

TOBAGO

THE CARIBBEAN'S BEST-KEPT SECRET

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LIVE THE CULTURE. *Tobago* THE ISLAND OF STYLE.

UNDERWATER WONDERLAND

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giant coral and barrel sponges | p6

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DESTINATION I DO

An island of romance, tailor-made for
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When it's a laid-back, authentic Caribbean experience you're after, pristine Tobago should be your first port of call, writes **Karen Robinson**

Discover a new way of being in the Caribbean — one that doesn't involve loud-mouthed billionaires racing jet-skis off the beach of a thousands-of-dollars-a-night hotel. Discover Tobago. On this tiny 26-mile long island at the southern end of the Caribbean archipelago, you won't find a five-star room butler handing you a pillow menu, or shops selling Prada swimming trunks and diamond-encrusted Rolexes. Fancy spas aren't really Tobago's style either, but how about a massage in a cabin by the sea?

Tobago's real luxury is in its unspoilt beaches and coral reefs, rainforests and waterfalls and some of the most amazing birdlife in the whole region.

The Tobagonians offer visitors a friendly and laid-back welcome in myriad small and independent hotels and guest houses. Even the big establishments tend to be privately owned, with nary a global brand in sight. Their many small businesses cater well to the mildly adventurous traveller — it's an easy place to get around, by rental car, bicycle or reasonably priced taxi. So you can be confident that your holiday money is fuelling local family enterprises rather than heading back to an international chain's corporate HQ. And the whole vibe is distinctly local: an accessible authenticity connects the visitor with the heart of this tiny island. In the pages of this guide you will find our pick of the places to stay and eat, and some of the activities on offer around the island.

COME LIME WITH ME You might like to start your immersion in local life by attending "Sunday School". This relaxed affair happens every Sunday night at



If paradise is half as nice

between: the Caribbean north flank is a bit balmy than the wilder Atlantic shores. Semi-deserted beaches abound on both sides, though on some you might find yourself involved in the local fishing industry (see page 4). For more amenities — cafes, watersports, boat trips, a photogenic wedding venue — head for the island's seaside showcase, the well-kept public beach complex of Pigeon Point.

IN THE WILD Tobago has the oldest legally protected rainforest in the western hemisphere, thanks to a law passed by a prescient settler in 1765. But man-made laws were no protection

against 1963's Hurricane Flora, which destroyed 75% of the forest, though carefully stewarded regeneration has ensured the lush vegetation is almost back to its old levels. It's so wild and dense that you're advised not to venture alone into the Tobago Main Ridge reserve: the guides are fed up with mounting rescue missions for lost adventurers. And a guide such as Dexter James, whom I now endow with the honorary title Professor of the Rainforest, will open your eyes to the wonders of this world. He leads you on foot along the network of paths that form the Gilpin Trace — which, until 1958 when the Parlaturier-Roxborough road was built, was the only way across the middle of the island. It is named for the tool that created it: a gilpin is a type of machete. You enter a

living, breathing green-shaded world of antiphonal bird calls, where the rarest of the island's eight species of tiny hummingbirds, the white-tailed sabrewing, drinks from the upturned blooms of the vivid red heliconia flower. They can apparently fly in eight directions. Other birds are easier to spot: there are more than 200 species on Tobago, among the most glamorous are the blue-crowned motmot, the rufous-breasted jacamar and the blue-grey tanager. See lush palms, dense ferns, trees with spiked trunks to keep the animals at bay, and jumping fish in the streams. There is another path network to the Gilpin, about 4in wide and made by leafcutter ants to transport vegetal building materials to their underground nests. Book a guided trip into the forest with Dexter through sunshinetourstobago.com from £30 for three hours.

WATERFALLS The forests of Tobago conceal some magnificent waterfalls, combining the opportunity for a calf-wringing workout as you climb to the top, with the reward of a plunge into a freshwater pool once you get there. Argyle Falls near Roxborough is the highest, dropping 175ft through a series of three flat pools. The custodians of this piece of natural heritage have helpfully hewn a path of steps with a rope banister to help you up. Entry costs £6.

