

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

March 15, 2016

A Bermuda Vacation: More Family-Friendly Than You'd Think

This prim-and-proper island may seem an unlikely choice for a spring-break getaway with the kids, but it's surprisingly easy and full of strategic distractions

AN ISLAND KNOWN for exclusive golf clubs, rum swizzles and insurance executives may not seem like the ideal destination for a family with three young children under 9. But Bermuda, as my wife and I recently discovered over spring break, is as practical as it is picturesque—especially during the off season, November through March, when crowds have thinned and you can snag a deal on a hotel room big enough for your brood.



The stress of having to shepherd our children through airport security and keep them entertained in the air has largely turned me off flying. But getting to Bermuda is as low-stress as one could hope for. Our flight from New York took just over two hours. Many other U.S. cities also offer direct

flights. And, on your return, the bureaucracy is abbreviated because U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement have agents stationed right in Bermuda's airport. Other island quirks were seemingly created for "vacationing" parents. The Bermudian dollar is equal to the U.S. dollar and most shops and restaurants accept American money, so you don't have to worry about exchanging in advance. Another hassle you can bypass: installing car seats in your rental vehicle; nonresidents are prohibited from driving cars on the island (all the better, since the roads are narrow and windy, and Bermudians drive on the left).

We considered staying in a family-friendly hotel like the Fairmont Southampton, which beckoned us with its kids' camp, kiddie pool and seven restaurants (plus another two in summer), where children ages 5 and under eat free from the kid's menu. But the tedium of dining out for every meal, especially with fidgety children in tow, didn't appeal. Nor did the \$12 per person, per day resort fees (for guests 6 and older).

We also looked into renting an apartment, but while we found a few passable ones on VRBO and Airbnb, having to keep the place tidy all week felt more like deprivation than a vacation.

Ultimately, we found a happy medium: The [Newstead Belmont Hills](#), an off-the-beaten-path resort that has two- and three-bedroom suites, each with a kitchen, a living area and outdoor space. Our two-bedroom unit had twin balconies that cantilevered out over the bay. Best of all, housekeeping stopped by twice a day. How to describe the joy my wife and I felt when we would return to our room and find the toothbrush-and-barrette-strewn bathroom counter had been tidied, the dishes that we'd guiltily left in the sink loaded in the running dishwasher?

The hotel lacks its own beach, but it offers free shuttle service to one nearby. During the off season, the chilly ocean discourages swimming, but our kids had fun running toward, then away from the waves. Among the hotel's other big perks: the complimentary shuttle service to and from the airport, a free water taxi to the city of Hamilton departing every hour or so, and a round of golf gratis for one person a day at the Belmont Hills Golf Course (this perk went unused).

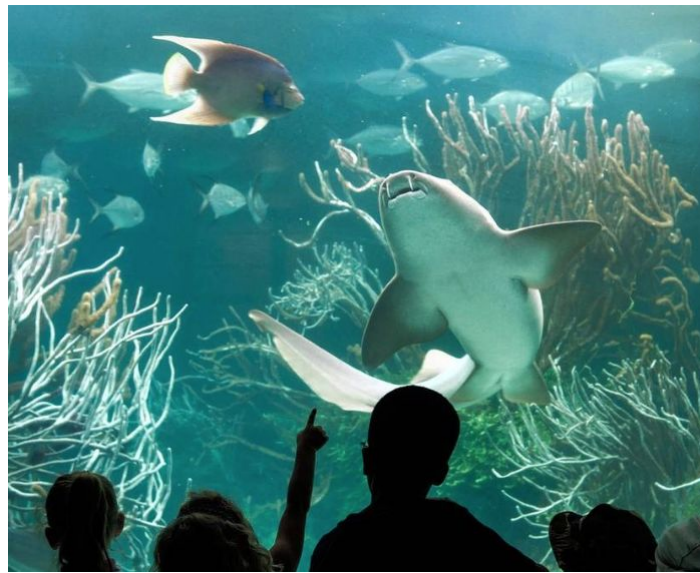
Our children would have been content spending the entire time splashing in the hotel's infinity pool and hot tub. We did, however, convince them to take a few half-day excursions before the youngest settled into her afternoon nap. Here are some of the island's most family-friendly activities:



