

[EB10SightsMain1.doc, Jeff Borg, 3,460 words]

Sightseeing

# Sea-to-Sea Sights

On these wondrous little islands, densely packed with old haunts, modern culture and natural beauty, visitors find more sights than anywhere else.

Go ahead, tempt the Bermuda Triangle. Although tourists do occasionally go missing around Royal Naval Dockyard, they always reappear — often laden with shopping bags.

Inspect the forts built over four centuries, see artefacts from the shipwreck that founded the colony, or climb the cast-iron lighthouse that still blazes a trail. Listen for blithe spirits in countless old houses, courts, and churches.

Bermuda is an island-wide architecture tour, with buildings dating to 1620, antiques coming from Europe and furnishings carved from local cedar. Music, art and literature blend their styles from Britain, Africa and the Americas. Bagpipers carry on Scottish traditions, and painters still get inspired by the light. Every hillside, coast and townscape is like a postcard.

Commune with Mother Nature on walking tours, in Victorian gardens or along decommissioned railway trails. Count the birds that fill the skies. Peer below the surface at aquariums, on boat tours, or strolling the sea bottom breathing in a helmet. Go underground for a stroll amongst the stalagmites.

Nothing beats a personal tour by your own guide who knows the stories and how to tell them. Walks and talks covering any angle of Bermuda are tailored to families, groups and individuals with particular interests. What could be easier than a professionally scheduled family day to make sure everybody has a good time? Ask about Tim Rogers, of Bermuda Lectures & Tours, or Kay Latter, from Byways Bermuda, two well-experienced guides on the islands.

An easy, relaxing way to see the sights is aboard a sunset cruise, favourite libation in hand, as the scenery floats by. Peek into the lavish estates of the rich and famous, charming colonial homes in pastel colours, even the classic landmarks, but from a new vantage point.

Or, see the sights down under — coral gardens, colourful fishes and shipwrecks — without even getting wet. Glass-bottom boat tours are as leisurely as they are fun. Cruises come with plenty of anecdotes about island personalities.

## **OLD HAUNTS**

Everybody knows the legend of the **Bermuda Triangle**, where ships and planes vanish without a trace. The northern tip of Bermuda's namesake enigma points to Clocktower Mall in Royal Naval Dockyard, but as far as we know, no hapless sightseers have ever been sucked in. The other two points are Miami and San Juan.

According to the National Geographic Society, the first documented encounter with the Bermuda Triangle was by Christopher Columbus, who witnessed mysterious lights and suffered compass malfunctions on his first voyage through it. The name entered the modern lexicon after a 1964 *Argosy* article.

The most infamous case was the 1945 disappearance of five bombers on a mission from Ft. Lauderdale, plus the search plane sent after it. In all, 27 men disappeared that day. Some connect the Bermuda Triangle to the disappearance of the USS Cyclops as far back as 1918, one of the great naval mysteries of all time.

Numerous theories have been proposed and discarded, including an electromagnetically induced fog that wreaks havoc on passing ships and planes. One John Hutchison claimed to have created this fog accidentally in his apartment.

As a matter of mundane fact, the Bermuda Triangle regularly experiences interesting weather, including thunderstorms, waterspouts, hurricanes and such, which can rise quickly and dispatch a ship or plane. The Gulf Stream, which runs through the triangle, can quickly clear any evidence. Modern satellite surveillance, unknown when the triangle was first hypothesized, has shown that rogue waves reaching 80 feet or higher occur with relative frequency. These waves can take down even a large ship. Finally, spatial disorientation is a well known factor in flying accidents.

So go ahead and visit Royal Naval Dockyard, tour the Bermuda Maritime Museum, do some shopping and don't worry about disappearing in any silly Bermuda Tri....

**Devil's Hole** was Bermuda's first bona fide tourist attraction. As the water rises and falls, eerie noises that emanate from the sinkhole near Harrington Sound spooked 19th-century tourists, who went away imagining they had heard the moans of Satan.

