

# The Red Sox Fan Guide to Camden Yards

By Kurt Smith

It's not that the Boston nine haven't enjoyed considerable glory since, but the last day of the 2011 season was a tough one to swallow.

On September 28 of that year, Oriole Park at Camden Yards showcased the climax of an epic Red Sox collapse. It was a season when the Sox were expected to run away with the AL East, steam roll through the playoffs and win their third World Series in eight years. When the dust cleared in Baltimore, a 7-20 September crumbling saw the team missing October and letting go of a manager who ranks among the biggest titans in Boston sports history.

Game 162 in 2011 may have been a delight for baseball fans just about everywhere else in the country, but it was momentarily awful for Boston fans, most of whom had endured enough frowning from the Baseball Gods for one lifetime.

But if the last few paragraphs were tough for you to read, maybe you can take some comfort in the Baltimore faithful having something to cheer about, in what continues to be a nightmarish era for them.

The revolutionary home of baseball in Baltimore is currently...and probably will be for at least another three to four years...the oldest in major league baseball to have never hosted a World Series. This is, for forty-something and older Orioles fans, something impossible to have conceived in the days of Palmer, Robinson, Murray, the young

Ripken, and master button-pusher Earl Weaver.

The younger Orioles fan base...true loyalists who cannot fathom the concept of their team being competitive every season...has understandable antipathy for Red Sox fans that often take over their ballpark, especially in lean years. That's to say nothing of their exasperation at having to pay more for tickets for games against the Sox and Yankees.

So pull for the Red Sox like a good traveling fan. But at least let the locals know how great their ballpark is. They don't have much else these days.

Following a 115-loss season and a full commitment to a long overdue rebuild, the Birds aren't likely to fill up Oriole Park very often in 2019. Not even for Red Sox games.

So now is the time to take advantage and visit a beautiful ballpark where you could experience some reverse sticker shock after years of attending games at Fenway. Even to see the Sox in a venue where you'll be surrounded by your fellow Sox loving brethren, Camden Yards is a far less expensive outing...tickets for even the best seats will probably cost about a third of equivalent seats in Boston, great parking spots can be had for a double saw buck or less, and even the food...well, okay, the food is still priced at a ballpark level. But you'll have money left over for it after you park.

