



Published May 2003

COUNTRIES IN BRIEF ... On assignment in BERMUDA

By Anne Dean, Editorial Director

Sending an assignee on assignment, a business trip, vacation, or are you just curious? Well, then, the IGM country profiles should be of interest to you. This month we profile BERMUDA.

"Bermuda is the right country for a jaded man to "loaf" in. There are no harassments; the deep peace and quiet of the country sink into one's body and bones and give his conscience a rest and chloroform the legion of invisible small devils that are always trying to whitewash his hair."- Mark Twain, from *Some Rambling Notes of an Idle Excursion*

Bermuda, an unassuming group of islands in the Atlantic Ocean, earned the praises of 20th century American writer Mark Twain for its beautiful pink beaches, lazy lifestyle and resistance of modernity. This self-governing British dependency first emerged to most of the world as a safe haven for wealthy tourists who marveled at the island's solitude in the face of the Industrial Revolution.

Although technology and progress have since invaded the island, Bermuda remains a popular destination for weary tourists. For some time now, Bermuda has also been a popular destination for some of the world's leading international businesses, and is fast becoming a leader in the insurance and reinsurance market. Today Bermuda enjoys one the highest per capita incomes in the world because of a successful balance between competitive modernity and luxurious simplicity. The overall cost of living, however, in Bermuda is roughly 2.5 times higher than the cost of living in the United States, and 1.8 times higher than in Canada and the United Kingdom.

Geography

Bermuda is a group of about 150 small limestone and coral islands, the largest of which are connected by a series of bridges and causeways. These islands are situated in the North Atlantic Ocean, about 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) due east of the US state North Carolina and 2,000 kilometres (1300 miles) north of Puerto Rico. Although Bermuda is often lumped in with the Caribbean islands, it actually falls within the territory of British North America.

Ancient volcanic activity is probably responsible for the hilly landscape of the main islands. Bermuda's land, roughly 50 square kilometres (20 square miles) in total, is characterised by low hills separated by fertile valleys.

Capitol

The City of Hamilton, Bermuda's capital and only city (Bermuda is divided into nine parishes or districts), is located in central Pembroke Parish. Hamilton is the cultural and economic centre of Bermuda. Doves of tourists disembark at this lively port to marvel at the city's Victorian pastel buildings, shop in the finest stores and dine on the island's unique cuisine. Global corporate giants have also been streaming into Hamilton for more than half of a century. While their motives are slightly different,

these international businesses have made a similarly positive impact on Bermuda's economy

Climate

Because of the warm Gulf Stream that flows to North America, the island's semitropical climate remains temperate and favourable year round. Average yearly temperatures range between 13 and 32 degrees Celsius (55 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit).

Bermuda has no rainy season, but heavy showers sometimes occur, especially at night. Rainfall on the island is rather even throughout the year. Hurricane season (which usually just means high winds), with most hurricanes occurring in August, September and October.

Culture

Bermuda's population of over 60,000 is comprised of Bermudians (natives by law) and non-Bermudians. About 70 percent of the Bermudian population is descended from Africa, while others can trace their roots to Britain, Barbados, Jamaica, Canada, Leeward Islands, Windward Islands, Trinidad & Tobago and the United States. There is also a small but significant Portuguese population and several other groups of expatriates that change with time.

Many of Bermuda's greatest national traditions are connected to the period of slavery and the separation of the island's black and white cultures. The locals celebrate the 1834 abolition of slavery every year with the Cup Match. This is a two-day cricket tournament that brings all races together.

Health requirements

Only foreign nationals arriving from areas infected with Yellow Fever require vaccinations to enter Bermuda. While there are essentially no required vaccinations for entry into Bermuda, your doctor may suggest certain vaccinations as precautionary measures. Hepatitis A and B, influenza, tetanus and routine childhood immunisations are all suggested before travel.

Although Bermuda is generally a health country, and no serious health risks exist, there are low occurrences of mosquito-transmitted Dengue Fever and marine hazards such as stinging jellyfish (Portuguese Man of War), sea urchins, sharks and corals.

Housing

If your employer has not already arranged housing for you, you should plan to spend several weeks researching the housing market. Many expatriates recruit the services of a relocation specialist or estate agent to conduct the search and handle necessary paperwork. Visiting your new host country before you move is a good idea. It will allow you to see for yourself what housing possibilities exist.

One of the best ways to find an apartment or house is through word-of-mouth. Once you have informed other parties that you are searching for a home, someone may be able to guide you towards certain properties or communities that best suit your needs. When local people learn that you are interested in becoming a part of the community, you will likely be provided for in many ways.

Transportation/Getting Around

Bermuda's size makes it easy to reach even the remotest corner of the island in good time. However, with only 60 kilometres (37 miles) of road stretching across just 21 square-miles of land and a very dense population that is frequently bloated with tourists, Bermuda has reached its vehicle saturation point. To combat severe road crowding and excessive pollution, Bermuda's government does not allow visitors to rent or operate cars or other vehicles with four or more wheels. Local residents are also restricted to just one automobile per household.

The beauty of these restrictions is that they have caused the island's public transportation system to evolve into a remarkably extensive and reliable network that makes daily travel almost hassle-free. Visitors can travel by bus, ferry, motor scooter, taxi, bicycle or foot just about anywhere on the island.

Business Customs and Etiquette

Bermuda's competitive business environment is calm and conservative. As many of Bermuda's customs are greatly influenced by the nation's ties with Britain, it should come as no surprise that the overall nature of business can be defined by punctuality and politeness.

Despite the island's relaxing tropical atmosphere, punctuality is an important issue when doing business in Bermuda. It is generally good practice to be a few minutes early for meetings. However, realise that transportation difficulties may cause your colleagues to be delayed. To avoid delay on your part, it is wise to allow more time than necessary to reach your destination.

Shopping

The City of Hamilton is Bermuda's business centre and the location of some of the island's best shopping. Hundreds of shops, restaurants and businesses in this efficient little city cater to tourists and locals with a diverse array of products and services. The large Washington Mall, with entrances on Reid and Church Streets, houses shops that offer just about everything: jewellery, film processing, bath products, books and magazines, dry cleaning, sports equipment, plants and flowers, tobaccos, leather goods, music, men's and women's fashions, health products, shoes, accessories, eyeglasses, hair cutting, cellular telephones, crafts, gourmet coffee and fine dining.

Grocery shopping can be done at a number of convenience stores, which offer decent selections of fresh food items, and small family markets. However, foreign nationals may be surprised by the high cost of most foods in Bermuda. This is directly due to the island's limited local production and the steep duties levied on imported products. Throughout the island, particularly in Hamilton, there is the opportunity to shop in stores that carry imported goods from many countries that will make the expatriate feel more at home.