



Martell Regis from Coots



For over 400 years the archipelago of Bermuda has played a major role in the development of the Western hemisphere.

Since its discovery in 1505, when a Spanish galleon returning from the Caribbean to Spain anchored off its shore - allowing Bermuda to be plotted on some of the earliest maps of the Western Atlantic - the island has played a remarkably strategic role in global geopolitics.

From the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia and the early days of the New World, through the American War of Independence and the Civil War, to both World Wars, Bermuda has consistently held a place of importance in shaping the course of history.

The name “Bermuda” is derived from the Captain of the Spanish Galleon, Juan de Bermudez. While he did not set foot on the island, nonetheless he is recognized as the first person to discover Bermuda.



Bermuda:

From Shipwreck to Thriving Crown Colony to Visitor’s Paradise

By Bill Storie and Robin Trimmingham



In 1543, a Portuguese Galleon on a similar voyage back to Portugal from the Caribbean, did manage to drop anchor and come ashore, thus becoming the “first feet” on the island - there were no indigenous people on the island at the outset.

A Shipwreck Changed Everything

The substantive discovery of Bermuda occurred in 1609 when a ship called the *Sea Venture* ran aground on the coral reef just off the eastern end of the island.

In those days, Jamestown, Virginia was a British Colony having been settled by English explorers seeking new land and new investment opportunity in the western hemisphere. They arrived in Jamestown in 1606 - but due to a number of obstacles - such as a mosquito-ridden area of land around the settlement, plus ongoing conflict with the Powhatan Indians - the settlers quickly found out that life in the Colonies was less than ideal.

So much so that a fleet of nine ships were sent from England in 1609 to bring supplies to relieve the horrible conditions of Jamestown - which included significant and serious levels of famine, disease and death.

Of the nine ships that set sail, four made it to Jamestown without delay, two ships made it a while later, two floundered in the open sea and one - the *Sea Venture* was blown off course by a severe hurricane and grounded on the coral reef surrounding the island of Bermuda.



Sir George Somers Monument



Sea Venture Replica

All 150 souls on board, including the Admiral of the Fleet, Sir George Somers KT., (Knighted in 1603, by King James VI of Scotland/King James I of England – son of Mary Queen of Scots -- and Captain Thomas Gates (who was intended to be the Governor of Virginia) survived and came ashore on a large beach which still provides pleasure to residents and tourists to this day. It is called Discovery Bay - located immediately in front of one of the latest additions to the hotels collection of Bermuda - the St. Regis - in the St. George's area at the Eastern end of Bermuda.

Sir George and Thomas Gates were determined to get to Virginia so, they arranged for the construction of two smaller ships on the island to sail to Jamestown - the *Deliverance* and the *Patience* using the remaining wood, sails and ropes of the *Sea Venture* plus an abundance of cedar trees on the island.

All but three of the Sea Venture crew and passengers successfully sailed to Jamestown some ten months later.

The remarkable story of the wreck of the Sea Venture and the subsequent onward sailing to Jamestown, made it back to London where William Shakespeare wrote his last play called *The Tempest* - first performed in London in front of Royalty in November 1610.

Sir George Somers went back to Bermuda for more supplies of fruit, timber etc., but died on the island soon thereafter, in 1610. His heart was buried in Bermuda while his remains were shipped back to Dorset, England for his family to claim his (substantial) inheritance.

Visiting the Original Capital of Bermuda

St. George's (today a UNESCO World Heritage Site) was incorporated as the Capital of Bermuda in 1612 - until 1815 - when the Capital moved to the City of Hamilton (still to this day).

Stepping into St. George's, Bermuda, feels like stepping back in time - 400 years to be precise.

A simple and pleasant walk in St. George's, begins in the heart of it all, the Town Square where the **Towne Hall** stands - an elegant and stately building built in the 1870s acting as the centerpiece of the town also called King's Square after King George III - the "cause célèbre" of the American War of Independence.

Slightly behind the Town Hall, up a slight incline is the **Old State House** - not only the oldest stone building in Bermuda but also the oldest English Colonial building in the Western Hemisphere! Thus was the site of the first Parliament of Bermuda from 1620 to 1815 when the Capital of Bermuda moved to the city of Hamilton.

The building was designed by then-Governor Nathaniel Butler in an Italian style. He mistakenly believed Bermuda was on the same latitude as Italy and thus believed the climate would be the same as Italy. Regrettably that was not the case - Bermuda is prone to hurricanes, which has always caused rainwater to pour through the roof.

