

Bermuda (Devil's Isle), Part 1 of 3

It seems like 6+ months since our plane dipped from the clouds and glided along the turquoise waters and emerald landscapes of Bermuda on our approach to L.F. Wade International on St. David's Island. A business trip later, and some massive changes at work, and the restorative effects of that special island have been reduced to a severe longing for a rebook.

It was a grand trip though and I've finally scratched out a day-by-day summary using the meta data from my digital photographs and a semi-permeable memory.

Before we begin...

Whenever possible I've linked to photos on Flickr from the Limestone Archives. In most cases, those photos have a description with additional details about the object or place.

»This symbol refers to a tip that follows the day-by-day entry.

Day 1

We stayed at [The Reefs](#) in Southampton which is marketed as a "beach front boutique hotel." We've been going to The Reefs since the 80s and have watched it evolve into a "boutique" whilst retaining its rich history and tradition. The Reefs opened in 1947 and **Beautiful Bermuda: The Standard Guide to Bermuda (1947)** describes it thusly: "The Reefs is Bermuda's New Cabana Club, a Cottage Type of Hotel Living. The "Motor Age" has made it possible to develop "The Reefs" which is located on Christian Bay, Southampton Parish. This section is know as Fort Royal, and we find it so marked on an old Bermuda Map of 1626, also showing it as the location of one of the original Forts...[Perched on a bluff, overlooking a private, secluded coral beach and protected bay.](#) "The Reefs" combines the most modern conveniences with the charm of old Bermuda."

There isn't a bad view at The Reefs and my happy spot is from any cliff side balcony.

After exploring the hotel and surveying the beach, we »rented scooters for the week from [Oleander Cycles](#). Our "orientation" ride was to [Gibbs Hill Lighthouse](#). The cast-iron lighthouse is very close to The Reefs and some sketches (and [photos](#)) from the beachfront show the lighthouse in the background. We »climbed the 185 steps and were rewarded with incredible views of the island.



We had dinner in Hamilton at the [Hog Penny Pub](#) on Burnaby Street and the bangers & mash was [Old Ship](#) quality. »Rent scooters for the entire length of your stay. The island is very expensive, and the flexibility of being able to shop at local grocery stores is a great way to save money. Also, the transit options in Bermuda are great (ferry, bus, taxi,

etc.) but the scooter buys you time and access to parts of the island (e.g. nature reserves) that aren't always convenient.

»Climb everything and anything you're *allowed* to climb. This includes steps in historic buildings (Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity), trails in nature reserves (Spittal Pond Nature Reserve), forts (Gates, Scaur, St. Catherine's, etc.), and slopes (Botanical Gardens). The *vantage* is always worth the effort.

Day 2

We drove west to visit [Somerset Bridge](#)— the world's smallest working drawbridge. The bridge links Sandy's Parish with Somerset Island.

I like to choose a place I would live wherever I travel (here's an [example](#)) and I found my Bermuda home on our first full day. In this case, it was a [little fixer-upper](#) near the bridge. We also explored [Scaur Hill Fort and Park](#) on our way to the Royal Naval Dockyard.

We didn't spend too much time in the [Royal Naval Dockyard](#); we had an appointment at the hotel and were clock-watching (on vacation). It can be a little hectic too (this is code for touristy) since this is where the cruise ships dock. On the way back to the hotel, we stopped for a »Barritt's Ginger Beer at RUBiS on Boaz Island.

We went to Hamilton again for dinner (all roads lead to Hamilton) and this time ate at trendy [Bulli.Social](#). After dinner, we continued on to St. George for some day trip scouting. In transit, my brother did a good impression of Tom Cruise in *Top Gun* on Kindley Field Road with his scooter at max. speed. We were starting to lose sunlight, but did stop at Gates Fort for some photos.

»Drink [Barritt's Ginger Beer](#) whenever you can.

Day 3

We spent our third afternoon in the Town of St. George. We visited Stella Maris Church (RC), the [Unfinished Church](#), Somers Garden, [St. Peter's](#), and [Bermuda's 400th Anniversary Monument](#). We also walked around town to take pictures before our dinner reservations at [Wahoo's Waterside Bistro & Patio](#). The streets in St. George are [tightly clustered](#) and should be ambled.

Bermuda Fact: Sir George Somers was at the helm of the *Sea Venture* in 1609 and deliberately drove the ship onto the reefs to prevent its floundering. All 150 passengers survived. The survivors later built two ships — *Patience* and *Deliverance* — using cedar and remains of the *Sea Venture* to continue their journey to Virginia. You can see a replica of the *Deliverance* on Ordnance Island in St. George.

