

# Bermuda's **SUNKEN** TREASURES

*Diving into  
its maritime  
history can be  
rewarding for  
most visitors*

STORY BY  
MARC ATCHISON

PHOTOS COURTESY  
BERMUDA TOURISM

*More than 300 wrecks  
rest below island's waves*

**HAMILTON, BERMUDA** – What you see above the waves on this regal island that juts out of the North Atlantic east of the Carolinas is pretty impressive – jellybean-coloured homes, fairy tale forts, sugar white beaches, stately mansions and renowned resorts.

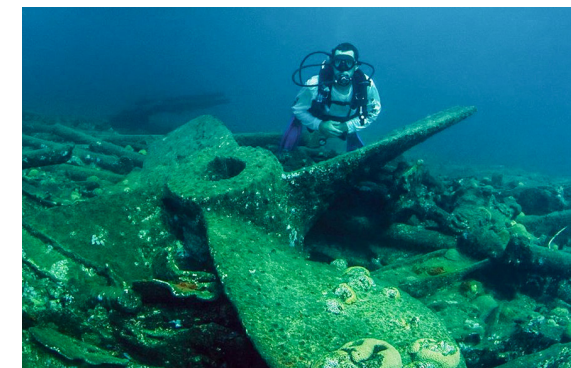
What's below the waves, though, is even more impressive.

In fact, many people will argue that if you truly want to experience Bermuda's scintillating maritime history, you better be prepared to don a wet suit or scuba gear and dive into the crystal blue waters that lap the shores of this former British colony. That's because Bermuda's waters are filled with lots of shipwrecks – more than 300, in fact, making it the shipwreck capital of the world. For visiting divers, these shipwrecks are sunken treasures just waiting to be explored.

According to historians, Bermuda actually owes its establishment to settlers stranded from a 1609 shipwreck – the Sea Venture.

Many of the 300-plus sunken ships fell victim to the coral reefs that protect over 400km of Bermuda's jagged coast, while others simply disappeared under mysterious circumstances, thus prompting tales of the "Bermuda Triangle."

Wrecks were so commonplace off Bermuda that European sailors began referring to it as the "Isle of Devils"



Bermuda's waters are littered with shipwrecks, like the *Cristóbal Colón*, above, which hit a reef and sank in 1936.





*The remains of the Hermes lie on the bottom of the North Atlantic off Bermuda. It was purposely sunk in 1984 as part of an artificial reef.*

and many refused to sail on ships heading here.

The wrecks span the centuries and began disappearing beneath the waves in the 1600s. Many others, however, sank or were scuttled in the 20th century to help make coral reefs.

Currently, there's a project underway to identify 100 of the lost ships, many of whom in the 1600s were carrying people and cargo to colonial Virginia. One of the most tragic shipwrecks occurred in 1661 when the Virginia Merchant hit a submerged reef off Bermuda and sank, taking 169 souls to the bottom of the North Atlantic.

Some of the most popular wrecks with divers are:

### **THE CRISTÓBAL COLÓN**

This 499-foot-long Spanish luxury liner is the largest known shipwreck in Bermuda waters. Launched in 1923, the Cristóbal Colón was the most advanced liner design of her time. Unfortunately, she crashed into a coral reef in 1936. Today, her wreckage is scattered across 100,000 square feet of the sea floor. Gigantic in size, this wreck offers divers hours of fascinating exploration including the ship's massive fixtures, over-

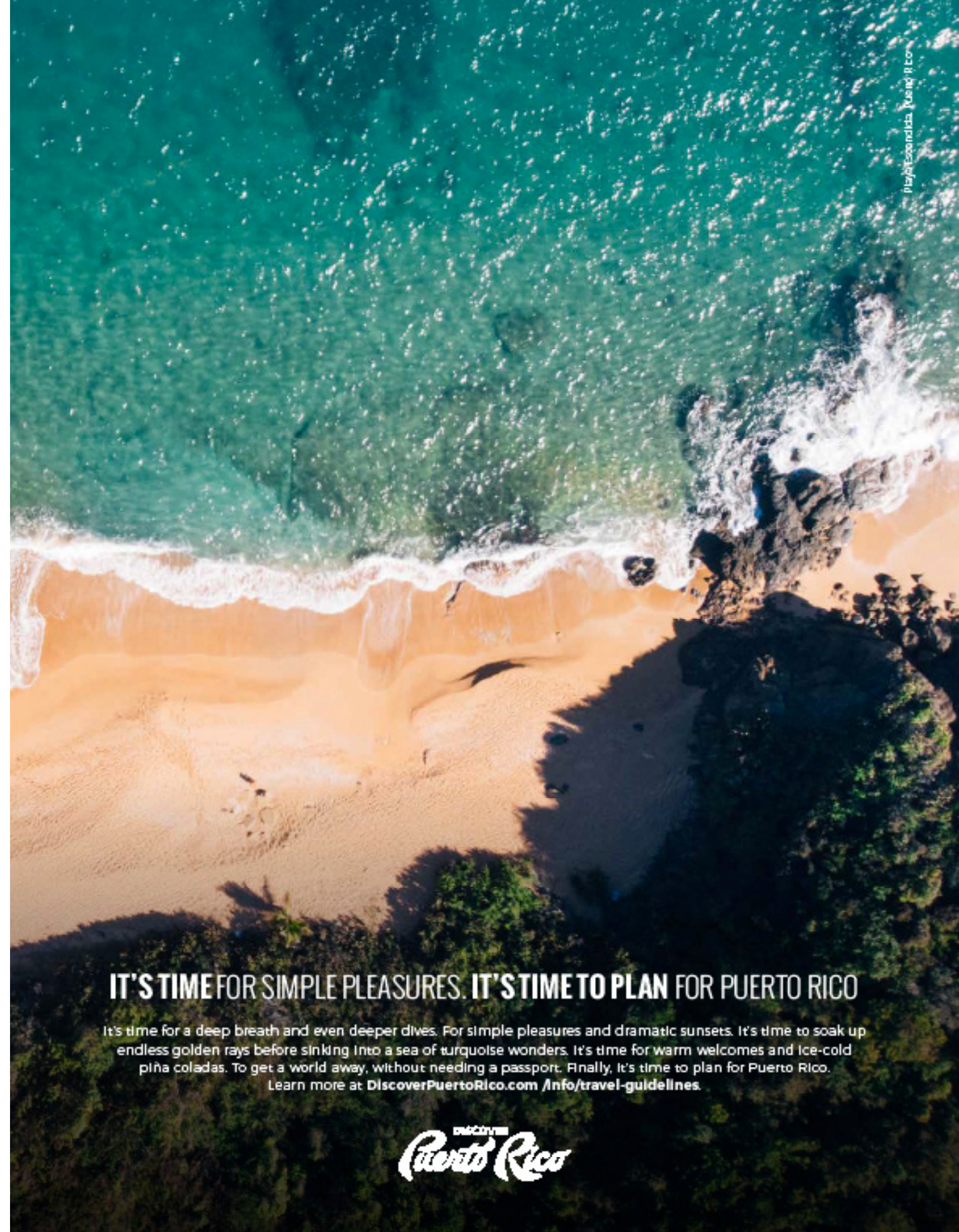
grown with a plethora of marine life.

