

Maryland lighthouses point way to dozens of Chesapeake Bay towns

19th-century structures retain historical, architectural appeal

Follow the lighthouses. Explore the Chesapeake Bay and the towns and attractions that line its shores, says Maryland's Office of Tourism, and you'll get authentic Maryland experiences along the way.

Tourism officials have designated September as a time to focus on the two-dozen lighthouses in Maryland, making them the theme of its *Maryland Spotlight* campaign – a monthly promotion that highlights distinctive aspects of tourism in the state.

"Our lighthouses have cultural, historical and architectural value," says Gov. Martin O'Malley. "These 'beacons on the bay' are iconic structures that reflect Maryland's maritime heritage while evoking a storied past."

The first lighthouse in Maryland was erected in 1822, and the last in 1910. Most of the 44 lighthouses built in that span were constructed from the mid-

to late 1800s. Early on, lighthouses were land-based, usually stone or brick towers. **Concord, Cove Point** and **Piney Point** are three examples. Dwellings for lightkeepers were built near each light. John Donahoo, a Havre de Grace businessman who held public office, was Maryland's prolific lighthouse builder at this time. He built a dozen of these masonry towers, including the ones just mentioned.

Screw-pile lighthouses came later. They tended to be multi-room, hexagonal structures or cottages that sat atop wrought-iron piles screwed into the bottom of the bay. A lantern was placed above each of these structures. Only four of screw-pile lights have survived the rigors of the bay: **Drum Point, Hooper Strait, Seven Foot Knoll** and **Thomas Point Shoal**.

By the 1870s, lighthouses were built with caissons, cylindrical bases sunk deeply into the bottom of the bay and filled with concrete. A tower or cupola would be placed atop the caisson. The **Craighill Channel Range Front Light** was the first caisson-style light built in the U.S. Among the surviving caisson lights on the bay are: **Bloody Point Bar, Sharps Island** and **Solomons Lump**.

After 1910, automated lights began to phase out the necessity for lighthouse keepers. The Coast Guard, starting in the 1960s, dismantled many of the lighthouses and replaced them with small, automatic beacons.

“The lighthouses that still stand – some completely restored with period décor and exhibits – are unique artifacts of a different era,” says Margot Ameilia, executive director of the Maryland Office of Tourism. “They are fascinating to see. Some you can visit in person. Others you can get a look at from the water when you take a charter-boat lighthouse tour.”

Amelia adds: “Lighthouses present opportunities for getting to know the diverse nature of destinations along the bay – even in the same area.”

Lighthouse locations in Southern Maryland, for instance, have varied elements of appeal. **Blackstone Light** is on St. Clement’s Island, immersed in history, in St. Mary’s County – where English settlers first landed 376 years ago aboard the *Ark* and the *Dove*. **Cove Point Light**, at the southern tip of the Calvert County peninsula, is a natural starting point or ending point for the county’s Patuxent Wine Trail.

Here is a sampling of more Maryland lighthouses:

Concord Point Light, Havre de Grace (Harford County) – Located at one end of a waterfront promenade overlooking the juncture of the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay, this is the oldest Maryland lighthouse open to the public. It’s the second oldest in Maryland, built in 1827, and similar in construction to the 1825 lighthouse at Pooles Island, which is off-limits. Both are granite towers (painted white) with mahogany doors. A restored keeper’s dwelling is 200 feet from the lighthouse. The first keeper was John O’Neill, a local War of 1812 hero. Havre de Grace Maritime Museum and Havre de Grace Decoy Museum are nearby.

Drum Point Light, Solomons (Calvert County) – This completely restored lighthouse, in operation from 1883 to 1962, is part of the Calvert Marine Museum. Drum Point is a 1.5-story white, hexagonal screw-pile cottage. When built, it had a light that could be seen for 11 nautical miles and a 1,400-poiund fog bell. It originally stood in 10 feet of water at the northern approach to the Patuxent River. By 1900, the water level had dropped to three feet. Drum Point stood on dry land by the time it was decommissioned. The museum offers regular tours of the lighthouse.

Hooper Strait Light, St. Michael's (Talbot County) – Now part of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum overlooking the Miles River, this screw-pile lighthouse was headed for demolition in 1966 when the museum interceded. The lighthouse, which includes a hexagonal dwelling, was built in 1879. It was installed at Hooper Strait, a passageway connecting the Chesapeake Bay and Tangier Sound, about 40 miles south of its present location. Groups can spend a night at the lighthouse and experience the lifestyle and duties of a 19th-century lighthouse keeper.

Seven Foot Knoll Light, Baltimore Inner Harbor – Built in 1855 from prefabricated parts, this screw-pile lighthouse was installed at the mouth of the Patapsco River. The original octagonal structure was upgraded in or around 1875 with a round dwelling unit, 40 feet in diameter, encircled by a gallery deck. A number of lighthouse keepers lived here with their families during the 133 years that it was manned. After a simple steel tower replaced the lighthouse in the 1980s, Baltimore City acquired the lighthouse and restored it with interior exhibits. Seven Foot Knoll is now part of Historic Ships in Baltimore's maritime collection.

Thomas Point Shoal Light, near Annapolis (Anne Arundel County) – This Maryland icon, one of the most recognized lights along the Chesapeake Bay, is also one of only 10 lighthouses in the U.S. to be designated a National Historic Landmark. Tours of Thomas Point depart from the Annapolis Maritime Museum. The hexagonal, screw-pile structure, built in 1875, stands just north of the South River, south of Annapolis – the sole screw-pile light on the bay still in its original location. It was built to withstand the fields of moving ice that had severely damaged other screw-pile lights on the bay. The first two lighthouses at Thomas Point were on-shore towers that succumbed to erosion.

For more information about lighthouses in Maryland, visit the [U.S. Lighthouse Society's Chesapeake Chapter online](#).

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