



ONE UNIQUE ISLAND, TWO DISTINCT STYLES

BERMUDA

by BILL CITARA

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The morning sun lights the cabin as if from within. The pale gray walls and canvas-covered ceiling slowly suffuse into a silvery glow as the soft pounding of the incoming tide gradually awakens sleep-dulled senses. You shrug off the covers, slip into a thick terry-cloth robe, and step out onto your own private deck.

It could be the end of the earth, or it might well be the beginning. There's nothing but water as far as the eye can see — water so blue it's startling, so brilliant it almost hurts to look at it, so clear it's like glass melted down and poured over the ocean floor. Here and there are patches of other colors: vivid purples and pastel greens and subtle shades of blue that could have come from an artist's palette.

Morning at 9 Beaches is almost beatific in its natural beauty. Located on the western end of the island of Bermuda, the resort comprises 18 acres of pastoral meadows, shorefront, and yes, 9 small but inviting pink-sand beaches with 84 private "cabanas" built of hi-tech fabric stretched over aluminum frames. These soft-sided cabins feature colorful furniture, portable AC/heater, ceiling fan, refrigerator, deck, and spectacular ocean views. A handful are perched high on stilts over the water and are connected by long fingers of boardwalk. Acrylic glass windows in the floors of these cabins reveal exotic parrotfish, snapper, moray eels, and even the occasional sea turtle in the crystalline depths below. There are no televisions, but guests are given a cell phone they can use for free local calls — particularly handy if you'd like food or drinks delivered to your cabana or the beach.



The area now home to 9 Beaches began its life as a national park, then became a wireless station for the British Royal Navy in World War II. From the mid-1960s until 1993 it was a Canadian military base; in 2000 it was reborn as an eco-resort, which lasted only two years before closing. The site lay vacant until reopening as 9 Beaches in 2005.

Be forewarned, however: 9 Beaches is not the Bermuda of immaculately manicured golf courses, 4-star hotels, 24-hour room service, and restaurants serving elegantly prepared haute cuisine. The rooms are small, and rainy weather combined with tidal spray and ground seepage can sometimes make them damp. Bathrooms offer minimal space and privacy, and the portable AC/heaters labor valiantly (and with marginal success) against extremes of heat and cold.

But 9 Beaches doesn't pretend to recreate the ultra-refined (some might say stuffy) atmosphere of traditionally conservative Bermuda. The motto is "flip-flops required" — and even those are barely necessary. What is necessary is a swimsuit, shorts, T-shirts, sunscreen, and a fondness for playing in the water. You can rent a jet ski from a vendor down by Dark 'n Stormy's, the resort's waterfront tiki bar, but somehow tearing across the pristine seascape on the aquatic version of a Harley seems akin to ordering a blood-rare steak at a convention of vegetarians. Much more appropriate are one-and two-person kayaks, some with glass bottoms, that require only modest effort to propel around the shoreline and put nary a dent in the resort's peaceful atmosphere.

There are also pedal boats, Hobie Cats, and inflatable rafts for some serious lounging, but nothing brings the beauty and diversity of Bermuda's marine life up close and personal like a snorkel, a mask, and a set of fins. A leisurely swim off any of the resort's beaches provides an extraordinary peek at the island's natural environment, perhaps to be celebrated at Dark 'n Stormy's with — what else? — a Dark 'n Stormy, a potent combination of ginger beer and Gosling's Black Seal Rum that's often hailed as Bermuda's national drink.

Though 9 Beaches has the feel of a summer camp for adults, it offers the amenities you'd expect to find at a traditional resort: a restaurant (with a surprisingly sophisticated wine list), a swimming pool, a fitness room, tennis courts, an indoor bar (open even when Dark 'n Stormy's is closed in the off-season), and a pair of computers in the main lobby for use by guests.



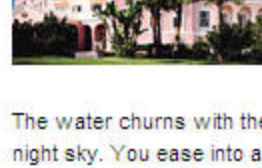
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Convenient entertainment options away from 9 Beaches, on the other hand, are fairly limited. With its market, shops, and restaurants, the town of Somerset is a long walk or a short bike (or scooter) ride away. (Bikes and scooters are available for rental at the resort, and some packages include their use.) A quick trip on the resort's shuttle (\$5 per person, one way) takes you to the Dockyard, a former British Navy outpost that now serves as a cruise-ship port and tourist attraction. Here you'll find a convenience store, boutiques, the popular Frog and Onion Pub, the Bermuda Maritime Museum and Dolphin Quest (you can go for a swim with the dolphins), and Dockyard Glassworks, where onlookers watch artisans shape blobs of molten glass into brilliantly colorful pieces.

