

Island Golf: Bermuda's 'Stormy' Seas

Solid play and tasty swigs put this East Coast fave a world apart

Getaways • Tom Mackin • 07/10/11

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The nights were dark and storm during my first visit to the island of Bermuda. Same goes for late afternoons. And around lunch time too. But the weather was great and the golf was good. Confused? You won't be once you go to Bermuda, where the national drink is the Dark 'n' Stormy, a delicious concoction of Gosling's Black Seal rum and ginger beer over ice.

Even if that's not your taste, Bermuda should be. Just under a two-hour flight from most East Coast cities, this favorite tax haven of the rich and famous is an underlooked golf destination too. It's a perfect long weekend trip — more geared toward couples than a buddy trip — but there's enough variety to keep both audiences happy.

The most well-known layout on the island is the private Mid Ocean Club, a golf architecture delight, created by Charles Blair Macdonald in 1921 and renovated by American Tom Doak in recent years. Work any and all connections to get on this gem. Or you can get playing privileges by staying at nearby Tucker's Point, a luxury hotel with a course of its own worth checking out.

The par-3 course in the shadow of the towering and classy Fairmont Southampton is better than most full-sized layouts back home. Downhill tee shots, uphill approaches, carries over water — it's all there, topped off by slick greens (the back-nine putting surfaces are always quicker since they are higher up on the property) and it's a blast to play. The nearby Riddell's Bay Golf & Country Club is private but can be played by Fairmont guests. Do it because the course is both scenic and strategic.

The big names — well, at least four of them — will tee it up at Port Royal this October for the PGA Tour Grand Slam event. The quartet of major winners (Ernie Els won here last year) will take on a windswept par-71 design that is mostly wide open. Stellar holes include the par-5 No. 7 and the dazzling par-3 No. 16, located along a cliff overlooking the colorful Atlantic Ocean.

No matter your scores, the relaxed vibe of this island with approximately 67,000 residents will get you in the right mood quickly. The pink sand beaches, Bermuda shorts and limestone white roofs are all there. Even the honking of horns (locals traditionally beep to acknowledge family, friends and work colleagues who come into view while driving) lacks the annoyance factor found in cities back home. Taxis are everywhere (no rental cars here), and like any island, prices for transportation, food and pretty much everything are not cheap.

Most visitors to this island stop at the famed Swizzle Inn, located on the road to the international airport. Good fish sandwiches, extremely casual ambiance and walls full of photos, business cards and names scratched in wood over multiple decades make it a must visit. The Rum Swizzle is not too shabby there, either. But next time I head to Bermuda, I hope it gets dark and stormy real fast.

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