

Castara Retreats: Notes for Visitors

Introduction

Do take the trouble to read these notes; they are intended to help you to enjoy your stay and to know a little more about what to expect.

The basic principle is looking after yourselves in well resourced self catering accommodation. As part of our fee, we arrange for fresh towels and bed linen every 3-4 days as well as a light clean up.

There is additional back up and support available such as laundry and cooking. This can be arranged on your behalf by Porridge who, with his wife Jeanell, looks after our accommodation. Such additional services are charged for. These costs are reasonable and should be discussed with Porridge after your arrival.

We have designed the house to be open to the wonderful landscape of Castara with its beach and rainforest whilst also being furnished simply but well. Birds and bats fly past, sting rays can be spotted in the sea from your lodge, and rain showers can be seen approaching, obliterating the hill for a short time, and departing again. You are likely to spot fireflies above your mosquito net at night, and wake to the light of the sun and the dawn chorus. In this way the house resonates with its setting - there are no cappuccino bars in Castara, and you are much more likely to encounter crab n' dumpling or calaloo soup than Spaghetti Bolognese in the village restaurants. This is a stunningly beautiful and unsophisticated place.

Nearly all our guests have truly enjoyed their stay at Castara Retreats. Occasionally someone stays who is not entirely happy with their experience and we are keen to receive feedback so that we can continue to improve what we offer. Please let Porridge know as soon as there is anything that you are not happy with and he will do his best to resolve any issues.

However, it is important for us to be clear with our clients that we are not a hotel. This means that we do not offer some of the services of a hotel, such as staff in residence, air conditioning, daily maid service and phones, but it also means it is free of the constraints and protocols of such establishments.

To enjoy Castara Retreats may require you to recognize the worth of such unsophistication. There are days when the electricity is off for a while, or the

village phone doesn't work, or Max's supermarket is shut, or.....you get the picture! At the Coco Reef Hotel you would be supported through such hassles; at Castara Retreats you may need to be a little more resourceful, prepared, or patient. Tobago works best when we let go and go with the flow.

Our Local Management Team

Porridge and Jeanell are our local managers and are at the heart of this team: Porridge will call by most days to make sure everything is OK with our clients and answer any queries. Tobago is a new experience for many people, and though many of your questions will get answered on this web site by browsing through the visitors' notes, more will arise once you arrive, for sure. Then Porridge will be at hand to help until you get your feet on the ground. He will also help you organise trips, take you on trips, take you limin' down to Sunday School, set up a barbeque, explain bank opening hours, and so on.

Jeanell is also very much part of the team, not only organising the accommodation practicalities, but also arranging meals on arrival, or any time during your stay. Marieta, our neighbour who lives in the house below Castara Retreats, will usually cook for you: as Porridge would say- don't be shy, just ask. Be sure to agree the price beforehand to avoid any misunderstandings.

Jeanell and her team of local ladies clean the accommodations and change sheets and towels.

Carrington, who is around four days a week, is responsible for keeping the garden looking lovely, and developing it on a week-by-week basis. Ask him what is in season so you can enjoy, quite literally, the fruits of his care and attention.

Flights from the UK and Frankfurt

<i>Operator</i>	<i>Departures</i>	<i>from</i>
Monarch	Wednesdays until November – then Thursdays	Gatwick
Virgin	Thursday	Gatwick

British Airways Thursday & Monday until Oct 31st Gatwick

From Nov 1st

Monday & Friday

Condor Air Sunday Frankfurt

Contact information for flights from the UK, Amsterdam and Frankfurt

Golden Caribbean operates flights to Tobago from Gatwick via Grenada on the way out through the charter company Monarch Airlines. The return flight is direct. Reservations and bookings can be made at www.goldencaribbean.co.uk

Virgin flights from Gatwick direct to Tobago can be booked on www.virgin-atlantic.com

British Airways flights from Gatwick go via Antigua and can be booked on www.britishairways.com

Condor operates flights from Frankfurt to Tobago on Sunday. Book on www.condor.de

Flights from North America

Caribbean Airlines (www.caribbean-airlines.com - 1-800-538 2942) - formerly known as BWIA - flies from most major gateways to Port of Spain Trinidad and then onwards to Tobago. The flight usually stops at least once in the U.S. on the way.

