

## Discover the offbeat and unique in Maryland

**S**tart in Baltimore, home of the [National Museum of Dentistry](#) and the [American Visionary Art Museum](#). Film director John Waters, a Baltimore native, uses the city as a backdrop for many of his productions. It's also where you can tap into the legacies of Edgar Allan Poe, Frank Zappa and Cab Calloway.

Travel across the Chesapeake Bay to the Eastern Shore and dine at [Suicide Bridge Restaurant](#). This seafood spot near Cambridge is next to a bridge that has been the site of at least a handful of suicides and suicide attempts since it (the bridge) was built in the late 1800s. The first victim, reportedly, was a local postmaster who shot himself, then fell into the creek below. One of the restaurant's food suppliers is [Kool Ice & Seafood](#) – a nearby place to buy bulk ice (up to 33,000 pounds), enjoy fresh seafood and have your car washed at the same time. A dog wash is also available. Keep going toward the Atlantic coast and stop in Crisfield, a town literally built on oyster shells. Called the "seafood capital of the world," Crisfield hosts the annual National Hard Crab Derby. Place a bet on the crab of your choice.

See a trend? Quirky and unique are easy to find in Maryland. The official state sport, after all, is jousting.

"Much of Maryland's allure is tied to its authentic traditions," says Margot Amelia, executive director of Maryland's Office of Tourism. "Western Maryland's Appalachian heritage, for instance, has shaped the art and culture of that region – as reflected at the [Mountain City Traditional Arts Center](#) in Frostburg. Farther east – in the Chesapeake Bay region – decoy-making is a cornerstone of bay-inspired art."

Decoy art takes the spotlight at the Ward Museum's annual [Ward World Championship Wildfowl Carving Competition and Art Festival](#), April 22-25 at the Ocean City Convention Center. Harford County also has decoy art at the [Havre de Grace Decoy Museum](#), located at the northern edge of the bay.

Harford has other venues for unique, nontraditional art. [Bahoukas Antique Mall and Beer Muzeum](#) is in Havre de Grace. [Ladew Topiary Gardens](#), site of My Lady's Manor Steeplechase Races in April, is in Monkton. Founder Harvey S. Ladew (1887-1976), who spoke French before he spoke English, was called a "gardener, sporting art patron and good companion" by an English magazine. Others just called him quirky.

"We have a variety of unique destinations tied to our history," Amelia says. "[Historic](#)

St. Mary's City, where Maryland started, is among the oldest colonial English settlements in North America – and one of the best-preserved. To the west, the Bridges of Washington County are a unique collection of 22 early- to mid-19th century stone arch bridges. One of the bridges is near Antietam National Battlefield, site of the epic Civil War battle."

She also names Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, a 27,000-acre habitat on the Eastern Shore that is known as the "Everglades of the North." Blackwater has the largest breeding population of bald eagles on the East Coast, beyond Florida.

As for events, Amelia mentions these yearly ones: the PEEPshow (an exhibition of marshmallow art) at Carroll Arts Center in Westminster, April, 8-17; the 18th Century Market Fair, April 28 - May 1, at Fort Frederick State Park in Washington County; Delmarva Birding Weekend, April 28 - May 1 on the Eastern Shore; and the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival, May 7-8 at Howard County Fairgrounds.

Here are more unique or offbeat places and events to see in the state, grouped by region:

### **Western Maryland**

- Allegany Museum (Allegany County)
  - Now at a new location in Cumberland's Canal Place Heritage

Area, the museum has 50,000 items grouped in a dozen collections.

Exhibits showcase The Kelly-Springfield Tire Corp., local brewing companies, glassware, canal boats and train models. A "Sleeping Beauty" window display from Saks Fifth Avenue in New York is one of 40 such refurbished displays. Also, the museum has a collection of woodcarvings by the late Claude Yoder, a Western Maryland native who left his Amish community in Garrett County to become an artist.