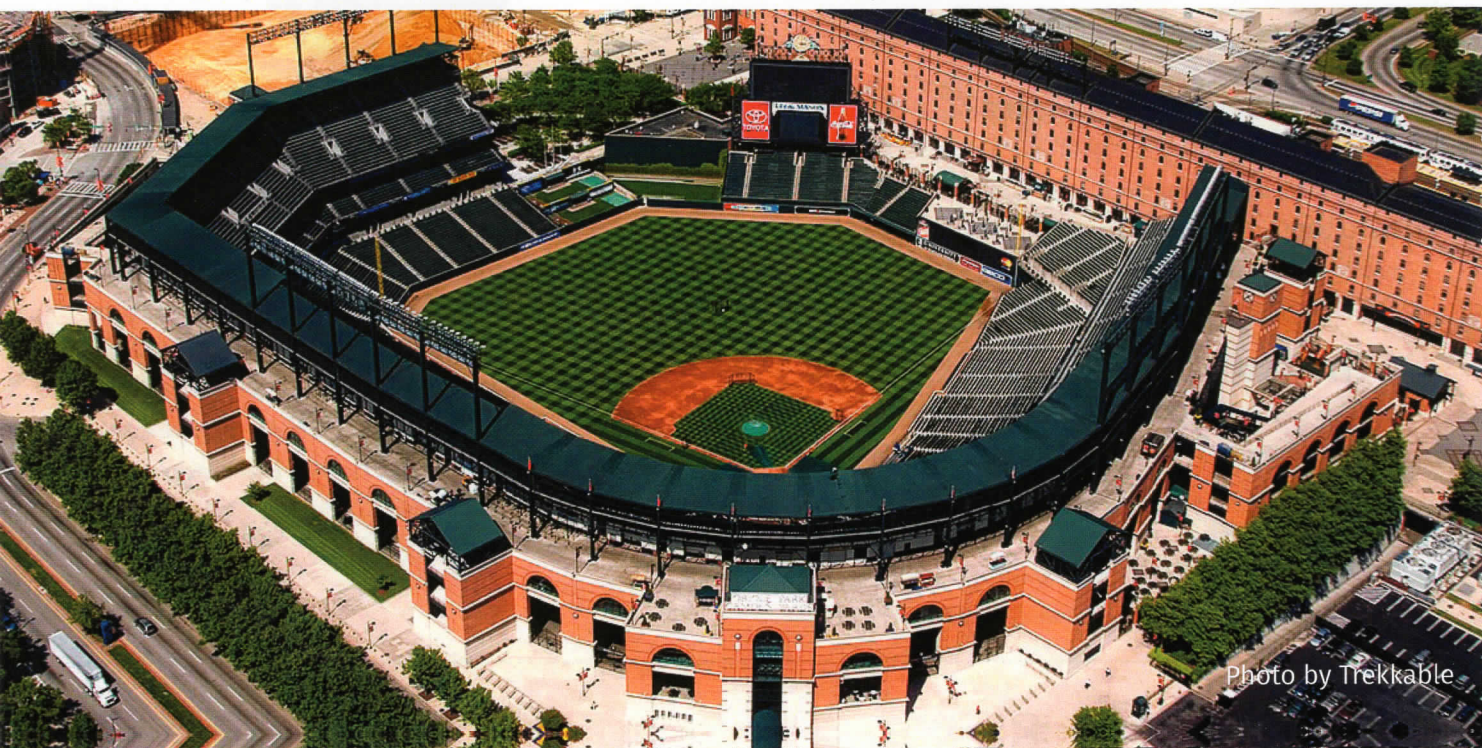


Photo by Trekable



If you're planning a weekend game in the summer months, it's probably best to get your pasteboards in advance...not because they're likely to sell out, but because you'll have more choices. There will likely be a third party mark-up for weekend games, and the Orioles website allows you to actually pick individual seats. But during the week, try the box office at the north end of the B&O warehouse... you should still have plenty of seats to choose from, and you'll save a chunk of change in online fees.



Camden is one of those ballparks where fans say there aren't any bad seats, which is true, but that doesn't mean some aren't better than others. If you're splurging for those cushioned premium lower seats (and you should), the visitors' dugout is on the third base side. As is the straight ahead view of the impressive warehouse, Oriole Park's signature feature.

But while the lower concourse features great Baltimore-friendly eats like crab cakes, you'll also be as far as possible from Eutaw Street. So if you go this route, show up early and get your Eutaw stroll into see the plates commemorating home runs that landed there, including two from David Ortiz. It's an essential in any Camden visit...along with your handshake and pit beef from Boog. Or your Rain Delay IPA at Dempsey's, if you remember the former O's catcher's rain delay antics at Fenway.

## A Name You Should Know

On the website "This Great Game: The Online Book of Baseball History", former commissioner Bud Selig is quoted as saying that Baltimore's revolutionary ballpark "may be one of the two or three most powerful events in baseball history. It changed everything. It really did. I'm not sure people grasp the significance of it."

Selig is probably correct. Yet it's doubtful that it would have been the case without the prominence of the B&O Warehouse, however impressive a new ballpark otherwise might have been. The Warehouse gave Camden Yards a striking, stand out visual element that was comparable to Fenway's Green Monster. It made a great venue into a phenomenal one.

Yet the man arguably most responsible for its preservation never received any official credit.

Eric Moss was an architecture student at Syracuse University who spent a year developing a model for Baltimore's ballpark that included the long, bulky, old brick structure...his design even featured the Warehouse as part of the playing field, suggesting that the Orioles would have to budget for window repairs.

His design was seen by one of the firms competing for the Oriole Park contract, Ayers Saint Gross. The firm actually brought Moss and his design to Baltimore. At the time, the warehouse was set to be demolished, an idea that had the backing of even the Orioles. Moss's design showed how the building could not only be preserved, but also be an integral component of the ballpark itself.

Moss's idea to build the ballpark around the warehouse survived...but Ayers Saint Gross lost the contract bid to HOK Sport, who ultimately designed not just Camden Yards, but dozens more sports venues in the wake of Camden's success.

Eric Moss's name is not on any of the official design documents. But he landed a nice career out of it. He is still today an architect at Ayers Saint Gross.



If your budget is limited, upper level seats at Oriole Park work just fine. They're closer to the field than in most ballparks, and are cheap even by baseball standards. (Bonus tip: the Orioles offer two free kids' tickets with every adult ticket purchase.) You'll have an outstanding panoramic view of both the field and the warehouse blending in with the Baltimore skyline, and the upper concourse features a fine view of the brick structure of downtown Baltimore in every direction, including M&T Bank Stadium (Ravens) across the street.

The Eutaw Street bleachers in center field...especially now that they've added a sit down bar there...are a popular spot for visiting fans too. But should you catch an Orioles home run ball, don't throw it back. That happened in a game in 2011. I'm not saying the Baseball Gods punished the Sox for that behavior, but I'm not saying they didn't either.

With Baltimore being 400 miles from Boston, you'll probably be spending at least one night in town. There are plenty of upscale hotels in downtown Baltimore, including the impressive Hilton across the street from the Yard. Just know that unless you're staying at the Hilton or another hotel just a few footsteps away, you might not be comfortable walking to the ballpark, especially at night.

This is probably of no never-mind, since you have a plethora of parking options for Orioles games, from Orioles' lots east of the ballpark to surrounding garages downtown. None of the lots and garages in Baltimore are gouging in price the way you're used to at Fenway, but you will likely find a better deal near M&T Bank Stadium, especially if you don't mind walking a bit. Parking east of the ballpark also makes for a much easier in and out.