Delta (www.delta.com) and 1-800 241 – 4141 (U.S.) or 1-800 221 1212 (international) flies from Atlanta to Tobago on Saturdays and returns on Sundays from December 2008. This is the only direct service from North America to Tobago.

Sky Service operates a charter service from Toronto to Port of Spain, Trinidad through www.titantours.com or phone 1-416- 925 2050.

Air Canada (www.aircanada.ca or 1-888-247 2262 \$20 booking fee applies if you don't book online) flies into Barbados from Toronto. Then you can get a

LIAT flight (see below) on to Tobago. The return flight unhelpfully arrives in Barbados after the Toronto flight has left so you have to stay the night.

Flights from the Caribbean to Tobago

Caribbean Airlines (www.caribbean-airlines.com or (868) 627 5160) flies from Port of Spain to Tobago 12 times daily from 6am to 9.15pm and returns 12 times daily from 6.40am – 9.55pm. It costs \$25 U.S. one way and the flight takes 20 minutes. Tickets can now be obtained through travel agents or from www.yes-tourism.com in Tobago. They charge \$5 U.S. for this service. Here's a link to the relevant page on their website - www.yes-tourism.com/airbridge.htm. We have, by the way, no financial interest in Yes Tourism nor do we take any responsibility for any aspect of this service.

LIAT (www.liatairline.com or 1-268 480 5601/2 from U.S.) also flies from Barbados and Antigua to Tobago.

Please note that flights can be booked up quite a long way ahead during festivals or carnival. It's wise to check with the airlines before you book your accommodation to make sure you can get the flights you want.

Flights to Venezuela

You can fly from Port of Spain, Trinidad to Venezuela by contacting www.aeropostal.com – look for an English button top right to translate the website for you.

Ferry Service

The ferry leaves Port of Spain once a day (Monday – Friday 2pm, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays 11am) and takes five and a half hours. You can only buy tickets at the ferry office from 7.30am-4pm Monday to Fridays and your car must be boarded two hours ahead of departure time. There is a fast ferry (two hours) too. Schedules for Sundays and Public Holidays vary. Please use the following link for the latest ferry timetables and prices - www.patnt.com/ferry_schedule.shtml

Please note that ferries can be booked up quite a long way ahead during festivals or carnival. It's wise to check with the airlines before

you book your accommodation to make sure you can get the flights you want.

Travel Agents

If you have trouble sorting out your North American flight, ask a travel agent for assistance. Most now charge a small fee but sometimes it's worth it particularly if you find booking online a struggle.

Airport Pick-up and Arrival Time

If you wish, we can arrange on your behalf for you to be met at the airport by Porridge (who will be holding up a sign saying 'Porridge!'). You can request the pick up via our on line booking procedure for the accommodation. Porridge charges \$250 tt to meet you at the airport (assuming there are 1-2 people in your party). For a party of four, he charges \$400 tt, and for a group of six he charges \$600 tt. He does not usually charge for children under the age of 16 years. We believe his prices are competitive and his service and goodwill is exceptional.

As part of what he provides he will offer to stop at a well provisioned supermarket en route to Castara provided your flight arrives before they shut, and he will see you settled into your accommodation.

Everyone knows Porridge and you will easily see him when you arrive. However, if anything goes wrong, his phone numbers are:

Home: 660 7702

Mobile : 766 3656.

BE SURE TO TAKE THESE NUMBERS WITH YOU IN YOUR HAND LUGGAGE IN CASE YOU NEED TO GET IN TOUCH WITH HIM.

Please note that whilst we act as a “go between” in assisting you to make these pick-up arrangements with Porridge, we have no commercial involvement in this business, seek no reward or commission and are not responsible for his service to our clients.

