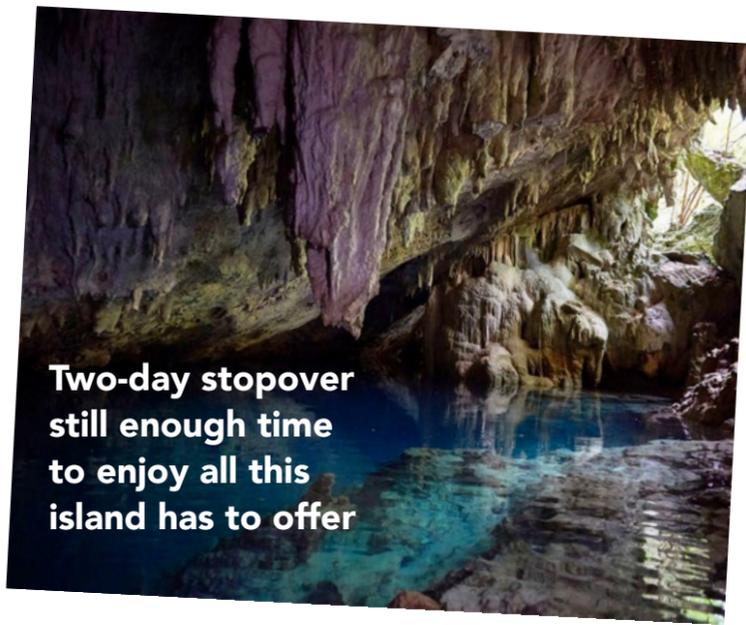


Cruising Around Bermuda

Horseshoe Beach is one of the most beautiful stretches of sand in the world. Thanks to Bermuda's local transit system, it's an easy access from where cruise ships and their passengers dock.



Two-day stopover still enough time to enjoy all this island has to offer

Legendary beaches, iconic Crystal Caves, right, and the warm hospitality of Bermudians is what awaits cruise passengers when they step off their ship.

ST. GEORGE, BERMUDA — Confession: I'm not a one-port cruiser. Type A by nature, I prefer cruises that pack the schedule with almost-daily port calls and little downtime on the ship. Yet I change my tune on a recent six-day cruise to Bermuda, only two days of which are on the former British colony.

While you can certainly fly to Bermuda in about two hours from the East Coast, cruising offers unique advantages, namely that it's a more cost-effective option. Bermuda isn't a cheap destination, and if you stay on the island, accommodations and meals can quickly add up. Even transportation can pose an issue, as visitors can't rent cars. There is public transportation via taxis and busses, and of course, Bermuda's quintessential scooters. Yet a word to the wise: Not only are the roads narrow and winding, you're also driving on the left side, which can be disconcerting enough in a car. One wrong move in a scooter could land you in the hospital (which I understand from a first-hand account, aka my mother who had a minor crash on her scooter there, is very nice).

Suffice to say then that cruising to Bermuda may be the perfect option, as it offers a good balance between

land and sea. Another bonus? It works well if you're taking a multi-generational trip. The key, of course, is finding the right ship. My nine-member family, with ages ranging from 6 to 76, makes the right call in choosing Royal Caribbean's Anthem of the Seas, a large, family-friendly vessel that offers plenty for all of us.

But here's the real question: Can you really see Bermuda, which will host the America's Cup yacht race in May 2017, in two days? You bet. Follow my lead:

DAY 1

Most ships dock at King's Wharf at the Royal Naval Dockyard, an early 19th-century fortress called the "Gibraltar of the West" as it was once Britain's largest naval base outside the United Kingdom. Decide first how you want to get around the island, whether by taxi or public transportation. If you choose the latter, you can buy one- or two-day passes to access the cute pink bus and ferry system. We choose a taxi to take us to Horseshoe Bay Beach, Bermuda's most famous pink sand beach, its colour derived from crushed shells and coral. We spend the 30-minute journey chatting with our driver, a local who's only too happy to share island information.

Be warned, though: Horseshoe Bay is Bermuda's most popular — it's frequently voted one of the world's best beaches — so expect crowds. You can rent chairs and umbrellas, and there is an eatery that serves fare like hamburgers and fishcakes on a Bermuda bun. If you do grab grub at the shack, eat it on site before heading back to the beach, which can be windy. We learn the hard way that flying sand redefines what a sandwich truly is.

