

THE BERMUDA SHORT

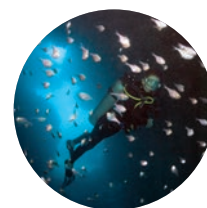
HOW TO HAVE BIG FUN AT SMALL CRAGS DURING A SHORT
VISIT TO A FARAWAY ISLAND

BY JEFF ACHEY / PHOTOS BY ANDREW BURR

JAZMYNE WATSON AND
SIMON ARTHUR TAKE A
BURN ON ALL PROPERTY
IS THEFT, (V3 R) IN
TRESPASSER'S COVE.



I was committed to the trip, but I still had several nagging questions about Bermuda. First, is the island actually IN the Bermuda Triangle, or is it on the outside perimeter? I mean, if you approached Bermuda from the correct direction, could you avoid ever entering the Bermuda Triangle? Second, what, exactly, ARE Bermuda shorts? Do I need a pair? And, most important: Is there actually decent climbing there?



TRAVEL TIP

As soon as you decide to travel internationally, make sure your passport is still valid; some countries will not accept a passport that expires within six months of your visit.

We were staying in Hamilton, not far from the airport and the capital “city” of the 20-mile-long, fishhook-shaped cluster of 180 islands, islets, sounds, harbors, bays, beaches, and cliffs that comprise Bermuda. Grant Farquhar arrived at our hotel punctually on Thursday morning in his beat-up 1995 Subaru, ready to give us a tour and answer at least some of our questions. Photographer Andrew Burr and I piled our climbing bags into the trunk and motored off.

Hunched behind the wheel on the wrong side of the car—Bermuda is a British Overseas Territory—Grant drove at a moderate speed, but still it seemed like we were careening through a European-esque landscape meant for much slower traffic, cresting steep hills, rounding blind curves walled in by 18th century stonework, and threading through roundabouts as swarms of scooters constantly overtook us, swerving back into their lanes inches from oncoming traffic. The scenery was a collage of jungle, manicured gardens, steep side roads, ocean views, and stone houses with thick tiled roofs that collect the rain that constitutes Bermuda’s only water source. There are no rivers or streams here; no point on the island is more than a mile and a half from the sea.

Bermuda is warmed by the Gulf Stream, but it is not in the Caribbean. In fact, it is fully 1,000 miles north, in the Sargasso Sea, at about the same latitude as Charleston, South Carolina. The nearest land is Cape Hatteras on the Outer Banks, about 650 miles to the northwest. Unlike the islands farther south, there are significantly warmer and cooler seasons in Bermuda. The climate is mild and pleasantly subtropical from fall through spring, but our visit was in high summer and the humidity was a palpable force. Temps hovered just below 90°, and the day’s dense cloud cover was welcome.

After about 20 minutes on the road, we passed a small, deep harbor where some old ships sat rusting—this remote northeastern tip of Bermuda, on St. David’s Island was as close as you can come to a bad neighborhood here. Old buildings clung to life, and machinery sat rusting. Grant pointed out one old ship barely afloat in the harbor that used to be a casino. It would sail 12 nautical miles off the coast into international waters so people could have some fun while still displaying an important Bermudian trait: strict observance of the law. Bermuda: population 68,000 on an isolated island cluster less than 20 by 5



JAZMYNE WATSON
HIGH ABOVE THE
OCEAN ON TRANSMIS-
SIONS FROM URANUS
(5.10C) NEREID'S WALL.

JAZMYNE WATSON ON
SAVE YOUR BREATH, A FUN
V2 AT JOHN SMITH'S BAY



TRAVEL TIP

Stash cash in your socks, toiletries bag, or a hidden pocket in your pack so that losing one item will not result in losing all your money.

miles, with much of that terrain being uninhabitable steep coastline or water. To keep order, there are a lot of laws in Bermuda, and people seem to obey them. For example, a family is only allowed one car. The rest of the commuting—on the busy island's narrow, serpentine roads—must be done by scooter. A tourist is not permitted to rent a car in Bermuda. Once we hit the roads, it became immediately obvious why.

Grant gunned the Subaru up a winding hill that ended at a deserted military park. There were nice lawns, stonework in various states of repair, and some massive cannons. Positioned high on a promontory, this was an old gunnery, overlooking the narrow channel through the reefs that is one of the only navigable entrances to the heart of Bermuda, St. George's Harbor, and the Great Sound.

