







# Shorts circuit

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Bermuda is famous for its wealth, its pristine beaches and perhaps the most recognizable cultural fashion accessory outside of the Scottish kilt.

And as one writer finds out, the look isn't for the pale-kneed or the sartorially self-conscious.

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**By Joseph Guinto**



Mark Twain is in Bermuda, sitting on a teak bench in the lobby of the Fairmont Hamilton Princess. Or rather, a life-size, bronze statue of Twain sits here, legs comfortably crossed in a state of infinite imperturbation. It makes sense that such a monument to the master American wordsmith would be in Bermuda. Twain was, after all, a frequent visitor to this island, declaring it, “the right country for a jaded man to loaf in.” But there is also

something odd about the bronzed Twain. Namely, that the sculptor cast him in a three-piece suit, boots and a bow tie. Who loafs in a three-piece suit, especially on an island that has pink-sand beaches and a mild climate where the temperature rarely dips below 55 degrees?

Um, actually, I do. Just after arriving in Bermuda, I’m standing in the lobby, looking at the bronzed Twain, wearing a peak-lapel sport coat; a pocket square; a striped, French-cuff shirt; boots; and dark, tailored jeans. This, for me, is not unusual island wear. If I want to go a little more casual, I’ll choose

a button-down shirt, linen pants and loafers with no socks. But flip-flops and T-shirts and shorts? Not ever. No matter the destination.

It may help to explain that I don’t care for tanning or swimming or sitting in the sand and that I haven’t made this choice because I think I look bad in the relaxed regalia that most people wear when they go somewhere to do all of those things or to do nothing. I’ve made this choice because I think *everyone* looks bad in those clothes. Especially men. Most especially, men in shorts. But admittedly, my sartorial stance on beachwear is as odd as the one the sculptor chose for Mark

Twain. And more than a few people have told me that my attitude doesn’t make me a fashion plate but instead makes me a lunatic.

That’s why I’ve decided to visit this island nation that’s 650 miles due east of Cape Hatteras, N.C. I have been told that on Bermuda I will find a people who are *simpatico* with my preference for polished style. Here, I will see neither beach bums nor bums of any other sort. Here, I will find an island that remains as Twain described it more than a century ago: “Nowhere is there dirt or stench, puddle or hog-wallow, neglect, disorder, or lack of trimness and neatness. The roads, the streets, the dwellings, the people, the clothes — this neatness extends to everything that falls under the eye. It is the tidiest country in the world.”

But here, too, I will find a catch. Bermuda and its people may be tidier and richer than those of any other island nation in the world, but the country is also synonymous with the very article of clothing that I long ago exiled from my wardrobe: shorts. So if I’m going to fit in here, I’m going to have to fit myself into a pair of Bermuda’s version of shorts — a version that is not intended for the beach but is, instead, bizarrely dressed up with jacket and tie and long socks. And I’m going to have to do that out of doors. In public. My pale knees shake at the thought.

I NEED A DRINK. SOME LIQUID resolve that might help convince me to, at some point in my stay, put on shorts in public for the first time since I was a kid. So, still dressed up, I head to the Fairmont Hamilton’s Friday happy hour. Friday happy hours are a big deal on this island, possibly because most people here need to unwind after a week’s work in the complex financial industries that dominate the island’s economy — re-insurance and offshore tax shelters. Every year, millions of dollars pass through a network of businesses that have only the

**OPPOSITE PAGE:**  
Family-friendly Horseshoe Bay Beach; scooters are Bermuda’s approved tourist-driven transportation



PREVIOUS SPREAD, FROM LEFT: SCOTT DUNN/GETTY IMAGES; DOUG WILSON/CORBIS  
THIS PAGE: ZOHAR LAZAR; OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: MICHAEL DEPRETTAS; CONNIE COLEMAN/BOTH GETTY IMAGES









faintest presence in Bermuda. How faint? Some 15,000 companies are registered to do business on this 21-square-mile island of 65,300 people. But, of course, there's real money to be made passing around all those millions, and as a result, Bermuda has the fourth-highest per capita income in the world, trailing only Liechtenstein, Qatar and Luxembourg, according to the CIA World Factbook. This is just one of the things that set Bermuda apart from its Caribbean counterparts 1,000 miles to the south.