Speaking of Old Scratch (Beelzebub, Lucifer, Satan), in the 1600s he kicked up his hoofs as witchcraft mania washed across the islands. When you visit St. George's, stop by the **Old State House**, where Gov. Josiah Foster condemned Jeane Gardiner for practising black arts. Gardiner was drowned — after three attempts — and other witches were burned at the stake on Gibbet Island, near the disarmingly quaint Flatts Village.

Almost any cottage or house in Bermuda that dates back more than 100 years can harbour a (friendly) ghost. Several have a literary bent. Noel Coward reportedly wrote his famed play *Blithe Spirit* based on his Bermuda encounters with a

beautiful French ghost. Playwright Eugene O’Neill also reported “unusual events” whilst living in Spithead, a lovely old house built by 18th-century privateer Hezekiah Frith, on Harbour Road.

In St. George’s, the **Old Rectory**, now a bed and breakfast, welcomes a musical spirit rumoured to play an invisible harpsichord, and Camden, the official residence of Bermuda’s premier, is where some have spotted the ethereal former wife of a government official as she appeared to stroll the grounds on moonless nights.

Built around 1710 and especially interesting to students of American colonial history, the tercentennial **Verdmont** has had plenty of time to collect ghosts. An exemplar of Georgian architecture still in pristine condition, it was used as a private residence until opening as a National Trust museum in 1956. Virtually no structural changes were ever made. The former owners never even added electricity or plumbing. The house is renowned for its wonderful collection of antiques, including the pint-size furnishings and period toys that fill its upstairs nursery. An early-19th-century piano was imported from England, but many pieces are made of local cedar crafted by Bermudians. A fine china coffee service on display was supposed to be a gift from Napoléon to U.S. President James Madison, but was seized by a privateer and brought to Bermuda.

Equidistant from east and west, Devonshire Parish offers views deep into Bermudian history. On Middle Road, look for **Old Devonshire Church**. Its present foundation was laid in 1716, and its first incarnation dates back to 1624. An explosion on Easter 1970 fairly destroyed the tiny building, but it was reconstructed and now serves as a national icon. Also worth a look is **Palmetto House**, one of the few remaining examples of an early 18th-century cruciform home.

Train buffs should check out the **Bermuda Railway Museum**, in Hamilton Parish, with a nice collection of maps, photographs and memorabilia. It occupies a Bermuda Railroad station from the early 20th century, when trains rumbled

through the woodlands, over the cliffs, and past the pretty beaches and dunes. Sometimes called Old Rattle and Shake, the local train service only ran from 1931 to 1948. What's left of the line is now the Bermuda Railway Trail, a walking trail and bridle path divided into seven sections that each take about one-and-a-half to three hours to walk. Along the way, hikers enjoy the native flora, scenic views and warming sun.

In Paget Parish, **Waterville**, now headquarters of the Bermuda National Trust, dates to 1725. It was home for the Triminghams, whose descendants operated the biggest department stores in Bermuda for more than 150 years. Waterville's drawing and dining rooms are full of antiques, china and art. Gracing the well-tended grounds is a lovely Victorian rose garden. Bermudian guide Tim Rogers leads walking tours through the grounds, where visitors learn about traditional gardens and unusual plants, continuing on to the Paget Marsh preserve.

Now 400 years since the founding of the colony by the passengers and crew of the *Sea Venture*, stop at the **Bermuda Historical Society Museum**, on Queen Street in Hamilton, to see artefacts from the life of Adm. Sir George Somers, who led the settlers. The museum also houses an impressive collection of antique Bermudian silver and cedar furniture. Whilst on Queen Street, pop in at the **Perot Post Office**, headquarters of 19th-century Postmaster William B. Perot, who produced the first Bermudian postage stamp.

