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Visiting Baltimore

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Introduction

Welcome to "Visiting Baltimore: A Guide for Tourists," a comprehensive exploration of one of America's most intriguing cities. Baltimore, Maryland, affectionately known as "Charm City," is a destination that delights visitors with its rich tapestry of history, culture, and unique character. Nestled on the Patapsco River, an arm of the Chesapeake Bay, Baltimore's proximity to water has shaped its development, offering travelers a distinctive combination of urban and natural attractions. This guide aims to provide all the information needed for prospective visitors to plan a memorable journey to this vibrant American city.

Baltimore welcomes visitors with a diverse range of experiences, from exploring its beautifully redeveloped waterfront, adorned with world-class museums, to uncovering the secrets of its distinct neighborhoods, each with its own story to tell. Whether you're a history enthusiast eager to wander through centuries-old districts or a foodie on the hunt for legendary crab cakes and the freshest seafood, Baltimore ensures a multitude of unforgettable adventures.

More than just a collection of itineraries, this guide delves into the specifics of visiting Baltimore, empowering tourists to engage with the city's rich history, architectural marvels, and thriving arts scene. From the bustling energy of the Inner Harbor to the charming historical streets of Fells Point, each chapter will take you deeper into the heart of Baltimore, revealing the best it has to offer.

Filled with practical advice and insider tips, "Visiting Baltimore" ensures you're well-equipped to navigate the city's public transportation system, uncover hidden gems, and enjoy its renowned culinary scene. Throughout the book, you'll also find safety tips and necessary precautions to help you make the most of your visit while ensuring your journey remains safe and seamless.

Baltimore's dynamic culture is evident not only in its attractions but in its events and festivals throughout the year. Our guide highlights essential experiences and local traditions, providing you with opportunities to immerse yourself in the city's vibrant community spirit. From the pageantry of the Preakness Stakes to the artistry of the annual Artscape festival, Baltimore offers events that engage the senses and feed the soul.

Finally, the book concludes with practical information designed to make your stay in Baltimore as enjoyable as possible, from finding the perfect accommodation to understanding local customs. Whether you're exploring Baltimore for the first time or returning to discover new aspects of the city, this guide serves as your trusted travel

companion, ensuring your trip is as rewarding and enriching as the city itself.

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CHAPTER ONE: Getting There & Getting Around

Baltimore, positioned strategically along the vital corridor of the American Northeast, is a remarkably accessible city. Whether you're soaring in from afar, rolling in on the rails, or navigating the interstate highways, reaching Charm City is generally straightforward. Understanding your options for arrival and, crucially, how to navigate the city once you're here, is the first step in planning a smooth and enjoyable visit. This chapter focuses entirely on the practicalities of movement – getting *to* Baltimore and getting *around* its diverse collection of neighborhoods and attractions.

Arriving in Charm City: Your Options

Most visitors arriving from distant locations will likely fly into Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport, universally known as BWI. Located about nine miles south of the downtown core, BWI consistently ranks well among U.S. airports for its relative ease of navigation and passenger amenities. It serves as a major hub for Southwest Airlines but is also serviced by nearly all major domestic carriers and a selection of international ones, ensuring competitive fares and frequent flight schedules. The airport terminals are modern, well-signed, and generally less sprawling and chaotic than some of its larger counterparts in the region.

Once your flight touches down at BWI, you have several convenient options for the final leg of your journey into Baltimore proper. The drive downtown typically takes around 15 to 20 minutes, but this can easily double during peak morning or evening rush hours, so factor that into your planning. Perhaps the most budget-friendly and often surprisingly efficient method is the Maryland Transit Administration's (MTA) Light RailLink service. Trains depart directly from a station connected to the lower level of the airport terminal (near Concourse E). For a very modest fare, currently \$2.00, the light rail offers a direct ride into the heart of Baltimore, making stops at key locations like Camden Yards (perfect for Orioles games or the Convention Center), the Convention Center itself, and continuing north towards Mount Vernon and Penn Station. The journey takes approximately 30 minutes to the downtown stops. While perhaps not the most glamorous arrival, it's reliable, avoids traffic woes, and drops you within walking distance of many central hotels. Look for signs directing you to the Light Rail station within the terminal; ticketing machines are available at the platform.

