

TRAVEL

Great
Escapes

TIME

Lost Horizons

IT MAY BE KNOWN FOR ITS MYSTERIOUS TRIANGLE BUT, AS PAUL KAY DISCOVERS, THERE ARE MANY MORE TANGIBLE REASONS TO LOSE ONESELF IN **BERMUDA**



IT'S A LONG WAY FROM GLASGOW TO Bermuda, I ponder, as I gaze down on the imposing wreck of The Pelinaion, which lies broken on the reef a mere 10 metres below. Like me, the ship was forged in Scotland's largest city before setting off to travel the world. And like me, it wound its way to this far-flung outpost of the empire during its 34th year of life. But thankfully my Atlantic adventure is sailing towards a happier conclusion than this haunting paragon of derelict power.

I'm diving in the crystal-clear waters a kilometre or so off St David's Island, at the northeastern point of the tiny archipelago of Bermuda. It's a destination that – with its infamous Triangle and persistent tales of ships and aircraft vanishing – has long piqued my itinerant curiosity, and it's exhilarating to discover that the place does not disappoint. Indeed, so rich and varied is Bermuda's heritage, and so alluring its charms, that it seems ridiculous most of the world knows it best for its status as a tax haven, its eponymous shorts and a certain three-sided polygon.

Discovered in 1505 by Spaniard Juan de Bermúdez, after whom the island is named, Bermuda has always been something of an anomaly. Despite its dalliance with the Spanish, its first settlers were English, in 1609, and it became a Crown Colony in 1707 with the formation of the United Kingdom. It remains a British Overseas Territory to this day – the oldest and most populous, in fact – but the American influence is pervasive, hardly surprising given a proximity of less than two hours to most of the US Eastern seaboard. Queen

Elizabeth II may have her face on the banknotes, but the interchangeability of US and Bermuda dollars is more telling.

The islands' location is also somewhat incongruous. Most people wrongly assume them to be in the Caribbean, but they are actually closer to Canada, cast adrift in the North Atlantic more than 1,000km from the nearest landmass: Cape Hatteras on the coast of North Carolina. At 32.3°N it is the northernmost reef system in the world. By comparison, Shanghai is a notch further south, at 31.2°N.

This unique geography has, over the years, attracted an intriguing cast of characters. Among its first wave of settlers was John Rolfe, who later continued to Jamestown, Virginia, where he married the native Indian squaw Pocahontas, thus inspiring storytellers and filmmakers for centuries to come. Edward and Wallis Simpson, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, were notable visitors in the 1940s, when the Duke was governor of the Bahamas, while recent residents have included Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones (Douglas' mother is Bermudian). Billionaires Ross Perot and Silvio Berlusconi have houses here, as does New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, who is a frequent weekend visitor.

It's not hard to see why Bermuda is so attractive a destination for the ultra-rich. As well as its famously low tax, the territory has a refreshingly low-key vibe and, with a population of just 65,000,

is a haven for those who wish to preserve their privacy. And that's before you consider the islands' exquisite natural beauty, climate and historical charm. Shaped like a fish-hook and temperate most of the year, Bermuda has more than 100km of coastline and an abundance of sheltered bays and pink-sand beaches that lead to cerulean waters of an impossible-to-overstate clarity.

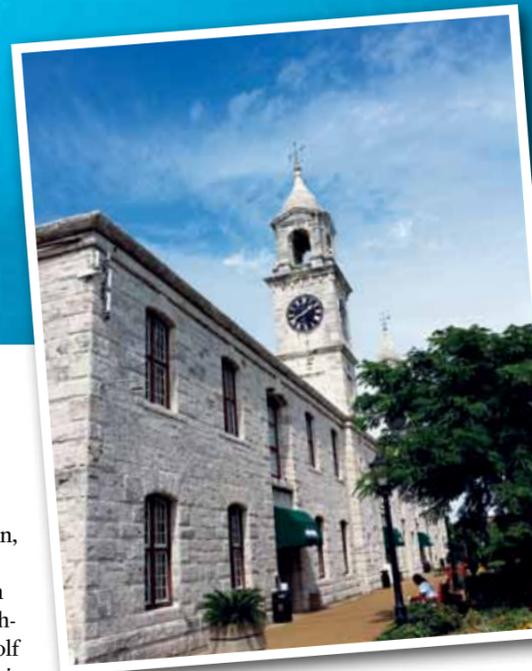
Many of the best beaches and secluded coves can be found along the south shore, while the nearby Royal Naval Dockyard welcomes cruise ships and other visitors with a mixture of museums and local handicrafts. The most popular tourist attraction, however, is the town of St George's in the north, which can proudly claim to be the oldest continuously populated settlement in the New World. A Unesco World Heritage Site, St George's is awash with historic buildings, winding brick lanes and quaint-looking houses painted in a range of pastel colours. Costumed re-enactments bring the past to life, particularly at the ducking stool, which sees troublesome shrews dunked in the harbour to cool off.

