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### Bermuda may be closer than you think

#### A long history on azure waters

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With all the focus in recent years on cruising to Bermuda, many travelers may have overlooked that this mid-Atlantic archipelago, with its rose-colored beaches, motley towns and fragrant breezes, is only a 2 1/2-hour flight from New York.

But Bermudians have not forgotten. An apocryphal story continues to circulate here about two New York City residents betting who could travel fastest to the Hamptons or Bermuda, play a round of golf and return. Guess who wins?

While cruising may offer cheap access to a tiny slice of this notoriously pricey territory of the U.K., flying to Bermuda allows travelers to spend leisurely nights on the island along with sun-soaked days in its emerald and azure waters. Visitors can dine in its fine restaurants, absorb some of the oldest Colonial history in the New World and enjoy Bermuda's courteous, genial culture - a unique blend of British, African, West Indian and Portuguese influences.

#### BARGAINS THIS YEAR

With planning, a Bermuda trip doesn't have to clean out a tourist's wallet. Since 2003, when Bermuda suffered a devastating hurricane, tourism has thinned, despite a quick reconstruction and frequent visits by cruise ships. To attract visitors, Bermudians are celebrating the 400th anniversary of the British settling of the archipelago in a big way this year, with plenty of discount travel packages. Jet Blue Airways, for example, is offering packages that include airfare and three nights' stay for as low as \$379 a person (not including taxes and fees). Several airlines are offering \$198 round-trip flights.

#### WHAT TO DO

Bermuda is the perfect size for a long weekend trip. Visitors can take in the capital and business center (Hamilton in Pembroke Parish); the historic center (St. George's); and the former home of the British Royal Navy, which has been converted into a maritime museum and shopping center (Dockyard in Sandys Parish).

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Those with more time can visit, say, the Crystal Cave of Hamilton Parish and the Gibbs Hill Lighthouse of Southampton Parish.

## **ST. GEORGE'S**

The seat of Bermuda's government for two centuries, St. George's is the oldest permanent English-speaking town in the New World. Its center is King's Square, where the stocks and pillory smack in front of a large St. George's bank serve as a reminder that history has a way of repeating itself. Near the water, a ducking stool dunked women who were gossips or nags - the town holds re-enactments several times a week for tourists.

Nearby, picturesque St. Peter's Church serves as an emblem of the relationship between Bermuda's European settlers and their slaves, emancipated in August 1834. A cedar gallery on the western end of the church served to segregate blacks from whites, and the church had a separate burial ground for the black population of St. George's, where many of the headstones bear no names. Visit is the Bermuda Heritage Museum, which records the story of slavery in Bermuda (Samaritans Lodge, St. George's, 441-297-4126).

## **WHALE WATCHING**

Humpback whales migrate north through Bermuda's waters in April, an excellent time to go on a whale-watching tour. The Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute (40 Crow Lane, Hamilton, 441-292-7219) offers seven-hour whale-watching tours for \$90. Watchers can spot humpback whales - which can grow to 50 feet long and 79,000 pounds - blowing, slapping their tails, diving and breaching.

## **BEACHES**

Bermuda's prime attraction is its world-renowned beaches. Though Bermudians don't swim all year round, many visitors do, with average water temperatures falling to a barely bearable 65 degrees in winter.

Perhaps the most beautiful - and popular - beach is Horseshoe Bay in Southampton Parish, a slice of creamy pink sands lined by azure water and verdant foliage. For snorkeling, there are accessible reefs in Church Bay (Southampton Parish) and natural stone columns rising from clear waters in Tobacco Bay (St. George's Parish).

For a more isolated beach experience, head to the powdery white sands of Turtle Bay (St. George's Parish), adjacent to Clearwater Beach and nestled among bird sanctuaries and nature preserves, as well as Astwood Cove (Warwick Parish), which can only be reached by a slightly precarious cliff-side path.

## **WRECK DIVING**

While Bermuda's glassy waters and layers of reefs are perfect for snorkeling and scuba, the numerous shipwrecks in shallow water have garnered the most attention among divers.

Triangle Diving (11 Blue Hole Hill, Hamilton Parish, 441-293-7319) takes PADI-certified divers to the Spanish shipwreck Cristóbal Colon, which is about 10 miles offshore. At Blue Water Divers & Watersports (Elbow Beach, Paget Parish, 441-234-2909; Somerset, Sandys Parish, 441-234-1034), divers can kayak out to Pollock-shields, a 1915 German wreck. Off the West End, shipwrecks visited by divers include the 1881 North Carolina, the 1943 Hermes and a U.S. Civil War blockade-runner that

sank in 1864, the Maria Celestia.

For those who want to learn about shipwrecks without getting wet, there's the Bermuda Maritime Museum (\$10, The Keep, Dockyard, Sandys Parish, 441-234-1333, [www.bmm.bm](http://www.bmm.bm)), a collection of artifacts and cultural heritage displays housed in breathtaking historic buildings.