Another rail option involves a combination of shuttle and train. A free shuttle bus, clearly marked, runs frequently between the airport terminals and the BWI Rail Station, located about a mile away. From this station, you can catch either MARC (Maryland Area Regional Commuter) trains or Amtrak intercity trains. The MARC Penn Line service is particularly useful for reaching Baltimore's Penn Station, a major

transportation hub situated just north of downtown near the Mount Vernon neighborhood. Penn Line trains run frequently on weekdays and offer limited service on weekends; the trip to Penn Station takes around 20 minutes and is quite affordable. Amtrak trains also stop at the BWI Rail Station en route to Baltimore's Penn Station and points further north, offering a slightly faster but usually more expensive alternative. Choosing between the Light RailLink directly from the terminal and the MARC/Amtrak option from the BWI Rail Station often comes down to your final destination within Baltimore (the Light Rail is better for the Inner Harbor/Convention Center area, while the trains are obviously ideal for Penn Station and its vicinity) and potentially your connection plans if traveling onward via Amtrak.

For those prioritizing door-to-door convenience, taxis, ride-sharing services (like Uber and Lyft), and pre-booked airport shuttles are readily available. Follow the signs in the baggage claim area to designated pick-up zones. Taxis operate on a metered fare, and a trip downtown will likely cost between \$35 and \$45, depending on traffic and your exact destination. Uber and Lyft offer variable pricing based on demand, but often come in slightly cheaper than a traditional taxi. Shared shuttle services, such as GO The Airport Shuttle or Super Shuttle Express (check for current operating status as the industry changes), can be a cost-effective compromise if you don't mind sharing the ride and potentially making multiple stops; booking these in advance online is usually required. Platforms like Jayride allow comparison and booking across various ground transportation providers. While these services offer the most direct route to your hotel, remember that Baltimore traffic, particularly on I-95 or the Baltimore Beltway (I-695) during peak times, can significantly extend travel times and potentially increase metered fares.

If you plan on exploring the wider region or require maximum flexibility, renting a car is also an option, with all major rental companies operating facilities at BWI. However, be forewarned: driving and parking within Baltimore's central neighborhoods can be challenging and expensive, as we'll discuss shortly. Unless you have specific needs requiring a vehicle throughout your stay, relying on the city's transport options might prove more economical and less stressful. Lastly, for general aviation pilots or those arriving via private aircraft, Martin State Airport (MTN) is located east of the city, but it does not serve commercial flights.

Train travel offers a highly civilized and often scenic way to arrive in Baltimore, especially from other major cities along the Northeast Corridor like Washington D.C., Philadelphia, New York City, and Boston. Baltimore's historic Pennsylvania Station, known universally as Penn Station, is a magnificent Beaux-Arts structure located conveniently between the Mount Vernon cultural district and the Station North Arts & Entertainment District, less than two miles north of the Inner Harbor. As a major stop on Amtrak's network, numerous high-speed Acela Express and regular Northeast Regional trains arrive and depart daily. The journey from D.C. can take as little as 40 minutes, from Philadelphia around 70 minutes, and from New York City between 2.5

and 3 hours, making it a competitive alternative to flying, especially when factoring in airport transit and security time. MARC commuter trains (the Penn Line primarily, but also potentially the Camden Line arriving at Camden Station near the ballpark) also terminate here, providing frequent service primarily geared towards commuters from Washington D.C. and surrounding Maryland suburbs. Upon arrival at Penn Station, you can easily connect to taxis, ride-sharing services, or hop on the MTA Light RailLink (which has a stop adjacent to the station) to reach other parts of the city, including the Inner Harbor area. Several hotels are also within walking distance or a short cab ride from the station.

For travelers hitting the open road, Baltimore is well-connected by major interstate highways. Interstate 95, the main north-south artery along the East Coast, runs directly through the city. Interstate 83 provides a direct route south from Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, York) into the northern part of downtown, terminating near the Inner Harbor. Interstate 70 ends just west of the city, connecting easily via I-695 (the Baltimore Beltway). Driving times are naturally dependent on traffic, but typically, Washington D.C. is about an hour away, Philadelphia around two hours, and New York City under four hours. Before setting out, it's wise to check the Baltimore City Department of Transportation website or use a reliable GPS app for real-time updates on traffic conditions and potential road construction, which can sometimes impact routes like the I-95 corridor or access through the Fort McHenry or Harbor Tunnels (both of which involve tolls).

