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36 Hours in Baltimore



Susana Raab for The New York Times

The main drag, 36th Street, in the now hip Hampden neighborhood.

By JOSHUA KURLANTZICK
Published: October 4, 2009

IF you watch [HBO's](#) police drama "The Wire," you might think that [Baltimore](#) is filled with drug dealers and crime ringleaders. But in truth, the city has attracted a different breed of misfits: artists. Lured by cheap rents and warehouse spaces, artists and photographers have flocked there to claim the city as their own. Once rough neighborhoods like Hampden and Highlandtown have been taken over in recent years by studios, galleries and performance spaces. Crab joints and sports bars now share the cobblestone streets with fancy cafes and tapas restaurants. But against this backdrop, there are still the beehive hairdos and wacky museums that give so-called Charm City its nickname.

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4 p.m.
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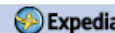
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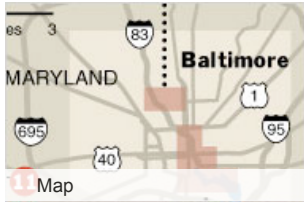
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Baltimore



A Weekend in Baltimore

Though you wouldn't guess it as you enter Baltimore on Interstate 95, which passes port terminals and factories spewing smoke, the center of the city conceals a wooded, stream-filled oasis, the [Jones Falls Trail](#) (www.jonesfalls.org). Once heavily polluted itself, the 58-square-mile watershed has been restored over the past decade and now features a green [biking](#) and [hiking](#) trail, which parallels the Jones Fall River and meanders through some of the old mills that once powered Baltimore's economy. It is a rustic and historical look at a sometimes gritty city.

7 p.m.

2) NOT JUST CRABS

In a town known for crab cakes and fried fish sandwiches, [Woodberry Kitchen](#) (2010 Clipper Park Road; 410-464-8000; www.woodberrykitchen.com) stands out for its refined local cooking. Set in the Clipper Mill complex, an old foundry that is now home to artists' studios, galleries and homes, Woodberry serves nouveau American comfort

food using seasonal and local ingredients, like Chesapeake soft-shell crabs served with a spicy tartar sauce, and brick-oven roasted chicken with a sweet cider glaze, on top of a Spanish-style tortilla. Dinner for two, about \$80.

10 p.m.

3) VERY OFF BROADWAY

True to its countercultural roots, Baltimore mostly eschews touring Broadway shows for offbeat theater. Perhaps the strangest are staged by the [Creative Alliance](#) at the Patterson (3134 Eastern Avenue; 410-276-1651; www.creativealliance.org), whose stage feels like an old vaudeville house. One night, you might catch burlesque artists stripping down to their pasties; another night, a documentary on Baltimore's decaying schools. The adjacent gallery often features the works of local painters and photographers.

Saturday

9 a.m.

4) UNDERGROUND CAFE

Tucked into a basement of an apartment house in the row house neighborhood of Charles Village, near the main campus of Johns Hopkins, [Carma's Café](#) (32nd and Saint Paul Streets; 410-243-5200; www.carmascafe.com) is easy to miss. But neighbors flock to it for buttery cherry-almond scones, desserts like fried cheesecake (could a dessert be richer?), frittatas and salads, and innovative coffee drinks like the zamboni, a drinkable version of a snowball. Breakfast for two, about \$20.

11 a.m.

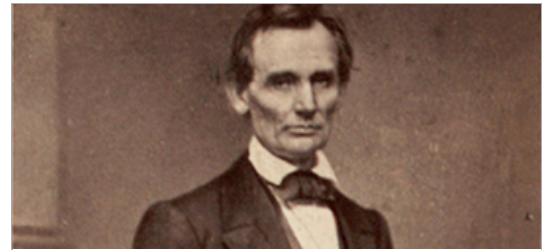
5) SISTER ACT

A short walk from Carma's, the [Baltimore Museum of Art](#) (10 Art Museum Drive; 443-573-1700; www.artbma.org) has a surprisingly large endowment of post-Impressionist art. The Cone sisters, socialites who lived in Baltimore in the early 20th century, had the foresight to buy thousands of paintings by master artists including [Cézanne](#), [Picasso](#) and [Matisse](#). They willed the pieces to the museum, whenever "the status of appreciation of

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modern art in Baltimore should improve.” Apparently, it did. Today, the Cone Collection is the heart of the museum, including Matisse’s “Blue Nude” and Gauguin’s “Woman of the Mango.” When you’re done inside, grab a snack at [Gertrude’s](#), the museum’s restaurant, and sit at a table in the nearby sculpture garden.

1 p.m.

