

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

By Rachel Raczka
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Did you know a cockroach egg sort of looks like a cooked pinto bean, with dozens of cloudy sacs of life inside? I bet you never want to eat pinto beans again. I definitely do not.

This is what I contemplated while on the sandy white beaches of the Grotto Bay Beach Resort and Spa in Bermuda. Even as I sipped unlimited banana daiquiris and crystal waves splashed by my feet, my sleep-deprived pupils blackened in fear behind sunglasses.

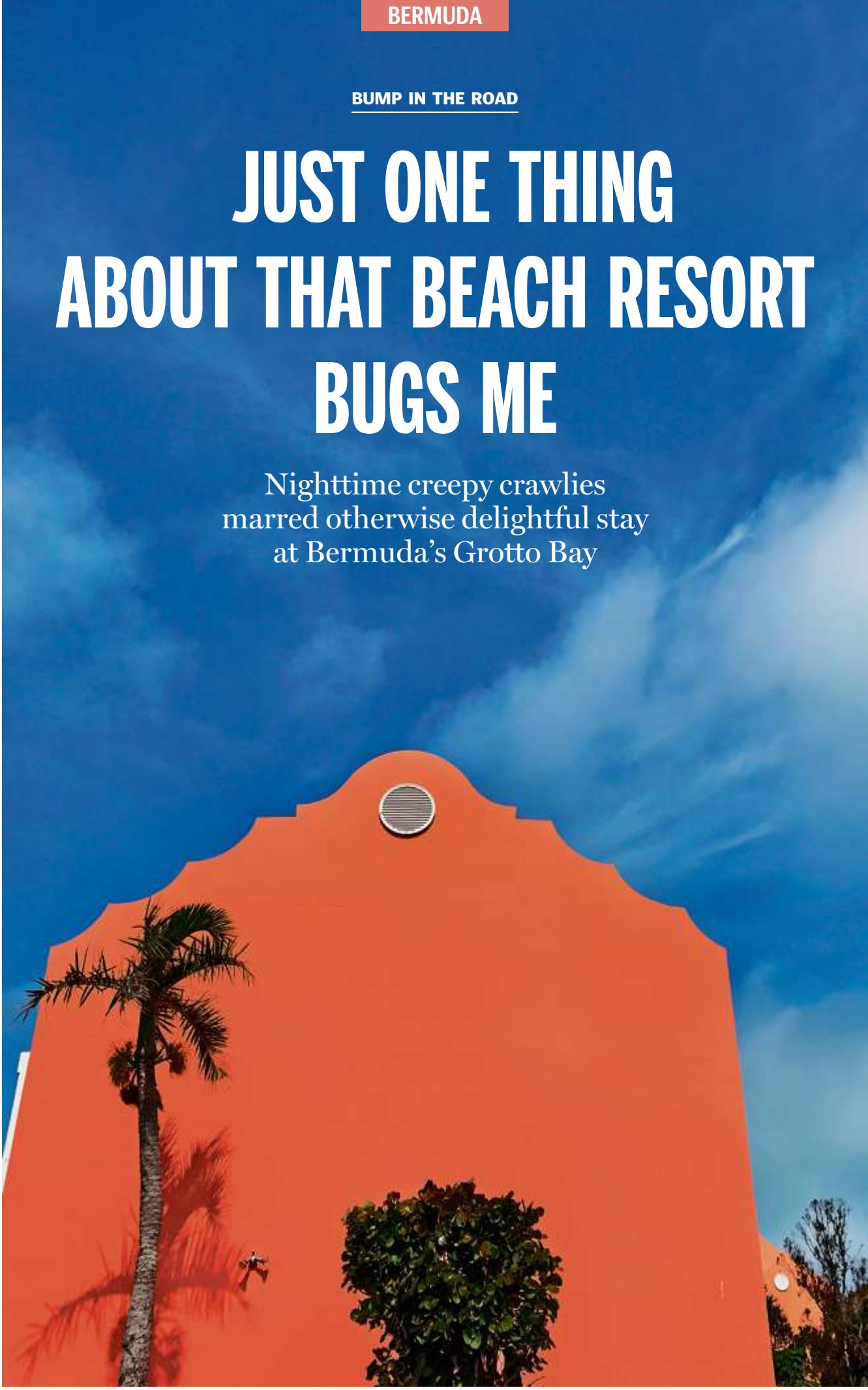
Otherwise, it was a very lovely vacation.