The clothes are another. At the Friday happy hour, I'm not the best-dressed person. Not even close. That honor goes to William C. Griffith, Bermuda's director of tourism. He breezes through the happy hour before I join him for dinner at the Fairmont's Heritage Court bar and restaurant, just off to the right of where Mark Twain sits. Griffith is clad in a pin-stripe navy suit and a purple shirt and tie. He's accessorized with a large, shiny gold watch, a dangly gold bracelet and black eyeglasses that have gold strips on either side. I tell Griffith, on this day in early April, that I expected him to be wearing Bermuda shorts. "Oh, no," he says with a Jamaica-meets-Scotland accent that's typical for Bermuda.

"It's too cold now. Two more weeks and I'll wear them."

He's right. The day we meet, the high is in the low 60s. The weather is another thing that makes Bermuda different from the Caribbean. Summers are mild, not sweltering, and winters can get a bit chilly. This is good news for me. It means that Bermuda

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shorts season is, well, short. And indeed, so far I've only seen one person on the island wearing the national dress. I'm thinking: Maybe I don't have to wear shorts after all.

Wandering around the next afternoon, I am further encouraged to abandon my plan to dress like a local. Plenty of businessmen who work on and around Front Street, the main artery in downtown Hamilton, the tiny nation's capital, wear Bermuda shorts. But

I see none. Then I remember: It's Saturday, stupid. No one is working.

A little later on, I'm still shorts-spotting while riding in the back of a taxi headed west on Bermuda's South Road. On one side of the street, perfectly kept homes flutter by like wildly colored flags. Aquamarine, pink, lavender, peach and all other imaginable shades of primly painted pastels, the houses sit on lawns landscaped almost as perfectly as the eight golf courses that are wedged into every corner of the island. Bermuda is all about wedging. If it were an independent country and not a British protectorate, Bermuda would be the third-densest nation on the planet, with 3,000 people per square mile. That's one of the reasons visitors aren't allowed to rent cars here — only scooters — and the primary reason Bermudians can only sell their homes to other Bermudians, who, last year, paid an average price of \$1.2 million for one.

As our taxi ride continues, I spot Elbow Beach, one of the most popular and biggest pink-sand beaches on Bermuda. There, I finally see men in shorts. Cargo shorts. Bulky, brown, ridiculous cargo shorts. To some they must be comfortable. But not to my eyes. Cargo shorts, to me, make grown men





**CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT:** The clock tower at the Royal Naval Dockyard; St. George's Island; an aerial view of Bermuda; locals sporting the native dress; the 16th hole of the Port Royal Golf Course; the Frog & Onion Pub; Crystal Cave; St. Peter's Church; Warwick Long Bay Beach

## If You Go

### SITES TO SEE

**St. George's Town** With its multicolored buildings, this town — a UNESCO World Heritage site — has been continuously occupied since 1612. Must see: St. Peter's Church, the oldest Anglican church outside the British Isles.

**Crystal Cave** A 55-foot-deep electric-blue lake was discovered in a Bermudian's backyard in 1905 and has been a major island attraction ever since. The lake is spanned by floating walkways, allowing visitors to pass under stalactites and over the stalagmites rising up through the clear water. [www.caves.bm](http://www.caves.bm)

### GETTING AROUND

**By bus** Visitors aren't allowed to rent cars in Bermuda — only scooters — but regularly scheduled

buses are a convenient way to get around. The buses run on a loop around the islands, with stops near all the major sites and beaches. One-way, daily, weekly or even monthly passes are available for purchase at most hotels.

