

LUXURY TRAVEL

Why Bermuda Should Be Back on Your Travel Radar

A guide to the island paradise, including new hotels and restaurants to know while the America's Cup is on.

by **Nikki Ekstein**

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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, a sales and marketing manager 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."



Horseshoe Bay beach, Bermuda. Photographer: Michael DeFreitas/robertharding/Getty Images

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.



Hamilton, Bermuda's historic seafront capital. Photographer: Michael Runkel/Getty Images

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 Loren Source: The Loren

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.

Then there's Rosewood's Tucker's Point, with just a handful of pastel-toned, British-colonial rooms and villas, largely contained in one grand manor house. It's perfect for a more intimate experience.

Where to Eat



Marcus' Source: Hamilton Princess & Beach Club

The new: Bermuda's food scene is generally seen as tired and passé. Such signature dishes as fish cakes, fritters, and sandwiches have never really stood out from offerings in the Caribbean, so it's no surprise that upscale dining is largely the domain of hotel restaurants. At the Loren, an all-glass spiral staircase connects the lobby to Maree, a white-tablecloth spot with ocean views whose menu includes gnocchi in lobster beurre blanc and duck confit cannelloni. Marcus' at the Hamilton Princess has emerged as the island's hottest table: Its mosaic-tiled bar is a dream at sunset, when magic-hour lighting is magnified and refracted through the dining room's enormous windows. Dishes such as whole, roasted island catch and fried yard bird—a riff on Samuelsson's hit dish at New York's Red Rooster—are livelier than anything Bermuda has seen before.

That said, don't overlook the Cottage Café and Bistro, on the second floor of a shopping mall in charming Hamilton. The intentionally rustic, unassuming dining room is run by Brian Richens, the chef who drew a local following for his farm-fresh Bermudan fare at Tempest. Here, he's taking cues from his wife's Azorean heritage to create riffs on such island classics as Old Bay crab cakes and Mahi Mahi fritters. Make this a pit stop for lunch and stick to more classic places for dinner.

The tried and true: You might catch a glimpse of Bermuda residents Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones in the so-called “snug corner” at Barracuda Grill, a surf-and-turf spot that Christensen ranks among the island’s best restaurants. Anna Gaffney, general manager at the Loren, is still a fan of chowder and fish sandwiches at Tempest but regularly sends her most food-obsessed travelers to Bolero, a market-driven brasserie hidden at the end of a narrow alleyway off bustling Front Street.

Where to See and Be Seen



The Arabella Source: Epiphany

The new: You can catch a party nearly any day there are races on the island, and many of them in temporary venues set up for the Cup. As part of its inaugural season, the Caroline Bay Marina will also host *The Arabella*, a 157-foot, schooner-style mega-yacht with dramatic ivory staysails. During the races, the ship's decks will double as spectator deck, dinner spot, and rum bar.

The tried and true: Harry's and Port O Call are the two most “happening” bars on the island, according to Christensen. Both pack in a power-brokering happy hour crowd, but Port O Call is along bustling Front Street—good for both bar- and boutique-hopping—while Harry's has easy access to a wide, beachfront promenade. At night, it's all about drinks and dancing at the hookah-smoke-filled Café Cairo; be prepared to relive your very best college days, all the way to 3 a.m.

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