BERMUDA FUN GOLF

Located on an acre of waterfront property, this 18-hole miniature course affords views of the Atlantic, with five holes running along the water's edge. Want to give your golfing protégée a sense of what it's like to play Pebble Beach or St. Andrews? Each hole here is modeled after a full-size course in the U.S., Scotland or elsewhere on the island. During the off season, Bermuda Fun Golf is only open on weekends, but you can request a weekday session for any size party by emailing office@fungolf.bm. Regular weekday hours start in April, and from May until the end of the summer, the course stays open at night for glow-in-the-dark putting. (*\$15 for adults, \$12 for children; fungolf.bm*)

Nearby eatery: The Frog & Onion, a two-minute walk from the mini-golf course, offers a run-of-the-mill children's menu, but you can make a meal of kid-friendly appetizers like house-smoked pork tacos, panko-encrusted fried pickles and "Frog Nachos" topped with brisket chili (the nachos, I figured out, covers four of the five food groups). There's a room out back with a few arcade games, air hockey and a pool table, should the kids get squirmy. Haggard grown-ups can take the edge off with a flight of the six beers and ales on tap. All are from the Dockyard Brewing Company, the island's only microbrewery, which is located right behind the pub. (*frogandonion.bm*)



BERMUDA AQUARIUM, MUSEUM & ZOO

This aquarium, zoo and natural-history museum spans 7 acres along the water. And although it is a fraction of the size of, say, Chicago's Shedd Aquarium or the San Diego Zoo, you'll find it a lot more manageable; young children can take in most of the sights before the inevitable meltdown. What's more, the small scale allows you to get a lot closer to the animals than you would at larger institutions. As you enter, you'll see the aquarium's five harbor seals frolicking in a small pool. Other child-bewitching highlights include: impossibly large Galapagos tortoises; extroverted ring-tailed lemurs, in a walk-through habitat, who aren't afraid to come within arm's length; and Oscar the alligator, an intimidating beast who is cordoned off just a few feet away from the visitors' path. (*\$10 for adults, \$5 for children 5 to 12 years old, younger children are free; bamz.org*)

Nearby Eatery: You'll find a quaint cafe at the aquarium with an outdoor seating area, but if you're looking for something more upscale yet family-friendly, head to Rustico, a few minutes away. (Note that the short journey requires crossing a busy street and walking a bit down a narrow sidewalk.) There's a children's menu, but our kids were content splitting the margherita pizza and the fettuccine with lamb ragu (we told them it was "pasta with meat sauce," which sounds a lot less alarming). Adults might want to try the local fish carpaccio appetizer or the East End Fish Sandwich, which comes topped with a heap of arugula and tomato. (*bermuda-dining.com*)

THE CRYSTAL CAVES OF BERMUDA

Superlative rainy-day contingencies are an essential part of any family-travel plan, so keep the Crystal Caves of Bermuda in your back pocket. The caves are an underground wonderland of stalactite formations and blue-green pools of water. Tours of this ancient formation last 30 to 45 minutes, depending on how spirited your guide is in telling the tale of the two teens who, in 1907, stumbled upon the caves while searching for a lost cricket ball. (The yarn unravels like a good ghost story.) There are two separate attractions here: The Crystal Caves and the Fantasy Caves. Both are spectacular, with their own unique formations, but keep in mind that the path down to the latter is slightly steeper; children can easily navigate the 80-odd steps, but you might end up carrying younger ones back up. (Feel the burn.) A good strategy is to buy the ticket for a single cave instead of a combo ticket for both; just bring your receipt at a later date and you can tour the second cave by paying the difference in ticket prices. (*\$22 for adults and \$10 for children 5 to 12 to tour one cave; children under 5 are free; caves.bm*)

Nearby Eatery: The Swizzle Inn, Bermuda's oldest pub, is located at the other side of the Crystal Caves' park-like grounds. Order milkshakes for the kids to keep them silently slurping while you enjoy the island's signature drink, the rum swizzle, a fruity sangria-like concoction. (The generously sized "single glass" is plenty for two to share.) The Swizzle Inn hosts a barbecue every Friday night. Appetizers include grilled shrimp and scallops-on-the-half shell, with mains coming right off an outdoor grill that's fired up for the occasion: steak, drunken chicken and a rotating selection of fish, plus baby-back and beef ribs from the smoker. Kids-menu tip: Instead of the French fries that come with every dish, ask for the raw veggie sticks (peppers, carrots, celery); our kids devoured them. For dessert, the sampling of scoops from Alex & Pete's Bermuda Artisan Ice Cream is the way to go. You'll get two classic Bermuda flavors—rum swizzle and banana and rum—as well as caramel and sea salt. (swizzleinn.com)