REAL CHOCOLATE Not far from the falls is the Tobago Cocoa Estate, where for nine years Duane Dove has been reviving an old 43-acre cocoa farm in what turns out to be the heartbreakingly difficult business of growing single-estate cocoa for a French chocolatier to turn into

How to spend it

The currency of Tobago is the T&T dollar, with around T&T\$10 to £1. The US\$, at around \$1.70 to £1, is also widely used. Sterling prices in this guide reflect exchange rates at the time of going to press.

award-winning premium choccy costing £10 a bar. Duane or one of his team will show you round and explain the extraordinary process. Each trinitario cocoa bush is planted under its own shady canopy of banana and immortelle, and takes five years to start producing 8in long red-orange pods. At this stage, enter the red squirrels and orange-winged amazon parrots, who love nothing more than to take a small nibble from each pod, rendering it useless for chocolate production. Harry the manager shows us the devastated pods — it's enough to make a chocolate-lover weep. Then he finds an



Fresh perspective Taking a dip at Argyle Falls near Roxborough and, main picture, the island's pride and joy, Pigeon Point beach

unsullied one, and tenderly wraps it in layers of net in the hope that it will be able to finish its time on the tree. In a process so convoluted you wonder how anyone ever came up with it, the white fruity seeds in the pod are fermented for six days, then dried before being shipped to France. The tour ends with a chocolate and rum tasting session — they go very well together. For times and bookings, go to tobagococoa.com.



Good life Goat racing at Buccoo. Far left, a copper-rumped hummingbird and, left, a fresh cocoa pod offers a totally new way to taste chocolate

What's on the menu?



Homemade crab and dumpling at Store Bay

COCONUT BAKE This ubiquitous bread appears in several guises: white and light, heavier wholemeal or — my favourite — as filling as an Irish potato farl.

AL FRESCO At Store Bay beach, a row of brightly painted huts sells takeaway to eat at shaded picnic tables. You can have conch and dumpling, bake and shark, fish and fries, callaloo — a thick green soup — and roti bread, but the signature dish is crab and dumpling. Prepare to get messy as you find your way into the sharp grey meat of crab legs and claws in mild, sweet curry sauce atop dense, flat dumplings, for about £5. Drink mauby: made from tree bark, tastes of liquorice.

SPICY TASTY At the Blue Crab in Scarborough, Alison Sardinha has run the front-of-house and husband Kenneth the kitchen for 30 years. Angostura Bitters is the magic ingredient, made in Trinidad to a secret recipe and used by Kenneth to liven up everything from fish to ice cream. Lunch on flying fish stuffed with crab, cou-cou — plantain polenta — or spicy chicken ("spicy tasty, not spicy hot") and coconut ice cream, for £10.

HIGH ENERGY Tobagonians love carbs. At lunch at Jemma's in Speyside, overlooking Little Tobago island, after refreshing cucumber in ginger dressing, brace yourself for grilled fish with cheesy cassava or breadfruit bake, potato fritters, savoury rice and a split-pea dahl for about £10. Bring your own booze. **KR**

Getting there

More direct flights British Airways (ba.com) is increasing the number of direct flights between London Gatwick and Tobago to a twice-weekly service from October 27. Return flights are from £603 in the World Traveller cabin, including drinks, menus by famous chefs and

hundreds of entertainment channels; in World Traveller Plus, BA's premium economy class, return flights are from £992, and in fully flat-bed Club World, from £2,421. British Airways Holidays has packages to selected Tobago hotels. See details throughout this guide and at ba.com/tobago.

TOBAGO CARIB GREAT RACE. POWER BOAT RACING. AUGUST 23RD. BASED ON TWO PEOPLE SHARING FOR TRAVEL BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 2014 - OCTOBER 2014. THE PRICE INCLUDES RETURN BRITISH AIRWAYS FLIGHTS FROM GATWICK AND B&B ACCOMMODATION IN A STANDARD ROOM. LIFE DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN THIS!

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These hideaways prove you can't get too much of a good thing, says **Karen Robinson**

From the breeze-kissed terraces of Castara Retreats, the view sweeps around the bay, taking in the sparkling cobalt sea, the clean white curve of sandy beach and the sweetie shop-bright paintwork on the houses clambering up the hillside. It brings to mind the prelapsarian state of a once similarly enticing Mediterranean fishing village. Have I discovered the St Tropez of the Caribbean? It may be no coincidence that Norman Parkinson, the great British fashion photographer who knew class and quality when he saw it, built himself a house just down the coast from here. He was a discerning early adopter of the quiet, authentic Caribbean.

