

Baltimore by the Sea

The city's scenic waterfront charms families with kid-friendly attractions and maritime activities **BY LUISA FREY GAYNOR**

BALTIMORE'S INNER HARBOR is the city's crown jewel, where the waterfront glimmers on a sunny day and maritime activities bustle year-round. There are so many attractions nestled in this compact and picturesque area that getting around the Inner Harbor with kids is easy, with most sites accessible by foot or water bus. And beyond the waterfront, the city is brimming with history, culture, and sports attractions.



Families can explore an early American fort, climb aboard historic trains, and revel in baseball lore at the Babe Ruth Museum or Camden Yards, home of the Baltimore Orioles. **Crab cakes rule at Phillips Harborplace** My husband, John, our then seven-year-old daughter, Alexandra, and I visited Baltimore in the spring. For John and me, the highlight of our weekend was dining

al fresco at the Inner Harbor's many waterside restaurants. For Alex, it was riding the pedal boats and water buses that made the trip special.

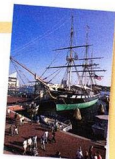
Friday

NOON
Baltimore Marriott Waterfront Hotel

We splurged on a room at this new high-rise hotel in the heart of the Inner Harbor that offers an indoor pool, two restaurants, and a water bus stop right outside its doors (700 Alicanna Street; nightly rates start at \$189; call 410-385-3000).

Other nearby lodgings: the recently renovated Holiday Inn Inner Harbor (about a ten-minute walk from the water) boasts spacious rooms and an indoor pool (nightly rates start at \$159; call 410-685-3500); the Days Inn Inner Harbor, located near Camden Yards, offers a small outdoor pool and a restaurant where kids ages 17 and under eat free (nightly rates start at \$129; call 410-576-1000).

12:45 P.M.
Harborplace
From our hotel, it was a



Tour the Navy's last all-steel-powered ship, the U.S.S. *Constellation*

scenic five-minute walk along the waterfront to Harborplace (800-HARBOR-1; www.harborplace.com), an indoor and outdoor marketplace with shops, sit-down restaurants, and an international food court. After lunch, we, like many others, were lured by the employees' banter at The Fudgery, a kiosk specializing in homemade treats and interactive fudge-making demonstrations with free samples.

2 P.M.

Port Discovery
This hands-on children's museum is one of Alex's favorite Baltimore attractions. The big draw for her (and John) was KidWorks, an elaborate three-floor climbing structure made of steel, rope, and wood. (For kids under age five, there's a Sensation Station with a mini KidWorks structure.) Other exhibits include Egyptian-themed Adventure Expeditions and Miss Perception's Mystery House, a challenging, kid-oriented whodunit, where Alex got to pretend she was a supersleuth like Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen (35 Market Place; \$11 for adults and \$8.50 for kids ages 3 to 12; call 410-727-



Families can explore the Inner Harbor by land — or sea, aboard a rented pedal boat

Family Traveler City Weekend



Baltimore's charming Inner Harbor (above) offers proximity to Italian restaurants (right) and a world-class aquarium (below and top right)



resident, met us for dinner. After careful instruction from Steve,

John joined the local tradition of pounding open spiced, steamed crabs with a wooden hammer. Alex thought this was an entertaining way to eat dinner, but opted for a kid's portion of chicken fingers and fries

instead (2701 Boston Street; entrées from \$12 to \$28; kids' menu, \$5; call 410-558-0202 or go to www.bo-brooks.com).

Saturday

9 A.M.

Water Bus 101

For a daily fare (\$5 for adults and \$3 for kids ages 10 and under), families can enjoy water bus rides to and from many Inner Harbor attractions and neighborhoods. Two companies, *Ed Kane's Water Taxi* (800-658-8947; www.watertaxi.com) and *Seaport Taxi* (410-675-2900; www.natharrisonseaport.org), provide comparable service and area discount coupons. Transfers from one line to the other are not permitted. See individual websites for operating schedules.

410-539-3810 or go to www.waynecooks.com).