- Adventure Sports Center International (ASCI) (Garrett County)
  - The center is home of the world's only mountaintop, man-made whitewater course. ASCI's 16-acre mountaintop campus is located at Wisp Resort. It offers a variety of rafting and kayaking experiences in a controlled environment. Water flow can be adjusted in 20 minutes. ASCI has hosted seven national whitewater championships and other competitive events. You can also arrange guided excursions for nearby rock climbing, bouldering, mountain biking, hiking and geocaching.
- Thrasher Carriage Museum (Allegany County) – James Thrasher's collection of horse-drawn carriages began with an 1889 Extension Front Brougham, a closed coach first

designed in 1833 by England's Lord Henry Brougham. Thrasher (1913-1987) was a successful businessman in Allegany County, who had started his professional life as a bottle-capper at a milk-processing plant. After acquiring several hundred carriages, he traveled across the U.S. in search of more to add to his collection. He exhibited the carriages in a space he leased from a school. Allegany County bought Thrasher's collection from his estate and moved the carriages, carts and sleighs to Frostburg.

- Washington Monument State Park (Washington County) – This state park atop South Mountain is named for the 34-ft. stone tower that the citizens of Boonsboro started to build on July 4, 1827, to honor the first president. The townspeople assembled at 7 a.m. and had a 15-ft.-tall monument by the end of the day. They added on to it in the fall, "after the busy season." It was the first such monument to be completed. Construction of Baltimore's Washington Monument began in 1815, but didn't finish until 1829.

### **Capital Region**

- Glen Echo Park (Montgomery County) – Now a National Park Service

property, Glen Echo was an amusement park that operated from 1898 to 1968. Take a ride on the restored 1921 Dentzel Carousel, which opens April 30. The Spanish Ballroom – a restored 1933 dance pavilion that reflects Mediterranean and Art Deco influences – is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Glen Echo offers an array of cultural exhibitions and performances, and is home to resident artists. Clara Barton National Historical Site is adjacent to the park.

- National Museum of Civil War Medicine (Frederick County) – Exhibits depict general medicine in the 1800s, moving into an era of war-time medicine. Triage medicine, which originated in the Civil War, is still a battlefield protocol today. The museum is in downtown Frederick's historic district. *The Burning Question of Secession* – a series of vignettes staged in the historic district on April 30 – includes the museum's participation.
- Surratt House Museum (Prince George's County) – In 1864, recently-widowed Mary Surratt leased this property and moved to Washington, D.C., where she opened a boardinghouse. Her Maryland home became a refuge for the Confederate underground. John Wilkes Booth kept

weapons and supplies there in connection with his plan to kidnap President Lincoln. Following the assassination, Surratt was arrested and convicted of conspiring with Booth. She became the first woman executed by the U.S. government. Robert Redford's *The Conspirator*, a movie about Surratt, opens nationwide on April 15.

- Weinberg Center for the Arts (Frederick County) – This restored theater in downtown Frederick, which opened in 1926 as the Tivoli, has the only Wurlitzer organ still in its original installation in the state. It cost \$19,000 to acquire. Despite years of disrepair and a few natural disasters – Hurricane Agnes in 1972 and the 1976 flooding of Frederick (when the organ floated up from the orchestra pit on to the stage) – the Weinberg's Wurlitzer is used today to accompany screenings of silent movies and sing-alongs.

### **Central Maryland**

- American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM) (Baltimore) – Located next to Federal Hill by the harbor, AVAM is the epitome of quirky. It showcases the work of self-taught artists who often are guided by their inner voices. The current featured exhibit is *What Makes You Smile*. Matt

Groening, creator of *The Simpsons*, and Gary Panter, who helped to create *Pee Wee Herman's Playhouse*, are co-creators of this show. AVAM also presents its annual East Coast Kinetic Sculpture Race Championship, May 7. Human-powered works of art navigate a 15-mile course that meanders across pavement, mud, sand and part of the Chesapeake Bay.

- Geppi's Entertainment Museum (Baltimore) – The museum houses more than 6,000 items reflecting American pop culture for the past 250 years. It's in Baltimore's Camden Station, adjacent to Oriole Park at Camden Yards. Collections include comic books, toys, dolls, games and memorabilia. Visit the museum on an Oriole game day and admission is half price. Founder Steve Geppi went from working as U.S. mail carrier to selling comic books. His company is now the world's largest distributor of English-language comics.
- National Cryptologic Museum (Anne Arundel County) – Run by the National Security Agency (NSA), the museum has thousands of artifacts showing how experts have broken codes and ciphers throughout American history. It's located next to NSA headquarters at Fort Meade. The museum also has a reference library.

The NSA Civilian Welfare Fund Gift Shop offers NSA logo items, books and videos. National Vigilance Park and the Aerial Reconnaissance Memorial are adjacent to the museum. The park has types of aircraft that have been used for secret reconnaissance missions.