There are plenty of guest houses and holiday flats in Castara village, but this is the chicest, a collection of 12 lodges and apartments cantilevered out from the lush green hillside at the southern end. No TV, no air con, just natural wood, slatted blinds, secluded terraces and simple, comfortable furniture – it's like living in a grown-up treehouse, with parrots swooping through the foliage. The rooms are kitted out for self-catering – buy a bonito tuna from the fishermen's co-op on the beach for about £8 and bread from the village's traditional clay oven – but Castara Retreats also has its own bar and restaurant. Italian-



Sitting pretty Lodges at Castara are raised up into the branches, perfect for spotting colourful birds, such as, below, the blue-diademed motmot

Venezuelan chef Patricia makes pasta that wouldn't disgrace Milan's finest restaurants and lighter-than-average-for-Tobago dishes using local herbs, fish, fruit and veg. The menu is on the pricy side for the island, about £18 for a three-course dinner, but not outrageous given the quality. Patricia's husband Kenny mans the bar, concocting fruit smoothies – try guava to aid dicky digestion – and recommending tipples from the selection of local rums.

The restaurant doesn't open for breakfast, so you have to wander down to a village cafe for your eggs and coconut bake – but that is exactly the point of the enterprise. Steve Felgate, founder of Castara Retreats, is determined to run it along the principles of responsible tourism, ensuring that as much cash as possible goes directly into the community. Locals are fully involved in building, supplying and running the place. The cleaning ladies have the concession for guest laundry, and what you pay them goes into their pockets, not his. Manager Porridge – he has a real name, but nobody uses it –

own enterprises with local staff, to do airport pick-ups and boat trips.

Using those services is certainly an easier way for visitors to help the community than getting involved with the fishing. The villagers cast a long seine net from the beach in a huge loop, then pull it in to land the catch on the sand. Sunbathing holidaymakers leap up to help, but I had been warned: most only do it once. It's 45 minutes of back-breaking, hand-blistering effort, and you can't lose face by stopping once you've started. The home team, on the other hand, haul with casual aplomb, making it look easy.

On the day I'm there (not hauling), what lands on the sand is a glittering silver disc of rather small fish.

"Is that the catch?" I ask one of the young fishermen in that brainless manner tourists adopt under strong sun. "Yes, mostly bait fish." That's disappointing? "Ah, you can't vex with the sea," comes the reply, with a radiantly contented smile typical of the laid-back Castara village vibe.

And the sea delivers other prizes, like the stingrays that flock into the bay for the overspill from the catch. It's

supply snorkel equipment if you want to get closer – they're harmless if you don't vex with them.

A studio for two at Castara Retreats costs from £85 per night; castararetreats.com

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Seahorse Inn on Grafton Beach is an ace restaurant with rooms attached. Nick and Norma Hardwicke's super-fresh lobster and local fish, served with an "international twist", have made dining under the stars at Seahorse a top foodie experience. If you take one of their four large rooms with air con, fridge, television and private terrace overlooking the beach, you'll be well placed come dinner time.

Double rooms at Seahorse Inn cost from £70 a night, B&B. Only one family room; seahorseinntobago.com

Arnos Vale apartments are a short walk from a small beach; you'd need a car to get to Plymouth for shops and restaurants. The gardens attract a constant sideshow of vibrant birdlife, and owner Victor, who lives on the premises, is able to identify

two bedrooms from £60; arnosvaleapartments.com

Another option for the independent traveller is Ade's Domicil, perched on a hill on the outskirts of Scarborough. The two studios and two one-bedders all have sea views and fully equipped kitchens. Landlady Ade will provide breakfast on request, and you're handy for cafes, restaurants and the beach. A one-bedroom studio at Ade's Domicil costs from £35 a night; adesdomicil.de

RESORT-STYLE

Coco Reef is the queen of Tobago's hotels and the one that comes closest to the upmarket, resort-style establishments on other Caribbean islands. The hotel is on a well-tended 10-acre site between Store Bay and Pigeon Point, with a beach sheltered by a man-made reef for safe family bathing. There are 135 rooms, suites and villas, including a knock-out waterfront lodge in its own garden. The social directors can organise excursions and activities outside the hotel. A tennis court and a gym tempt the