The crescent-shaped Horseshoe Bay Beach, bookended by rock formations, is perfect for walking and can be a great spot to log a sweat. But don't let your feet stop there. To the left of the beach as you're looking at the Atlantic Ocean lies the start of a sandy trail — Horseshoe Bay is part of a nature reserve called South Shore Park — that winds past dunes and limestone cliffs, even numerous secluded coves like Jobson's Cove. I walk past that to Warwick Long Bay, another beautiful long stretch of beach that's less crowded than Horseshoe Bay, where I perch on the rocks to meditate.

While most folks are happy to spend the day at the beach, I'm anxious to explore the Dockyard area and have no trouble catching a bus at the entrance of the beach. Once at the Dockyard, I wander through the Bermuda Craft Market, a glassworks studio, the National Museum of Bermuda, even the Rum Cake Co. But for this cerevisaphile, the Frog & Onion Pub is my favourite find. Bermuda has only one microbrewery, Dockyard Brewing, which has paired with this pub, and it's worth belling up to the quaint bar to try its beers, which includes five year-rounds and one seasonal. (The Trunk Island Pale Ale earns my vote, by the way.)

DAY 2

I'm leaving the beaches behind and setting out on my own island jaunt today, first catching a ferry from King's Wharf to St. George, a UNESCO World Heritage site which was Bermuda's capital for 200 years. The 45-minute ride provides scenic views of parts of the island I wouldn't have otherwise seen. If, by the way, you happen to arrive at the right time, you can watch a free re-enactment of the ducking stool, once a form of public punishment. Another highlight is St. Peter's, an Anglican church built in 1612.

From there, I hop a bus to Crystal Caves. It's a not-to-miss attraction, one that takes you into Bermuda's underground world. There are two caves, and the first was discovered in 1907 by two boys who lost a ball down a hole. When they went to recover it, they unearthed an incredible world of stalactites and stalagmites.



St. George's, top photo, the main street in Hamilton, above left, and Bermuda's landmark churches, like St. Peter's, are all easily reached from the cruise ship terminal at the Royal Naval Dockyard.

Later, their neighbour found a second cave, now called Fantasy Cave, and today, you can explore either one or both.

While they both deserve attention, Crystal Cave is the highlight. Not only is it bigger, there's also a floating walkway that takes you across water that's 15 metres deep in spots and so clear you can see to the bottom. (A quick aside: Both caves do have about 90 steps at the beginning that you'll have to climb down and then up). Just don't worry when you feel a little water drip on your head or shoulder. What you've gotten is a cave kiss, my guide says. There are lights in cave, by the way, and the temperature is surprisingly comfortable.

Of course, no trip to Bermuda is complete without visiting the Swizzle Inn, a beloved pub and restaurant that's been in operation since 1932 and serves the famous rum swizzle, an island specialty made of several different types of rum; orange, lemon and pineapple juices; a local sweet syrup called falernum and several "secret" ingredients. Fortunately, it's located across the street from Crystal Caves, making it an easy jaunt by foot.

If you have a few in your party, order a jug of rum swizzle and be sure to try the Bermuda fish chowder, another island icon that's served with sherry pepper sauce and Goslings black rum. Every restaurant has a slightly different recipe, and they all compete to be the best, but if you're a fish lover, you can't go wrong with any of them.

I have one more stop to make before having to board the ship. It requires another bus ride — I catch it right outside the Swizzle Inn — this time to Hamilton, Bermuda's capital since 1815. Here, you can shop to your heart's content, perhaps even purchasing a real pair of Bermuda shorts (yes, they really do exist).

From Hamilton, it's a 20-minute ferry ride back to King's Wharf. I'm tempted to grab another pint at the Frog & Onion, but the ship is calling, and I don't dare be late. I fear, after all, the captain will send me to the ducking stool. ■

STORY BY KAREN ASP / PHOTOS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

Japan Grows Up

STORY & PHOTOS
BY DENNIS CHU

CEREMONY CELEBRATES IMPORTANT MILESTONES

TOKYO — Each year, on the Saturday closest to November 15, children aged 3, 5 and 7 all across Japan dress up in traditional garments — kimonos for the girls and hakama for the boys — and are taken by their parents and grandparents to shrines to participate in an ancient ceremony called Shichigosan.



The smallest of the children look especially cute in their traditional clothes.



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