However, arriving by car introduces the often-vexing issue of navigating and parking within the city itself. Downtown Baltimore features a network of one-way streets that can be confusing for newcomers, and traffic congestion, particularly during weekday rush hours (roughly 7-9 AM and 4-6 PM) and around major events, can be significant. Parking is available but requires planning. On-street parking is largely regulated by meters, with varying time limits and rates; payment is often possible via coins, credit cards, or mobile apps like ParkMobile, but finding an open spot in popular areas can be a challenge, and enforcement is active. Numerous surface lots and multi-story parking garages are scattered throughout downtown, the Inner Harbor, Fells Point, and other central neighborhoods. Garage parking offers more security and predictability but comes at a higher cost, often ranging from \$15 to \$40 or more per day. Many hotels offer parking for guests, but invariably charge a substantial daily fee, so be sure to factor this into your accommodation budget. Using apps like SpotHero or Parking Panda allows you to find, compare rates, and even reserve garage spots in advance, which can sometimes save money and guarantee availability, especially during peak times. Given these factors, many visitors find it easier to arrive via train or plane and utilize Baltimore's public transportation and ride-sharing options rather than dealing with the hassles of a car within the city center.

Finally, Baltimore is also accessible via intercity bus services. Greyhound operates from a station southwest of the downtown core, requiring a connection via local bus,

taxi, or ride-share to reach central tourist areas. Several budget-friendly bus lines, such as Megabus and BoltBus (check current routes and operators), offer frequent and inexpensive service connecting Baltimore to cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. Be aware that some budget bus services may utilize suburban stops (like the White Marsh Park & Ride north of the city for some Megabus routes) rather than a central downtown terminal, potentially requiring an additional transfer via MTA bus or Light RailLink to reach your final destination. Always confirm the exact drop-off and pick-up locations when booking bus travel.

Getting Around Charm City: Navigating Baltimore

Once you've arrived, you'll find Baltimore offers a variety of ways to get around, many of which are convenient and cost-effective, particularly for exploring the central tourist districts. The city's layout features a concentration of attractions around the Inner Harbor, with distinct neighborhoods radiating outwards, some highly walkable, others requiring some form of transport.

One of the most appealing options, especially for budget-conscious travelers sticking to the main tourist corridors, is the Charm City Circulator (CCC). This is a fleet of *free* buses operating on five distinct routes, designed specifically to connect popular neighborhoods and attractions. The Purple Route runs north-south, linking Federal Hill, the Inner Harbor, Mount Vernon, and Penn Station. The Orange Route travels east-west, connecting Hollins Market, the University of Maryland Baltimore campus, the Inner Harbor, Harbor East, and Fells Point (though check for any recent route adjustments). The Green Route loops around City Hall, Fells Point, Harbor East, and the Johns Hopkins Hospital campus area. The Banner Route is particularly useful for reaching Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine from the Inner Harbor. There's also an extension on the Green Route serving areas further east. Buses generally run every 15 to 20 minutes during operating hours (which vary slightly by route but typically cover daytime and evening hours – check the official website for current schedules). The CCC is clean, relatively efficient, and an excellent way to hop between major points of interest without spending a dime on fares. Just look for the distinctive purple, orange, green, or banner-marked bus stops. Be aware that buses can get crowded, especially during peak times or major events.

For more extensive reach into the city and surrounding suburbs, the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) operates a comprehensive network of public transit services. This includes LocalLink and CityLink buses, the Light RailLink, and the Metro SubwayLink. The bus system is extensive, with over 60 routes covering nearly every corner of the city. While potentially overwhelming for short-term visitors to master fully, specific routes can be very useful for reaching destinations not covered by the Circulator. Route maps and schedules are available online and via transit apps.

The MTA Light RailLink, the same system that serves BWI Airport, runs on a north-

south axis through the city center. Key downtown stops include Camden Yards (for the stadium and Convention Center), Convention Center, Pratt Street (heart of the Inner Harbor), Lexington Market, Mount Royal/MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art), and Penn Station. It continues north towards Lutherville, Timonium, and Hunt Valley and south towards BWI and Glen Burnie. The Light Rail is particularly useful for connecting the airport, Inner Harbor, Penn Station, and points directly north or south along its corridor.

The MTA Metro SubwayLink operates on a single line running generally east-west beneath the downtown area. Its route connects Owings Mills in Baltimore County through downtown to the Johns Hopkins Hospital campus on the east side. Key stops for tourists might include Charles Center (connecting to downtown offices and near the Inner Harbor), Lexington Market (for the historic market), and Johns Hopkins Hospital. While its coverage of central tourist zones is less comprehensive than the Light Rail or Circulator, it can be a quick way to traverse the city east-west if your origin and destination align with its stations.