### **THE IRISTO (ARISTO)**

Known as Bermuda's unluckiest ship, this 250-foot-long Norwegian freighter sank in 1937. She sank because of another shipwreck. Unfamiliar with our reefs, her captain was surprised by the sight of the wrecked Cristobal Colon, and ordered his ship to turn away. The course change caused the Iristo to crash into a submerged reef and sink. Currently, the ship lies with her engine, boilers, propeller and a fire engine still visible. She's also laden with large amounts of beautiful coral.

### **THE HERMES**

Built in 1943 and only 165 feet long, the Hermes was en route to the Cape Verde Islands when she experienced engine trouble near Bermuda. The ship was abandoned by her crew. In 1984, the deserted ship was sold to the Dive Association for \$1 and became a sunken artificial reef 2km offshore at Horse-shoe Bay. With her mast pointing toward the surface,



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Some of the wrecks are not fully submerged and provide swimmers and paddleboarders a place to explore and play.

the Hermes is fully intact and one of Bermuda's most popular dive sites. The wreck is quite photogenic because of the area's excellent visibility.

### THE MARY CELESTIA

The paddle steamer and Civil War blockade-runner Mary Celestia sank soon after leaving port in Bermuda in 1864 bound for Wilmington, North Carolina with ammunition and supplies. Running aground on a reef, everyone on board survived the wreck except for the ship's cook, who entered the ship to collect his personal belongings. Some suspect that the Bermuda pilot guiding the boat at the time was bought off by the U.S. Consul in Bermuda and deliberately wrecked the ship. She rests at approximately 55 feet deep off the South Shore, with sections of her bow and stern, boilers, anchor and both paddle wheels visible.

### THE CAESER

Built in 1814 in Durham, the English brigantine was lost on a reef

## JUST THE FACTS

**HOW TO GET THERE:** Air Canada and WestJet offer direct flights to Bermuda from Toronto.

**WHERE TO STAY:** The recently renovated Hamilton Princess & Beach Club is located in the heart of Bermuda's largest city, overlooking beautiful Hamilton Harbour and just steps from downtown shops and restaurants. The resort featured a spa and its main dining room is governed by celebrity Chef Marcus Samuelsson.  
<https://www.thehamiltonprincess.com>

**BERMUDA INFO:**  
<https://www.gotobermuda.com>

off the west end of Bermuda on May 17, 1818.

The ship was heavily salvaged at the time of her sinking, and telltale evidence of this salvage operation can be found around several nearby docks where parts of her distinctive cargo can be found. The wreck was rediscovered lying in a sand hole in 35 feet of water in 1957.

One of the most distinctive ele-

ments on the wreck itself is the remains of her cargo of grindstones – a critical traded goods for the U.S. because no good source of the stones had yet been found in the U.S. to fulfil their purpose.

### THE MANILLA

An unknown Dutchman-class ship, dubbed the Manilla by archaeologists, is believed to have run aground in 1753 in what is now the North East Breaker dive area. The name derived from manillas – bronze bangles produced in Europe that served as a form of African currency used to purchase slaves from African chieftains. Shipwrecked on the reef, the 18th-century vessel went down just breakers away from the Eagle, a Virginia Company ship wrecked a century earlier in 1659 on the North East Breakers. What's left of the Manilla appears to be lying upside down. There are stacks of cannons that were overgrown with coral when first discovered.

Diving into Bermuda's rich maritime history can be quite rewarding for visitors.

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