**Sessions House**, an 1815-era Georgian building with an impressive clock tower, is where the House of Assembly and Supreme Court meet. Visit the Parliament Street landmark Monday to Friday 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. In the downstairs court, Bermudian judges still wear wigs and red robes, carrying on a tradition that dates to the 17th century.

In Sandys Parish, **Scaur Hill Fort and Park** affords visitors majestic views of Great Sound and Ely's Harbour. The British Army built the fort from the 1860s to the 1880s to protect against feared American attacks. The park opens 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Designed in London and opened in 1846, the cast-iron **Gibb's Hill Lighthouse** still towers over Southampton Parish — 117 feet tall and 362 feet above sea level. The modern 1,000-watt lamp can be seen by ships 40 miles out and by planes 10,000 feet up. The 185 stairs to the top are cramped and gruelling, but the views of Bermuda are panoramic and well worth the effort.

After the American Revolution, Royal Naval Dockyard became the headquarters of the British Navy in the western North Atlantic. It now houses shops, cafés, recreation, attractions and the **Bermuda Maritime Museum**, located within Bermuda's largest fort, The Keep. Open 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., this museum is home to the territory's most extensive collection of maritime and other artefacts, and no student of military history should miss a chance to explore here. Curator Elena Strong says, "Best day out is definitely Bermuda Maritime Museum. Nowhere else can you find impressive historic military buildings, commanding views of the ocean, dolphin encounters and 500 years of Bermuda history, all in one place."

Immediately after Bermuda was settled, several forts were erected to defend against Spanish attack. Early sites were along the northeast coast and the south shore, where the barrier reef had gaps. Eventually, 90 forts would be built.

According to Dr. Edward Harris, director of the Bermuda Maritime Museum, all forts were constructed of stone, except one built of timber, which promptly burned in 1620. Seems that a new governor had visited the fort and received a salute from its guns. Anxious to go and greet the governor, the gunner neglected to put out his match. All watched in horror as the fort went up in smoke.

"Change came dramatically at the end of the American Revolution in 1783," writes Dr. Harris. Britain had lost all of its American harbours between the Canadian maritimes and the West Indian Islands, so Bermuda became the pivot of British naval strategy.

Massive forts arose along the vulnerable northeast coast. A great naval dockyard arose in the far west. Instead of defending against Spain, Bermudian forts defended against the United States — for a while. Then during World War II, a friendly invasion took place, as the American military assumed wartime responsibility for the defence of Bermuda.

For visitors interested in military history, Dr. Harris recommends three installations: **Fort St. Catherine**, which towers over the beach where the *Sea Venture* survivors washed ashore four centuries ago and includes a museum; **Fort Hamilton**, a 19th-century fort offering great views of Hamilton and its harbour; and **The Keep**, the largest fort in Bermuda, at Royal Naval Dockyard.

## **UNIQUE CULTURE**

After 400 years, this crossroads of culture has amassed quite a collection of music, art, architecture and literature, with elements from Britain, Africa and the Americas.

Traditional Scottish bagpipe music still rouses these islands, courtesy of the **Bermuda Islands Pipe Band**, wearing the Gordon tartan. “Scottish and Canadian highland regiments were posted to Bermuda, a heavily defended colony of Great Britain, and where the highlanders went, so did the bagpipers,” explains drummer Adrian Cook, whose day job is with the police.

The band performs a heavy schedule of public and private events. The Skirling Ceremony, a free 30-minute show with pipes, drums and a highland dancer, is performed at noon each Monday from November through March, at Fort Hamilton. The Beating of the Retreat ceremony, a tradition from the days of King James VII of Scotland, is performed twice a month from May through October — early in the month at the Clocktower in Royal Naval Dockyard or at Kings Square in the Town of St. George, then later in the month on Front Street in Hamilton — at 9 p.m.

“The Masterworks Foundation and **Masterworks Museum of Bermuda Art** are amongst the finest of the flowers thriving at the botanical gardens in Paget,” effuses Nicholas Lusher, prominent dealer of art and antiques. The museum concentrates on works inspired here.