Smack in the middle of America's Cup, I spent five days in Hamilton Parish at a terribly cute, pastel, 201-room resort that made its Bermudian debut in the early '70s. It boasts the island's only all-inclusive package, with metered meals, unlimited beverages, and water sports for \$114 a night. If you've been to a Bermuda grocery store and spent \$18 on a watermelon, you will recognize this as a bargain.

There's a small, but just fine, private beach with a surf shop offering snorkel gear and kayaks. If you hate the sun, then why are you in Bermuda? But lucky you, there are on-campus caves for swimming and spa treatments. It costs a fraction of the inflated nightly rates of downtown Hamilton and is a five-minute drive from the airport, though relentless singing frogs drown out the residual noise.

We were charmed by the staff and the ability to order unlimited Rum Swizzles and spent most of our first day patting ourselves on the back for taking a chance on a mixed review resort. Those shrill TripAdvisor reviews were nothing more than uptight tourists. I wondered if there should be a "Mean Tweets"-type segment where my new best friend, the resort's guest services guide, read negative reviews for YouTube.

But — they come at night. Following a feast of steak frites and Dark and Stormy cocktails at Palm Court, one of the hotel's three dining options, we were ready to settle in when the first chicken egg-size cockroach sauntered in from behind the dresser. I don't mean to provide a narrative to a nonvocal creature, but this enormous, evil beast had absolutely been there before. It confidently approached as I felt the thump of heart palpitations rising in my chest. Soon, its associates joined. My boyfriend managed to stamp them out with a copy of the Economist (if you happen to have a spare edition, please let us



BERMUDA

BUMP IN THE ROAD

JUST ONE THING ABOUT THAT BEACH RESORT BUGS ME

Nighttime creepy crawlies marred otherwise delightful stay at Bermuda's Grotto Bay

know) and trapped another under a glass as collateral before we rang guest services.

"Oh my god," the woman at the front desk said. It was past 1 a.m. "Well, that's how it is on the island," she sighed, before quickly declaring that they would relocate us. We were moved from the ground floor to a room, one floor up, the next villa over. The hotel has ongoing renovations, as evidenced by crews and construction, and the updated rooms are dramatically different. What the room we were relocated to lacked in accessible power outlets and cockroaches, it made up for by appearing to have ransacked the prop closet of the '90s jungle flick "Jumanji."

I spent half of the remainder of our trip wondering how much it would cost to change hotels. I spent the other half of that time wondering whether most American travelers are intolerant of native critters. Monster-size cockroaches are indeed common in Bermuda, as are the slender lizards that might be less welcome if they weren't such an on-brand turquoise ombre and the hotel's pseudo-resident feral cats, which I found to be the best amenity of all.

Grotto Bay offers a round-trip shuttle service to Cooper's Island Nature Reserve, where, if you are not willing to encounter multi-legged locals, you could miss the most spectacular hidden beaches. The famed pink sands of Horseshoe Bay are easily accessible via a 45-minute ride by public transit (a bus pass is included in the all-inclusive package), but these quiet coves are the spectacular tranquility that desktop computer screen backgrounds are made of.

The cockroaches did not appear again, though one of the many live chickens that roam the resort joined us for lunch. "We try to shoo them away, but then days later we see them reappear with little baby chicks in tow," one exasperated staffer said with a laugh, replacing the cocktails our dining guest splattered to the ground. We laugh, too. We're one with nature now.

By day five, the cockroach invasion seems like a distant memory. Instead, we're happily snapping off aloe leaves from a plant in the hotel's front lawn at the advice of our concierge. New arrivals watched, horrified, as we ripped open leaves and slathered our sunburns in goo. This is Grotto Bay at peak all-inclusive. Nature, too.