**By ferry** Locals and tourists alike hop between the many small islands that make up the country of Bermuda by boat. The ferry network runs to and from central Hamilton Harbour to the far ends of the islands. Buy tickets at hotels and post offices. [www.seaexpress.bm](http://www.seaexpress.bm)

### EATING AND DRINKING

**The Frog & Onion Pub** Housed in an 18th-century cooperage adjacent to the cruise ships and tourist attractions at Bermuda's Royal Naval Dockyard, this restaurant serves its own house-brewed beer and

pub fare, such as fish and chips. [www.frogandonion.bm](http://www.frogandonion.bm)

#### **Little Venice Wine Bar**

This upscale, quiet bar in downtown Hamilton specializes in wines from France and California, with more than 700 available by the bottle.

[winebar.littlevenice.bm](http://winebar.littlevenice.bm)

**Lido Restaurant** Part of a complex of eateries on the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group's property on Elbow Beach, Lido offers Mediterranean cuisine, including simple seafood dishes, in a glass-enclosed dining room with ocean views.

[www.lido.bm](http://www.lido.bm)

**Waterlot Inn** Just past the dock on Jews bay, this elegant and expensive restaurant with wood-beamed ceilings has been serving Bermudian food at the Fairmont Southampton for more than 340 years. Both the interior lounge, with antique furniture, and

the outdoor terrace and gardens are excellent spots for cocktails. [www.fairmont.com/southampton/GuestServices/Restaurants/WaterlotInn.htm](http://www.fairmont.com/southampton/GuestServices/Restaurants/WaterlotInn.htm)

### PLACES TO STAY

#### **Rosewood Tucker's Point**

Adjacent to New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Bermuda residence, this resort has 88 rooms, is situated on a hilltop and boasts a private beach. [www.tuckerspoint.com](http://www.tuckerspoint.com)

#### **Fairmont Southampton**

The hotel is set on 100 acres on the southern shore of Bermuda, including miles of pink-sand beaches and its own golf course. [www.fairmont.com/southampton](http://www.fairmont.com/southampton)

### THINGS TO DO

**Shipwreck dives** More than 300 ships have run aground of Bermuda's coral-reef system, and snorkelers can visit dozens of them,

from wrecked schooners to dashed warships. Fantasea Bermuda offers diving trips to those of various experience levels. [www.fantasea.bm](http://www.fantasea.bm)

**Golf** Bermuda offers more courses per square mile than any other country on the planet, and golfers will definitely find a green to their liking. Contact the Bermuda Golf Association to reserve tee times at any of the country's courses. [www.bermudagolf.org](http://www.bermudagolf.org)

**The best beaches** Elbow Beach, with nearly a mile of beachfront and three nearby hotels, is one of the most popular beaches on the island and often features a cadre of windsurfers. Many families prefer Horseshoe Bay, because it has a lifeguard on duty during the season. For a more isolated, tropical-island feel, try Warwick Long Bay, where tall grass gives way to pink sand. —J.G.

appear like overgrown children. I lean up to the front seat to ask Joy Sticca, the communications coordinator for Bermuda's tourism department, what she thinks of the island's trademark fashion. "I think the men look sexy in those shorts," she says. "I like the colors too. The pink is nice."

I slam myself back into my seat. Good gracious, I'm thinking, not only do I have to wear shorts, but I have to wear *pink shorts*? It's too much for this ankle-skimmer aficionado to handle.

TIME FOR ANOTHER DRINK. AT 64 DEGREES, the bar and restaurant at the Port Royal Golf Course, I'm having a Dark 'n Stormy. This is the national drink of Bermuda, consisting of ginger beer and Gosling's Black Seal Rum, which is distilled on the island. My view is past the 18th hole, down a sloping green hill and out into the ocean where Bermuda's ring of coral reefs creates the brightest turquoise

### Bermuda shorts season is, well, short.

water I've ever seen. I pull out my research materials on Bermuda shorts and read conflicting accounts on when this fashion fad took over. Some date it to the 1920s, others to after World War II. Either way, the source of the look isn't in doubt; it's based on warm-weather British military uniforms, which featured tailored shorts and high socks. This explains why there are stringent rules for wearing Bermuda shorts. The shorts must be tailored, meaning they must be made like typical dress trousers, out of cotton or linen blend. They must have a crease down each leg. They must hit above the knee, with a two-inch hem. Also, they have to be worn with knee socks that are folded down at the top and with dress loafers, a dress shirt, a tie and a blazer or sport coat.