Bermuda is named after the Spanish sailor Juan de Bermudez, who first sighted the island in the early 1500s. He did not claim it for Spain, but it became a known landmark for Spanish sailors. The English would soon learn of Bermuda as well, following one

of the most famous shipwrecks of all time.

In 1609, George Somers set out from England to resupply the new and starving colony of Jamestown on the Virginia coast. Three weeks into the journey, still a thousand miles from their destination, a three-day storm overtook them. This was the maiden voyage of the newly constructed *Sea Venture*, the first emigrant ship of its kind. New and green, the *Sea Venture*'s planking had not yet seasoned properly, and the storm's thrashing left the hull leaking like a sieve. Somers sailed on, with all hands bailing, apparently doomed, until a watchman sighted the uninhabited island of Bermuda. Somers intentionally crash landed on the reefs, saving all 140 on board. Bermuda has been inhabited by Englishmen ever since. Some say Shakespeare's *"The Tempest"* is based on this event. The entire area around us is a World Heritage site; over the hill and across the harbor to the northwest lay the town of St. George, Bermuda's first capital, the oldest continually inhabited English-speaking town in the New World.



JOSH HILL, LAW OFFICER,
ENTERS THE BUSINESS
ON PONTIUS PIRATE
(5.10D), SCAUR HILL.

We parked and pulled on our packs. If we had any sense, we would be deep water soloing on the dreamy little cliffs that rim other parts of Bermuda's shoreline. But Burr and I had only three days, so Grant started us off with the island's biggest cliff, the Great Head. Unfortunately, the sport routes here are best climbed during Bermuda's mild winter. That day, in late July, conditions would be horrible, Grant assured us.

A 20-yard stroll took us to an overlook atop an impressively tall bluff with a commanding view of the open ocean, the reefs, and the various ports and parishes surrounding St. George's Channel and Smith's Sound. The sky was saturated from an unseasonable spell of rain, and gray sea met gray clouds in an undefined horizon. It was hot, but the sea breeze kept conditions bearable.

The bluff—the Great Head—terminated abruptly below us in an alarming band of cliffs, the highest of which arced 100 feet to the crests of small hills, steeply overhanging, and riddled with tufas, huec-

os, and stalactites. Visible below was a broad bench just above the high-tide line that provided a dry belay zone for most of the cave, but in other places the walls often hung over the turquoise water. Grant pointed out one very high place where the American professional freeskier and BASE jumper Mike Wilson jumped and did a couple of flips into the water, later showing us a video to prove it.

As we scrambled down an overgrown path, I immediately noted a strange absence of sharp, thorny plants. We were bushwhacking in shorts and flip-flops and not getting a scratch, which would seem very appropriate for a place where few ever wear pants. We then began a tidewater traverse that started out mellow and pleasant but soon turned quite sketchy, culminating in a slimy overhanging section perilously high above sharp, sea-washed rocks. I was carrying next to nothing and styled the crux no problem, but Burr was sporting a huge pack, full of ropes, hardware, and camera equipment—maybe scuba gear from the looks of it. I glanced back with concern, only to see him calmly down-campus the overhang, stabbing the toes of his approach shoes into algae-filled pockets.

The traverse landed us in a fetid cave. In the still air we immediately began to sweat. A bit up from the sea was a small pool filled with gelatinous red water that looked like a party-sized Bloody Mary. It was 88° with 100% humidity. We uncoiled the ropes.

No point in postponing the inevitable, I reasoned, and I volunteered to lead the cave's 5.11 warm-up. Steep as it was, the holds looked huge, but I think the heat was starting to get to me. The scene seemed surreal, and I felt a bit dizzy—maybe I was jet-lagged. Maybe I was feeling the effects of Burr and my late-night strategy session, when we'd cleaned out our rooms' supplies of canned Dark and Stormys, the island's trademark ginger beer and rum cocktail. But the dizziness passed. I felt better than Burr looked. I could do this.

I shoed up, tied in, and surged up to a stalactite that was so unexpectedly slimy I nearly squirted right off. I stabbed for an incut pocket, barely saving myself. My hand came away green—the rock had apparently grown a living membrane of algae.

I pushed on, sweating profusely, monkeying from jug to jug. Thirty feet up I thrutched into a hueco and wedged my elbow in an attempt to recover. A passing ship disappeared into pea-soup mist. Seabirds swooped through the warm air. Sweat poured into my eyes. Strenuous as it was, my flurry of thrashing had created something like a wind, but once I stopped moving I began to overheat.

