

Dining

Swimming in Seafood

Restaurants offer cuisines of the world,
but local fish make you shout, “Wahoo!”

In Bermuda, “wahoo” is more than just a fun interjection to express exuberance. Wahoo is an athletic game fish, a vigorous mackerel, silvery blue in color with a sweet taste like albacore. Esteemed both as sport and as dinner, it attracts fishermen to Bermuda and diners to its restaurants.

As a tiny archipelago, Bermuda gets beef and agricultural products from the best of North America, and chefs work with local gardeners to source fresh fruits and vegetables.

As an international crossroads, Bermuda offers plenty of American, British, French, Italian, Portuguese and Caribbean cuisines, and a growing list of Asian flavours.

SEAFOOD

The seafood here practically leaps from the ocean onto your plate, and you can't go wrong with the basics: local fish, pan-seared simply, served with a nice citrus vinaigrette.

If you see wahoo on the menu, order it. Look for the wahoo steak. Prepared properly, it will be superb. For lunch, try a light and healthy wahoo salad — lean

protein amid pickled ginger, dried cranberries, carrots, arugula, salt, pepper, lemon and lime zest, some virgin olive oil, and a dash of rice vinegar.

But wait, there's more! Red snapper, gray snapper, yellowtail snapper, and the ubiquitous rockfish: All are abundant, fresh, and rewarding in Bermuda.

September to March, try the spiny lobster, split down the middle and finished on the grill. A first cousin of the Maine lobster, around here the tasty bug is called "guinea chick." Popular despite the price: Go for it!

Traditional Bermudian fish chowder arrived with the first colonists, then got spiced up here. The local staple starts with a rich, flavourful stock of fresh white fish, often rockfish, with a few heads and tails. Onions, potatoes, carrots, tomatoes and celery bulk it up. Pawpaw, bay leaves, peppercorns, cloves, thyme, parsley, bacon, sherry peppers, ground pepper, salt and a dash of black rum — okay, another dash — make this chowder sing.

Long, slow simmering is key to good chowder, a hearty appetizer or a satisfying meal. Search out the local sherry-pepper sauce and dash liberally — if you dare. Practically every Bermudian restaurant has its own take on chowder, but *The New York Times* gushes over two places: Hog Penny, a classic English pub, and the Lobster Pot, a nautical café, both in Hamilton.

Outerbridge's Original Sherry Peppers sauce — 50/50 flavour and fire — is an institution here, made from a secret recipe of 17 peppers, sherry wine and herbs. Ages ago, Royal Navy sailors used it to spice up bland or expired rations. Today it just makes a great chowder better.

Rockfish appears on every menu, steamed, broiled, baked, fried or grilled. Mussels are cherished, and a popular dish is mussel pie, filled with steamed mussels, fresh papaya, onions, potatoes and bacon, spiced with curry, lemon and thyme.

Until recently, you could find conch chowder and fritters. But alas, the giant sea snail is dwindling in number, thus protected here and illegal to import. Shark is not as popular as it used to be, but traditional shark hash can still be found.

For a Bermudian Sunday breakfast, order codfish and bananas. The salted codfish comes from New England or the Maritimes. The bananas are local. The dish is featured in many restaurants, and variations include creamed codfish and codfish cakes.

TERRESTRIAL FOOD

Bermudian agriculture was built by onions — both the edible kind and the human kind. The large, flat, yellow-skinned, mild-flavour Bermuda onion probably originated in Italy or the Canary islands. It came with English settlers around 1616, and by the 1830s, it was a big export. Bermudians started calling themselves onions and calling their islands the Onion Patch.

Onions still figure in many local recipes, including the onion pie, onion soup, onion casserole, onion biscuit bread, onion sandwich, onion soufflé, even glazed onion for dessert. By the 20th century, however, the onion business had moved to Texas — to a town now called Bermuda.

While Bermuda's thin soil and dearth of acreage discourage most agriculture, these islands are not without their succulent crops. Bermudians grow potatoes, principally Pontiac red and Kennebec white. They grow many fresh fruits, including strawberries, guavas, Surinam cherries, bay grapes (sea grapes), avocados and bananas.

Tasty jams, jellies, pies, sherbets, walnut breads and wines are coaxed from local Surinam cherries, which look like miniature pumpkins. Flaming cherries are served with rum and vanilla ice cream. Guavas are made into jelly to complement the johnnycake, a cornmeal bread simple enough for fishermen to cook at sea without burning down the boat.

In 1850, Bermuda imported loquats to encourage the birds to stop eating their expensive citrus fruits. Instead, the humans developed a taste for the yellow-orange plum-shape fruits, as liqueur, chutney, jam, pie and straight from the tree.

Other local favourites include Portuguese red-bean soup, a spicy contribution of the Portuguese farmers who came in the 19th century. In Bermuda, comedian Bob Hope once quipped, “Every restaurant here has a smoking and non-smoking section. The smoking section’s for people eating the Portuguese red-bean soup.”

Savoury cassava pie dates to Bermuda’s earliest days. The cassava root, elsewhere known as yucca, was used by New World natives to make flour. The pie involves eggs, chicken, pork, sugar, nutmeg, mace and more — not exactly lean cuisine.

Try the traditional “peas and plenty,” black-eyed peas cooked with onions, salt pork and rice. Hoppin’ John is cowpeas, rice, and salt pork or bacon eaten as a main dish or side. Banana meatloaf is just like regular meatloaf, except with a sweet banana thing goin’ on.

The Bermudian version of sillabub, an indulgent dessert from the days of King Henry VIII, involves layers of the local guava jelly, plus thick cream and sherry.

ATMOSPHERE

Like the Brits, the Bermudians enjoy their pubs. A typical pub lunch might be fish and chips or shepherd’s pie, a pint (or two) of ale, and a rousing discussion of sports and politics.

Exemplars of the pub life include North Rock Brewing Co., in Smith’s Parish, with fine ales and stouts, local and international dishes, and a dining room trimmed in mahogany; and the Frog and Onion Pub, in Royal Naval Dockyard, with traditional and not-so-traditional pub pies, soups, salads and entrees, plus a good mix of locals and visitors. Other good pubs include Flanagan’s and Hog

Penny in Hamilton, White Horse in St. George's and the Swizzle South Shore in Warwick Parish.

Many casual-dining restaurants offer dishes with their own twist, like the lobster tail and Bermuda spinach drizzled in warm mango dressing at Rustico in Flatts Village. "Never had a bad meal since I started going there five years ago," says Elena Strong, who works at the Bermuda Maritime Museum, on the other end of the islands.

Bermuda cuisine means fine dining beachside — gazing over sparkling pink sands onto royal blue waters with the golden sunshine reflecting off the bright-white yachts. Such sea-sprayed settings become the highlights of many unforgettable vacations.

The only thing even *more* indulgent might be dining *aboard* that yacht, gazing *back* at the islands, accompanied by your most valued friends, family members or business associates, while attentive crew ensure you don't lift a finger except to sip your favourite cocktail.

Diners here may dress up more than in the States or the Caribbean. For fine dining, men wear a jacket, maybe a tie, and women wear a dress or skirt. At least khakis and a collar. Jeans, T-shirts and sneakers, however, fetch looks of disapproval.

Many places automatically add 15 or 17 percent to the bill as a gratuity. Beware of tipping again if you are not sure. Cigarettes are smoked outdoors.

BEST BETS

Here are some of our favourite places — pubs, ice cream shops, casual and fine restaurants, resorts, yachts, and nightclubs.

[Insert advertorial paragraphs.]