The rooms and junior suites are being upgraded and there's a pool, although no gym or spa, but the place retains a touch of class in a swoonsome location. Seven nights B&B at Blue Haven costs from £839pp, including return British Airways flights from Gatwick, if you travel Sept-Oct and book by May 31; ba.com/tobago

CLASSIC GLAMOUR

When Blue Haven was built in the 1940s, on the site of an old fort, its commanding cliff-top location allowed all 51 rooms, arranged in three wings, to have a sweeping eyeful of the Caribbean from their balconies. Back then, the hotel was the last word in Hollywood-style chic. Robert Mitchum and Rita Hayworth stayed, and film-makers flocked to use the beach as a desert-island location. After a recent renovation, Blue Haven has retained the original coral-pink facade and "wow-factor" domed octagonal lobby that opens



Laid-back life Views from Castara's villas take in the length of the bay. Left, barman Kenny keeps your spirits up

ECO-FRIENDLY

You can visit the Adventure Farm and Nature Reserve in Arnos Vale to walk the trails and spot the dazzling avian life that flits in and out of the lush foliage – including five species of hummingbird. But for a real back-to-nature experience, stay in one of the two wooden



Calm waters Luxury Coco Reef resort and its sheltered white sands

houses raised up on stilts among the trees. Built with sustainable timber and furnished with local craft items, the one-bedroom chalets put you at the heart of wild Tobago, and your staying there helps support conservation projects. One night at the Adventure Farm costs from £60pp, or £105 based on four sharing; adventure-ecovillas.com

Seven nights B&B at Blue Waters Inn costs from £769pp, including return British Airways flights from Gatwick, if you travel Sept-Oct and book by May 31; ba.com/tobago

VILLAS

Ocean-front Villa Jammeev is a three-bedroom, single-storey property, with a pool and hot tub, within the Tobago Plantations Golf Resort. Great for a quick round, it's close to shops and restaurants, too. Seven nights at Villa Jammeev costs from £819pp; 0843 770 6267, tropicalsky.co.uk

Seven three-bedroom bolt holes on the leafy Bon Accord Estate, Coral Sea Villas offer easy access to popular beaches Pigeon Point and Store Bay. Each has a private pool and a housekeeper. A week in a Coral Sea Villa for four costs from £795pp, including return flights; 01373 814234, justtobago.co.uk

Tobayoga



Feed the inner person

If you don't mind a 15-minute walk to the beach, Kariwak Village offers a relaxed and restorative break under palm-thatched roofs.

This family-run hotel near Store Bay has 24 chalet rooms and a traditional thatched *ajoupa* in a peaceful corner of the garden, where daily yoga and t'ai chi are on offer, free to guests. The services of five therapists, from physiotherapy to shiatsu, are available in the treatment rooms, from £36 a session.

Cynthia Clovis is in charge in the kitchen and many of the fruit, vegetables and spices on the substantial, wholesome menus come from Kariwak's own kitchen gardens.

One of Kariwak's yoga teachers is Ginny Plumpton, who visits from her own establishment, Moonlight Mountain, overlooking Scarborough. Here, she runs wellbeing weekends and longer stays for small groups. Resident reflexologist Penny Morris Scott creates vegetarian and fish dishes.

A typical weekend at the centre, which includes four 90-minute yoga sessions, one reflexology treatment, three massages and all meals, costs £300pp. Seven nights at Kariwak costs from £839pp, including return British Airways flights from Gatwick. Details at ba.com/tobago kariwak.com moonlight-mountain.com

Super-luxurious, uber-chic Villa Being is set in an organic fruit farm perched on cliffs in Arnos Vale. Its three-bedroom suites occupy separate buildings and amenities include an infinity pool and meditation site.

One night at Villa Being costs from £800, which includes a chef and use of a Jeep and snorkelling gear; 0049 521 163 883, being-tobago.com

Additional reporting by Wendy Gomersall

TOBAGO HERITAGE FESTIVAL. JULY 17TH– 1ST AUGUST. 7 NIGHTS AT THE 3 STAR KARIWAK VILLAGE IN TOBAGO. BASED ON TWO PEOPLE SHARING FOR TRAVEL BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 2014 – OCTOBER 2014. THE PRICE INCLUDES RETURN BRITISH AIRWAYS FLIGHTS FROM GATWICK AND ROOM ONLY ACCOMMODATION IN A STANDARD ROOM. LIFE DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN THIS!