The territory's capital is the 'city' of Hamilton, where you'll find a selection of designer boutiques as well as some of Bermuda's better restaurants and bars. It's here you're also likely to see the Bermuda short in all its semi-formal glory – it's common practice for businessmen to wear them along with a blazer, tie, smart shoes and long socks known as Bermuda hose.

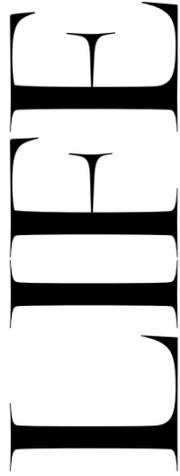
And, of course, Bermuda has no shortage of well-appointed places to stay. Fairmont and Mandarin Oriental have properties along the southern shore, and The Reefs is a local institution, but it's hard to look beyond the quietly spectacular Rosewood Tucker's Point in the northeast. Opened in 2009, this nigh-100ha resort boasts the island's finest golf course and largest private beach among its treasure trove of attractions.

It's a resort that harks back to the pleasures of a more genteel era; as well as its first-rate golf and tennis facilities and gorgeous outdoor swimming pools, there's a central croquet lawn on which you can practise your mallet skills and a secluded private beach club that instantly makes you feel like a visiting billionaire. A classic British seaside style is in evidence throughout, from the 88 rooms and suites to the nostalgic poolside cabanas, making it seem like a hotel with far more than four years of history. And in a way it is: the site was formerly occupied by the Castle Harbour Hotel, which film buffs may recall from the 1962 Cary Grant/Doris Day romantic comedy *That Touch of Mink*.

What really sets Tucker's Point apart, however, is the impeccable, convivial service and unwavering attention to detail. The staff embody the spirit of the resort, perhaps none more so than effervescent veteran bell captain Raymond Ming,

**SHORE THING**

FROM LEFT
The impressive private beach club at Tucker's Point; colonial architecture in the Royal Naval Dockyard



The secluded private beach club instantly makes you feel like a visiting billionaire

who is invariably the first to greet each arriving guest. The award-winning doorman speaks with passion about making guests feel welcome and says his aim is “to be better tomorrow than I am today”, and its hard to question his sincerity.

The service at the fine-dining The Point restaurant is similarly impressive, as is the cuisine, which gives an international twist to the freshest local ingredients in a casual, cosy, wood-panelled setting. Of particular note in the surroundings here are the magnificent wall murals, which once decorated the Sky Club at the Pan-Am Building in New York, and which depict the great harbours of the 1800s, including Rio, Beirut and Hong Kong. As well as enhancing the setting, the murals hold special significance: Tucker’s Point is the brainchild of Ed Trippe, son of Pan-Am founder Juan Trippe, who commissioned the original murals.

Attention to detail and local produce are in abundance at the Sense spa too. Locally hand-blown glass bowls adorn the soothing space, and local honey and aloe are used in the treatments. You can even take things a step further and pick the leaves for your spa journey personally at the lovingly tended ‘Coffee Chine’, a verdant sunken volcanic grotto just beyond the main pool that has been a labour of love for Tucker’s Point managing

director Duncan Graham. Home to avocado, coffee, pawpaw and citrus trees, it’s a lush oasis that just begs to be explored – or which can be booked as a setting for a private dinner if romance is on your mind.

