

Travel



Thursday, October 30, 1986 O&E

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City by the bay

Baltimore still evokes images of old frigates, clipper ships

It is a foggy morning at Fell's Point in Baltimore.

When I took out the third-floor window of the Admiral Fell Inn, it would be easy to believe that the 18th century frigates and clipper ships are still anchored in Chesapeake Bay, and the morning market is about to begin in Market Square.

The brick fronts of the narrow, three-story buildings are scrubbed and clean, their gold-and-black signs swinging in the wind. The immigrants no longer pour down Broadway, but the market buildings and shops have been restored and the wharves are still busy with ships. Fell's Point became the first historic district on the National Register in 1969.

I have had less than 24 hours to see the historic city of Baltimore, just enough to taste it and want more. I have toured the historic streets, cruised the harbor, walked Harbor Place and explored the new National Aquarium, but there is much more: Fort McHenry, B & O Railroad Museum, Babe Ruth House, Lexington Market, Maryland Science Center and Planetarium, and all the colorful crannies available in any historic city.

The Admiral Fell Inn stands at the corner of Broadway and Thames, three connected buildings constructed between 1850 and 1910. It was once the Anchorage Hotel, a boarding house for sailors. But now the Georgian buildings hold canopied beds and antique furniture for those who love old luxurious settings.

I HAVE MET owner Jim Widman before, not here, but as the owner of the Eliza Thompson House in Savannah, Ga. Widman's story is that Baltimore's colorful mayor, William Schaefer (presently running for governor of Maryland) visited Savannah, fell in love with the Eliza



1-of-a-kind traveler
Iris Jones
contributing travel editor

Thompson House, and lured Widden to Baltimore.

Widden has paid the same attention to detail here as he did in Savannah. You enter the Admiral Fell Inn through a lobby glowing with dark green woodwork and carpets set against stark white walls.

There is no hotel registration counter, just a beautiful antique partners desk, backed by a grandfather clock and a line drawing of the Pride of Baltimore, the high-masted sailing ship that sank in the Caribbean Sea this spring.

The real pride of Baltimore has always been its setting beside Chesapeake Bay. Dan Wilson and his wife Susan, who recently established their classic yacht Sakonnet as a dinner cruiser, took us into the bay, where container ships and loading cranes mark the skyline, and on into the Inner Harbor and Harborplace.

From the sea it is hard to believe that this was one of America's more distressed inner cities until the European-style boutiques and eateries were built under that low, green roofline, now such a familiar sight on the waterfront promenade.

THE FOREGROUND of the Inner Harbor is pure 18th century: the high-rise masts of the U.S. Frigate Constitution, launched in 1797 as the first commissioned ship of the U.S. Navy and now the oldest American warship afloat; the low lines of a Skipjack, one of the commercial oyster boats familiar to Chesapeake

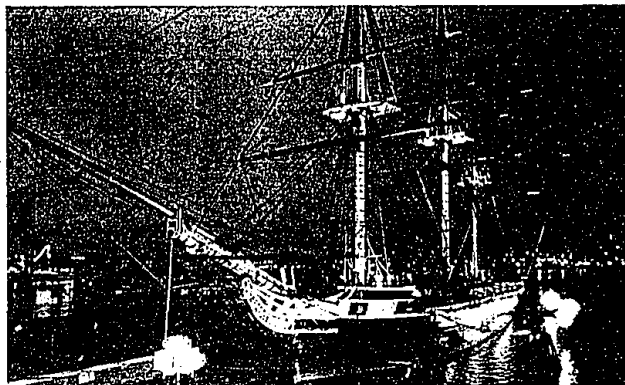
Bay cities; the Lady Maryland, a Chesapeake Bay Pungy Schooner now used to take schoolchildren into history. Only the Pride of Baltimore is missing from her moorings.

The background is late 20th century pointing towards the 21st: the angled glass walls of the National Aquarium, the World Trade Center lifting its 17th-floor observation deck high above the bay, the new Maryland Science Center and Planetarium; new hotels and office buildings everywhere.

If you drive through the historic streets of Baltimore, past houses with their traditional marble stoops and colorful windows, you will find a low-income family in an historic but deteriorating house on one block and a Yuppie with a restored house on the next block. Here on the waterfront, the restoration seems to come all together.

The city-owned National Aquarium, so designated by Congress although it was built without a dime of federal funds, is a striking glass building housing a scientific and educational showcase. If you can only make one stop, this is it.

You enter past the glub-glub of water tubes and ride the elevators up, floor by floor, to the sound of water animals. The elevators are in an open atrium dominated by a huge whale skeleton. You travel first from the mountains to the sea, past tidal marshes and coastal beaches, past anemones and clown fish, each stage diverted briefly by a whimsical streak of neon set against concrete walls.



The U.S. Frigate Constellation sits like a stately old ship in the Inner Harbor in Baltimore.

THERE ARE puffins and razor-bills of Iceland and the subarctic prancing around the rocks in a cold tank, rainbows of colored fish from the Pacific Reef, even an area where the kids can touch the sea life. The aquarium has 5,000 fish, mammals, birds and amphibians in 500,000 gallons of water.

When I rode the last elevator to the Rain Forest, I felt that the rest of the aquarium had just been preamble. The forest is there to show the unity of life through water. You must be quiet and patient to see the three-toed tree sloth or to notice the brilliant red birds hidden in the green trees.

From there, you spiral down past the coral reef, with tanks circling around you. A spotted eagle ray glides by, folding his graceful tail, a porcupine fish sputters along, a

diver feeds the fish as you round a corner, and at the bottom, large as life, is the beluga whale.

If you are an aquarium-lover, don't miss this one.

The aquarium is a good side trip for travelers who participate in the many public events going on along the Inner Harbor Promenade as well as other parts of the city. There will be a big Halloween party in the Inner Harbor tomorrow and then the events begin pointing toward Christmas.

YOU CAN LEARN to make a Christmas garden at the Baltimore Streetcar Museum, attend the Christmas bazaar at the Evergreen Carriage House, a holiday marketplace at Waxter Center, a holiday decorations workshop at Cylburn Arboretum, watch the Thanksgiving Parade at the Baltimore Trolley

Works, enjoy the festival of trees at Festival Hall, all in November.

In December things speed up, with candlelit tours of Clusters Children's Museum; a Colonial Christmas at Mt. Clare Mansion, Peabody Conservatory Christmas concerts, New Year's Eve extravaganzas and cruises. The National Aquarium has many seasonal events: Breakfast with Santa, Candlelit Chamber Music Concert, The Nutcracker puppet show, and a Sugar Plum Fantasy among them.

For more information on Baltimore, including specific dates for these events, contact the Baltimore Office of Promotion and Tourism, 34 Market Place, Suite 310, Baltimore, Maryland 21202.

For information on the Admiral Fell Inn, telephone toll-free (800) BXB-INNS.

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