9 A.M.

National Aquarium in Baltimore

Friends of ours were also in Baltimore for the weekend, so we met up with Caroline, her mother, Connie, and her children, Callie and Nick, then ages seven and five, respectively, at Baltimore's world-renowned aquarium. Since the aquarium draws big crowds, we arrived right after it opened.

The sea horse exhibit captured the attention of the kids, who made a game out of being the first to spot the beautiful creatures. After the daily dolphin show, we visited The Children's Discovery

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Street; call 410-276-4429).

The water bus from Fell's Point to Canton was much smaller than those plying the

main part of the Inner Harbor, and Alex remarked, "This is like going on our own private boat ride." Our efforts were rewarded at Bo Brooks, where our brother-in-law, Steve, a Baltimore

Wayne's Bar-B-Que

The rustic motif of this popular barbecue restaurant appealed to Alex, who got a bird's-eye view of a masted ship, *Pride of Baltimore II*, as it pulled into the harbor. The banana walnut pancakes won hands down for John and me, while Alex ordered plain pancakes off the limited children's menu (Pratt Street Pavilion; breakfast, lunch, and dinner served daily; breakfast entrées from \$5 to \$9; kids' menu from \$2 to \$4; call

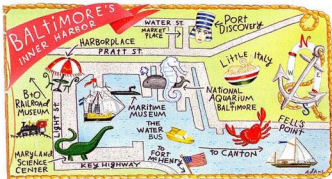


8120 or go to www.portdiscovery.org).

5 P.M.

Fell's Point and Bo Brooks at Lighthouse Point, Canton

We couldn't resist an evening water bus ride from our hotel to Bo Brooks at Lighthouse Point (see "Water Bus 101" for fare information), a waterside seafood restaurant in the Inner Harbor's outlying neighborhood of Canton. The trip required changing boats at Fell's Point, which gave us a chance to wander around this quaint, cobblestoned section of the waterfront, where Alex made her first of two visits to the Great Bears & Childhood Delight toy shop (1643 Thames



Family Traveler

Cove, which offers a small touch tank and a few hands-on exhibits (501 East Pratt Street; \$16 for adults and \$9.50 for kids ages 3 to 11; call 410-576-3800 or go to www.aqua.org, which has information on preordering tickets from TicketMaster for specific dates and times — an especially useful option during busy summer months and holiday periods).

NOON

Coast Guard cutter Taney
Before parting ways with our friends, we toured the *Taney*, one of the three Baltimore Maritime Museum vessels docked in the Inner Harbor. The kids liked our self-guided tour and climbing up and down the ship's many ladders (Pier # 5; museum admission is \$6 for adults and \$3 for kids ages 6 to 14, which includes tickets to all three vessels as well as the Seven Foot Knoll Lighthouse; call 410-396-3453 or go to www.baltomaritime-museum.org).

12:45 P.M.

Phillips Tour the **U.S.S. Torsk**
Harborplace
The three of us loved watching the harbor action from our outside table at this mid-Atlantic chain restaurant, which John and I voted the best spot for crab cakes in Baltimore (Light Street Pavilion; entrées from \$8 to \$13; kids' menu from \$6; call 800-782-2722 or go to www.phillipsfoods.com).

2 P.M.

Maryland Science Center
The science center appeals to all ages, but its many hands-on exhibits make it especially kid-friendly. Alex enjoyed

All aboard for fun at the B & O Railroad Museum; history comes alive at Fort McHenry (inset)



unearthing a replica of a dinosaur bone at a simulated dig. Afterward, we watched an IMAX movie (601 Light Street at Key Highway; \$8 for adults and \$6 for kids ages 3 to 12; IMAX and planetarium shows cost extra; call 410-685-5225 or go to www.mdsi.org). Alex felt she was too old to ride the carousel in front of the science center, but it was very popular with younger kids.

6 P.M.

Little Italy

After an easy walk from our hotel, we found ourselves in the old Baltimore neighborhood of Little Italy, where private homes commingle with family-owned restaurants. We chose home-style Sabatino's (entrées from \$10 to \$24; kids can order half portions of pasta or chicken fingers for \$5 to \$7; 901 Fawn Street; call 410-727-2667), which was pricey for what we got. Next time, we'd like to try one of the area's many other eateries.