- Maryland State House (Anne Arundel County) – This distinctive Annapolis landmark, built between 1772 and 1779, is the oldest state capitol still in continuous legislative use. (Construction was held up during the Revolutionary War.) A "Benjamin Franklin" lightning rod sits atop its wooden dome – the nation's largest wooden dome built without nails. Join prominent politicians and head to Chick & Ruth's Dolly for a daily recitation of the *Pledge to Allegiance*. The owner does tableside magic tricks, too. City Dock is nearby. Watch local boat owners parade their vessels along "Ego Alley."

### **Southern Maryland**

- Annamarie Sculpture Garden & Arts Center (Calvert County) – This 30-acre property in Solomons, near the juncture of the Patuxent River and Chesapeake Bay, blends art and nature. A quarter-mile path meanders through a sculpture collection that includes more than 30

pieces on loan from the Smithsonian Institution and the National Gallery of Art. A scavenger hunt calls attention to snippets of re-created art masterpieces framed in tree knots. You'll also find an azalea collection, butterfly garden and a fairy house. Earth Day Celebration is April 16.

- Calvert Marine Museum (Calvert County) – The museum has two lighthouses, a collection of small boats, a woodcarving shop, a 1934 seafood-packing house, river otters, skates and rays, and a "marsh walk." Exhibits include a display of fossilized feces (coprolites) that have preserved the teeth impressions of prehistoric sharks. Solomons Island Kite Day at the museum is April 2. Solomons Maritime Festival is May 14. To collect your own fossils, head to nearby Calvert Cliffs State Park – its beachfront cliffs were formed 15 million years ago.
- Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum (Calvert County) – Spread across a peninsula along the Patuxent River, "Jef Pat" is a 560-acre property with 70 archaeological sites. The Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory, which houses 8 million artifacts, is here. Volunteers can join digs in the summer. Indian Village offers a look at life when John Smith sailed into the area 400 years ago.

During the War of 1812, just off-shore, Joshua Barney led his rag-tag Chesapeake Flotilla against the British in Maryland's largest-ever naval battle.

- Leonardtwn Winery, Wharf and Water Trail (St. Mary's County) – Have a glass of wine, see wildlife and enjoy the park. The winery is located at the start of McIntosh Run, a 3-mile canoe and kayak trail that leads to the Leonardtown Wharf Public Park. This trail winds through a habitat for bald eagles, Baltimore Orioles and wild turkeys. Port of Leonardtown Winery is one of seven wineries along Southern Maryland's Patuxent Wine Trail.

### **Eastern Shore**

- Chestertown Tea Party Festival (Kent County) – Five months after the Boston Tea Party, citizens of Chestertown protested British excise duties (according to local legend) by marching down to the brigantine *Geddes*, docked on the Chester River, and tossed its cargo of tea overboard. A re-enactment of this protest takes place during the Chestertown Tea Party Festival every Memorial Day weekend. The May 27-29 event also includes the Colonial Parade, tours, wine tasting, and an

annual raft race with the Tea Cup as its prize.

- Pork in the Park BBQ Festival (Wicomico County) – Held April 15-17 in Salisbury's Winterplace Park, this event is the Kansas City Barbeque Society's second-largest competition in the U.S. Recent years have featured 140 barbecue teams. The festival also includes a special Eastern Shore touch: the annual Chickin' Pickin' Contest.
- Smith Island (Somerset County) – Take a cruise to Maryland's only inhabited offshore island. Located in Tangier Sound, west of Crisfield and Janes Island State Park, Smith Island has about 350 residents. This is the home of Maryland's official dessert: Smith Island Cake. And, as you'd expect, the seafood and scenery are impressive. Wildlife is abundant. Fig trees, pear trees, mimosas and pomegranates are springtime delights. See the island by renting a golf cart or bike, or by paddling along local water trails.
- Ward World Championship/ Wildfowl Carving Competition and Art Festival (Worcester County) – This 41st annual event at the Ocean City Convention Center, April 29 - May 1, attracts carvers, collectors and visitors from around the globe. Ward

Museum of Wildfowl Art in Salisbury (Wicomico County) hosts the event. Named for Maryland brothers Steve and Lem Ward, pioneers of today's decoy industry, the museum claims to have the world's largest public collection of decorative and antique decoys.

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***Story by Gerald H. Levin***

*Maryland Office of Tourism*