The Chine is also a clue to one of Tucker’s Point’s more subtle charms: its commitment to environmental sustainability. The only hotel in Bermuda to receive a hard-to-obtain Green Globe certification, it is run on ecologically sound practices, from the use of solar power and recycling, to innovative water-saving systems and ongoing staff training, so you can put your mind at ease along with your body.

The hotel’s location makes it a perfect base from which to reach St George’s and other local points of interest such as the stalactite-filled underground cave system and the dense Tom Moore’s Jungle, where the intrepid can discover an underground cave pool of their very own. Renting a scooter is perhaps the best and most fun way to see the island, and these can also be hired at the resort.

But all these attractions pale in comparison to Bermuda’s number one draw: getting out on a boat and enjoying the water. Tucker’s Point Dive & Water Sports Centre is one of the best equipped on the island and offers all manner of aquatic diversions. It’s overseen by the experienced Terry Pryse, a Cornwall native who’s called Bermuda home since 1981 and who is a veritable font of local knowledge and insider info. As we head out into Castle Harbour in his dive boat, he gives me the lowdown on the impressive homes perched along the coast, from Mayor Bloomberg’s weekend retreat to the house recently put on the market

by Australian TV producer Reg Grundy for a cool US\$38 million. Judging by the sublime, sun-kissed views in every direction, it’s a price tag that seems almost reasonable.

Our first stop is beside the curiously named Nonsuch Island, a tiny islet that has been used variously as a home for wayward boys and a yellow-fever quarantine hospital over the years, and now serves as a wildlife sanctuary dedicated to the territory’s national bird, the Bermuda petrel. Known locally as the *cahow*, the endangered species was thought to have become extinct in the early 1600s, but was rediscovered in the 1950s and is now protected. We don’t spot any *cahows*, but the waters around Nonsuch are teeming with a motley mélange of marine life. Snorkelling around a small, semi-submerged wreck, we see snapper, squirrelfish, trumpetfish, a midnight parrotfish, a huge angelfish and a pufferfish, as well as a pair of enormous lobster hiding under the hull. It’s a thrilling if gentle introduction to the world beneath the waves here, and one that has me thirsty for more.

Back on the boat, we head out to deeper waters as Pryse delves further into Bermuda’s past. We pass the former site of Bermuda’s NASA space-tracking station, which supported every manned US space flight until its closure in 1997, and hear stories of galleons and freight ships sunk by the archipelago’s treacherous reefs, sudden storms and by lighthouses turned off during wartime. Intriguing story though it may be, the overwhelming majority of the Bermuda Triangle’s supposed disappearances have been explained, and almost all are attributable to the unpredictable undersea terrain and weather conditions. Astoundingly, more than 400 wrecks

lie in the waters around the islands, some dating back more than four centuries, and most can be explored. Few, however, are as impressive as The Pelinaion, a 120-metre steamer that lost its way amid a blackout and sank on the reef in 1940. Today she lies split in two, rusting and motionless just a few metres below the surface, no more than a giant’s playground for the fish, turtles and divers who come to pay homage. Drifting along above its massive form and swimming around its colossal steam boilers and once-mighty engine, I feel tiny and a million miles from the world above. Getting lost in Bermuda, I realise, has nothing to do with triangles. ■



ROSEWOOD BLOOMS

Already an established and much-respected name in the US, Rosewood Hotels and Resorts is aiming to replicate that success in Asia, starting with two openings in the next two years. First up is Rosewood Beijing, which is scheduled to open in autumn. Located opposite the CCTV Tower in Chaoyang District, the 279-room hotel will feature some of the largest guest rooms in the city, seven restaurants and more landscaped outdoor

space than any other luxury hotel in Beijing. Rosewood’s second Asian property (not counting the Middle East, where it already has four hotels) will open in Phuket towards the end of 2014. Situated on secluded Emerald Bay on the island’s west coast, and with an environmentally sensitive design aesthetic, the resort will feature 87 villas (artist’s impression above), 20 residences and six hideaway homes, of 2,600sqft or more.

TEE TIME

FROM LEFT
The golf course at Tucker’s Point; a secluded courtyard makes at the hotel; one of the nostalgic pool-side cabanas