If you are in Tobago before your stay at Castara Retreats, then Porridge will meet you in the Castara Retreats car park. Normally we will have arranged for you to meet with him at 3pm (check in time). It is very important that you arrive on time, as he will be waiting at Castara Retreats to show you in. Please ring him if you

are delayed for any reason. If, by arrangement, you arrive before 3pm, then Porridge can arrange for you to leave your bags in a store room. Whilst we have had no security problems re the baggage store, we cannot guarantee security so your decision to use the facility is at your own risk. There is also a shower and changing room available for you if you want to go down to the beach or eat in a café while you are waiting for your accommodation to be prepared.

Wherever you are being met, Porridge will show you where you are staying, carry your bags in, hand over keys, and explain anything that needs explaining e.g. where the spare tank for the cooker is etc.

If you would like Porridge to take you back to the airport on your day of departure then please discuss this with him during your stay. He charges the same price as for your arrival.

The Accommodations

General

In 2006 we completed a new driveway onto the land so that clients no longer have a steep walk up the hill when first arriving. There is a small attractively landscaped car park for three cars between Coasthanger and Birdsong. However, in the daily routine of visiting the village and beach, our accommodations are located about 75 yards up a paved, well-lit footpath that winds uphill.

Porridge will visit most days to check everything is OK, but do ring him if you need his help or guidance on anything.

One of our housekeeping team will visit your accommodation every 3-4 days to change sheets and towels and do a light tidy up, usually between 10 am and noon; if you prefer not to have this, please let Jeanell or Porridge know in advance, since our housekeeping team will have been scheduled specifically to provide this service. If you skip this service, they will of course come 3-4 days later, but we are not able to change the schedule outside of that morning slot. House towels and bed linen are provided; we ask you to bring your own beach towels.

Hairdryers, irons and hammocks are available in each accommodation as well as security safes.

Washing

One of our cleaning ladies will do washing for you, though you need to set that up via Porridge or with one of them directly (50tt dollars a load, washed, dried and folded).

Water and electricity

The house is on mains water, and there is hot and cold running water. However the water is stored above the house in storage tanks, and the water supply can occasionally be interrupted on the island, so we ask visitors to be mindful in their use of water. The tap water is perfectly OK to drink.

The electricity supply is 110 volts (same as Canada and the USA) so many appliances made in Europe will not function, although mobile phones can be charged provided you have brought an adaptor for the socket – this is the same as for the USA and can be purchased at most airports.

It is quite common for the electricity to be cut off for short periods. Please take sensible precautions to reduce the risk of fire and do ensure that if you use night light candles that you place them in the glass holders that we provide.

Rubbish

There is a rubbish collection point in the car park area at Castara Retreats – ask Porridge to show you. We ask our clients to take rubbish disposal seriously because of the tropical climate and suggest you take it down to the disposal point on a daily basis. We recommend that you avoid leaving it outside your accommodation as it attracts chickens and dogs who tend to strew it about. Porridge also requests clients to keep cooked food that you want to dispose of in your freezer compartment until you are ready to take your rubbish bag to the disposal point. This helps to reduce the rate of decomposition and smells.

There are also compost areas that Porridge or Carrington can show you. It is important that only raw vegetable and fruit matter is placed on the compost heaps as otherwise stray dogs, chickens and mice will be attracted.

If this is your first trip to this part of the world, the rule of thumb is 'if in doubt, keep food in the fridge'. Remember you are in tropical rainforest country - if you leave bread, sugar or bananas out overnight, for example, they will be demolished by bananaquits (a delightful local bird) or ants. There are also plastic containers in each apartment for other perishables.

Facilities for music

We are very pleased to say that we have just installed good quality iPod docking systems in all our accommodations. Previously, we provided CD players only in the lodges because we were worried about noise sensitivity in the apartments. However, we had great difficulty finding good quality players and they broke down a lot so we have got rid of them. Now, more and more people are arriving with their iPods so we have decided to go ahead with the new systems. We are happy to this but please be mindful of volume level particularly later in the evening so you do not disturb your neighbours.