6) CALL IT FELL’S

Tourists flock to the Inner Harbor, home to the aquarium and countless chain restaurants. For the local version, walk a few blocks farther to historic Fell’s Point, a cobblestoned waterfront area of patisseries, bars and galleries — and, unlike the Inner Harbor, a real neighborhood with brick row houses that have become a Baltimore icon. Start at the open-air plaza at the bottom of Broadway, where skateboarders mix with musicians and with couples snuggling on benches. Walk east, along Thames Street, looking over the water. Stop to inhale French pastry at [Bonaparte Breads](#) (903 South Ann Street; 410-342-4000), before heading on toward Canton, the next waterfront neighborhood, full of restored warehouses turned into shops and condos.

4 p.m.

7) T-SHIRTS MEET BEEHIVES

In recent years, the neighborhood of Hampden has gone from working-class to artsy. Packed with galleries and used-clothing stores, Hampden’s main drag, 36th Street, is where you’ll see 20-somethings in stylishly rumpled vintage jeans sharing cigarettes with “Hons,” the nickname for women who wear classic beehive hairdos. For obscure self-published art books and zines, browse through Atomic Books (3620 Falls Road; 410-662-4444; www.atomicbooks.com). Then, head to In Watermelon Sugar (3555 Chestnut Avenue; 410-662-9090), where you’ll find decidedly un-[Ikea](#) furniture. You might finish up at Mina’s (815 West 36th Street; 410-732-4258; www.minasgalleryandboutique.com) for vintage wear, poetry readings and Baltimore-based artists.

7:30 p.m.

8) PETIT FOURS

Every city needs a neighborhood restaurant that feels like a social club. In Baltimore, that would be [Petit Louis](#) (4800 Roland Avenue; 410-366-9393; www.petitlouis.com), a cozy French bistro in the swank residential neighborhood of Roland Park. It has the air of a private party, with a host greeting diners by name, and the kitchen serving up classic bistro dishes like grilled salmon with asparagus, and eggplant napoleon stuffed with chèvre. Don’t miss the pommes frites, crispy and sinfully fatty. Dinner for two, about \$80.

10 p.m.

9) BREW CREW

There may be tons of bars in Baltimore, but calling the [Brewer’s Art](#) (1106 North Charles Street; 410-547-6925; www.thebrewersart.com) a bar is like calling crabs just another shellfish. Housed in a classic town house, the pub takes its beers very seriously, pouring everything from Trappist ales from Belgium to local microbrews like Clipper City Pale Ale. The crowd seems just as serious — artists and designers, older couples coming from the symphony and occasional college students looking out of place among the adults.

Sunday

11 a.m.

10) YOUNG ARTISTS

Everyone's got to start somewhere, and for many of Baltimore's top artists, that push came from the [Maryland Institute College of Art](#) (1300 Mount Royal Avenue; 410-669-9200; www.mica.edu). The college, situated in the stately Bolton Hill neighborhood, regularly showcases the work of its promising students and faculty, which is to say the art can be hit or miss. But, like a treasure hunt, that's part of the fun. If you're hungry, grab a bite at [b](#) (1501 Bolton Street; 410-383-8600; www.b-bistro.com), a simple bistro opened by a brother of [Hamid Karzai](#), the president of Afghanistan.

2 p.m.

11) ANTIQUE CITY

For unique antiques, skip the ho-hum stores in Baltimore and head west to Ellicott City (www.ellicottcity.net), an 18th-century mill town about 25 minutes by car from downtown. Its historic Main Street is lined with Rockwell-esque stores that have become an antiques hub. For four floors of pop collectibles and crafts, check out Taylor's Antiques Mall (8197 Main Street; 410-465-4444; www.taylorsantiquemall.com). Out of Our Past Antiques (8111 Main Street; 410-480-2970; www.outofourpastantiques.com) carries stately wooden pieces. Don't forget to bargain — the store owners may turn on the Southern charm, but, if necessary, they will haggle like a street dealer.

THE BASICS

Thurgood Marshall BWI Airport has flights from all over the country. From [New York City](#), it makes more sense to drive or take a train. The drive from New York is about three and a half hours, and all [Amtrak](#) East Coast trains stop at Penn Station in Baltimore. If you don't drive to Baltimore, be sure to rent a car there. For up-to-date event listings, try the local free weekly, the City Paper (www.citypaper.com).

Upscale hotels in Baltimore are clustered downtown, near the central business district and the Inner Harbor waterfront.

The 757-room [Hilton Baltimore](#) (401 West Pratt Street; 443-573-8700; www.baltimore.hilton.com) opened in 2008 and sits only blocks from the water. Rooms in mid-October start at \$165. For a more local option, stay at the [Admiral Fell Inn](#) (888 South Broadway; 866-583-4162; www.harbormagic.com), a cluster of red brick buildings dating from the late 18th century, in the heart of the historic Fell's Point waterfront. The 80 rooms resemble a colonial home and start at \$170.

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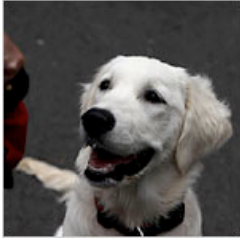
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