Baltimore in the War of 1812

The War of 1812, often called America's "Second War of Independence," lit the Baltimore skies in 1814. Expecting to cruise with little resistance into the city's harbor, a British fleet was instead frustrated by American forces at North Point and inside Fort McHenry. The courage of the fort's defenders during the Battle of Baltimore was witnessed by Francis Scott Key, a Maryland lawyer detained on board a truce vessel after facilitating an American prisoner's release. Key watched bombs burst along the shoreline and rockets zooming across the sky. But when the smoke cleared and British ships pulled back, a large American flag—measuring 42 feet by 30 feet—fluttered over the fort's ramparts, prompting him to write the poem that became the national anthem.

Day One:

Begin your day at the **Baltimore Visitor Center** at the Inner Harbor. Here, a new exhibit will introduce you to the Bicentennial of the War of 1812 and "The Star-Spangled Banner." Learn about special events, purchase tickets for attractions, tours and harbor cruises, pick up brochures, and make reservations for dining and lodging—all in one convenient location. Next, make your way to Baltimore's **Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine**, site of the battle that inspired Francis Scott Key to pen the poem that would later become "The Star-Spangled Banner." Fort McHenry features exhibits, tours, and lush grounds. Visit the new Fort McHenry Visitor and Education Center to see a dramatic film about the War of 1812. Learn about the Battle of Baltimore and walk the ramparts of the star-shaped fort. You can also see Baltimore as the British did by taking a **harbor cruise**. The **Westminster Burying Grounds and Catacombs** in Baltimore is the final resting place for several prominent military figures from the War of 1812. Plaques throughout the grounds feature biographies of famous leaders including Major General Samuel Smith and statesman James McHenry, for whom Fort McHenry was named. When in port, the **Pride of Baltimore II** at Baltimore's Inner Harbor shows visitors a re-creation of an 1812-era topsail schooners that harassed the British fleet and merchant ships.

Day Two:

When in season, take the Baltimore Heritage Walk, a guided walking tour of Baltimore's historic sites and museums offered by the Baltimore National Heritage Area. Prefer to explore on your own? Start at the home of flag maker Mary Pickersgill. Built in 1793, the **Star-Spangled Banner Flag House** is the home where Pickersgill and her daughter sewed the 15-star, 15-stripe garrison flag that inspired America's national anthem. Through exhibits and original artifacts from the Pickersgill family, the museum illustrates 19th-century life, and tells the story behind the Star-Spangled Banner. Later, make your way to the **Maryland Historical Society** to see the earliest original manuscript version of Key's poem. The hand-penned version of Key's poem is on display, along with other historical treasures in a special exhibit on the War of 1812. View the **Washington Monument** at Mt. Vernon Place, Baltimore's tribute to George Washington that was constructed after the Battle of Baltimore. (Visitors can view the monument but the interior is closed for renovations.)

Day Three:

Start your day in **Fell's Point**. During the War of 1812, Fell's Point was home to a private navy instrumental in the American quest for independence. Known as privateers, they were privately owned ships authorized by the government to attack and capture enemy ships. During the War of 1812, approximately 55 privateers sailed out of Fell's Point, leading to Baltimore's reputation with the British as a "nest of pirates." To discover the Baltimore of 1812, visit the Fell's Point Visitor Center on Thames Street. Then, make your way to **Federal Hill**, which served as a lookout point and signal station during the War of 1812. **Federal Hill Park** features monuments to Lt. Col. George Armistead and Major Gen. Samuel Smith.

A trip just south of city will take you to **North Point**. Just prior to the naval bombardment of Fort McHenry, about 5,000 British troops landed at Fort Howard in Baltimore County and engaged American troops in a battle on the North Point peninsula. **North Point State Park's Defenders Trail** follows the route of the British as they progressed toward Baltimore before confronting the city's defenses and being compelled to retreat.