

Bermuda is the choice of thousands of British honeymooners and holiday-makers but for the lucky bankers and business people relocating to this magical island to live and work, there's still culture shock to contend with. By Marie Porter



# Bermuda bound

Having been given the opportunity to live and work in Bermuda for three years in the 1990s, I am fortunate enough to return there regularly to visit firm friends I made 10 years ago.

Having lived in London for my entire life settling in Bermuda was not easy. I didn't even know where Bermuda was and – before eventually coming to grips with the island's culture – I certainly made some social gaffes with the locals that could easily have been avoided.

More of that later. First the geography. On certain maps it's not even shown – but maybe you're looking in the wrong place! Bermuda is not in the Caribbean; it lies 1,000 miles northwest of the Bahamas and 570 miles off North Carolina in the West Atlantic.

This British colony, with a population of approx 65,000, is tiny – just 21 square miles – enabling you to travel the entire length of the island by car in one hour. Their economy is based on tourism and international busi-

ness. One of its attractions is its status as 'off-shore' bringing certain benefits to residents – locals and expats alike.

And the weather? Hot and humid – quite a shock when you first step off that flight from Europe.

### 5\* ALL THE WAY

The island is truly five star in accommodation and beauty and not just in pockets where the tourists stay. Unlike many islands where all-inclusive compounds are the norm to enjoy this type of luxury, in Bermuda the whole island shows no obvious signs of poverty enabling the visitor the freedom to venture out in a relatively safe environment.

The Bermuda Tourism Department rules over things with a gentle touch, ensuring that visitors experiences pure luxury with plenty to do and see. You can be as busy or as laid back as you want to be.

Of course, such luxury does not come cheap. This is a popular wedding and honeymoon destination and tourists who choose Bermuda are mainly those who can afford not to be too concerned about costs during the decision-making process regarding destination.

Every time I return to this island I am still taken aback by its beauty, which is why Bermuda welcomes many repeat visitors time and time again.

Adjusting to island life without any country briefing was not easy. I innocently offended the locals and didn't realise it straight away. I felt that for some reason they had taken an instant dislike to me.

### CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

At the office I wasn't aware that it was customary to acknowledge everyone you came into contact with when entering a room, with 'good morning', 'good afternoon' etc, so you ended up saying these words over and over again every day.

In the UK, while we greet each other politely we don't go over the top, which may be a reason why in Bermuda, and elsewhere, where effusive greetings are the order of the day, the

British can be seen as being aloof, reserved and unfriendly.

I, like many, naively did not take into account these simple cultural differences. Eventually, the penny dropped and I made some important cultural adjustments.

Bermuda is a place where Saturday afternoons are spent lazing on the 'pink' beaches instead of rushing around like 'a headless chicken' as I used to do in London (I know which I prefer). Trips back to the UK to see family and friends were great and made me appreciate even more the privileged lifestyle I had grown accustomed to in Bermuda which boasts one of the highest per capita incomes in the world and a very high standard of living.

In Bermuda I had a mixture of expat and local friends. I was pretty much determined that if I was going to live in another country I should make the effort to integrate with the locals.

### HOMESICKNESS

The expat relationships I made were great, especially in the early days when I did feel incredibly homesick and confused with the culture clashes I had encountered, knowing that they would understand where I was coming from and my feelings.

As time went by I made friends with local Bermudians, and got to understand their culture and beliefs and their attitude to foreigners. I was now able to embrace this new culture, rather than dismiss it. Through these friendships it was possible to integrate and enjoy Bermuda from a deeper and knowledgeable perspective.

Bermudians welcome friendly people, so it comes as no surprise that if you make an effort and show that you are happy to be on their island you will be rewarded with real friendships that will continue well after you have returned to your own country.

### More info

Orientation Angels workshops prepare new expats who are relocating to Bermuda.

[www.orientationangels.co.uk](http://www.orientationangels.co.uk)

## BERMUDA FACTFILE

Bermuda was first settled in 1609 by shipwrecked English colonists headed for Virginia. Tourism to the island to escape North American winters first developed in Victorian times. Tourism continues to be important to the island's economy, although international business has overtaken it in recent years.

Bermuda has developed into a highly successful offshore financial centre. A referendum on independence was soundly defeated in 1995.

**Land area:** 53.3 sq km consisting of about 138 coral islands and islets.

**Climate:** Subtropical, humid, strong winds common in winter. Hurricanes (June to November).

**Official language:** English

**Economy:** Bermuda enjoys one of the highest per capita incomes in the world, nearly equal to that of the US. Its economy is primarily based on providing financial services for international business and luxury facilities for tourists. Most capital equipment and food has to be imported. The average cost of a house is almost \$1 million. Foreign nationals are not permitted to buy property in Bermuda for less than this amount and must also pay a fee of 22 per cent of the value of the property.