This uniform seems particularly ineffective as shorts go, given that only the very top of the calf and the knee are open to the air. But therein lies its appeal to me: The tailoring of the shorts means I'll be dressed up when I dress down. Maybe it's just the Dark 'n Stormys talking, but I'm suddenly convinced I can carry off this look.

A few hours later, Jamahl Simmons deflates my confidence. Simmons, the public-relations director for the Fairmont Southampton, located on the other side of

Bermuda from the Fairmont Hamilton Princess, tells me the time for Bermuda shorts as a fashion trend may be running short. "The shorts are something that my grandfather wears," explains Simmons, a baritone-voiced Bermuda native with the frame of a Division II defensive lineman. "It's a look for the older generation."

Even so, Bermuda's English Sports Shop, the main retailer of Bermuda shorts on the island, still sells about 20,000 pairs a year. Some of those go to conventioners and visiting businessmen, others to local executives. But Simmons isn't alone in the belief that fewer men are wearing the Bermuda shorts uniform to work than in

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years past. As this island nation's workplaces have followed the worldwide trend toward more-casual dress, the demand for the dressy Bermuda shorts has waned. Air-conditioned offices haven't helped, either. (Who wants cold knees at work?)

Today, the biggest buyers of Bermuda shorts seem to be people like Simmons and

Griffith — those who interact daily with tourists. The Fairmont, like other hotels here, requires its male employees to wear the traditional dress during the warm season, which, during my visit, was just days away. And the women in Simmons' office were counting down the days to shorts season. "They have been torturing me for two

weeks," Simmons says. "They keep telling me, 'Hey, I want to get a look at those legs.'"

"Man," he continues, breaking into a powerful laugh, "I feel objectified."

TODAY IS THE DAY. AFTER ONE MORE morning of touring the island's sites — from the Royal Naval Dockyard in the west to the eastern town of St. George's, which celebrates its 400th year of continual settlement this year — I'm preparing to don Bermuda shorts. I head to the English Sports Shop on Front Street, where I find dozens of pairs arranged in appropriately tidy piles. Here, too, are the must-have knee socks and preppy ties and shirts and blazers. But there is one problem. "We don't have our spring colors in stock yet," says Jackie, the sales clerk who is helping me. "Just the gray and navy and khaki." Having dodged the pastel-colored bullet, I go with gray.

Back in my hotel room, I get dressed. Navy sport coat. White, French-cuff shirt. Red-white-and-blue tie. Black loafers. Navy socks. And, finally, the gray shorts. I look at myself in the bathroom mirror when I'm done tying the tie. I can only see myself to the waist. You know what? I look fantastic. I could definitely do some offshore tax avoidance in an outfit like this. A few steps later, though, I arrive at the room's full-length mirror and see the full Monty. Truth is, I look ridiculous. It's like I'm living out one of those dreams where I've forgotten to wear pants.

I walk out on the balcony where my wife, who has come along with me on this trip, is sitting. Graciously, she doesn't laugh. Still, I tell her that I don't think I can leave the room dressed like this. "Oh, we're leaving," she says, leaping to her feet and grabbing me by the hand, literally pulling me out the door.

On my way out of the hotel, I catch the eye of two women who are on their way in. They look me up and down. I, too, feel objectified. But then, they smile. Suddenly, as I head out toward downtown and my knees see sunlight for the first time in decades, I am reminded of something William Griffith told me about those dressy shorts. He whispered it, leaning in over the top of my Dark 'n Stormy. "This is the truth about those shorts," he said. "Chicks dig them."

A man would have to be a real lunatic to argue with that kind of logic. ☑

Frequent *American Way* contributor **JOSEPH GUINTO** has not worn his Bermuda shorts Stateside. But he does sometimes wear the knee socks.

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