Assistant director Elsie Outerbridge says that artists often praise the quality of Bermuda’s sunlight as it plays with the islands’ distinctive architecture. Besides Homer and O’Keefe, visiting artists have included Marsden Hartley, Albert Gleizes and Charles Demuth, whose works are amongst 1,200 in the museum’s growing collection. A Masterworks Artist in Residence Programme spotlights visiting artists through exhibitions and selling shows, of which there may be 20 in a year.

Form follows function on these remote islands, where the **distinctive architecture** — indigenous island materials in classic British styles modified to suit this unique environment — turns every hillside, coast and townscape into a postcard scene. Many consider architecture as Bermuda’s principal native art form. But it’s really about function; houses are low and boxy with shallow eaves to withstand high winds. They have gleaming white roofs and pastel-coloured walls to reflect the ubiquitous sun. High ceilings and large windows invite cooling sea breezes. Many fine examples of original Bermudian architecture are found in St. George’s, including the Old State House from around 1620, the Old Rectory from 1699 and the Globe Hotel from 1700. In Hamilton, Front Street is lined with 18th- and 19th-century facades, making it a prime position for pictures.

Learn more about Bermudian art, architecture, culture and history by perusing the shelves of the **Bermuda National Library**, in Hamilton. Amongst its collections are rare books and current periodicals from Bermuda and abroad.

## **NATURAL HIGHS**

For nature lovers, Bermuda has preserved several beaches, bays, ponds, parks, gardens, caves, forts, lighthouses, scenic overlooks, and hiking trails.

The Bermuda Railway only operated in the 1930s and 1940s, but it left a fabulous recreational resource, the **Bermuda Railway Trail**. Reopened in 1984 as a scenic pathway for walking and riding, the trail offers spectacular views, stunning seascapes, lush gardens and exotic flora. Quiet stretches amble through nearly every parish, but the best parts are from Paget west. Points of interest along the way include historic Fort Scaur, in Sandys. Sign up for a walking tour, or catch a bicycle tour to cover more territory, and get some colour commentary along with the beautiful scenery.

If you enjoy hiking, check out the four-mile walking trail from Dockyard to Somerset. The path crosses **Gilbert Nature Reserve** and passes the **Royal Naval Cemetery**, which dates to the 19th century. The hike allows ample opportunities to take dips in the ocean along the way and enjoy fabulous views of Great Sound.

A way to commune with nature whilst learning some history, flora and fauna is on **walking tours**. Bespoke tours can last from 90 minutes to four hours, cover just about any collection of interests, and serve groups up to 15 people. Professional guide Tim Rogers of Bermuda Lectures & Tours says, “My tours are all about painting pictures of the past to appreciate the present.” Popular routes include Dockyard, Hamilton, Hog Bay Park, Walsingham and Spittal Pond.

To join the locals for an informal six-or-seven-mile walk on a Sunday morning, fall in with the **Walking Club of Bermuda**. Luxuriate in the islands’ natural beauty, traversing the rolling hills, nestled valleys, and paths strewn with flowers. Find a schedule at [www.walk.free.bm](http://www.walk.free.bm). Bring your water bottle, sunscreen and walking shoes.

To see Bermuda as the early settlers did, pay a visit to **Paget Marsh**. The 25-acre preserve is a palmetto and cedar forest with distinctive mangroves. An elevated, wooden boardwalk takes you past the pond and its peat marsh. It also gives you an opportunity to see a wide array of wildlife and birds.

**The Botanical Gardens**, in Paget Parish, are simply magnificent. Species range from lush, subtropical foliage and ferns to cacti. Established in 1898 at Camden House, the garden is open without charge from dawn to dusk.

Orchid lovers should take time to explore **Firefly Nature** and **Freer Cox Memorial** reserves, in Devonshire, home to many animal species as well. **Blue Hole Park**, part of Hamilton Parish's **Walsingham Nature Reserve**, is known for its palm groves and a veritable carpet of elephant ears.