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HERE

PIRATE TREASURES AND TALES IN PORTLAND
Visit the Portland Science Center and find out what happened to the infamous Whydah, a pirate ship that sank off Cape Cod 300 years ago, filled with treasure from more than 50 captured ships. "Real Pirates: An Exhibition from National Geographic" runs until this fall (no end date yet), and showcases more than 200 artifacts from the 18th century pirate ship, which was located by underwater explorer Barry Clifford in 1984. See treasure chests full of gold coins, jewelry, and "state-of-the-art" 18th century weapons, such as cannons, pistols, and swords. The exhibit also offers a look at the history of pirating, from New England to the Caribbean and beyond, and of the people involved, including 11-year-old John King, the youngest-known pirate aboard the ship. The ship sank April 26, 1717, during a treacherous nor'easter. 866-822-4780, www.portlandsciencecenter.com.

BOSTON HOTEL OFFERS KIDS' ADVENTURE PROGRAM
Check in to the Mandarin Oriental, Boston, and your kids can catch their own plush lobster stuffed animal, snack on a sea life-inspired cookie creation, and pore over a Boston treasure map that showcases must-see kid-friendly spots throughout the city. The hotel's Mini Mate kids adventure program directs people on a self-guided tour to the city's historic landmarks and attractions, including the Public Garden, where you can float on a swan boat; the Boston Tea Party Ships and Museum, where you can "dump" tea into Boston Harbor; and Frog Pond on Boston Common. Then find a treasure at the secret "x" that marks a spot, somewhere inside the hotel. Rooms start at \$595 and include complimen-

tary use of cribs, high chairs, strollers, Diaper Genies, and child-size bathrobes and slippers. 617-535-8888, www.mandarinoriental.com/boston.

THERE

NEW WALKING TOURS OF LONDON
Explore favorite hangouts of old pirates and artists, and get a taste of Indian food during two new walking tours of London. Eating London has launched a new 2.5-hour guided walk, called Brick Lane-Flavors of India and Beyond, that lets participants sample their way through nine restaurants in "Banglatown," a London neighborhood that showcases South Asian food and culture (cost: \$36 per person 12 and under, \$48.50 13-18, and \$58.65

adults. The 4-hour London Docks-Historic Pubs and Classic Grub Tour takes adults to popular hangouts visited by pirates, thieves, and artists, including the city's oldest riverside pub. Walk through quiet residential areas with cobblestone lanes and old warehouses to glimpse stunning views of London's skyline (\$100.75 per person). www.eatingeuropetours.com.

DOGGIES DINE IN STYLE AT FLORIDA HOTEL
Stay at one southwest Florida resort and your canine friend can indulge in grilled filet mignon and veggies, bacon-flavored boneless wings, and other mouthwatering menu items. The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village, which welcomes dogs up to 45 pounds without a fee or deposit, has launched a new menu that's geared to pooches. Your furry friend can choose other lip-smacking favorites such as the peanut butter surprise appetizer, chicken bowl with rice and veggies, and berries and bacon dessert. Dogs can dine with owners at the resort's dockside bar and grill, The Nauti Mermaid, or enjoy room service. The hotel's Heavenly Pet Treatment includes complimentary use of dog bed, floormat, and food and drink bowls. Room rates start at \$137 per night. Doggie dishes run \$7-15 (apps), \$19-\$39 (entrées), and \$10 (desserts). 866-716-8108, www.westincap coral.com.

EVERYWHERE

YUMMY MEALS AND MUNCHIES FOR ON THE GO
Pack a snack or meal for your next trip that's healthy and nutritious, and



made by a company that values long-term sustainability. Patagonia Provisions makes portable, easy-to-prepare snacks and meals that are all organic and produced by regenerative farmers. Grab a banana, red raspberry, or apple hot cereal mix made with certified-organic whole grains, buckwheat, and fruit; buffalo jerky from American bison that roam and graze freely on the open prairie; tasty fruit and nut bars with almonds and Inca berries, apricots, or mangos; savory grains with mushroom or kale and Kamut khorosan wheat; and meat- and dairy-free soups, including red bean chili, green lentil, and black bean. Our favorite: Wild Lummi Island pink salmon caught in reef-nets in northwest Washington state using an ancient selective-harvest technique. Meals and snacks come ready to serve or just add hot water, so work perfect on the go or in your hotel room. Available at Patagonia on Newbury Street, or online. Most snacks and meals \$6.50, except buffalo jerky (\$10) and pink salmon (\$12 for two 4-ounce packages). 888-221-8208, www.patagonia provisions.com.

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