

Commentary

Brad McDearman: How the 'Land of Pleasant Living' stacks up to national competition

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BALTIMORE -

Over the past decade, Greater Baltimore has rapidly emerged as one of the nation's most vibrant and livable regions. Telling this story is easy since our region has received rankings and accolades from national policy groups and associations, consultancies and media publications. We continue to gain worldwide attention for our vibrant city, cultural destinations, natural resources and other quality of life indicators.

In fact, Places Rated Almanac, the most comprehensive quality of life guide covering [North America](#), rated Greater Baltimore the 12th-best place to live in its 2007 guide. In addition, five towns in the Greater Baltimore region were ranked among Money Magazine's 100 best places to live in 2007.

Arguably the most defining feature of Greater Baltimore's quality of life is the expansive coastline along the [Chesapeake Bay](#). Covering 2,500 square miles, the Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in North America. It provides a wide array of recreational opportunities. Greater Baltimore's urban waterfront is one of the most recognized and emulated in the world. [Coastal Living](#) ranked the harbor third nationally. And in February 2007, the Project for Public Spaces gave [Baltimore](#)'s waterfront an honorable mention in its "Great Waterfronts of the World" list. The winners were [Sweden](#), [Italy](#) and [Finland](#), and Baltimore kept company on the list with such cities as [Chicago](#), [Montreal](#) and [San Francisco](#).

The [Chesapeake](#) is one reason that Baltimore is increasingly recognized as a great place to visit, especially as summer approaches. Many would be surprised to learn of a 2005 ranking by Frommer's Travel Guides that put Baltimore among the best in the world as a "Top 10 Destination for Summer Travel." Just last year, [MSNBC](#)'s [Sherman](#)'s Travel placed Baltimore at No. 1 on its list of "Top 10 Underrated U.S. Cities," which shows that we're just starting to realize our potential as a tourist destination. The region's location also provides convenient access to a diverse mix of getaway spots, from [Ocean City](#) and Deep Creek to [Washington, D.C.](#), and [New York City](#); we are situated in an enviable central location convenient to all.

In addition to the Chesapeake, downtown Baltimore is a destination in itself, and has emerged as one of the nation's strongest and most vibrant downtowns. It ranks eighth among [U.S.](#) cities for both population density and high-earning households (those with incomes of \$75,000 and greater) within a mile radius of the city's center. Downtown also sees more than 20 million visitors to its attractions annually.

The city performs well in arts and culture, and was ranked seventh in American Style Magazine's "Top 10 Arts Destinations" in a reader's poll in 2006. Fells Point was ranked 10th by the Project for Public Spaces "Best North American Neighborhoods 2007" based on its architecture, history, waterfront location, human scale and walkability. Last year, [The New York Times](#) did a story titled "36 Hours in Baltimore," and the writer cited our "wonderful seafood restaurants, Colonial history, quaint waterfronts, and other tourist-ready attractions," adding "but Baltimore's renaissance has also cultivated cool restaurants with innovative cuisine, independent theaters that showcase emerging talent and galleries that specialize in contemporary art."

Perhaps most important of all, the region works hard to maintain the unique historical flavor that attracts many of its visitors — and residents. [Maryland](#) ranks among the top states for recognized historic districts and has a wide variety of programs to support preservation and revitalization. There are more than 40,000 national register and locally designated historic properties in Greater Baltimore. The region has also done an effective job at limiting sprawl, ranking eighth among the top 25 U.S. metro areas for controlling sprawl. Statewide, over 21 percent of land in Maryland is now permanently preserved through a wide variety of state programs.

When assembled into one place, these factors combine to show a region that has redefined itself as a destination with substantially developed quality of life indicators comparable to those in other highly desirable metro areas. As Greater Baltimore continues to gain recognition for its accolades, the old "Natty Boh" slogan declaring the region the "Land of Pleasant Living" rings truer with each passing year.

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