7:45 P.M.

ESPN Zone Baltimore
To cap off the day, we headed to the ESPN Zone's lively Sports Arena arcade, located in a renovated power plant

turned entertainment complex. Alex, who had learned to ski the previous winter, liked the virtual reality ski game (601 East Pratt Street; call 410-685-tspsn).

Sunday

8 A.M.

Bonaparte Breads, Fell's Point

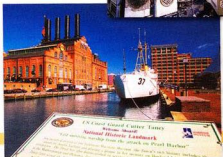
"I can't believe Mom's letting me eat breakfast at a bakery," I overheard Alex say to John on our way to Bonaparte. Admittedly, I'm a bit of a health-food nut, but I too thoroughly enjoyed the bakery's European atmosphere and award-winning breads and pastries (pastries from \$1.50 to \$3; 903 South Ann Street; call 410-880-0858).

9:45 A.M.

Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine

A 15-minute film in the visitors' center recounted the history of this famous fort,

Hands-on fun for kids at Port Discovery (right); the Coast Guard cutter *Taney* (below)



where the 1814 battle with the British inspired Francis Scott Key to pen "The Star-Spangled Banner." Afterward, we wandered the ramparts, admired the many cannons, and viewed the powder magazine and guardhouses. We left Fort McHenry humming "Oh, say can you see..." (2400 East Fort Avenue; \$5 for ages 17 and up; call 410-962-4290 or go to www.nps.gov/fmoc)

11:15 A.M.

B & O Railroad Museum
Alex has never been a train buff, but she ended up having a great time at this eclectic museum, which features historic and modern railroad cars, many of which are open for exploring. Indoor exhibits include a model train set that occupies an entire room and train memorabilia like stopwatches and velvet car seats (901 West Pratt Street; \$8 for adults and \$5 for kids ages 2 to 12; call 410-752-2490 or go to www.borail.org). Hungry for lunch, we were lured back to the outdoor dining and multiple options of Harborplace.

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1:45 P.M. *Pedal boats*

From Alex's point of view, we saved one of the best activities for last. This popular rental spot near the aquarium offers traditional pedal boats as well as those in the shape of a dragon. Alex and John pedaled the boat, while I sat back and watched the action on shore drift slowly by (Pier 1 next to the U.S.S. *Constellation*; hourly rentals for up to four people range from \$10 to \$15; call 410-385-2733).

2:30 P.M. *U.S.S. Constellation Museum*

Next to the pedal boats is the U.S.S. *Constellation*, the last all-sail-powered Navy ship ever built. After a self-guided audio-tour, we helped pull the ropes and manipulate the ship's massive mast, which was one of the daily special events (Pier 1; \$6.50 for adults and \$3.50 for kids ages 6 to 14; call 410-539-1797 or go to www.constellation.org; daily activities and times are posted on a pier-side blackboard in front of the ship).

3 P.M. *U.S.S. Torsk*

We ended our stay in Baltimore with a tour of the Baltimore Maritime Museum's World War II-era submarine. After climbing from the narrow torpedo room to the mess hall and navigation station, Alex exclaimed, "I feel like Alice in Wonderland. Everything seems to be getting smaller!"

For more Baltimore information, call 888-BALTIMORE or go to www.baltimore.org which offers sample itineraries and links to attractions.

Although it was an optical illusion, it indeed felt as if the doorways from one area to the other were shrinking as

we progressed through the ship (Pier #3; see the cutter *Taney*, page 50, for rates; call 410-396-3453).

Although Alex doesn't usually sleep in the car, our action-packed trip to Baltimore must have thoroughly tired her out for the ride home. I'm sure she had sweet dreams of magical sea horses, mighty trains, and savory croissants all the way to New Jersey.

New Jersey-based travel writer Luisa Frey Gaynor recently gave birth to her second little traveler, Ethan.