

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

If one of the things you adore about Atlanta is its assortment of distinct neighborhoods, then you'd enjoy visiting Baltimore to explore a whole new collection of eclectic communities. The best news for foodies: Each neighborhood's unique personality and vibe shine through its culinary scene.

What most defines Baltimore cuisine is its waterfront location and laid-back attitude. The Chesapeake Bay makes itself known by way of crab and seafood—it would be a challenge to find a restaurant without some seafood on its menu. As is true nationwide, today's leading Baltimore chefs showcase fresh ingredients and local produce, and give regional go-to recipes creative new spins. Yet Baltimore's food is as unpretentious as its people. And while there's pride in local, non-chain restaurants with authentic, fresh food and inventive menu items, highly rated establishments aren't full of highfalutin snobs. (Odds are, any folks with their noses in the air are out-of-towners.) At even the hottest neighborhood restaurants, regulars are known by name.

Fabulous to funky, swanky to homey, classic to trendy, Baltimore boasts a mix of dining options. Get to know the city one neighborhood and restaurant at a time. Our guide will help you get started:

**INNER HARBOR**

When you think of Baltimore, this is the view that most likely springs to mind, since it's the most photographed area of the city. A major seaport since the 1700s, Inner Harbor is the heart of Baltimore. **Miss Shirley's Café** (410-528-5373; www.missshirleys.com) attracts locals and visitors alike with dishes like crab and fried green tomato eggs benedict and coconut cream-stuffed french toast.

**FEDERAL HILL**

Federal Hill boasts Baltimore's best view from atop its namesake grassy knoll, where patriots celebrated Maryland's ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1788. Today the neighborhood is home to a mix of new professionals and empty nesters. The city's first green-certified



Fell's Point

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IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Exploring Baltimore one distinct community at a time



Baltimore's Inner Harbor

fied restaurant, **Spoons** (410-539-8395; www.spoonscoffeecafe.com) roasts free-trade coffee beans and serves irresistible pastries. At **Corks** (410-752-3810; www.corksrestaurant.com) Chef Jerry Pellegrino transforms seasonal ingredients into delectable dishes that satisfy cravings.

**FELL'S POINT**

A vibrant waterfront community with cobblestone streets and historic architecture, Fell's Point is popular with filmmakers (it's appeared in "Sleepless in Seattle" and "Homicide: Life on the Streets"), tourists and locals. A standout among the eclectic assortment of pubs, restaurants, shops and entertainment venues is **Max's Taphouse** (410-675-6297; www.maxs.com), pouring the city's most extensive beer selection with 140 varieties on tap and 1,200 by the bottle.

**HAMPDEN**

Hampden is the hub of hipster chic and eccentric kitsch, a place where everybody calls you hon. **Café Hon** (410-243-1133; www.cafehon.com) is a Baltimore treasure. It's more than a place

to get your fill of classic diner fare and traditional local dishes; it's the business that launched this neighborhood's renewal and host of the annual HonFest.

**HARBOR EAST**

Home to some of the city's newest hotels and other businesses, this still-emerging neighborhood is being transformed into one of Baltimore's swankiest. **Pazo** (410-534-7296; www.pazorestaurant.com) brings Mediterranean flair to its menu features like Neopolitan pizza, regional cheeses, house-made breads, grilled seafood, spit-roasted game and aged ribeyes as well as its 100-label wine list.

**LOCUST POINT**

Once entirely industrial, Locust Point is best known as the home of Fort McHenry, the place that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the National Anthem during the War of 1812. At **The Wine Market** (410-244-6166; www.the-wine-market.com), you can sip from more than 30 wines by the glass alongside charcuterie, cheese and upscale creations by Chef Jason Lear.

**MOUNT VERNON**

The city's cultural district, Mount Vernon is home to an art institute, music

conservatory and university. In tune with that vibe, **City Café** (410-593-4252; www.citycafebaltimore.com) transforms classic Baltimore ingredients like crab into dishes that are at once familiar and brand new. Don't miss the cream of crab soup.

**LITTLE ITALY**

If the architecture in this neighborhood isn't enough to make you feel transported overseas, the food will clinch it. Whatever you order at **Aldo's** (410-727-0700; www.aldositaly.com) it's bound to be the best Italian you've ever tasted, even if you recently toured Italy. A romantic mood makes Aldo's a popular setting for engagements.

**DOWNTOWN**

The city that bills itself as "a multicultural, family friendly, pet friendly and gay travel friendly destination that offers something for everyone" has a vibrant downtown. Also all-American: **B&O American Brassiere** (443-692-6172; www.bandorestaurant.com). The menu is a mouthwatering collection of quality ingredients, expertly prepared. **SP**

To plan your trip to Baltimore, contact Visit Baltimore at 1-877-BALTIMORE or www.baltimore.org.



Steamed crabs