Like the humans, many species of birds migrate from North America to spend their winters in Bermuda, so birdwatchers flock to **Spittal Pond Nature Reserve**, on the south coast of Smith's Parish. The 34-acre reserve features trails and footpaths through wetlands and along the south shore. The woodland habitat hosts a great variety of resident, migratory and rare birds.

It is also where you find the oldest evidence of human activity on the island. Along the coastal path, look for Portuguese Rock — errantly called Spanish Rock prior to September 2009 — with the initials “RP” and the date “1543,” believed to be carved by a Portuguese sailor who had wrecked on the reefs 66 years before the first English settlers.

While the herons and egrets are roosting at Spittal, the great blue herons are found along Great Sound. Pied-billed grebes settle around many ponds, and double-crested cormorants fish the inshore waters. The National Audubon Society of the United States has held a Christmas Bird Count for over 100 years, and the **Bermuda Audubon Society**, established in 1954, has taken part since 1974, averaging 90 species per count, totalling 200. Grab the binoculars and look up.

Learn about the local briny deep by visiting Flatts Village. Built in 1926, its **Bermuda Aquarium, Museum & Zoo** is one of the oldest continuously operating aquariums in the New World. It features an intriguing look at Bermudian wildlife, especially native fishes, exotic reptiles, pink flamingos and a giant replica of a living local coral reef. Animals roam around at arm's length in a

vast flight cage. Bermuda's Turtle Project, sponsored by BAMZ and the Caribbean Conservation Corporation, is world-renowned.

If the aquarium whets your appetite, then sample the displays at the **Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute**, on the harbour east of Hamilton.

Sophisticated multimedia demonstrations teach about heretofore-unknown creatures. "The more information visitors have about the ocean environment, the more we are able to protect it," says Director Wendy Tucker, daughter of famed undersea archaeologist Teddy Tucker.

Go ahead and pet the friendly fish and explore other magnificent sea life at **Hartley's Under Sea Adventures**, near Somerset Village. Fun for the entire family, the shallow-water helmet diving is the safest undersea adventure yet devised, but everyone — even certified divers — finds the experience exhilarating.

On the spring migration of humpback whales, Bermudians can hear their complex songs as they pass offshore. People share breathless tales of **whale-watching** encounters by land and sea. They find friends who own boats or join party-boat whale tours. Few activities inspire more awe than witnessing the whales frolicking, which peaks in April.

"At this time of year," allows local environmentalist Jennifer Gray, "I can often be found perched on a warm cliff top on the south shore, with binoculars in hand, hoping to catch a glimpse of these creatures as they cruise down the coastline." Sometimes the whales breach and play. Sometimes the only sign is an occasional fountain of mist erupting from a blow hole. Learn more about local whales at BAMZ, in Flatts Village.

Don't want to get wet? Need a break from the sun? Then go underground. The limestone that capped the islands' volcanic origins left them crisscrossed with caves and caverns. Each of the 150 caves found under the islands has its own impressive display of stalactite and stalagmite formations.

Two great places to learn about underground Bermuda are **Crystal Caves** and **Fantasy Caves**, at Bailey's Bay in Hamilton Parish. Crystal Caves opened in 1908 and is one of the largest cave systems here. "The delicacy of the formations and the quantity of formations make them world-renowned," says Dave Summers, president of Crystal & Fantasy Caves and active in the International Show Caves Association. In Fantasy Cave, startling white crystal formations are viewed from a walkway floating above the lakes. The foremost decorations are huge formations that give the appearance of orange chandeliers.

Other caves accessible to the public are **Prospero's Cave** and **Cathedral Cave**, beneath Grotto Bay Beach Resort in Hamilton Parish. They organise regular "cave crawls" for interested guests. Prospero's beautiful underground lake alone is worth the visit.

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