The seat of the Bermuda Government remained in the State House until 1815 when the capital of Bermuda moved to Hamilton - an almost 200-year period.



Town Hall



Old State House

The Peppercorn Ceremony

When the Capital moved to Hamilton, a decision had to be made as to what to do with the State House. It was solved by the gifting of the building to a Scottish Masonic Lodge (No. 200 on the Roll of the Grand Lodge of Scotland). The Lodge was formed in 1797 and is the oldest still-working Scottish Masonic Lodge outside of Scotland.

The building was given in perpetuity and has an Annual Rent of one Peppercorn (which was a highly valuable and desirable commodity in those days).

Ever since, the **Annual Peppercorn Ceremony** is held in St. George's - when the Government, Royal Bermuda Regiment, including their Bagpipe Band, VIPs and general public congregate in the Town Square. Then the Governor arrives by horse-drawn carriage to "Demand" payment of the Annual Rent for the State House for the year. It is one of the many highlights of the Bermuda year and has been held every year since 1815. To this day.

A short stroll leads over to the serene beauty of Somers Garden also dating back to the formation of the town in 1612. Enjoy the majestic Royal Palms, mainly imported from the Caribbean. The Garden is full of greenery, much of which was brought into Bermuda by sea-faring captains from the island who travelled the oceans of the world from its earliest days. A quiet and peaceful haven to relax and reflect.



Somers Garden

Alley Wanderings

Wandering out the far end of the Garden into **Blockade Alley** - a recognition of the part Bermuda played in the American Civil War. Looking along the alley is another intriguing sign - **Shinbone Alley** - a reference to the problems experienced by soldiers in the early days who probably had had an abundance of alcohol, and thus, struggled to get back to their barracks nearby, albeit crawling - with resultant damage to their shinbones.

Around the corner stands **Mitchell House**, located on the corner of Featherbed Alley and Duke of Kent Street, one of the oldest buildings on the island. Built around 1731 by the wealthy merchant Major Walter Mitchell for his nephew William, the house has a rich and varied history.



Shinbone Alley



Mitchell House

Today, Mitchell House operates as the **St. George's Historical Society Museum**, preserving and showcasing a glimpse of 18th-century Bermudian life.

Visitors can explore a colonial-era kitchen with authentic cooking implements, see a 300-year-old Bible - the "Geneva" bible - printed in Amsterdam. The cellar houses a vintage printing press, a replica of the one used to print Bermuda's first newspaper, the *Bermuda Gazette*, in 1784.

Oldest Anglican Church Outside Britain

A short stroll along Church Lane leads to the grandeur of **St. Peter's Church** - the oldest Anglican church in continuous use outside the British Isles.

Originally constructed from wooden beams and thatch, the church was later rebuilt in stone and has remained central to Bermudian spiritual and social life ever since.

The churchyard is equally revealing with its four separate graveyards segregated by race and status, reflecting Bermuda's complex social history. The gravestones all have that weathered look - simply because the entire graveyard was not used after 1854, when the Yellow Fever caused massive damage to the population of Bermuda. A new graveyard was built a short distance away.

In 2012, to mark the church's 400th anniversary, Queen Elizabeth II granted it the royal designation, "Their Majesties' Chappell."

Originally built in 1612 with cedar logs and thatch, the church was rebuilt in stone in 1620 and has undergone careful restoration ever since. Inside, visitors will find a cedar altar - the oldest in Christendom still in use - and a fascinating collection of historical artifacts, including a baptismal font dating back to 1450 and hand-carved family pews.

Look up into the ceiling to see how the interior of the church was first built by survivors of the Sea venture - they only knew how to build ships, so they turned their craftsmanship upside down for the ceiling. Look over to the right and see a small triangle of cedar beams from the very first building in 1612.



St. Peter's Church



Globe Museum

Globe Museum

Exiting from the front door of the Church and down the impressive steps into York Street to the **Globe Museum**, a treasure trove of artifacts showcasing the island's rich maritime heritage and significant involvement in the American Civil War.

Given that some 75% of all types of materiel for the Confederacy came from Europe - most of which came into St. George's for transshipment to the South, notwithstanding the Union Blockade - the Globe became the commercial center for the shipments to the South - and then in return for the incoming shipments of cotton back to Europe at the time of the Industrial Revolution.