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Do not disturb
A southern stingray lifts off from its sand bed at the approach of a diver off Speyside

Blue heaven

You'll find deep delights, says Jo Mattock of Dive magazine

Set between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, Tobago gives divers quite a choice. A dive on the Atlantic coast to the south and east is an exhilarating ride, with fast currents and big fish, while the Caribbean waters to the northwest are more sedate. The island is also blessed with nutrient-rich waters from the Orinoco river in Venezuela, which flow past from the south. This can cause plankton blooms that reduce visibility under water — particularly after June — but it's also the reason the island's marine life is so rich. The current brings food for hundreds of species of fish and allows super-sized corals and barrel sponges to flourish. You can swim around the largest brain coral in the Caribbean — 10ft high by 18ft wide — at the Coral Gardens dive site (also called Kelleston Drain or Little Tobago Drift: the names of sites aren't official and differ between dive centres). "We don't have the vivid

colours of Asia, but our dives can be just as exhilarating," says Wayne Palmer of Blue Waters Dive'n in Speyside. He's referring to drift dives, where currents sweep divers along at speeds of up to 4 knots on the wildest days.

Experienced divers are drawn to Speyside, on the Atlantic coast, where sites such as Grand Canyon (also known as the Alps because of the underwater topography) have currents so strong that the bubbles you breathe out can go down before they go up. Such high-adrenaline dives bring rewards in the shape of large reef predators such as barracuda, tarpon and reef sharks, which find their prey here. Manta rays are most often seen between January and February, while whale sharks — which are incredibly rare in the Caribbean — are seen occasionally in June and July.

A favourite among snorkelers, Angel Reef near Speyside is suitable for all levels of diver, despite the occasional current. Even here you can see surgeonfish, damselfish, trumpetfish and Spanish hogfish. Blisteringly fast dives can be had near Crown Point at the other end of the island. At Diver's

Dream, Diver's Thirst and Flying Reef, the currents have sculpted giant barrel sponges into weird shapes. Blacktip reef sharks and eagle rays are often spotted here, and nurse sharks and turtles hide in the reef's nooks and crannies.

In general, diving on Tobago's Caribbean coast is more laid-back, with calmer waters, though drift dives are possible here as well. There are a few shipwrecks to explore, and an old ferry from the Trinidad-to-Tobago route, the MS Maverick, was sunk in 30m of water in 1997 for divers to explore. Soft and hard corals are growing across the wreckage, and schools of bait fish attract predators such as jacks.

DIVE DATA

Most dive sites are reached by boat. Dives cost from £30 to £55, including equipment and taxes. The island has a hyperbaric chamber available 24 hours a day, in case of decompression sickness.

Blue Waters Dive'n, Speyside, northeast Tobago
bluewaterstinn.com
R & Sea Divers, Crown Point, southwest Tobago
rseadivers.com

STAND-UP PADDLEBOARD

Pigeon Point beach is the ideal place to master the stand-up paddleboard. It's an easy way to have fun on the water and the gateway activity to more challenging sports, such as surfing. An hour's lesson (£35) with instructor Duane Kenny is all it takes.

He'll start you off with 15 minutes on the beach, explaining the basics, then launch you on an extra-stable beginner's board, like a fat surfboard, making sure you're wielding your long-handled paddle in the correct manner. In no time, you're on your feet, gliding serenely over the clear blue water, with a great view of what's swimming below you. If you fall off, all you get is a benign soaking in the warm Caribbean.

Once you're hooked, rent a board for £12 an hour, or join Duane on an evening expedition to Bon Accord lagoon (£35). Leave Pigeon Point at sunset and by the

time night has fallen you'll be at the lagoon and ready to marvel at the brilliant bioluminescence given off by the plankton in the water. Magical. KR standuppaddletobago.com

GLASS-BOTTOM BOAT

A fun way for everyone to experience the amazing undersea world of Buccoo Reef is to take a trip on one of the excursion boats that leave from Store Bay, Pigeon Point or Milford Reef.

The long glass panels in the boat's floor give a great view of the 40 different species of coral and the brightly coloured fish that live in and around them, and informative commentary from the captain adds colour. Even the most nervous of Nellies can snorkel from the boat thanks to a buoyancy aid and a rope to hold on to for extra reassurance.

