



Why Bermuda Should Be Back On Your Travel Radar

JUNE 8, 2017 • NIKKI EKSTEIN

And they're off. Late last month, the oldest and most glamorous sailing competition in the world kicked off on the pink shores of Bermuda, an island that, until five years ago, had never made a concerted effort to drum up tourism.

Hotels had existed on the island, yes, but only a few—and talking about suits here generally referred to the type you wear with a tie, not with sunscreen and shades. Until recently, the charming cottages that once served as vacation rentals on the island had been converted into corporate housing, and the hotel room count had shrunk in step with the island's leisure-travel market.

Setting out to change that is Sandra Christensen, co-developer of Caroline Bay, a first-of-its-kind hotel, residence, and marina project on nearly 200 acres of the island's southwestern tip. "Tax neutrality became a big focus for Bermuda in the '80s," she told us during a meeting at Bloomberg's New York headquarters. "Until not too long ago, much of the island's development was more focused on business growth than anything else."

Now, she and a few other torchbearers are reinvigorating Bermuda's image. The island's natural beauty and close proximity to the American Northeast are severely underutilized tourism assets. So are new, year-round JetBlue flights from New York that arrive within an hour and a half.

“Roughly a decade ago, the island started to reconsider tourism,” explained Christensen. In the last five years, the new government has created private enterprises to stimulate tourism development and overseas investment, such as the Bermuda Tourism Authority (BTA), founded in 2012, which is applying its marketing muscle to draw hotel investors, restaurateurs, cruise companies, airlines, and sporting events like the America’s Cup.

In the last year, the BTA has reported a 17 percent spike in leisure air arrivals. Travelers from New York have increased by 47 percent year-over-year, and leisure spending has seen an uptick of 18 percent over the same time frame. Yacht arrivals—a sign of ultra-high-net-worth visitors—are up by more than 30 percent.

Meanwhile, the Hamilton Princess, the island’s grand dame hotel, is fresh off a \$100 million makeover. The Loren, Bermuda’s first newly built hotel in 45 years, has just opened its doors; an five additional properties are under construction, including a Ritz-Carlton Reserve and a St. Regis. Add a major airport expansion, set for completion in 2020, and Bermuda may be the next great Hamptons alternative.

Whether you’re heading to the pink-shored island to catch the races—which culminate on June 27—or just to catch some rays, here’s the latest on where to stay and what to do.

Where to Stay

The new: The 45-suite Loren is Bermuda’s first new hotel construction in 45 years, and it gleams appropriately. The rooms pile on texture (plush rugs, quilted throws, velvety throw pillows) rather than color, to keep your eye trained on the pink-and-turquoise expanse beyond your verandah. That rosy sand is an island signature, but even on aptly named Pink Beach, right outside the Loren, it’s more blush-toned than magenta.

The tried and true: What does \$100 million buy you in hotel renovations? At the Hamilton Princess, the island’s giant pink palace, the answer is, a lot. The 132-year-old property reopened in 2016 with fully redone rooms, a new beach club with hammocks suspended over the ocean, a restaurant by Marcus Samuelsson, an Exhale-branded spa, and artworks by Jeff Koons and Andy Warhol. It also offers America’s Cup-themed workouts, which include sprints in the sand, swimming, boxing, and strength training.