

Tobago



A Few General Tips for your stay in Tobago

This information is part of the book "Tobago-Island Notes" by Ulli Jenisch, an individual and detailed little travel guide about Tobago. You can download Tobago Island Notes as pdf file or order the actual printed version at our WebSite www.sunbird-holidays.com .

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In Tobago there are no dangerous **animals** and only one poisonous type of snake, the coral snake but you will hardly meet it in public and the colouring is a warning in itself (orange and black rings). Insects and other animals live in the rain forest unless you keep garbage in your room. Put everything in the fridge (besides spices and tins). Throw your garbage away immediately and rinse out your bottles. In this way your room will normally stay free of insects. An excellent tip: keep your "wet garbage" in a plastic bag in the fridge. Just be aware that everything is bigger than you think - butterflies, flowers or bees. The whistling from sunset to sunrise is not from birds but tree frogs; you will get used to it and maybe even miss it.

Beach harassment mostly consists of somebody wants to sell you something at a ridiculous price, for example a coconut at TT\$ 20 - which costs TT\$ 4 in the market - which the seller himself might have stolen from some tree. Ask for the price before you start any negotiations or say "Not today" which is a polite Tobagonian form of rejection in all situations. Some guys might settle down comfortably by your side and start to tell you an endless story. The "normal" hints like staring in your book or closing your eyes will not work. Direct confrontation with direct statements is much better. Examples: "I would like to have some privacy" or "Leave me/us alone" can be quite effective. In serious cases get serious as well and threaten to call "999", the emergency number for the police. This normally helps as those guys don't expect a tourist to know this number. You can also approach a dozing security guard on some of the beaches. This action is called for in rare cases if somebody wants to sell you drugs on the beach.

Dogs: Keep away from stray dogs, most of them belong to fishermen or have various diseases like mange, fleas and tics. Do abstain from feeding them: if you do feed them on your porch for example, you will never get rid of them again. You will enjoy permanent dog fights in front of your window and any guests who come after you (maybe with small kids) will experience a hell of a time...

Drinking water in Tobago is not so clean and safe anymore and has a high concentration of chlorine. Better buy cheap gallon bottles in the supermarket; look for the brands for TT\$ 7 or 8 they are just as good and are only half the price of the other brands.

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Driver's license: You can use your national license for up to 6 weeks, after that you need an international license which is then valid for 3 months driving in Tobago. The international license alone is not enough - you have to prove by showing your national license that you are not disqualified from driving. Please note: you have to be over 25 years and under 65 years and driving for at least 2 years to rent a car in Tobago.

Drugs: Keep away from drugs at all times - they are illegal and the "scene" in Tobago is small but intense. Everybody has a grudge against somebody and you never know who is watching you and the dealer and who might have a policeman as a cousin...

Environment: The consciousness in regard of pollution is, unfortunately, still underdeveloped. Garbage is dumped at Studley Park, you will find a few recycling plants in Trinidad, but not in Tobago. In front of "Gourmet Foods" supermarket is a new glass recycling container, but none for aluminium or paper. You cannot escape the flood of plastic bags from the supermarkets; the cashiers switch on "autopilot" and don't react if you bring your own bags. Try it out but don't be frustrated if you are unsuccessful. Just be a good example, don't leave your garbage at the beach, and avoid stepping on reefs and picking coral; the destruction is getting worse with the expansion of tourism.

The **food** is multicultural and tasty; you can normally eat everything without any problems. Avoid fish and meat in the market as it is not refrigerated. We also keep a general list of restaurants and bars available for you, just call us....

Internet: There are a few cheap Internet shops in Tobago if you wish to check your e-mail. Most of them are in Scarborough, e.g. "Pro Computer", located in the little shopping mall, the TLH building, on Milford Road close to the wharf (everybody knows it, just ask). The hourly fee is about TT\$ 10 and you can also buy a monthly card for around TT\$ 100 which provides you with unlimited Internet access. Avoid the one or two overpriced Internet shops (TT\$ 25 to 40 per hour). The Internet access is rather slow and impossible on some days but, this is Tobago. In general the worst days are Mondays and Fridays.

No **Malaria** protection is needed in Tobago but a good mosquito repellent and a net can be helpful if mosquitoes love you...

Marriage: If you want to get married in Tobago you have to be in the country for at least 3 days. You will need a valid passport, your birth certificate and two witnesses. If you are divorced or widowed take the relevant papers with you as well. You can get married at the registry office in Scarborough by Mr. Jordan who has been there for so long that nobody remembers any more who was there before him. Jordan is an old professional with a tendency to heartbreaking speeches. He loves to be invited to wedding parties but this is not an obligation. The fee is a few hundred TT\$ depending on where and how you want to get married. Of course you can also get married by a priest at a location of your choice, even under water. Your embassy in Trinidad will have your wedding papers validated and forwarded to your home address.

