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## Why attend America's Cup?

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*by Lisa duBusc Miller*

Sure there are plenty of cool colorful racecourse graphics and insightful commentary when you watch the world's greatest sailing race on TV. But when those hydro-foiling winged AC Class catamarans are soaring right at you, across the Great Sound of Bermuda in the 35th America's Cup, as you sway to and fro astride a fabulous spectator boat, with a Goslings rum swizzle in hand, and a warm salty breeze is blowing, nothing beats it.

In the words of [ExperienceBermuda.com](http://ExperienceBermuda.com), the America's Cup, which is generally held every four years, is the "pinnacle of international sailing, and has generated intense excitement and fierce rivalries for more than 160 years." And "it is not only the oldest trophy in international sport, it predates the modern Olympic Games by 45 years and is yachting's biggest prize." 2017 is the first time it has ever been held in Bermuda.

Rewind to April 30, 2016, when American Yacht Club (Rye, NY) provided some up close and personal time to its members with the "Auld Mug." Then a few months later, in July 2016, we were fortunate enough to get to spend time with Oracle Team USA at Coral Beach & Tennis Club and their boat in Bermuda. It was around then that I made a personal pact to return to Bermuda in 2017 to see them defend the Cup, on this island full of my favorite childhood memories.

The pure physics of this particular regatta are difficult to comprehend. But we all do our best. These boats behave more like man-powered airplanes as they hover and glide above the sea, tacking and swooping like birds in the deep turquoise waters off of Royal Naval Dockyard.

So we fly to Bermuda on June 14, 2017, and land amidst Day Two of the SuperYacht Regatta over on the St. George's side of the island. Although we had planned to take an official spectator boat out to watch them, the boat breaks and cannot be fixed in time. Ah, the island life. So, we decide to relax on the pink sand at Coral Beach instead.



Oracle had the day off, so we get to spend quality time with team member Juan Vila, who is a friend of the family. Juan is meteorologist and tactician and he rides in the first chase boat during the races. Juan is also “possibly the best and most experienced Spanish sailor of all time. Winner of some of the most important sailing events worldwide he is the only Spanish competitive sailor to have won both a round-the-world race with stop-overs (Whitbread/Volvo Ocean Race) and the America's Cup. As if this was not enough, he broke the Jules Verne record (round the world non-stop) on board the maxi-trimaran Banque Populaire,” according to Trofeocondegodo in May 2012.

Spending time with Juan, a Barcelona native, it's impossible not to think about how few Americans are actually on 'the American team'. Perhaps the rules will change and going forward, teams will be comprised of nationals only. We will see.

We head out the next day, on June 16th to watch the J-class boats, but there is not enough wind for racing, so we just enjoy the jovial camaraderie aboard the sailboat. As we motor around this “coral cap,” as our Captain refers to it, he educates us on how a volcanic eruption mixed with the winds, temperatures and currents of the Gulf Stream to create this, the most northern coral island in the world.

Captain Bob—whose family's been in Bermuda for 300+ years—proceeds to regale us in his lovely Bermudian lilt, with maritime wisdom. He tells us about how Bermuda was discovered by Spanish pilot, Juan de Bermudez in 1505. But he also touches on the sinking Sea Venture coming upon Bermuda in 1609 after a hurricane. The story of salvation of those aboard and their miraculous arrival on 2 small ships the following May in Jamestown is widely thought to be the inspiration for Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Bob also describes the “thick slurry of lyme” created for use in the island's signature limestone roofs, designed to collect rainwater. This is all how the island gets its water. He delves into a discussion about the endangered cedar trees, crystal caves, and that magical grotto at the entrance to the old Castle Harbour Hotel, which brings me right back to age 8.

I, in turn, find myself reminiscing about sea slugs and champagne bottles that my brother Bentley and I used to find at the bottom of Harrington Sound. They were remnants of when my grandparents' “Harrington House” used to be called Harrington Hotel and guests gleefully tossed half drunk bottles over the coral wall into the water in the 1940's. It's on that very same wall, on hot summer nights, I sat with my mom and grandma in the 70's and 80's, eating ice cream and searching the sky for shooting stars.

For Day 1 and Day 2 of America's Cup Match (June 17 and 18), we board America's Cup ferries, spectator sailboats, catamarans and even manage some time aboard a floating pirate ship (Calico Jack's) in Dockyards, complete with “walk the plank.”

Yachts surround us, and are of all shapes and sizes. And I



think back to when my grandfather would walk me into the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club for lunch during a workday in the 70's. I'd smell the cedar rafters and doors and marvel at his getup of knee high socks worn with shorts, coat and tie while I'd gaze at the rows of docked sailboats in Hamilton Harbour.

We on the spectator boat revel in the atmosphere and variety of boats surrounding us now, here in the water at the America's Cup: everything from Ross Perot's Buzzi 39 foot RIB to Charles Simonyi's luxury 233-foot yacht. The atmosphere is one of genteel majesty and the sun is so hot, the beverages so refreshing, the turquoise water so inviting, and the limestone roofs atop pastel homes dotting the shoreline, so charming. It all mixes together and allows us to feel a heady America's Cup high.

Between the regalia and relaxation, we notice Oracle has had a few missteps: losing precious time up on foil, incurring various penalties, and not keeping their speed up while foil tacking and jibing. We all bristle whenever the hulls of the Oracle boat come down off foil and touch down, causing unstable flight.

And yes, we speculate—along with the rest of the world—about whether the decision by the New Zealanders to bank on bigger leg muscles to supply all the boat's power to the hydraulic system will pay off. They certainly took a gamble by swapping out the traditional arm-powered winches with cycle-style grinders to provide power to raise and lower the foils and pull in the huge wingsail. But, as is commonly said, this race has become a technology race almost more than anything else.

So, in spite of a few exhilarating moments of potential, they have fallen behind the Kiwis, giving up all 4 races—over the course of both days—in spite of all our cheering from the spectator boat area.

We numb the pain by dancing it away to music by the Queen of Soca in the America's Cup Village, then we eat a somewhat somber dinner with Oracle team members at The Frog and Onion in Dockyards. We leave to catch the last ferry to Hamilton to enjoy live music at The Hog Penny and dancing at Café Cairo.

Oracle Team USA spends the next week (June 19-23) shedding about 200 pounds off of it, according to skipper Jimmy Spithill. And under his watch, Oracle manages a critical win in their effort to defend the Cup, maneuvering in shifting winds in the 6th race on June 24th.

I watch the win on TV in Rye, New York, and can almost taste the Goslings, smell the saltwater, and feel the boat sway.



Almost.

**Epilogue:** Oracle Team USA would lose the next three races on June 25 and 26, losing the series 7-1 to challenger Emirates Team New Zealand.

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