Enough whining. To make a long struggle short, let's just say that I did not send, and we climbed

TRAVEL TIP

Carry at least a few snacks in your pocket or carry-on to stay fueled when there's no time to eat a real meal.

at Great Head for the rest of the morning, using at least some aid on almost every thing we tried except for a couple of sweet 5.10s on Nereid's Wall. The cliff's summit wasn't suited to lowering anchors, so we topped out into the long, soft grass and belayed from slings around shrubs and old ironwork, then scrambled down in flip-flops and traversed back in for another climb.

Most of the climbs here, and elsewhere on the island, were pioneered by our tour guide, "the mayor" of Bermuda climbing. UK-trained and originally from Scotland, Grant Farquhar practiced psychiatry in various locales from North Wales to New Zealand and was first lured to Bermuda in 2002. Working in Australia at the time, he saw an advert in the British Medical Journal for a Consultant Psychiatrist in Bermuda, and thought, why not? He and his wife, Eloise, have been here for the past eight years.

"My initial impression was that the cliffs were small and crappy," Grant recounted. "I had been climbing in places like Diablo [in Mallorca], which is arguably the best DWS in the world."

"But fortunately," he continues, "the climbing in Bermuda was much, much better than my first impression." An avid surfer as well, Grant explored the coastline by boat, paddleboard, and sometimes by long "coastaneering" traverses that combined fourth and fifth class scrambling with sections of swimming, never knowing what was around the next corner.

Grant has been involved in deep water soloing since its earliest days, participating in forays on British cliffs, and in the Mediterranean, Vietnam, and Oman. For years, he says, climbers approached sea cliffs with a traditional and land-locked mindset, climbing hard, runout, multi-pitch trad traverses and the like. In reality, it turned out to be much easier and safer to just solo these lines and fall in the water and swim out if there were a problem. But this somehow wasn't obvious at first. Maybe you needed to be a surfer to see it. It was a vision thing.

The DWS "revolution" began in the late 1980s. Often cited as the godfather of the sport is Mallorca climber Miguel "Psicobloc" Riera. At about the same time, cliffs like Dorset in England were seeing pushes from Crispin Waddy and Mike Robertson. Grant had climbed a bit with Waddy in the 1980s in North Wales, and Waddy had talked about DWS. "He was way ahead of his time," says Grant, "and regarded as slightly deranged by everyone else." Grant's first DWS experiences were with Robertson in the early '90s. He was also one of the first foreigners to visit Riera at his home crag of Diablo in Mallorca.



I was woozy after the Great Head expedition, but we'd scheduled an afternoon visit to Clarence Cove, the DWS gem of the island. You could spend your entire trip to Bermuda climbing at Clarence Cove alone with no regrets. Some DWS, then maybe some snorkeling at the world-famous pink-sand Horse-shoe Beach, then head back into Hamilton for beers and seafood. Wake up and do it again.

Clarence Cove is walking distance from Hamilton, at a place the tourist maps call Admiralty House Park, a historical site with nice lawns and places to picnic atop a low, breezy bluff with a fine view of the north shore of Pembroke Parish. Most important to us, poised above the green-blue water were 25-foot limestone overhangs.

Most of the close-knit crew that is Bermuda climbing was already at the crag when we arrived. One of the younger guys, Josh Stephenson, was sporting a new Climb Bermuda tattoo: a climber hanging off the underbelly of the fishhook-shaped island silhouette. Josh Hill, a local policeman, was the acrobat of



TRAVEL TIP

Always carry a few key medicines: ibuprofen, Imodium, allergy meds—foreign countries bring foreign allergens.



GRANT FARQUHAR, MAYOR OF BERMUDA CLIMBING, ON BIGGUS DICKUS (5.11C), SCAUR WALL.

THE BERMUDA ROCK CLUB

Though no longer living on the island, John Langston was a central figure in Bermuda climbing for a few dynamic years beginning in 2009. Originally from Wyoming, he learned how to climb at Vedauwoo before moving to Denver, where he, in his own words, “failed to thrive as an adult but really got gung-ho about climbing.”

