

Bermuda is a Total Contrast to AZ

(8/8/2014 AZ Republic by Dr. Harold Wong)

I was recently flown to Bermuda by a financial group. This is an island of 65,000 people that is about a 2-hour plane ride from NY, NJ, Philadelphia, or Miami. There are vast differences from AZ in terms of the climate, social structure, racial harmony, and the economy.

Climate: Bermuda is an island where summer temperatures are in the 80s and there's a refreshing ocean breeze. In July and August, hurricane season can begin whereas in AZ we're supposed to have the monsoon season. However, the AZ desert is suffering from at least a 17-year drought and we have rarely had heavy rains during recent years.

Social Structure and Racial Harmony: This was a British-controlled island, going back to the 1600s. During the American Revolutionary War, Bermuda stayed loyal to England. About 9,500 English convicts were brought to Bermuda to provide slave labor. Many died due to disease and malnutrition. There were some African slaves, but not nearly as prevalent as the U.S. South and other Caribbean islands. Britain was politically against slavery before America. Bermuda natives told me that ship-building was one of the major early industries. A British guy might own the company and the main house, but all the workers lived together, whether from England, Africa, or India. Natives claim that there were no racial problems and everyone gets along. Everyone feels safe walking at night anywhere, which we can't say in AZ.

Tax structure: There is no income tax in Bermuda. However, there are real estate taxes and a stiff 25 percent duty on everything that is imported into the island. Because there are no income taxes, Bermuda for decades has been a center of legal off-shore insurance and reinsurance companies. With the financial centers of the U.S. East Coast only a 2-3 hour flight away, this makes sense. I saw signs of major U.S. insurance companies outside of Bermuda buildings in Hamilton, their main commerce center.

Economy: In addition to offshore insurance and banking, the island relies heavily on tourism. In one island tour that I took, the tour guide stopped where 2 major cruise ships had docked, containing at least 7,000 passengers and crew. It's an economic bonanza for the local businesses as thousands walk ashore and most buy souvenirs. In addition, Bermuda is known for the scuba diving, as the water is very clear. Offshore reefs about 25 miles outside of the island absorb much of the waves during storms and Bermuda has a number of safe harbors.

Prices: Compared to AZ, most grocery store items are 2-3 times more expensive. A loaf of bread is \$6 and a tube of toothpaste is \$12. On sale, Hellman's 30 oz. jar of Mayonnaise is \$6.95. Iced tea costs \$3.79 for a quart container, which is 3 times what it costs in AZ. Peaches are \$3.99 per pound. A 2-litre bottle of Coke costs \$3.45, vs. \$1 in AZ on sale. Gas is \$8.50 a gallon.

At local roadside food stands, expect to pay \$10-15 for a sandwich. At the Fairmont Southampton resort, lunch for two costs \$88 for: a 4-oz. order of wahoo and French fries and 2 tiny wahoo fish sliders and fries. In contrast, one can get 4 much bigger fish sliders and French fries for \$9 at an AZ sports bar. A couple from Chicago who earns over \$400,000, balked at going out to a well-known local restaurant, because it would be \$375 plus a \$35 taxi ride each way. The average house can cost \$1-2 million.

Summary: Bermuda has unbelievable beauty, weather, racial harmony, and political stability. However, the high cost of living and lack of enough high-paying jobs cause many of the young to go to college offshore and migrate to other countries.

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