In Part 2, I'll pick up with days 4.

“These little islands are thickly covered with cedar groves, through the vistas of which you catch a few pretty white houses, which my poetical shortsightedness always transforms into temples.” – Tom Moore

Bermuda (Devil's Isle), Part 2 of 3



Day 4

Our adventures started at the Bermuda Botanical Gardens. We spent a couple of hours exploring the thirty-six acres of flowers, trees, and shrubs. Make sure to visit the cacti / succulent hillside since most ascents in Bermuda are rewarded with a gorgeous vista (this one

was completely unexpected and my plan is to build a café at this location after retirement). There's a rose garden too.

Our next stop was Spittal Pond Nature Reserve in search of Portuguese Rock (formerly Spanish Rock). **Bermuda Journey: A Leisurely Guide Book** (1958) describes Spittal Pond thusly:

“The origin of this curious name is unknown, but there is a Spittal in Yorkshire, mentioned in Cobbett's *Rural Rides*, which may possibly furnish a clue. The water of the pond is brackish, and at all seasons of the year wild birds can be seen resting there or hovering near by; the isolation of the pond suggests that it would make an ideal bird sanctuary. Between the pond and the shore are three curiosities, of which the best known is *Spanish Marks*. This was the cryptic inscription found by the first settlers, crudely carved in the rock, on a high bluff overlooking the ocean.”

The surge from Hurricane Jose made parts of the trail impassable BUT with shoes (and socks) removed we pushed on. There's NO signage in the nature reserve SO finding the bluff ([yeah, it's a bluff](#)) is a real true-life adventure. I'm not sure vacationers would choose this nature reserve in a top ten, but for bird watchers / birders and those seeking quiet it's an incredible destination. The ascent to Portuguese Rock is a proper hike so budget time, wear appropriate footwear, and bring plenty of water to stay hydrated. This isn't a stop you make in a bathing suit and flip-flops.

The view from Portuguese Rock is absolutely humbling. The site is marked with a sign that reads:

“ A bronze plaque near this sign records an early inscription believed to have been carved in the stone by survivors off a Portuguese ship wrecked on Bermuda's reefs in 1543. The original carving has deteriorated but the bronze plaque was cast from a lead mould taken of the inscription in 1893.

The site was formerly known as Spanish Rock because the initials were mistakenly thought to be those of a Spaniard. Later research, however, interpreted the initials as R.P. (an abbreviation for Rex Portugaliae, King of Portugal) and the cross as the Portuguese Order of Christ.

The stranded Portuguese mariners did not stay long but built a new vessel and left the island.

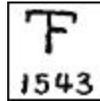
After leaving Spittal Pond we drove west on South Road to Brighton Hill Road. We stopped at the Old Devonshire Church whose interior is entirely lit by candles. It wasn't open, but we walked through the graveyard. Our approach to the City of Hamilton took us past the U.S. Consulate on Middle Road. We had two planned stops in Hamilton—Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity and the Historical Society Museum. Unfortunately, the latter was closed so we visited the City Hall and Arts Centre WHICH turned out to be serendipitous.

The [Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity](#) is an Anglican cathedral located on Church Street. According to the **Bermuda Journey**: “Among the materials combined in the fabric of the Cathedral are Bermuda stone, quarried from the Parlaville property; Bermuda cedar; Caen stone from Normandy; freestone from Nova Scotia; stone and oak from Indiana; pitch pine, granite monoliths, and paving stone from Scotland.” The nave, pulpit, stained-glass, organ are all impressive. The altar screen is beautiful and features the sculptures of Byllee Lang (more on her shortly). We climbed the 155 steps of the tower and were once again rewarded, this time with an [impressive view of the city](#) and harbor.

The City Hall and Arts Centre contains the [Bermuda National Gallery](#). It also has a slightly jaundiced portrait of Her Majesty The Queen. The BNG has three permanent collections and my favorite was the wing displaying paintings of

Bermuda from artists like Henry M. Gasser, Abbott Graves, and Catherine F. Tucker. There was a special exhibit (Celebrating Women Artists) that included a sculpture of the Virgin Mary in plaster by [Byllee Lang](#) and photograph(s) from [Edith Watson](#).

Exhausted from our BIG hike and exploration of the City of Hamilton, we had dinner at the Village Pantry in Flatts Village. I had the special— Wiener Schnitzel & Hefeweizen Grapefruit Beer.



Bermuda (Devil's Isle), Part 3 of 3



Day 5

After a proper English breakfast in the clubhouse we departed for the Crystal Caves in Hamilton Parish. The caves were discovered in 1908 by two boys in search of a lost cricket ball. The guided tour is expensive, but the walk across Cahow Lake (at a depth of about ninety feet below the surface of the earth) is pretty memorable.