Working full-time riding a pedi-cab in downtown Denver and climbing as much as he could, he saw an ad on rockclimbing.com for a climbing instructor position in Bermuda. It looked legit so he responded. Josh Hill—the acrobatic DWS climber and policeman pictured in this story—was in charge temporarily, and needed a full-time person to run the wall. U.S. climbers Ward Byrum and Bryan Caldwell had previously run the facility, introducing many Bermudians to the sport. When Langston took the job, he became the facilitator and mentor for the first generation of true Bermudian climbers—and also established the hardest sport climbs on the island.

A CLIMBING GYM IN BERMUDA? IT SOUNDS A LITTLE LIKE THE JAMAICAN BOBSLED TEAM.

Nothing was really going on climbing-wise. The owner of the Olympic Club decided to build the wall as a way to expand his business. To my knowledge, there was no climbing scene. Grant was

already putting in sweet DWS lines at the time, but he may have been the entire climbing community. After the wall, that changed. The wall attracted locals and expats who were interested in climbing, some beginners, and some with experience elsewhere. The wall became a clubhouse of sorts, a place for us to gather, plan, and talk about cliffs we’d seen. It was also an excellent place to dry out ropes, shoes, and chalkbags. It was never profitable, though.

WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT BERMUDA CLIMBING AT FIRST?

My first day on the island, Josh showed me a few sport routes on a vertical cliff just right of the Great Head. The routes were equipped with threads made from sailing line. It looked like a bunch of tat. In reality, in the sun and salt, the sailing line was far stronger and more durable than a steel bolt. It was hot, and I’d never been in humidity to snorkeling and riding a scooter at that point.

The next day I was introduced to Clarence Cove. It was all DWS and all overhanging. Steep, rough, and the water was like 88°. It was fantastic. Soon I was taking my little scooter and all my free time to check out other areas. I remember my on-sight of the *Crackhouse*, full-body pump, probably sweated out a liter in 80 feet, and covered in stalactite muck. Heaven!

WHO DISCOVERED MOST OF THE ISLAND’S CLIMBING?

There were two prolific developers on the island when I got there, Grant Farquhar

and Davey Crawford. Grant put up the classics from around 5.10+ to mid-5.12, and Davey filled up the bottom. These guys had basically established Bermuda as the climbing area it is by the time I showed up. My role ended up being more Sisyphean. I’d find—or more likely, have pointed out to me—some ridiculous steep hard thing, forget the world, and go after it.

FONDEST MEMORIES?

One thing that was fantastic, and I still miss, is the level of psych. I was psyched, Grant was psyched, so was Davey. Josh was psyched, and Devin. We had a crew at the wall, but not a team. Some climbing teams compete or travel or get sponsored. My climbing kids—Jazmyne, Josh, Ilia, Min, David, and David—we had no goals. No master plan. These kids were locals who came together for no other reason than to crush. I couldn’t train them—I was never the coach. I was a facilitator. We had no prizes, no rankings. They crushed because they wanted to. It was the most positive situation I’ve ever been part of.

HOW DOES BERMUDA CLIMBING RANK FOR YOU?

My whole time there was surreal and amazing. A few times in my life, I’ve been in a situation where I couldn’t elaborate on the significance of what was happening, but I knew that, for the story of my life, this was important. For me, Bermuda was one of those times. I always told Jazmyne that when I was 80 I was going to hike over to the Great Head, shed a single tear, and walk away.

the crew. Before the climbing started, he stunned a small crowd of young onlookers (and us) with a gravity-defying “vault” stunt off the 25-foot cliff, running in from a position well back up the hill.

Devin Page, a Canadian/Bermudian, and Leeroy Beeby, South African, were in international business. There was Jazmyne Watson, one of the stars of Bermuda climbing, who studies psychology in Ontario most of the year. Dr. Sam Mir was a cardiologist from Philadelphia. Simon Arthur was a Scotsman, like Grant, and a gamekeeper out on the lonely moors before he came to hot, busy Bermuda. Also like Grant, Simon was a keen surfer. Chemmy, a printer from Poland, made a brief appearance, and the next day we would meet Leila Wadson. Many of these Bermudians got their start in climbing through an unlikely climbing wall constructed in one of the island’s fitness centers, the Olympic Club. (See sidebar “The Bermuda Rock Club” about the gym’s original climbing wall manager, John Langston.) A few of the crew were missing, but it

was a good turnout.

Grant and I scrambled down a passage carved through the rock and emerged in a small cave at the sea. The water was clear blue and a balmy 83°. We dove in for a swimming tour of the classics. Most climbs, Grant pointed out, are approached with a water-level traverse from the left, then take aesthetic lines through the 20-degree overhangs below the main overlook. There were blunt arêtes and jutting roofs. The rock was stratified and grippy, Swiss cheese-pocketed in places with flat edges in others.