For the benefit of everyone, we have a clear policy that music can only be played if it does not disturb your neighbour. Over many years we have had almost no complaints about this. You can also use your iPhones and MP3 players on the iPod docking system provided you have a "Mini Jack to Stereo RCA Cable" to make the connection. These can be bought at Dixons at Gatwick Airport.

By the way, no local would understand the concept of quiet music, so if there is a party on the beach, do join in. Occasionally there is a village wide party and the music goes on into the early hours. The Fishermens' Fete in late August is an example. Such events happen maybe three or four times per year.

Personal responsibility, safety and security

There are seldom problems to do with security in Castara and few stories of crime within the village. In 2005 there was a spate of petty crime that included thefts at holiday properties including Castara Retreats. However the thieves were caught and put in prison and there have been no problems since then. However we recommend that everyone take the usual precautions and care with regard to your valuables. There are security safes in each accommodation. We recommend that you use these for all valuables, cash, passports etc.

We rent our accommodation to our clients on the understanding that they take full responsibility for their own safety whilst they are in Tobago and at Castara Retreats. Please consider the environment that you find yourselves in and take sensible precautions.

Consider the ocean, for instance, and do not take risks - even strong swimmers can get into problems. There are lifeguards on the beach and a flag indicates the level of safety for swimmers. We recommend that you familiarize yourself with its position and what the different colours mean.

Also please take care around the accommodation and the garden. We are located

on the side of a hill, so do watch where you are walking, and use the handrails on the steps. You need to take special care after a rainfall as the hardwood walkways and decks and the concrete paths can be slippery when wet. These are regularly swept and cleaned but you need to be alert particularly immediately after a rainfall.

Most of our accommodation is constructed of wood, so please do not create a fire hazard. Take proper precautions if you use candles or burn mosquito coils by making sure they are prevented from dropping onto the wood. Please do not use the bird feeders to burn night-lights or candles in.

All accommodations have fire extinguishers. When you arrive, check where they are positioned and read the instructions on the bottles.

We strongly recommend that as soon as you book your stay you take out full travel and health insurance so that you are well covered in the event of cancellation, accident, illness, and loss of belongings and valuables.

Things to Take...

- Beach towels;
- Binoculars if you are at all interested in birds (there is a bird book at the house, but best to take your own if you are a serious bird watcher);
- Snorkelling gear - get the best you can afford before you go;
- High factor sun cream - the sun is deceptively fierce;
- Mosquito cream or Citronella Oil mixed with a base oil;
- Take a bag of nightlight candles, which can sit in their metal holders and are safer than full size candles. We provide safe and attractive holders for your nightlight candles;
- Tshirts/shorts/sarongs - nobody dresses up in Castara. Only bring a smart dress/shirt if you intend to eat out in smart restaurants down the island or if you are getting married;
- Anything that you simply can't live without (your favourite ground coffee, Shreddies if you are Freya, books);
- Torch (flashlight), lighter and matches in waterproof bag;

- And most important, HAVE A BRILLIANT TIME! Tobago works its magic on most people.
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Check out and departure arrangements

Check out arrangements

On your day of departure, we ask you to vacate your accommodation by 11 am, so that Jeanell and the cleaning ladies can get in and prepare for whoever is coming after you. We have been aware for some time that this can be difficult for those clients with evening flights home. So, we have built a special facility where you can securely lock up your baggage, shower and change after a swim and sit quietly on the patio with a book, until you have to go to the airport. The baggage store also has security safes for you to use on your departure day. Porridge will show you where it is. Please note that we cannot guarantee the security of your baggage and your decision to use this facility is on the understanding that it is at your own risk.