Or you can kick off your flip-flops and wiggle your toes in the sand. 9 Beaches is that kind of place.

IN HAMILTON

- Fairmont Hamilton Princess**
76 Pitts Bay Rd. 866.540.4447 fairmont.com
- A.S. Cooper & Sons, Ltd.**
59 Front St. 441.295.3961 coopersbermuda.com
- Kirk's Jewelry**
67 Front St. 441.296.9428
- Gosling's**
Front and Queen streets 441.295.1123
- Chatham House**
63 Front Street 441.292.8422
- Hog Penny Restaurant & Pub**
5 Burnaby Hill 441.292.2534 hogpennypub.com
- Fresco's Restaurant & Wine Bar**
2 Chancery Lane 441.295.5058 bermuda.com/frescos/main.htm
- Waterloo House**
100 Pitts Bay Rd. 800.468.4100 waterloohouse.com



The evening sun sinks slowly beneath the horizon, dragging the burnished golden complexion of the day with it. In the harbor, the bobbing bums — from modest pleasure craft to palatial mansions of the sea — disappear into the dusk. White-painted homes studding the hills beyond the water are replaced by pinpoints of bright light, an earthbound starscape.

The water churns with the final departure of the local ferry, the laughter and noisy conversations of its passengers rising into the night sky. You ease into a big Adirondack chair at the edge of the seawall that overlooks the harbor and sip a Cuba Libre from the outdoor bar. The tiny red dot of a fat Montecristo purchased from a nearby cigar shop joins the panoply of lights across the way. This is a pretty special place to be, and you can't help but thinking that you must do it again tomorrow.

At the Fairmont Hamilton Princess, the grand dame of Bermuda hotels, the lap of luxury is as easy to sink into as it is difficult to relinquish. Built in 1885, the hotel is named for Princess Louise, the fourth daughter of Queen Victoria and wife of the Governor General of Canada; Louise made repeated visits to the island, reportedly to escape both the bitter winters in Canada and her husband. There may be more opulent and expensive hotels in Bermuda — hotels with ample beachfronts and superior facilities and picture-perfect golf courses — but none convey quite the same sense of grandeur as the massive pink Princess, which spreads out along Hamilton Harbor just a few blocks from the city's downtown.

The Princess is the epitome of old Bermuda: gentlemen in neatly pressed shorts (Bermuda, of course) with proper blazer and regimental tie, the cordial greetings and air of quiet reserve of the residents, the relaxed pace of traffic, even downtown. If 9 Beaches is a high-revving dune buggy, this is a buffed and polished Bentley. Inside, the 122-year-old hotel is equally grand, the recipient of a \$30 million makeover. Off the elegant main lobby, clad in gleaming earth-toned marble, is a cozy sitting area replete with fireplace, grand piano, antique furniture, and over-stuffed leather chairs. This area gives way to the Heritage Court lounge, where time slows to a crawl as you relax at the bar with a well-made martini.



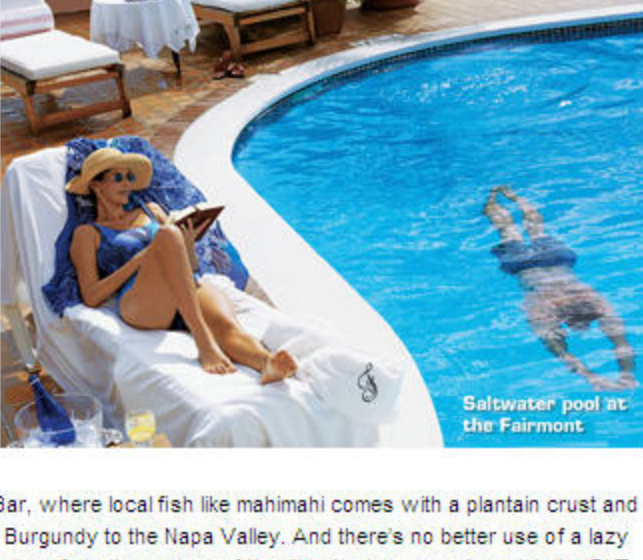
High tea speaks to Bermuda's genteel and civilized British heritage. A selection of 14 teas is offered, brewed in British silver tea sets and served in fine Belgian china.

