

Bermuda: Think Pink!

by Joy Gray, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Think pink! The pink sand beaches of Bermuda, that is. There's a lot to love about Bermuda, especially if you are traveling from the east coast of the United States and/or traveling with kids. For starters, it is one of the safest and cleanest islands you can visit, with a notable lack of the pushy street vendors that populate the Caribbean ports of call. It is nearby, a mere two-hour flight from several major Eastern U.S. cities.

You can easily get to Bermuda by cruise ship departing from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, or Charleston. Even if you are a veteran cruiser, a Bermuda cruise is a totally different experience. You get the benefits of a cruise ship, coupled with access to land for up to four straight days. Cruising to Bermuda can be a bargain when compared to the cost of airfare, lodging and meals for a land vacation.

I cruised to Bermuda recently with my 70 year-old mother and seven year-old daughter. We toured the island extensively on our own, and never felt at all uncomfortable or unsafe. We sailed in April on the Celebrity Zenith - an older, smaller ship that departs from Cape Liberty Cruise Terminal in Bayonne, NJ. Despite her small size, we found plenty to amuse all three of us while onboard. I was particularly impressed by the wide variety of family-friendly activities offered. We enjoyed trivia contests, family bingo, some great Broadway-style shows, and the hot tubs that are beautifully located at the rear of the ship. There were more than 200 children onboard the ship the week we sailed, and Celebrity ran a full youth program on both land and sea days. Some of the activities for the Cadets (ages 7-9) included arts and crafts activities, science journeys, pirate day, stargazing, and a dinosaur night. They had a delightful Junior Cruisers talent show at the end of the week that included group performances choreographed by program counselors, so everyone who wanted to could participate. My daughter, a frequent cruiser herself on lines including the Disney Cruise Line, gave the Celebrity youth program a thumbs-up rating.

With the unpredictable April weather the pools didn't get a lot of use, but they would be a welcome relief from the heat for summer travel. If you are considering a Bermuda cruise, keep in mind that the North Atlantic waters are not quite as smooth as the Caribbean -- you may be in for a bit of a rough ride, particularly during early and late season sailings (generally April and October). The first leg of our trip from New Jersey to Bermuda had some rough seas but our return was extremely smooth sailing.

Once in Bermuda, most ships dock for three or four days. The Zenith docks first in Hamilton, which is ideal -- centrally located with lots of shopping nearby. We purchased three-day transportation passes that allowed us unlimited travel on Bermuda's excellent bus and ferry services. While the passes probably didn't save us any money, they certainly were convenient, as we didn't have to worry about having correct change. Bermuda has its own form of currency, the Bermuda dollar. It is that same rate and system as the American dollar, i.e. one U.S. dollar is equal to one Bermuda dollar, and there are 100 cents in a dollar. Both American and Bermuda dollars are accepted on the island.

Family-friendly activities are easy to find in Bermuda. With miles and miles of beaches to choose from, you can't go wrong with spending a day at the beach. Be sure to bring along water shoes and sand toys for the kids, and lots of sunscreen! Also be sure to identify which beaches are safe for swimming and which are not. Some of the most scenic and popular beaches, like Horseshoe Bay Beach, can have strong undercurrents. We preferred Tobacco Beach and Shelly Bay for wading and swimming, even though they are not as scenic as Horseshoe Bay.

We also thoroughly enjoyed the Bermuda Aquarium Museum and Zoo. It is easy to spend an entire day here enjoying the living coral reef in the 140,000-gallon aquarium, visiting with animals ranging from kangaroos to Galapagos Tortoises, and exploring the well designed children's playground. Add to that a touch pool and a children's discovery area where kids can dress up as a bee or a butterfly, and your family may not want to leave at closing.

Another popular attraction is the Bermuda Maritime Museum at the Royal Naval dockyards. You can enjoy incredible views and displays that are both historic and yet appealing enough to keep the kids engaged. This is also the home of Dolphin Quest Bermuda, where you can enjoy Dolphin encounters for ages three and up. My daughter, who is a strong swimmer, was a bit intimidated by being in the water with the dolphins -- you may prefer the shorter dockside 'fins and flipper' encounter as it allows kids to interact with these fascinating animals without being in the water with them. It's also easier on the wallet!

If you and your kids still have some energy to burn after visiting these attractions, then head on over to Crystal Caves. This is a great 'starter cave' for younger explorers as it is smaller and does not require climbing quite as many steps as some of the larger caves here in the U.S. You will still be rewarded with fabulous crystal stalactites and stalagmites and an underground river, but you'll only have to climb about 100 steps!

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After two full days in Hamilton, the Zenith moves to St. George. St. George is full of historic buildings and narrow streets, and has to be accessed through a very narrow channel. It is far more scenic than Hamilton, but not as convenient for exploring the island. Not far at all from the town of St. George is Fort St. Catherine, with another museum and a great view of Tobacco Beach. Note that none of the bus routes travel out to the Fort, so your best bet may be to take a taxi to the Fort and walk from there to the beach.

If you travel in the warmer summer months, you may wish to explore underwater Bermuda. Even though Bermuda is not particularly well-known as a dive location, it is a great place to learn to dive. Thanks to numerous shipwrecks and a couple of nice coral reefs, there is plenty to see underwater. For those who are not eager to try diving but would like an underwater experience, there is Hartley's Undersea Walk. I can hardly wait to return to Bermuda so I can try this out - and I've about got my daughter convinced to do it!

The one thing you won't find on Bermuda is a casino, and while cruise ships are in port they are required to keep their casinos closed, so this is not the place for serious gamblers. Bermuda's nightlife also tends to be a bit subdued. Cruise ships are allowed to have live performances onboard while in port, so we never found ourselves lacking for evening entertainment. All in all, Bermuda is a delightful, friendly island -- I'm ready to go again!

About The Author: Joy Gray is a travel agent affiliated with CruisingCo.com and MouseEarVacations.com. She resides in NH with her husband Kevin Brey and their daughter Sydney. She is busy planning a tenth anniversary cruise to Alaska, where she and her husband were married atop a mountain in 1997.

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