At the Nylon Pool — so called for the way the pale aquamarine water resembles

the colour of fishermen's nylon ropes — the water is just knee-deep, offering the opportunity of a safe swim far out at sea, or an exfoliating pedicure from the crushed coral underfoot.

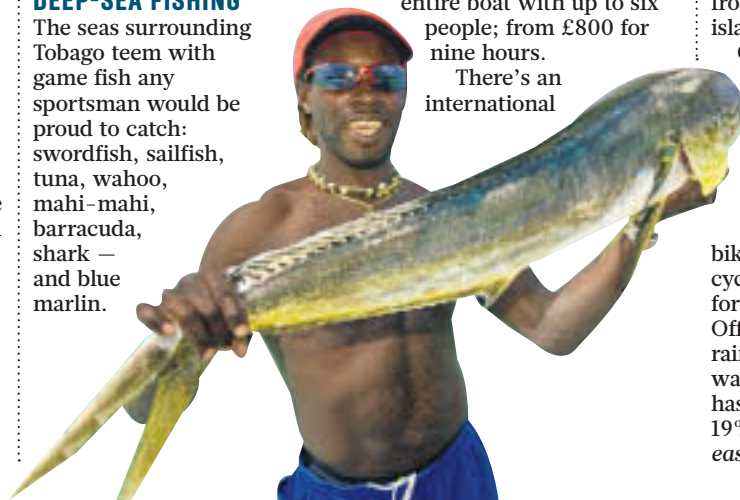
Trips last about 2½ hours and cost £12. Just turn up, or book through a local operator such as Sunshine Tours. KR sunshinetourtobago.com

DEEP-SEA FISHING

The seas surrounding Tobago teem with game fish any sportsman would be proud to catch: swordfish, sailfish, tuna, wahoo, mahi-mahi, barracuda, shark — and blue marlin.

Specimens of this awesome fish weighing more than 1,000lb have been spotted. The fishing season runs October to June; March and April are best for marlin. Captain Gerard "Frothy" de Silva, of Hard Play Fishing Charters, runs offshore trips aboard high-tech, big-game fishing boats, on a catch-and-release basis. A six-hour trip costs from £540 for the entire boat with up to six people; from £800 for nine hours.

There's an international



game-fishing tournament (tigft.com) off Charlotteville this month, too. WG hardplay.net

HIRE A BIKE

For about £6.50 a day, or £32 a week, you can rent a bike, with helmet, for pottering around — handy for exploring the beaches of Tobago's flat southwestern end.

You can pick up your steed from Easy Goers, one of the island's bike-rental stores, in Crown Point, and manager Damian will recommend mainly car-free coastal routes, though traffic in Tobago is on the whole well-mannered and respectful of cyclists.

Easy Goers delivers bikes to your hotel and runs cycling tours, with stops for swimming and lunch. Off-road fans can ride in the rainforest, though Damian warns that "your fitness level has to be quite high" for the 19% gradients. KR easygoersbikes.com

TURTLE WATCHING

Tobago plays host to five of the world's seven species of sea turtles — leatherback, hawksbill, green, loggerhead and olive ridley — all of which are endangered.

Leatherbacks are the most common. The largest of all living turtles, they can reach 7ft in length and weigh 1,000lb, and they have swum the world's oceans for more than 100m years. Named after their distinctive dark, rubbery shells, the animals come to congregate in Tobago from as far away as Africa, Canada and even Britain. They come ashore to lay their eggs on some of the island's beaches.

The main turtle nesting season runs March to September. Specialists such as Tobago Nature Tours offer controlled turtle-watching excursions, from £20pp. WG tobagonaturetours.com

By Wendy Gomersall
and Karen Robinson

11.05.2014 / 7

Go tropical, says weddings expert Amanda Statham

Tobago is a relaxed, unspoilt getaway for those seeking a scenic ceremony that's simple to organise and won't cost the earth. Fly in, pick up a licence, exchange vows and toast yourselves as Mr and Mrs within days. And remember to hold back on the sunbathing — nobody wants to look like a lobster in their wedding photos.

WHERE TO WED

The **Villas at Stonehaven**, spread over 10 acres of lush hillside on Tobago's west coast, is one of the most luxurious places on the island to tie the knot. Locations for your ceremony include your villa's own garden, by the pool or on the beach; the French Colonial-style pavilion clubhouse is a perfect venue for the reception.