Please respect the check out requirement, as there is no other solution to Jeanell's need to fully clean and prepare for incoming guests. Remember to check with Porridge several days before you leave to agree what time to meet him if he is taking you to the airport.

During your stay, please talk with Porridge and arrange for him to take you to the airport if you need this service of him. He charges \$250 tt per couple.

Car Hire

Castara is so lovely that you may only want a car for the occasional day out. Others prefer the flexibility of having a car to hand so they can go off spontaneously. Whichever, Porridge has a number of good quality, air conditioned vehicles, both cars, and jeeps. You can usually sort out an arrangement with him after you arrive, but if you know you would like a vehicle for a week or so, it is best to email him in advance at sugartucky@gmail.com to avoid disappointment.

This is his own business, which we are very happy to recommend, but we take no responsibility for any aspect of this service, about which you need to talk with him directly.

There are a number of professional car hire services on Tobago. myTobago.info has a comprehensive list of rental agencies classified by geographical area.

Several of these have been reviewed in depth. There is also a very well researched article on the subject of driving on the island.

Eating Out and In

Fish, as fresh as it gets, can be bought daily on the beach or at the fishermen's area next to Max's store. There are three sources of supply:

From fish pots put out in the bay by Porridge and Sherwin. Ask Porridge if you would like some fish.

Pulled in from the beach using a drift net. This happens regularly in the mornings and is quite a spectacle. The catch ranges from huge to very small, but usually there are fish for sale.

Boats return each afternoon between 2 and 5pm. The fishermen clean and de-scale the fish at the wash area. Join the queue. Say if you want fish filleted, in steaks, or left whole. If you have forgotten a bag to put it in, Max sells them for a dollar a bag and is used to people asking for them. Occasionally, one or two of the fishermen bring back fish from small cages they have up and down the coast. You can get red snapper, little georgies, and the occasional lobster this way. The cost of all the fish is between 15 and 20TT dollars a pound.

There are a number of 'eating out' options currently in Castara. All serve local food. Prices vary from 65TT to 100TT depending on what you order.

At these, you will usually be asked if you want chicken or fish although there are now quite a few other options including goat and shellfish. This will often be served with small portions of coleslaw, macaroni pie, and salad. All are good cooks. Locals eat lunch early- any time from 11.30 am onwards, so arrive by 1pm at the latest to avoid disappointment, or reserve your lunch earlier in the day.

- **The Coffee House** (Chino's) by the river bridge and opposite Marguerite's: they are very friendly, and open for breakfast (including cooked breakfasts), sometimes lunch and most evenings.
- **The Almond Tree** (Vera's place) beautifully located in the shade behind the big beach, not far from the Naturalist. She is famed for her rotis at lunch, and dinner in the evening. She is reliably open but closes on Sundays to go to church.

- **The Boat House** on the Little Beach is also very good, more international in flavour, with a romantic beach side atmosphere and live music at least once per week on Wednesday evenings. He serves lunch and evening meals but go easy with the devastating rum punches.
- **Marguerite's**, which is just down the hill from Castara Retreats by the river on the edge of the village. She is a very good cook. She can prepare meals to take away, including excellent pizza (though order that the day before), and she is accustomed to cooking for vegetarians. She hasn't got a license for alcohol, but you are welcome to take a bottle. She is reliably open, even on most bank holidays, and doesn't close shop if there is a party in the village!
- **Hazel's** (above L&H supermarket), Hazel is a very good cook also; crab n' dumplin' is worth ordering in advance here - one of her specialities.
- **The Naturalist**: you can have breakfast, lunch or evening meal here.
- **Cascreole** on the beach: the added charm of viewing the sunset while you eat.
- **Sandcastles**, which is a five minute walk up the hill from Castara Retreats, has a good reputation. Adam, the owner and chef, is from the UK and his menus are international in style and whilst it is quite pricy by local standards, it is the only place in the village offering three course meals, European style.

Wherever you eat, we suggest that you call by in the daytime and check that they are open in the evening and book a table.