Back at the staging area, we pulled on climbing shoes and descended to the entry traverse. We yarded over juggy walls, stemming across small coves and rounding arêtes, then paused where the rock became steep and smooth. Grant gave the basic beta for *Atlantis*, Clarence Cove's classic 5.11b: Go out the belly of that shallow cave, left-to-right across the hanging white panel, then top out through the overhang. He went first, making it look easy. I asked him later what was his most memorable DWS experience in Bermuda, and he recounted a time he looked down from this very spot to see a six-foot dusky shark cruising underneath.

In contrast to the morning's outing on the flowstone at Great Head, the rock at Clarence Cove was confidence inspiring. Bermuda's rock is wind-deposited limestone. Though soft, it's generally consistent and solid. Almost every building on the island is made from it. Its sandy texture is a limestone climber's dream: When you grab a fingertip edge, you feel like you can really pull.

Which is a good thing. Even when DWS isn't scary, it's committing. There's no going back. You'll either cruise the route, or, if you get in trouble, give everything you have or plunge into water. There's no such thing as "take." If you fail, your shoes get wet, your chalkbag too. Yet with no crashpad to hit, no rope to catch a leg, and the warm Sargasso Sea a comfortable distance below, deep down in your heart you know that you are completely, magically safe. As soon as I moved into the hard climbing, I felt focused, elated, and free.

It rained all the next day, a rarity in Bermuda other than during hurricanes. On the last day we did some wet beach bouldering, then convened at the nearby Swizzle Inn for fish sandwiches and attempted to score a boat for the afternoon. Everyone hit their smartphones, and after several near-misses, Devin Page found one at a marina on the Great Sound.

When we arrived at the marina, Devin's friend looked a little concerned, but he gave us the boat, smiling nervously, and waved us off. We spent all afternoon DWSing on the cliffs below Scaur Hill on



INTERNATIONAL BUSINESSMAN DEVIN PAGE TRIES HARD ON XAVIER (5.12C), CLARENCE COVE.

DWS WISDOM

You could easily have a sweet climbing vacation in Bermuda without bringing a rope and just focusing on deep water soloing (DWS), allowing you to easily travel without checking luggage. In addition, you could hit the juggy, flowstone cave at John Smith's Bay for some of the most fun beach bouldering anywhere.

If you've wanted to try DWS but have been intimidated by 60-foot-plus falls, cold water, or violent seas, Bermuda is for you. The sea is warm and gentle, and the cliffs aren't too tall. DWS is possible year-round, but the best season is from May to October. Average

water temps range from 66° in early spring to 85° in August. Sharks and jellyfish are rare.

A few DWS tricks: First, liquid chalk. Once immersed in seawater, your hands don't really dry properly unless you use this alcohol-based stuff as a "base layer." Multiple pairs of shoes are nice, but you'll find that wet climbing shoes perform quite adequately. Chalkbags, though, don't, so bring several small ones with the fuzzy liners cut out (or make some duct-tape custom jobs), and stock them with just enough chalk for the climb. If you take a swim, lay the bag inside out on a sunny rock and grab your extra. That's pretty much all you need to know. Oh, and keep your legs together when you fall!

TRAVEL TIP

Befriend locals or ask folks on the street about the best community hangouts; they'll know better than any travel blog out there.

DESTINATION:

Deep Water Solo

Somerset Island, named after Admiral Somers of Sea Venture fame.

In the spirit of that shipwreck, in late afternoon, after we'd all had our fill of climbing, Devin headed out under Watford Bridge to circumnavigate Somerset Island. For this late in the day it was an ambitious objective. The reef-filled route between our sea cliff and the marina was laced with shipwrecks.

Devin, originally from Toronto, was as passionate a DWSer as anyone on the boat, but come Monday he would become a respectable Bermudian businessman. Maybe he could answer a question that had been burning since my arrival.

"So, Devin," I began, "what, exactly, are Bermuda shorts?" He looked at me a bit quizzically, so I narrowed it down a bit. "Are they casual or dress attire?"

That seemed to be the correct approach. "Trick ques-

TRAVEL TIP

Beware of extra charges from international data roaming. Turn "cellular data" off right before you leave your home country.



