante-bellum, black citizens, Frederick Douglass and Isaac Myers and by extension the African American and maritime communities that flourished in Fells Point.

Tours are docent led and begin with a ten-minute orientation video narrated by Charles Dutton. Many exhibits are interactive and designed to introduce visitors to the craftsmanship involved in maritime trades.

Two similar displays are comprised of chronological tableaus of the lives of Douglass and Meyers. Douglass life is traced from his birth on the Wye Plantation through his life as a caulker, an escaped slave and an ardent abolitionist. Visitors are encouraged to stand on the deck of the ship that brought Douglass to Baltimore, the Sally Lloyd, beside him and to sit near him on the train that carried him to freedom.

Meyers, who was born free, worked on the waterfront and eventually became one of fourteen founders of the Chesapeake Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company. Established in 1850, it was the largest African American owned business in the US and employed 300 individuals. The museum is located near the Philpot Street site of the original company.

Additional tour highlights include artifacts, documents, the third floor Founders Room with its tri-level portraiture and the La Trappe Creek Canoe. The yellow pine canoe, dating from the late 18th-century, was found in Talbot County. Its design and location lead us to believe it was constructed and utilized by slaves on the Wilderness Plantation.

The adjacent Maritime Institute houses a living classroom equipped with a boat building shop. Children can participate in hands-on activities under the guidance of master boat builders.

A walk along the exterior of the building takes you pass a gigantic bronze head of Frederick Douglass, sculpted by Mark Robinson, and an authentic marine railway. www.douglassmyers.org

Geppi's Entertainment Museum, opened on September 8, 2006, is representative of all that is wonderful about Baltimore's eclectic collection of museums. It is an outgrowth of one man's dream and determination and yet it captures the imagination and the inner child in each of us.

The museum's founder, Steve Geppi, is a native of Baltimore's Little Italy. He developed a love of comic books early on and credits Batman comic books as being the impetus for his learning to read. He left school prior to completion in order to support his mother and eventually went to work for the U.S. Postal Service. Through it all he never lost his love of comics and began to establish a following as a comic book dealer at conventions.

In 1974 he left his job as a mail carrier to open his first Geppi's Comic World. He went on to become the founder of Diamond Comic Distributor, the largest English language distributor in the world and part owner of the Baltimore Orioles among other business endeavors.

The museum features 8,000 items from his personal collection of comic books, toys, animation cels, movie posters, newspaper articles and pop-culture collectibles, displayed in 17,000 sq. ft. of exhibition space. The galleries are chronological, by era, each differentiated by a defining event or character. As visitors enter each room narration is activated and colorful displays and interactive kiosks entertain and educate.

Tours begin in the lobby with a three-minute video and continue with the displays in the Comic Room. The comics, many rare and unique, are displayed in cases maintained at a temperature of 70 degrees with a constant 50% humidity.

Seven additional galleries include more of my personal favorites such as, two rare Action Comic Books, the first political cartoon, created in 1754 by Benjamin Franklin, Beatles collectibles, original Barbie and Ken dolls and "Star Wars" wanted posters.

A temporary exhibit, "Finally in Full Color," is on view until March 10th. The collection of Professor William H. Foster III showcases a historical perspective of African American comic book characters and those who created them. The emphasis is on how depictions have changed from being demeaning and stereotypical to the current, heroic portrayals. www.finallyfullcolor.com

Geppi's Educational Museum (GEM) is located at Camden Yards on the second and third floors of Camden Station and I guarantee, no matter your age, you will have a wonderful time. 301 W. Camden Street. www.geppismuseum.com

The Pier 5 Hotel was my base for this trip and it was a truly excellent choice. The vast majority of Baltimore's attractions are within walking distance of the Inner Harbor and Pier 5 is located at the eastern end of the waterfront. This boutique hotel boasts colorful Art Deco décor and a 3-story atrium with velvet couches arranged to form intimate conversation areas. Nightly activities are offered and three restaurants are located within the complex, Ruth Chris-Pier 5, the Peacock Café and McCormick & Schmick's.

Guest rooms provide outstanding views, the standard amenities and such extras as robes, plush towels, down bedding, wireless internet and coffee makers. 711 Eastern Avenue. www.harbormagic.com

Less than one block from Pier 5, at 401 East Pratt Street, is the tallest pentagonal building in the world, and a great way to end your trip is with a visit to the 27th floor of Baltimore's World Trade Center. The panoramic view from 423-feet above the harbor is one you will long remember. www.viewbaltimore.org

Baltimore is only two hours and one tank of gasoline away and there is always something new.

I wish you smooth and novel travels!