To eat a wider variety of food you will need to go to Scarborough, Buccoo or the Crown Point area. There are Italian, South American and French places - take your pick. However, it is a long drive back at night. A very good place to eat on the Atlantic side is the King's Bay Café, just beyond Roxburgh on the sea-side of the road: great homemade hamburgers and brownies! Buy a Rough Guide before you arrive or check on the MyTobago website, which has up to date reviews on places to eat as well as everything else about Tobago.

Eating in with Marieta: our neighbour, who does meals on arrival for our guests, is happy to cook for you during your stay. She is a very good local cook, very friendly, and charges TT\$100 per person depending on the meal, though it is always a good idea to discuss everything in advance. She prepares food in her house and brings it up at a pre-arranged time, so you can consume it at your leisure. She can also cook you a wonderful local meal called Bust-up-Shut. Talk

with her directly: she lives in the house on the main road between our driveway entrance and the footpath entrance, and is very happy for you to go and knock on her door.

Eating in with Veronica: our housekeeper is a lovely cook and has just started to offer this service, so talk through in detail how you would like things. Differently from Marieta, she asks you to provide the ingredients, unless it is something difficult to buy like breadfruit, which she will find. She will then prepare the meal in your kitchen from 4.30/5pm onwards on the day in question, so that when she leaves a couple of hours later, everything is ready to serve. Talk with her when she is up cleaning about timing and what you would like to eat, or phone her on 497 5398. The standard of her food and presentation is high and quite European in style, which is unusual. She does lovely dressed salads as well as main dishes and pies, and desserts if requested. She charges \$200 tt for 2-4 people or \$260 tt for 5-6 people. There is a list that shows you the range of dishes she offers in the Visitors' Notes in all the accommodations.

Or, you can rustle up something yourself. Fry some fresh fish with a squirt of lime juice, serve with a salad and fried plantain and you have a feast fit for kings.

Snorkelling/Wildlife/Insects

You can snorkel from the Little Bay right from the shore. There are many sorts of coral and fish to be spotted. Our favourites are the families of squid that shelter near the rocks and the sting rays which never cease to inspire awe, but every time you go out you will see something for the first time. We have seen little turtles on several occasions and an octopus once.

As mentioned earlier in these notes, we have done some serious planting around the house, and this has increased the cover and habitat significantly. The house acts as a huge hide, and many varieties of bird can be spotted without moving an inch further into the rainforest. The growth of the ginger lilies and ornamental bananas below the house has encouraged the arrival of hummingbirds, much to our delight. Also, we have had several experienced and knowledgeable bird watchers to stay as guests, who have kindly compiled lists of birds seen in and around the garden. Various lists (gradually added to) can be found in the different Visitors' Books. We often see agouti in the garden, which is a great treat, since I read recently on [myTobago](#) website that they are quite rare now. Guaranteed sightings in early morning and evening, but we have had sightings at all times of

the day. They are dark brown, about the size of a large rabbit, and bound off at a pace if disturbed.

Tobago is generally a benign place with little to harm or worry you. There are no poisonous snakes or spiders. Protection is advised against mosquitoes with good repellents being available in any chemist and at the airports. We have found Citronella Oil mixed with a base oil such as Coconut Oil to be an extremely effective repellent against both mosquitoes and sandflies.

Then the subject of bugs and flying insects. Tobago is a tropical country, so bugs cannot be avoided. However, there are a few things to say which we hope will be helpful. First, we have very good frame mosquito nets over all the beds, which keep out everything, (including mosquitoes obviously). Secondly, our lights operate on dimmer switches, and so you can limit the number of visiting insects in the evenings simply by keeping the lights soft and low (- we are amazed when we are out there just how bright some clients keep the lights!). You get more insect activity after heavy downpours, it is true, but even this summer, when we were there in the rainy season, we had only one such visitation from flying termites once, and it lasted only an hour or so. We also have sprays in the house, and you can buy stuff locally or bring your own. You'll never stop the odd cicada or flying beetle from flying in from time to time.