## SHOPPING

The best places to shop in Bermuda are concentrated in three locations: Hamilton, St. George's and Dockyard, which offers the Clocktower Mall. Shopping tends away from cheap T-shirt and souvenir shops in favor of more upscale (and expensive) stores, including one of the relatively few Marks & Spencer stores outside Great Britain. U.S. dollars are widely accepted, though change may be given in Bermuda dollars.

### The Bermuda Perfumery

Stewart Hall, Queen Street, St. George's, 441-293-0627, [bermuda-perfumery.com](http://bermuda-perfumery.com)

This perfumery lodged in a striking historic building stopped making its products from Bermuda's flowers in the 1960s. Though it imports its blending oils now, the perfumery focuses on the fragrances of Bermuda - oleander, jasmine, passion flower, frangipani and Bermuda lilies. The perfumery does make one oil - from Bermuda cedar - which it has turned into a popular men's fragrance. Stop here for a tour of the blending and aging process and a whiff of the perfumery's delicate fragrances.

**English Sports Shop**, 49 Front St., Hamilton, 441-295-2672

With branch stores all around the island, the English Sports Shop is a great place to purchase Bermuda shorts, jackets and matching long socks. It also carries madras, capris, Hawaiian shirts and an array of other men's and women's clothing, including some fashions that have been all but lost to time, such as the cravat.

## GETTING AROUND

**BY CAR** While taxis are a wonderful way to see Bermuda, as the country's cabbies are true ambassadors and love chatting up visitors - they are expensive. After an initial drive from the airport, consider alternate forms of transportation to save money or negotiate a price on a taxi for the day. Cars cannot be rented on Bermuda.

**SCOOTERS:** They're quite popular and there are many places to rent them. But roads are often congested and Bermudians do drive on the left, which can be confusing to Americans - this leads to frequent accidents.

**MASS TRANSIT:** Buses and ferries make efficient, regular trips to most of the archipelago. One- to seven-day unlimited ride passes cost \$12-\$45.

## WHERE TO EAT

### EXPENSIVE

**Tom Moore's Tavern**, Walsingham Lane, Hamilton Parish, 441-293-8020, [tommoores.com](http://tommoores.com)



A tavern housed in a waterfront homestead built in 1652, it's named after the Irish poet who visited the property and had a love affair with the Bermudian governor's wife, according to restaurant staff. Moore penned several love poems to her beneath a calabash tree (still existent) and then moved on. In keeping with the romantic history, this is the place to go for that special night out. It's expensive (main courses from \$28), but with dishes like the whipped Brie with honey poached pears, candied walnuts and a Port wine reduction, it's worth it.

**Fourways Inn**, 1 Middle Rd., Paget Parish, 800-962-7654, [fourwaysinn.com](http://fourwaysinn.com)

Chef Tommy Poh serves a scrumptious lobster bisque with Pernod and Cognac, Maine shrimp and a potato tower (\$12.75). A "Bermudian Essence" menu offers gastronomic delights from the traditional fish chowder to classic dishes reinterpreted, such as the Guinea chick ravioli stuffed with local baby lobster and set in a pool of crayfish emulsion (\$36.75). Wash it down with one of the inn's 700 wines.

## MODERATE

**Café Acoreano**, 2 Washington St., Hamilton Parish, 441-296-0402

This tiny cafe serves up some of the best Portuguese treats on the island, such as deep-fried malasadas (Portuguese doughnuts) or Portuguese chouriço (spicy sausage). Owned and staffed by Portuguese-Bermudians, it also serves a good cup of coffee.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Fairmont Hamilton Princess Hotel**, 76 Pitts Bay Rd., Pembroke Parish, 441-295-3000, [fairmont.com/hamilton](http://fairmont.com/hamilton), RATES \$299-\$699

This candy pink hotel on the Pitts Bay waterfront dates to Victorian times but has all the amenities of a contemporary hotel. With beautiful harbor views and well-tended gardens, it doesn't have a beach but is within walking distance of Hamilton's shopping district. The hotel also has a heated pool, spa and scuba center, along with popular restaurants.

**The Reefs**, 56 S. Shore Rd., Southampton Parish, 800-742-2008, [thereefs.com](http://thereefs.com), RATES \$369-\$1,035 a night

Clinging to the cliffs above its own beach, this coral-pink hotel has operated for six decades and is owned by Bermuda's former tourism minister - and it shows. The hotel recently updated its rooms, and the spa, La Serena, is undergoing renovation to open in June with new eco-centric treatments tapping into Bermuda's abundant and seasonally changing flora. The hotel also offers three restaurants, a pool, a gym, kayaks and tennis courts. All 65 rooms have private balconies or patios.

**Royal Palms**, 24 Rosemont Ave., Pembroke Parish, 800-678-0783, [www.royalpalms.bm](http://www.royalpalms.bm), RATES \$222-\$394

Formerly a manor house, this small, confectionary-pink hotel with 32 rooms offers a taste of turn-of-the-last-century Bermuda, with a beautiful garden and a wraparound veranda with wicker chairs and white shuttered windows from which to view it. Rooms are cool and comfortable. A cedar bar and terrace overlook the pool. It's just a short walk to Hamilton's commercial center.

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