

Spotlight Quirky Baltimore

Baltimore's off-beat museum scene transports visitors to a world of style, history, the macabre and the weird.

(AirTran Magazine | June/July 2005)

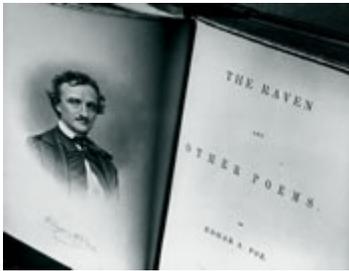
By Melissa Arnold



American Visionary Art Museum

Sure, Fort McHenry National Shrine and Monument is not to be missed. Of course, the Baltimore Orioles and Ravens are awesome championship sports teams. And Baltimore's Inner Harbor could keep you busy for a month of Sundays with its world-class attractions and fabulous dining and shopping opportunities. Entire guidebooks are filled with things to see and do in Charm City. But aren't you in the mood for something a little bit more eclectic? Maybe something just plain quirky? Well, read on then and learn about some of the more unusual tourist

venues in Baltimore.



Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum

The Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum presents exhibits about the author's life and work in his former Baltimore abode. Special events sponsored by the museum include, appropriately, "Halloween at the Poe House" and the world's largest celebration of the birthday of the "Master of the Macabre". After your visit to where he dwelled while living, go to Westminster Burying

Grounds and Catacombs for a visit to where his earthly remains now dwell. In true quirky Baltimore style, each year since 1949 on Poe's birthday, a mysterious admirer leaves three roses and a partial bottle of cognac at his gravesite.

If you're wanting to share a bit of cognac with ol' Edgar yourself, the historic maritime neighborhood of Fell's Point, just east of Baltimore's famed Inner Harbor, claims the long-dead writer still hangs out at what was reputedly his favorite pub, now known as The Horse You Came in On Saloon. It's worth the trip to Fell's Point, if not for an encounter with Poe, then for the museums, shopping and dining opportunities.

A fairly recent addition to the local scene is the American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM). The AVAM mounts eclectic displays of non-traditional art by self-taught artists. You can't miss the towering 55-foot, four-story whirligig on permanent display outside, built by an elderly mechanic, farmer and visionary. Over 4,000 more intriguing pieces are in their permanent collection, as well as the distinctive interior architecture of the buildings. There are no run-of-the-mill exhibitions here; a recent show entitled "High on Life" artfully investigated the topic of addiction. And the current special exhibit, running through September 4, is "Holy H2O: Fluid Universe," celebrating all things water-related.

Speaking of water, the first museum in America devoted to the history of public works, the Baltimore Public Works Museum, takes you behind the scenes to view a re-creation of what lies beneath the urban streets. Learn about the technology involved in roads, tunnels, clean water and wastewater management. Enjoy exhibits, video presentations and the “Streetscape”—an outdoor maze of drains, conduits and pipes for kids of all ages to explore... all just steps away from the center of the world-famous Inner Harbor. And for a truly unique souvenir of your visit, the museum gift shop offers such quirky items as jewelry made from trash, a perfect way to say “I love you” to that special someone.



The Urological Museum of the American Urological Association

Perhaps somewhat analogous to the Baltimore Public Works Museum, though in an anatomical sense, is the Urological Museum of the American Urological Association, also known as the William P Didusch Center for Urologic History. Located just 10 minutes from BWI Airport, the museum has many items of interest including an amazing array of uncomfortably long spiky probes used to aid healthcare professionals in their quest to get backed-up urine flowing around those pesky bladder and kidney stone as well as exploring prostate problems and other ailments. There has also been a kidney stone the size of a woman’s fist on display. Other recent exhibits include “Fact, Fraud, Future: Quackery and Nostrums in Urology.”



The Samuel D Harris National Museum of Dentistry

If quirky science is your thing, then head downtown to the Samuel D Harris National Museum of Dentistry, where you can visit such interesting artifacts as George Washington’s dentures—made of hippopotamus bone and human teeth, not wood as legend has it. Queen Victoria’s gilded dental instruments are here too. And those with a personal nostalgic bent will get a kick out of the “Tooth Jukebox,” which plays vintage dental commercials. One of the newest exhibits is “Saliva: A Remarkable Fluid,” extolling the virtues of spit. An affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, the National Dental Museum makes oral education a high-tech experience with state-of-the art interactive learning technology. Of course, after visiting the Samuel D Harris National Museum of Dentistry, any lover of all things quirky would want to stop by the nearest ice cream shop (try Vaccaro’s in Little Italy for some of the best in town) to undo all the good they learned at the museum. What a lovely way to honor the fact that Baltimore was home in 1851 of the first commercial ice cream factory in America. But... “Baltimore Firsts” are another story altogether!

BALTIMORE INFORMATION

Edgar Allan Poe House

203 North Amity Street (West of downtown), 410-396-7932

Westminster Burying Grounds and Catacombs

West Fayette and Greene Streets (downtown), 410-706-7228

The Horse You Came in On Saloon

1626 Thames St (Fell's Point, east of Inner Harbor), 410-327-8111

American Visionary Art Museum

800 Key Highway (Inner Harbor/Federal Hill), 410-244-1900

Baltimore Public Works Museum

751 Eastern Avenue (Pier 7 of the Inner Harbor), 410-396-5565

American Urological Association

1000 Corporate Boulevard in Linthicum, 410-689-3700

Samuel D Harris Museum of Dentistry

31 South Greene Street (west of downtown), 410-706-0600