JOSH HILL AND JAZMYNE WATSON SPELL OUT THE OBVIOUS NEAR TRESPASSER'S COVE.

BETA

BASICS. The first place to go for beta on Bermuda climbing is Grant Farquhar's website: Climb De Rock Bermuda (climbderock.wikifoundry.com). You'll find a more or less complete online guidebook, as well as tons of photos and island beta. Note that there is no climbing shop on the island, so bring everything you might need.

Bermuda is easily accessible from the Eastern seaboard, with daily flights from Toronto, Boston, New York, Newark, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Miami. Air travel to Bermuda is not expensive, but staying on the island definitely is. Your visit will probably need to be short. Camping is not permitted. If you search carefully, you should be able to find something for less than \$150 per night, but hotels average more than twice that. If you want to stay longer, the best option, like anywhere, is to befriend a local climber.

TRANSPORTATION. You can't rent a car in Bermuda. The most convenient way to get around is to rent a scooter, but you will definitely want to know what you're doing—this is NOT Kalymnos, where you can get away with sub-par skills. Driving on the left is twice as confusing on a bike, without the wrong-side steering wheel to remind you you're not in Kansas anymore. Perhaps wiser, take ferries, buses, or taxis, which will get you anywhere on the island.

WHEN TO VISIT. The sport climbing—at Great Head and Tsunami Wall—is near St. David's, so if you're bringing a rope, look for a place there. Plan your sport climbing trip for winter, when conditions in the caves are best. It's cheaper, too. For DWS, staying in Hamilton is better. The rock is fine year-round, but the water will be chilly from late fall through spring. May through October is the most comfortable time to get wet. A mid-October or early April trip is your best bet for a combo trip, giving you tolerable but chilly DWS and decent sport climbing conditions.

OTHER ACTIVITIES. You name it. If you're a sailor, have at it: The winds in Bermuda are good enough that the island will host the America's Cup in 2017. The snorkeling is outstanding in the clear, clean water. This is also one of the best places in the world for wreck diving—many ships that survived the Bermuda Triangle came to grief on the reefs, within sight of land. There's surfing in Bermuda, not great, usually, but it could be a fun, low-key place to learn, and hurricane season can bring excellent swells. There are caves to explore. You can ride the ferries or bike the 22-mile Bermuda Rail Trail. Or, you could just hang out on some gorgeous beach with an umbrella drink.

TICK LIST

DEEP WATER SOLOING. Most of the routes listed here are in DWS-central, Clarence Cove, or its sister cove Hogfish Bay, a two-minute walk to the west.

ENEMA OF THE STATE (5.10B). Clarence Cove. The easiest climb in Clarence Cove and the most-climbed DWS in Bermuda. Once you have it wired, it's also very useful as a

tion, really,” Devin said knowingly. “Bermuda shorts can be absolutely casual, the utmost formal, and everything in between. That’s what makes them so great.”

I asked him how that was possible. “It’s the accessories that go along with the shorts that dictate the level of formality,” he informed me. “The least formal would be shorts, shirt, and either flip-flops or dock-siders—no socks. Slightly up from that you would wear dress loafers—again, no socks. From there up it’s a matter of adding on each of the following accessories, in order, to indicate an increasing level of formality: knee socks, tie, blazer. Once you have all those elements, you are pretty much set to do anything from riding your scooter to the beach to having dinner with the governor.”

I found Devin’s answer most helpful, and pressed him further about the shorts themselves. “The legs should be cut three inches above the knee, give or take an inch,” he said. “Originally, there was a rule in the British military [where Bermuda shorts originated] that the shorts couldn’t be higher than six inches above the knee, but I’m hoping that rule wasn’t tested often.” An image of a helmeted sergeant in khaki hot pants flashed before my eyes and I nodded in agreement.

“The fabric is normally some sort of lightweight cloth,” Devin continued, “linens mostly. Colors are pretty much solid pastels, bright and tropical. Pinks, yellows, greens, blues. Island colors.”

“Knee socks mandatory?” I inquired, showing off my Wiki research. “Again, this depends on the situation,” Devin replied, “but for the most part, yes. From a business-attire perspective, most companies have knee socks as a requirement in their dress codes, and the only time you can get away with going sockless is on ‘casual Fridays.’”

Almost there in my quest to understand Bermuda shorts, I needed some sort of comparison. “What really differentiates Bermuda shorts from ordinary tourist shorts?” I asked.