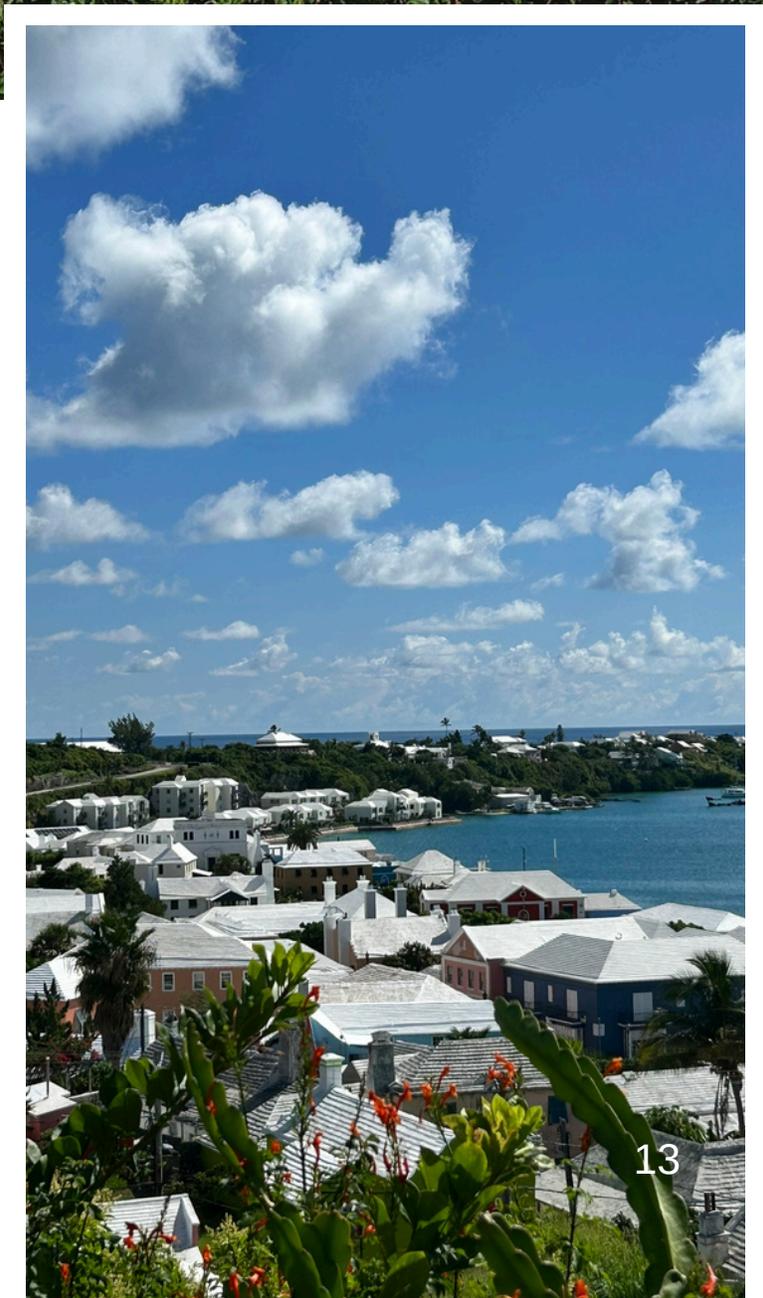
St. George's Harbour

St. George's Harbour has long been known for its impressive depth, once drawing sailing ships from around the world on a daily basis until the advent of steamships shifted maritime routes.

Apart from concerns about Spanish, then French invasions, Bermuda was a stable and comfortable British Colony. In fact, several military forts were built on the island - mainly in the East End in those early days - with expansion thereof all around the island for many years thereafter.

Bermuda is twenty-one miles long and a mere twenty square miles in total - part of an extinct volcano. The coral reef surrounding the island (thought to mark the rim of the crater) provides complete protection for all large ships while they are in port - but with only one safe route (the "Cut") through the treacherous reef next to Gates Fort.

Navigation into Bermuda by any other entry has resulted in some 300 shipwrecks around the island. Many of those were the so-called "Pirates of the Caribbean" including the famous **Blackbeard** and another more prominent pirate called **Henry Jennings** (circa 1715) - a local Bermudian who plied his adventures in Nassau and Kingston, Jamaica.



Crown Colony

A major shift occurred in 1684 when King Charles II revoked the charter of the Somers Isles Company which had been the successor to the original “owners” of Bermuda - the Virginia Company of London. This change effectively dissolved the corporate governance of Bermuda and placed the island directly under the authority of the British Crown, marking the beginning of its *Crown Colony* status.