Using any MTA service (bus, Light Rail, or Metro Subway) currently requires a standard fare of \$2.00 for a one-way trip. If you plan on making multiple trips within a single day, a Day Pass, priced at \$4.60, offers unlimited rides on all MTA services and represents excellent value. Fares can be paid in a few ways. On buses, you'll need exact cash amount, as drivers do not provide change. At Light Rail and Metro Subway stations, ticket vending machines accept cash and cards. The most convenient method, however, is often the CharmPass mobile app. Available for smartphones, this app allows you to purchase single fares, day passes, or longer-term passes directly on your phone and simply display the activated pass to the driver or fare inspector. The app also provides access to real-time transit information and trip planning tools. Using transit apps like Google Maps or the dedicated Transit app can also be very helpful for navigating the MTA system, providing route options and estimated arrival times.

Adding a uniquely Baltimore dimension to getting around is the Water Taxi. This service offers a scenic and enjoyable way to travel between various waterfront neighborhoods and attractions. Paid Water Taxi services operate a fleet of boats connecting numerous landings around the harbor, including the Inner Harbor (multiple stops near the Aquarium, Science Center, and Harborplace), Harbor East, Fells Point, Canton, Federal Hill (at the Rusty Scupper restaurant), Locust Point (near Fort McHenry), and Fort McHenry itself. They typically offer all-day passes allowing unlimited hop-on, hop-off access, making it a fun way to explore different waterfront areas without dealing with street traffic. Operating schedules are generally seasonal, running most frequently during the warmer months (spring through fall). Check their website for current routes, schedules, and pricing.

It's important to distinguish the paid Water Taxi from the Harbor Connector, which is another *free* service, technically part of the Charm City Circulator system. The Harbor

Connector operates small ferry boats primarily during weekday commuter hours (morning and late afternoon/early evening) along specific routes connecting piers such as Maritime Park (Fells Point), Tide Point (Under Armour headquarters in Locust Point), Canton Waterfront Park, Pier 5 (Inner Harbor East), and Harbor View. While its limited schedule makes it less versatile for all-day sightseeing compared to the paid Water Taxi, it can be a useful free option for specific point-to-point trips between these waterfront locations during its operating times.

Many of Baltimore's most popular tourist areas are surprisingly walkable. The Inner Harbor boasts a wide, well-maintained brick promenade that stretches for approximately seven miles, perfect for leisurely strolls with great water views. Neighborhoods like Fells Point, with its historic cobblestone streets and compact layout, Harbor East, with its modern streetscape, Federal Hill, with its charming rowhouses, and Mount Vernon, with its elegant architecture, are all best explored on foot to appreciate their unique character and discover hidden shops and cafes. Just be sure to wear comfortable shoes, as you'll likely cover more ground than you expect, and be prepared for some gentle inclines, particularly when ascending Federal Hill itself for its iconic harbor view. While generally safe during the day, always remain aware of your surroundings, especially when walking after dark.

For covering slightly longer distances or simply adding an element of fun, dockless electric scooters and occasionally bicycles are readily available throughout many parts of the city. Companies like Lime, Bolt, and Spin operate fleets that can be located and unlocked using their respective smartphone apps. Users pay a small fee to unlock the scooter and then a per-minute charge for the ride. These can be convenient for bridging the gap between transit stops and your destination, or for quick trips between nearby neighborhoods. Riders are strongly encouraged to wear helmets (though not always provided) and should utilize bike lanes where available, obeying all traffic laws. Be mindful of where you park the scooter when finished, ensuring it doesn't obstruct pedestrian pathways. Costs can add up for longer rides, so consider the distance and potential transit alternatives.

Of course, traditional taxis and ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft remain ubiquitous options for getting around Baltimore. Taxis can sometimes be hailed on the street in busy areas like downtown or near hotels, or found at designated taxi stands. Using ride-sharing apps is often more convenient, allowing you to request a ride from your exact location and track your driver's arrival. These services are available 24/7 and are particularly useful for traveling late at night, reaching destinations not easily served by public transit, carrying luggage, or simply when convenience and speed are the priority. Fares vary based on distance, time, and demand, but generally offer a reliable way to get directly from point A to point B.

Choosing the best way to get around Baltimore really depends on where you're staying, where you're going, your budget, and your personal preference. A

combination of approaches often works best: utilize the free Charm City Circulator for key routes, leverage the MTA for longer distances or reaching areas like BWI or Penn Station, enjoy the scenic Water Taxi for waterfront exploration, walk to soak in the neighborhood atmosphere, and rely on taxis or ride-sharing for direct trips or late-night travel. Planning your routes in advance using maps and transit apps can save time and help you navigate the city like a local.

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