

O say can you see a perfect picnic spot in Baltimore

My favorite picnic spot is probably our backyard. No planning needed, and our boys can simply carry plates of food to a beach towel on the grass.

When we feel more adventurous, we pack dinner and head to a local park with a playground.

But when we have out-of-town cousins visiting—and sometimes even when we don't—we fill the cooler with food and drive to [Fort McHenry](#). My parents, who live in Baltimore, started taking us there years ago and it has become our family picnic spot.



Now, I know that Baltimoreans often think Fort McHenry is that place you go to on a third or fourth grade field trip and again years later when an out-of-town friend who's an American history buff comes to visit.



But Fort McHenry is actually the prime picnic spot in this fantastic city.

Here's why:

It's full of history. You can picnic in the place that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the Star Spangled Banner. It's a fort. There are cannons. Sometimes there are even people in time-period garb who will explain to you about parasols or spinning or cannonballs.



Just try to pry yourself away from the view. Fort McHenry is, of course, on the water. You can watch boats go by, including tugboats and fireboats and sailboats and motorboats and tour boats.



You can also look across the water and watch industry in action. One time we saw a tugboat turn an enormous freight ship. This weekend we watched dump trucks and a crane work alongside another ship.



You can always find a seat. There is a huge lawn, and you can choose shade or sun. Just pack your blanket and pick your spot.



You can bring your dog (on leash) or your stroller or your cooler. Just don't bring a kite or a [solar-powered UFO balloon](#).

Every visit to Fort McHenry is different. When we went this weekend, there were even more soldiers than usual.



The [U.S. 3rd Infantry Regiment](#) marched in and performed for us.



We could have found out that was scheduled, but what's the excitement in planning ahead?

Oh, and the Pride of Baltimore II was there, anchored in the water. We climbed aboard and explored.



“How do you turn it on?” one of our sons asked. Well, you don’t.



The wind does.



But get this. The ship has a GPS on board just in case.



The price is right. Picnicking and parking at the Fort is free. You can eat and enjoy yourself and even see a few cannons without spending a dime. (You can even pretend to use a crab chip to revive your brother, who is pretending to be ill.)



But it’s worth [paying the cost of admission to go inside the fort](#), and children 15 and younger are free. Even better? Take a senior citizen along. The senior membership lets him or her bring three adults and unlimited grandchildren into the fort.



If you have too many adults there, send your children in with an uncle or aunt or Grandpa and take a nap on your picnic blanket or eat the leftover cookies. Victory. If the cookie is so good that you feel inspired to write an anthem of your own, so be it.



Now that I've let you in on our secret, tell me yours. Where's your favorite spot to picnic? Keep in mind that my parents once took us on an 11-hour round-trip on Easter Sunday just to picnic in New Haven, Conn., so it doesn't even have to be in Baltimore.