



INSIDER'S GUIDE TO TOBAGO

By thinking a little about your holiday destination before you travel, and taking some simple steps when you are there, you can gain so much more from your holiday. You will also be making a positive contribution to the people and the places you visit.

TOBAGO

Tobago is a beautiful tropical island just 26 miles long and 8 miles wide (42 by 10 km), with a rugged coastline, deserted palm-fringed beaches, enchanting coral reefs and protected rainforest. With no heavy industry, very light development and only a handful of all-inclusive resorts, the island has remained exceptionally natural and unspoilt. The Tobagonians are deeply religious, have pride in their culture and heritage and are extremely friendly and welcoming.

– CONTRIBUTE TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY BY USING LICENSED LOCAL GUIDES, AGENTS AND OPERATORS FOR YOUR EXCURSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Certified guides are licensed by the Tourism Department and can be identified by their uniform and badges. Registered hotels and the Tourist Information Office at the airport have updated lists.

– BE SENSITIVE TO THE CULTURE OF THE ISLAND

Tobagonians are very friendly, laid-back people, but some behaviour is unacceptable to them. Kissing in public may be frowned upon, especially in the small villages. Nudity and topless sunbathing is prohibited in public places (which includes all beaches). Swimsuits and beachwear are not appropriate for shopping or doing business. It is considered offensive to wear skimpy clothing (halter-back dresses or miniskirts, for example) in church.

– DON'T BE AFRAID TO VISIT PEOPLE'S HOMES

As a visitor, Tobagonians will be pleased to meet you and will often offer to show you where they live. There is no ulterior motive, other than to show hospitality. If you are invited to a family's home and you want to take a gift, cosmetics for women or fruit or toys for the children would be appropriate.

– SUPPORT LOCAL CRAFT WORKERS

Buying craftwork that is made on the island guarantees you a memorable souvenir, and helps Tobago's economy. Things to look for include works of art, custom-made clothing, batik fabric, wood sculptures, ceramics, beaded accessories and leatherwork.

– BE AS SPARING AS POSSIBLE WITH WATER

Don't squander water, especially in the summer months. Local people are affected by water shortages during the dry season, as they have to depend on truck-borne supplies which are sometimes unreliable. Visitors can help conserve water simply by taking showers instead of baths and using towels for more than one day, to reduce laundry.

– TRAVEL TO TOBAGO WITH AS LITTLE PACKAGING AS POSSIBLE

Recycling facilities have become familiar in the UK but they are, as yet, rare in the Caribbean. And Tobago's refuse disposal systems are not geared up to cope with huge amounts of waste paper, plastic and polystyrene. You can help avoid a rubbish mountain in your holiday resort by removing unnecessary packaging from anything you plan to take **before** you leave home.

– DON'T USE DRUGS

It is a common perception among tourists that small amounts of marijuana are permissible. This is not the case in Tobago. As with all other drugs, possession of any amount of marijuana is a crime punishable under law.

– HELP TURTLES TO SURVIVE

The endangered leatherback turtles, which visit Tobago's beaches from March to July to lay their eggs in the sand, are often victims of poaching. Visitors can donate to Save the Turtle or, during the nesting season, volunteer to join anti-poaching beach patrols. During the breeding season, you should turn off beachfront lights so as not to distract nesting females and hatchlings. Never accept turtle meat or buy jewellery made from turtleshell. If you do see poachers, or would like more information, inform your hotel or call SOS (Save Our Sea Turtles) on 639 0026.

– DON'T EAT THE WILDLIFE!

"Wildmeat" or "bushmeat" – which can include iguana, turtle meat, turtle fin soup and many other native species – is considered a delicacy or even an aphrodisiac by the locals. However, eating the local wildlife is illegal. If you are offered it, you should report it to your hotel or to Environment Tobago on 660 7462.

– HELP PRESERVE THE CORAL

Tobago's coral reefs are beautiful but fragile. When snorkelling or diving on the reefs, refrain from walking on, or touching, or removing coral. If you take a trip in a glass-bottomed boat, don't accept invitations to walk on the reefs. (Plastic shoes are commonly handed out by the boat operators, in spite of local attempts to discourage the practice.)



– BE DON'T BUY WILDLIFE PRODUCTS

You may be offered souvenirs that originate from endangered species – even though selling them is illegal, and your purchases may be confiscated. Don't accept sea turtle products, black coral, seashells, exotic plants or butterflies. If in doubt, don't buy any animal or plant souvenirs at all.

– DON'T START FIRES

Bush fires are a constant threat during the dry season. You need a license to light a fire in public areas, and you should be wary of how you dispose of your cigarette butts. Fires on the beach can also damage turtle nests.

FOR MORE INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

<http://www.visitnt.com>

Trinidad & Tobago Tourist Board

www.virtually-tobago.com

Picture gallery of Tobago

<http://www.scsoft.de/et/et2.nsf>

Environment Tobago, a local conservation organisation

<http://www.scsoft.de/et/et2.nsf/0/5f278e42d427b619052569ee007082b1?OpenDocument&Click>

Save Our Sea Turtles Tobago

www.buccooreef.org

Buccoo Reef Trust – organisation concerned with coral reef protection in Tobago

http://www.wwfus.org/buyer beware/caribbean_buyer_beware.pdf

World Wildlife Fund guide to buying Caribbean souvenirs