But perhaps nothing speaks to Bermuda's genteel, civilized British heritage as much as its high tea, considered one of the finest this side of Albion. The best place to take this afternoon delight is just beyond the Court proper, at one of several low tables surrounded by plush leather chairs against a wall of glass, where you'll have a view of the lushly landscaped koi pond. A selection of 14 teas is offered, brewed in British silver tea sets and served in cups of fine Belgian china on flawless Italian linen tablecloths. A three-tiered tray arrives, bearing an array of delicacies that change with the season — perhaps finger sandwiches of Parma prosciutto and cantaloupe with chive-champagne butter, a tapenade of cucumber and sun-dried tomato on tiny Bermuda onion rolls, or flaky pear-amanidine tart. And these are always accompanied by what must undoubtedly be the lightest, most delectable scones served on the planet.

After that, it's time for a nap, or maybe a swim in one of the two pools (one heated freshwater, the other unheated saltwater). Though the hotel occupies a lengthy stretch of waterfront, it has no beach, so you must take the ferry to its sister property, the Fairmont Southampton, to get your ration of sun and sand. Also at the Southampton are tennis courts and a 2,684-yard par-three golf course, available to all Fairmont guests.

For those who prefer less strenuous activities in an indoor setting, shopping and dining opportunities are plentiful in Hamilton. Art, fine china, cashmere, perfume, cigars, jewelry, and antiques are abundant in the tiny city's upscale shops. A.S. Cooper & Sons is Bermuda's oldest retailer of china and glassware; Kirk's Jewelry is a tiny bastion of tasteful, elegant pieces. For a bottle of Bermuda's renowned Black Seal Rum, make a stop at Gosling's at Front and Queen streets. And cigar aficionados will want to plan an extended visit to Chatham House and peruse its impressive selection of Cuban brands.

Meal shopping in Bermuda are expensive, but there are many establishments where you can get a casual and (relatively) affordable meal. Hog Penny Restaurant & Pub is one of Hamilton's best-known dining spots, a good place for a pint of beer, fish'n chips, and the island's signature fish chowder, traditionally finished with a splash of rum (Gosling's Black Seal, naturally) and sherry peppers.



More adventurous fare is found at Fresco's Restaurant & Wine Bar, where local fish like mahimahi come with a plantain use of lime-tomato mojo and the wine list includes offerings hailing from Burgundy to the Napa Valley. And there's no better use of a lazy summer day than to lunch on the patio at Waterloo House, only inches from the waters of Hamilton Harbor, savoring a lobster BLT with a glass of crisp Sauvignon Blanc — and resting secure in the knowledge that yet another spectacular Bermudan sunset will soon be yours.

HOW TO GET THERE
US Airways flies nonstop from Philadelphia to Bermuda daily, and from Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C., three times a week.

HOW TO GET AROUND
Tourists aren't permitted to rent cars, so your transportation choices are limited to cabs, motor scooters, and public transportation. Cabs are pricey: The fare from Bermuda International Airport to 9 Beaches runs at least \$50. Scooter rentals are cheaper but demand a certain level of bravery and expertise. Buses and ferries are the least expensive modes of travel. Go to gov.bm and click "Transport" to find out more.

- AT 9 BEACHES**
- 9 Beaches**
4 Danie's Head Lane 866.841.90099 beaches.com
- Bermuda Maritime Museum and Dolphin Quest**
15 Maritime Lane Royal Navy Dockyard 441.234.1418 bmm.bm 800.248.3316 dolphinquest.org
- The Frog and Onion Pub**
1 Maritime Lane Royal Navy Dockyard 441.234.2900 frogandonion.bm
- Dockyard Glassworks**
19 Maritime Lane Royal Navy Dockyard 441.234.4216 dockglass.com

Bill Citara is a restaurant critic for the *Miami New Times*. Prior to moving to Florida, he was the wine critic for the *San Francisco Examiner*.

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