The original shareholders of the Company were noblemen in Scotland, Ireland and England. It seems they individually asked the King if they could buy the Company - hence buy Bermuda. The King refused every one of them but eventually agreed to split the land of Bermuda into nine “Parishes” - each one (to this day) being named after one of the noblemen - e.g. (the Earl of) Warwick, (Lord) Paget, (the Earl of) Southampton, (the Marquis) of Hamilton and so forth.

The term “Colony” was officially updated to “British Overseas Territory” in 2002 as a result of the British Overseas Territories Act 2002.



Fort St. Catherine



Turtle Beach

Military Reuse

A few miles from St. George's lies the international airport - originally built as a military airbase by Franklin Roosevelt in World War 2 as a result of an agreement with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1939.

The base (originally named the Kindley air Base after an American WW II Ace pilot from Arkansas) was off limits to the local Bermudian public but in 1995, when the base was officially handed back to Bermuda, local folks discovered an array of beautiful beaches ranging from the Clearwater Beach and right next to it the small, but stunning, Turtle Beach.





The island is renowned for its beautiful beaches from one end to the other. Thus, spending time in the St. George's area of Bermuda provides a collection of venues of historical significance, military importance, commercial significance, ecological beauty and stunning beaches.

Bermuda's year-round climate (circa 65 Fahrenheit through the winter months) delivers a peaceful and charming location to explore and enjoy the warmth of the island and its people.

RECOMMENDED READING

FICTION

The Sea Venture by F. Van Wyck Mason — This novel centers on the famous shipwreck of the Sea Venture in 1609, which is foundational to Bermuda's early colonial history. It's earlier than the 1700s, but it engages with the maritime, political, and emotional tensions of colonial life.

Under the Moon Gate by Marilyn Baron — A romance novel set in Bermuda with intrigue, secrets, and a romantic pairing.

Facing the Flag by Jules Verne -- Though not entirely focused on Bermuda, this adventure novel places much of its action on the island.

Told by Two by Marie St. Felix -- The novel frames a romance in Bermuda among visitors in the gilded-age era. It offers a view into social life, manners, and the island's appeal at the turn of the century.

The Lost Diary of Don Juan by Douglas Carlton Abrams — For a flavor of Iberian exploration during the era of Bermuda's discovery.

NON-FICTION

The History, Culture & Beauty of St. George's, Bermuda by Bill Storie and Robin Trimingham — Locally informed guide to the historical, cultural, and scenic charms of St. George's.

Islands of the Sea: The Story of Bermuda and the West Indies by Sir Henry Wilkinson — classic study of Bermuda's maritime role.

Bermuda: Five Centuries by Rosemary Jones — a sweeping, well-illustrated history of the island.

A History of the Bermuda Maritime Museum by Edward Harris — For readers fascinated with shipwrecks, forts, and the Royal Navy.

Under the Calabash Tree: 150 Years of the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club by Robin W. Trimingham

Their **St. George's Town Square Live Cam** has officially passed **100,000 views!** You can see the livecam here: [LINK](#)



Bill Storie, C.A.

Meet Bill - the man who has traded spreadsheets for street history. A highly successful Chartered Accountant (Scotland) with a distinguished background in international finance and reinsurance, Bill now dedicates his time to revealing the authentic soul of Bermuda with special focus on the military history of Bermuda. Bill is the Co-Founder of **Bermuda Heritage Tours**, guiding groups from cruise lines like Norwegian, Regent of the Seven, as well as co-author of "*The History, Culture and Beauty of St. George's Bermuda*." As a Certified Tour Guide in Bermuda, Bill is renowned for his unique raconteur style and deep historical expertise, all delivered with an unmistakable Scottish accent.



Robin Trimingham

With a career spanning over two decades in luxury hospitality and history, Robin isn't just a tour guide - she's a storyteller with exclusive, firsthand knowledge of Bermuda. Robin's credentials stem from both high-level corporate experience and deep historical research. She is the acclaimed author of two Bermudian history books, including "*The History, Culture and Beauty of St. George's Bermuda*," coauthored with Bill. Her professional background includes serving as Director of Group Sales for the iconic Fairmont Hamilton Princess, Bermuda, following a successful tenure as Director of Large Group Sales for Fairmont Hotels Canada's Western Mountain Region. Co-Founder of **Bermuda Heritage Tours**, Robin has personally led over 500 private tours for the guests of leading cruise lines. Robin's friendly, engaging style has made her a favorite among international travelers.