In searching for a description of the cave, this one from **Beautiful Bermuda** was particularly colorful:

“As we walk at ease upon a sturdy pontoon bridge, we behold the varied forms of nature’s tracery and marvel at the gleaming peninsula of purest crystal. Flashing, scintillating stalactite formations crowd together like vain beauty for a peep at their own charms in its smiling mirror. Stalactites and stalagmites, often

suggesting the droll shapes of animals and plants, heighten the fantastic effect. Here and there, after centuries of toil, they have at last met and the columns so formed seem to support the natural roof. One stalagmite in particular attracts our attention, presenting as it does a great bank of snow. Each step we take across the pontoon bridge reveals some fresh object of delight.”

After the tour, we once again crossed the causeway on our trusty scooters, and made our way to St. David’s Lighthouse. This is the second lighthouse on the island and offers a commanding view of L.F. Wade International Airport. The property isn’t as well maintained as Gibbs Hill (there’s no gift shop, restaurant, and well manicured approaches) but it’s ridiculously raw and accessible. We spent a couple of hours on St. David’s Island also visiting the Lost at Sea Memorial.

“ For centuries St. David’s Island occupied a unique position in this little Colony...Seafarers they were, born with the taste of salt sea spray in their mouths and a barometer in their brains. They were proud of their homes...built by their forefathers...Suspicious of anything new, they...clung stubbornly to a tiny island in a changing world.

The rest of the afternoon was spent lazily on the beach. I haven't written much about the beach, but the entire trip was punctuated by half-days on it (or in the infinity pool).

We had dinner at The Dining Room at Gibbs Hill Lighthouse and this is not a kitschy -or- touristy restaurant. The menu is incredible and the views are spectacular. The dining room is very small SO make sure you make reservations in advance. I had the stir fried sriracha jumbo shrimp & scallops and it was my favorite meal of the trip.

Day 6

Our last day. It was Sunday so we headed to Hamilton for mass at [St. Theresa's Cathedral](#). We arrived a couple of hours early to take some final photographs of Hamilton. We ambled along Front Street and snapped some shots of the Cabinet Building and [Cenotaph](#).

St. Theresa's opened in 1932 and is the Cathedral of the Diocese. Once again, the prose in **Beautiful Bermuda** is most illustrative:

"Gracing a promontory in the lower reached of Cedar Avenue, the chase loveliness of the church greets the eye with medieval splendor. Its Spanish architecture harmonizes gables, windows and doors, above which rises a newly constructed Tower carrying the inevitable cross so dear to the hearts of the Catholic people...A beautiful white marble altar, sentineled by the red lamp of the Eucharist, graces the tiled sanctuary and invites devotion."

The Bishop said our mass and his energy/enthusiasm was a fitting exclamation to our week of restoration, recuperation, and renewal.

We returned the scooters after mass and spent our final afternoon on the beach. We had dinner at Coconuts Restaurant at The Reefs Resort and Club. Our flight was ridiculously early on Monday morning but we still managed to enjoy a couple of Dark N' Stormy(s) as we packed furiously and watched the lamp of Gibbs Hill Lighthouse from our cliffside balcony partially light the dark horizon.

"This little life from here to there –
Who lives it safely anywhere?
Not you, my insulated friend:
What calm composure will defend
Your rock, when tides you've never seen
Assault the sands of What-has-been,
And from your island's tallest tree,
You watch advance What-is-to-be?"
– Edna St Vincent Millay, *There Are No More Islands, Any More*

Notes & Sources

Beautiful Bermuda: The Standard Guide to Bermuda by Euphemia Bell

Your Bermuda by George Rushe

Bermuda Journey by William Zuill



On this site, the Corporation of Hamilton plans to build the new City Hall—as shown in the architect’s plan on this page. This hall, when completed, will provide adequate housing for the activities of the Corporation, more in keeping with progress of the city than the present City Hall, which is located on Front Street, East. It will provide a Council Chamber, Municipal Offices and an Auditorium seating four hundred persons. The funds for the erection of this building were bequeathed to the Corporation of Hamilton by late Miss Catherine Browne Tucker, who died April 14, 1933, and whose father, the Wor. George Somers Tucker, was for many years a member of the Corporation of Hamilton and Speaker of the House of Assembly. The funds now available for this purpose are in excess of £52,000 sterling.

*Scan and quote are from **Beautiful Bermuda: The Standard Guide to Bermuda (1947)**