If you're not staying downtown, you also have the inexpensive and convenient Light Rail option...park for free along the route, and take the street car right to the entrance of the ballpark. It's not just a good deal cheaper, it spares you the considerable headache of driving in downtown Baltimore, where red light duration can be measured in eons and could even cost you an inning of baseball. You can also take the Light Rail directly from Penn Station, should you be using Amtrak.

Fenway Park features lobster poutine, lobster rolls, and lobster melts. Oriole Park has crab cakes, crab kettle chips, and crab waffle fries. Not a big adjustment for Massachusetts natives.

Yes, people rave about Boog's BBQ here and rightly so. Just know that Boog's amazing pit beef and turkey sandwiches aren't your only option. In the lower level concourse, you can find a baseball-sized crab cake (the Orioles tried about 50 recipes before hitting on the right one for it), kettle chips with crab meat piled on, or crab dip waffle fries that are worth grabbing a fork and sitting down to eat.

## OneYear To The Day

Every baseball fan remembers what happened at Camden Yards on September 6, 1995. Cal Ripken Jr. took the field for the 2,131st consecutive time, and single handedly restored a country's love for a sport that had been badly damaged by its participants' greed. As the ballpark's history goes, it's not likely that anything short of an Orioles World Series victory could top the moment.

One year to the day later, longtime Orioles star Eddie Murray made September 6 extra special for Orioles fans, launching a home run into the center field seats following a rain delay that caused the early exit of several thousand fans. This wasn't just any home run, by the way...it was number 500 of Murray's storied career. He would finish with 504.

Murray and Ripken were arguably the two key members of the last Orioles team to reach the top of the baseball mountain. Both of them were relatively young stars in 1983, the year the Orioles took the crown against the Phillies. The two teammates and friends battled for the MVP all season, with Ripken taking the honors and Murray finishing a very strong second. (Carlton Fisk finished a distant third.) Neither would play for a World Series winner again in their careers.

Ripken credited Murray as one of the reasons he played in every single game for over 16 years. It was Murray, he said, that stressed to a young Ripken the importance of always being ready to play.

Today both players have statues and retired numbers 8 and 33 at Camden Yards, immortalizing their careers with the Birds...and the seat where Murray's 500th home run landed is now painted orange to commemorate the occasion.



And pile on some Old Bay at the condiment stands.

It's all great for a taste of Maryland, but don't forget about the eats and libations outside the ball park too, especially across Washington Boulevard from the Left Field Gate. The pre-game watering hole tandem of Pickles Pub, Slider's and the Bullpen all offer dogs, sausages, burgers, and yes, crab cake sandwiches at prices much cheaper than inside. You can wrap this stuff and bring it in, incidentally. And like inside the ballpark, there will be enough Red Sox fans at the pre-game party that have your back. (Not that O's fans will give you any trouble.)

Speaking of libations...the establishments across the street continue to offer a brew that the Orioles amazingly do not sell inside the ballpark... National Bohemian, affectionately known as Natty Boh. How vital is the one-eyed Natty Boh logo to the Baltimore baseball experience? When this team was consistently good (yes, they really were once), it was the brand sold at Memorial Stadium...because the owner of the team happened to be the owner of National Bohemian.

You'd think the Orioles would respect that. Maybe someday. But for now get your Natty Boh on across the street and salute the...wait for it..."once proud Orioles franchise".

One of the multitude of features the designers of Camden Yards got right was its location...in the heart of downtown Baltimore, just steps away from the beautiful Inner Harbor. Out of town visitors can enjoy a ballgame, a delightful pre-or post-game meal, and visit the top tourist attraction in the city in one day.

If you haven't yet crossed a Red Sox game at Oriole Park off your bucket list, 2019 is the year to do it.

*Kurt Smith is the author of the Ballpark E-Guides website, the #1 resource for major league ballpark info, tips, and money-saving hacks. Visit the site at [www.BallparkEGuides.com](http://www.BallparkEGuides.com).*

## The Peanut Church

As stated in this article, you can bring food and non-alcoholic drinks into Camden Yards. This lenient policy of the Orioles' has been a great boon to nearby people of faith.

The Old Otterbein United Methodist Church, located near Conway Street adjacent to the ballpark, discovered in the early days of the new ballpark that Orioles fans would be happy to pay a dollar for a bag of peanuts rather than quadruple that price inside.

They've been selling peanuts to fans heading to Orioles games since the ballpark opened in 1992...and they've used the proceeds from peanuts and water sales to restore an organ, replace the roof, fix crumbling brick walls and repair the electrical and HVAC systems.

According to the church's website, "The best sales are always when the 'Yanks' and 'RedSox' are in town." So when you buy peanuts from the Old Otterbein, you're not only saving money on everyone's favorite ballpark snack, you're helping a local house of worship maintain their home. .

So there are some Baltimore natives that always will be happy to see you, even if you're wearing Red Sox gear.