A wedding concierge is on hand to help with everything from obtaining a three-day licence to arranging flowers, cake, photography and extras, such as a steel band or DJ.

Stonehaven's 14 self-catering ocean-view villas each has an infinity pool and three bedrooms, so there's plenty of room for friends and family. Wedding packages cost from £2,000.



Bridal suite at the Villas at Stonehaven



Sealed with a kiss on Bacolet beach

Bliss starts here

The **Magdalena Grand Beach & Golf Resort** has 750 acres of landscaped gardens, ocean-front suites with private terraces, a ballroom and a white-sand beach.

Its silver wedding package (worth £550), including the marriage licence, floral wedding arch and cake, is free to guests staying 14 nights. The platinum package (£900) has extras that include a day cruise, candlelit dinner and champagne breakfast in bed the morning after. There's also an option to create a bespoke wedding package.

Palm-fringed Pigeon Point Heritage Park is an off-resort choice that delivers the tropical-island wedding dream: white sand, startlingly bright blue sea and a thatched pier — an ideal backdrop for photographs. A new pavilion for weddings is under construction. There are cabanas, bars and a restaurant for a post-ceremony feet-in-the-sand celebration.

HONEYMOON OPTIONS

At boutique retreat **Bacolet Beach Club**, every one of the 21 rooms has a four-poster bed and white marble floors. This dazzling white bolt hole on the southern tip of the island has its own secluded crescent of almond- and palm-shaded beach down a 65-step path. Stop on the way down for a massage in the pavilion overlooking the sea (£30 for an hour), and on the way back up at sunset for a

rum cocktail or two in the Rok beach bar.

Villa Yellow Bird, close to peaceful Grafton Beach, ticks all the honeymoon boxes: pool, sea view, gazebo and balcony for watching those amazing sunsets. It's self-catering, with daily cleaning and the option of a cook.

NEED TO KNOW

Couples must be resident for three full days before they

can apply for a wedding licence, and must then wait a further 24 hours before holding the ceremony. You'll need proof of identity (passports) and proof of entry into the country (flight tickets). If either of you is divorced, you'll need the original decree nisi.

Most resorts have wedding packages, which include government fees, registrar costs, clergyman or magistrate hire and decorations, plus a wedding co-ordinator.

Those planning to tie the knot somewhere other than a resort will be relieved to know there are wedding planners on the island, such as Tobago Weddings. They can provide witnesses as well as assisting with religious ceremonies. For example, a one-day Hindu celebration, in Hindi with English translations, includes Vedic astrologers who offer readings and advice to the happy couple.

Your wedding list

Seven nights B&B at Magdalena resort, from £969pp, travelling between September and October. Includes return British Airways flights from Gatwick. Details from ba.com/tobago

The Villas at Stonehaven (stonehavenvillas.com)

Seven nights B&B at Bacolet from £829pp, September to October. Includes return British Airways flights from Gatwick. Visit ba.com/tobago

Villa Yellow Bird (cvvillas.com)

Tobago Weddings (tobagoweddings.com)

And finally...

Tobago Heritage Festival, July 17-Aug 1
Island-wide celebration of Tobago's cultural mix, with art, music and dance. tobagostyle.travel

Tobago Cycling Classic, Sept 29-Oct 5
An international stage race, held annually, that takes in the whole of the island. trinbagowheelers.com

Blue Food Festival, Oct 19
Named for the dasheen, a type of yam that turns blue when cooked. tobagostyle.travel

Scarborough Cup Golf Tournament, Feb 2015
The top three teams this year won a golf package to compete in Barbados. ttgolfassociation.org

Carnival, Feb 16-17
A party to beat all parties, heavy on the calypso. ncctt.org

Tobago Jazz Experience, April 2015
John Legend was among the performers at this year's festival. tobagojazzexperience.com



TOBAGO BLUE FOOD FESTIVAL - OCTOBER 19TH. BASED ON TWO PEOPLE SHARING FOR TRAVEL BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 2014 - OCTOBER 2014. THE PRICE INCLUDES RETURN BRITISH AIRWAYS FLIGHTS FROM GATWICK AND B&B ACCOMMODATION IN A STANDARD ROOM. LIFE DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN THIS!

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