“The obvious are: anything with a pattern—camo, checkered. Long shorts or capris, and for God’s sakes, no cargo shorts. There are more subtle differences between true Bermuda shorts—slim-cut, linen masterpieces—and plain dress shorts—frumpy ill-fitting things that your dad wears golfing. That’s a finer line, but Bermudians definitely spot it.”

Devin said that the full, formal Bermuda short outfit was sometimes referred to as the “Bermuda Rig,” a nod to a sail configuration run by Bermuda sloops, an exceptionally fast type of sailboat that was a favorite among pirates, including Blackbeard.

My curiosity satisfied, we threaded our way back among the reefs to Elly’s Harbor, with the day’s last light hitting the pale blue and pink and green homes, and on up the final narrow channel to the marina.

TRAVEL TIP

Make sure your credit card doesn’t charge you an international fee every time you swipe outside your home country.



downclimb to quickly access the central cave routes.

CRAIC HEADS (5.10B). Scaur Wall, on Somerset Island and Great Sound. A few face moves lead to a spectacular hanging flake.

ATLANTIS (5.11B). Clarence Cove. Superb athletic climbing through bulges and around roofs.

BAROTRAUMA (5.11B). Clarence Cove. Campusing on massive holds close to the water.

NIGHT DIVE (5.11C). Hogfish Bay. Begins with a long, challenging entry traverse and finishes up a striking arête.

GO RIN NO SHO (5.11C R). Kamikaze Wall. Excellent pocket climbing on a superb wall in Harrington Sound.

XAVIER (5.12C). Clarence Cove. A superb area testpiece, with fine climbing on pockets and crimps and a gymnastic last-move crux.

POOPENSHOOTEN (5.12D). Clarence Cove. A super-pumpy 100-foot traverse.

SPICY TIMES (5.13A R). White Grunt Hole. Hard climbing on sketchy rock high above a shallow landing—what else would you expect from famed British DWSer Tim Emmett? Unrepeated.

SPORT CLIMBS. If you visit the island in the colder months (average temps in the low 60s), definitely bring your sport climbing kit. There are burly 5.11 through 5.13 flowstone cave routes, as well as gentler fare. You’ll find the best conditions for roped climbing from December to April. The breezier, lower-angled walls will be fine in any month.

XANTHO (5.9). Nereid’s Wall. The first established climb on the wall, up an obvious weakness. Vertical climbing on massive holds protected by threads.

TRANSMISSIONS FROM URANUS (5.10C). Nereid’s Wall. Steep cruising with a stinger crux finale.

AHAB (5.11B). Pump Room. Short, dangling traverse on slopers out a small cave. The cave direct is a bouldery 5.13.

THREE SHEETS TO THE WIND (5.11B). Great Head. Three pitches. “Gogarth-style spacewalking” that tours the massive cave. A fall results in swinging into space.

CRACKHOUSE (5.11C). Great Head. This route would be three stars anywhere. Steep moves on big holds lead to a no-hands rest and lower off on a plinth. The continuation to the top is 5.12c.

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH (5.12A). Tsunami Wall. Stalactite grappling leads to a finish through a skylight in the apex of the cave.

UNDER THE VOLCANO (5.12A). Tsunami Wall. Climbing on stalactites in very steep territory.

BOGEYMAN (5.12C). Great Head. A superb and sustained 20-meter pitch.

ONE SHOE OVER THE CUCKOO’S NEST (5.13C). Great Head. An outrageously steep line through the massive cave, courtesy of John Langston. Unrepeated.

BOULDERING. Bermuda has some fine beach bouldering on sandy-textured limestone.

John Smith’s Bay (convenient, steep, juggy, and scenic), Astwood Cove (remote, gorgeous), and Trespasser’s Cove (awesome, with pirate-style access) are standout spots. Bouldering pads are not needed—bring a few extra beach towels instead.

SAVE YOUR BREATH (V2). John Smith’s Bay. A juggy lip trip above a sandy landing at Bermuda’s most popular bouldering spot.

DARK & STORMY (V9). John Smith’s Bay. A long line of pockets and pinches out the belly of the cave, courtesy Scottish hardman Dave MacLeod.

ALL PROPERTY IS THEFT (V3 R). Trespasser’s Cove. One of many scenic problems at Farquhar’s favorite bouldering spot.

BLACK WATCH PASS (V10). Admiralty Park. Another MacLeod gift to Bermuda, near Clarence Cove, a savage line through a ceiling.