Opening Hours:

Supermarkets: Monday to Saturday open any time between 8 am to 9 am and close between 7 pm and 9 pm. Sundays and public holidays from about 9 am to midday;

Banks: Monday to Thursday 8 am to 2 pm or 3 pm (according to the bank), Friday 8 am to 1 pm and from 3 pm to 5 pm., Sundays and public holidays closed;

Authorities: Monday to Friday open between 8 am or 9 am and close between 3 pm and 4 pm, Sundays and public holidays closed.

Drugstores: Monday to Friday (some also Saturdays) open between 8 am to 9 am and close at 4 pm. Drugstores are also **pharmacies**; the pharmaceutical section is usually located in the back part of the store.

Doctors: normally open Monday to Friday between 9 am and 10 am, some also make house calls, ask "Sunbird" or your host;

Car mechanics: Monday to Saturday from 8 am until...

Gas stations: (2 in Scarborough, 1 in Crown Point, 1 in Plymouth, 1 in Carnbee, 1 in Roxborough, 1 in Charlotteville) Monday to Saturday open from 6 am to 9 pm; Sundays

and public holidays: 1 in Scarborough, Carnbee and Plymouth from 6 am to 2 pm. Opening hours at Crown Point are unreliable.

Police: The emergency number is "999" and is used for all types of complaints including small misdemeanours. The "999" squad are patrolling police cars, which drive along the highway, checking residential areas and beaches. Police stations are located in Scarborough, Crown Point, Old Grange, Moriah, Roxborough and Charlotteville. Now and then you will experience traffic controls especially on busy evenings and nights. If you are driving a rental car always carry your driver's license, your rental contract and the car insurance papers. Speed controls exist (a rather senseless action but nice to help the police fund): the police often hide about half a mile before the entrance to the Hilton Hotel when approaching on the highway from Scarborough. They are lurking behind the bushes to the left and right of the highway and burst out if a car approaches too fast (they measure it by instinct, not with instruments). Beware if oncoming traffic is driving suspiciously slow, if you allow some fool to overtake will see what happens. Alcohol - in general "don't drink and drive"! Follow that rule as you are probably lacking any relatives in the police force. An alcohol level of 1 or 2 beers is okay.

The Post office is located in the wharf building in Scarborough and normally opens Monday to Friday from 8 am. As the mail is exceedingly slow, don't be surprised if your friends tell you they have never received your postcard. The postcards for sale in the post office are quite nice compared to those in many other shops.

Service in relation to price paid sometimes leaves a lot to be desired, not because you are a tourist but as a general rule. If you are not satisfied say so and don't go there again. When dealing with authorities stay polite and don't freak out. Just keep in mind that we residents have to deal daily with these grumpy individuals (fits included!).

Religions: You find all kind of religious groups in Tobago. To name just a few: Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Latter Day Saints and many more. Tobago is a favourite outlet for all kind of American churches to send their missionaries, in suit and tie complete with leather briefcases, (the loudspeakers are on the house) to yell at the gullible population. Tobagonians love to go to church and the longer and bloodier the sermon the better. Many just love to sing gospel, meet neighbours and friends, exchange gossip and in general socialize. If you want to visit a church feel free to do so, you are always welcome and you can leave at any time (the meetings in general last between 3 to 4 hours). Please note: some churches welcome visitors in front of the congregation e.g. the Pentecostals.

Attention, single ladies: The island is still quite safe. Due to the increase in tourism you will, of course, be exposed to increased harassment but normally it doesn't get too bad or physical. The former old time respect towards a lady is fading. I think that both sides are to

blame for that. However, most Tobagonians will still accept a brief strong "no" (without a friendly smile).

Buy good **sun lotion/sun block** with a very high protection factor; you can get sunburnt even on a cloudy day or when sitting in the shade under a tree. Otherwise bring the usual basic medication supply for travelling - that's enough.

Telephone and cell phones: the overseas code to European countries starts with 011, followed by the country code, then the city code without the 0, and then the phone number. One (1) is the country code for the USA. Direct calls to Europe cost about TT\$ 7 per minute, local calls cost 25 cents, calls to Trinidad TT\$ 1 per minute. Coin phones are scarce; it is better to buy a phone card. You get the cards in supermarkets or other shops. Best for overseas calls are the "companion cards", where you have an own account, your own PIN number and so forth - detailed instructions are written on the back of the card. You can also use them to make calls from a private phone; the fees will not appear on the bill of the owner.

Some European cell phones function in Tobago. You have to go to the local telephone company in Scarborough (TSTT) to put everything in place. Most American cell phones are no problem.

Time: Winter time difference is 5 hours, summer time difference 6 hours earlier than in Europe with the exception of England where you have 4 hours/5 hours difference. All other nationalities please bear with me - I just don't know...

Topless? Never in Tobago!! Also swimwear is inappropriate when in town or in restaurants and bars - this is considered rude; you could be denied access or be treated disrespectfully.

Vaccinations: you don't need any; just get a tetanus and polio booster.

Voltage is mostly 110 V.

Ulli Jenisch

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