You will find that the main cause of ants is food, so keeping things in the fridge and keeping the kitchen and bin area clean will ensure that ants are not a problem. Food left out overnight will attract ants in numbers. They particularly love sweet things, so if you have kids with you, keep an eye out for half eaten sweeties and sticky wrappers.

Finally, Hummingbird 1 and 2 apartments are not as open as the deck in Rainforest, and so you can limit the potential by keeping the shutters closed into those rooms if you so desire, as you can in the bedrooms of Rainforest.

Organised Trips

General

We try to manage our enterprise in Castara on the basis of sustainable tourism. For instance, a number of local families now make a living through the services they offer to our clients and by extension, to others staying in the village. We have supported these families to establish their businesses, but have no ownership in them nor share in their profits, and we cannot be held responsible for any aspect of their service.

In many ways local people are still learning how best to offer their service and what to charge. Sometimes they ask too much, and sometimes too little. We recommend therefore that you make it your business to get clear in advance what is being offered and what the cost is.

An easy starting point is to talk with Porridge who will give advice and make suggestions. There are many possibilities to choose from:

diving	rainforest walks	island tours	bird watching
boat trips	fishing	snorkelling	waterfall walks and swims

Bird watching trips & rainforest walks

We can wholeheartedly recommend Newton George and his team, whether you are seriously interested in birds, or want a more general rainforest walk. Newton is recognised as the top professional bird guide on the island and has also many years' experience working with the Forestry Department on Tobago. There is an article on him on the MyTobago website, and he has his own website at www.newtongeorge.com. To be sure of securing his services, it may be a good idea to email in advance (newton@newtongeorge.com) or phone him at (001 868) 660 5463. Once you arrive at Castara, Porridge can contact him on your behalf if you prefer to be more spontaneous. His two experienced and enthusiastic colleagues, Darren Henry and William Trim, also take our clients out, and you will read glowing reviews of both of them in our visitors' books.

We have arranged special rates for trips with Newton for clients at Castara Retreats. **The first is a 7am start and is for people who want to experience the rainforest and see some birds for three or four hours. The rates for this are as follows:**

For 1-3 people, he will charge \$300 tt per person

For 4 or more, he will charge \$260 tt per person.

If he is taking a family out, children under 10 years old are free, and dependent children over the age of 10 are charged at 50% of the adult rate.

The second trip is longer and is for people who want a more extensive trip and are serious about bird watching. For this he recommends that he picks you up at 6 am at the entrance to Castara Retreats (so as not to disturb other guests). For this second trip he charges \$360 tt per person, for an outing that can last between 6 and 8 hours, depending on your enthusiasm- Newton will always find birds!

We do not recommend local untrained people who offer rainforest tours as they do not have in depth knowledge.

Island tours with Jeanell and Porridge

Tobago is beautiful, and there is much to see beyond Castara. A day out with Jeanell or Porridge is a great way to see the island. They know most of the places of interest, how to get there, where to stop for a drink or for lunch. The day is designed to suit you and typically begins at 09.00, to be back in Castara by 16.00. Travel is in an air conditioned car or jeep for two or three people, or in the minibus for larger groups. The itinerary below describes various options and these can be mixed and matched to suit your interest. Talk with Jeanell and Porridge to agree what suits you best, as there is a good deal of flexibility regarding your day out.

- The charge for a day out is \$300 tt per person. Reductions for 3 or more people and for children.
- Be sure to agree the itinerary and the cost of your trip in advance.
- Castara Retreats have no responsibility for your well-being or safety and we receive no financial gain.
- Costs for lunch are in addition, as are entry fees or costs of guides, or boat costs.

Circular tour of the North end of Tobago (6 plus hours)

It is now possible to do a circular drive, much of it through rain forest, and following the coastline. Drive up the coast, past Englishman's Bay and through the rain forest to the Atlantic coast. Then head up the coast to Speyside and stop for lunch. Continue across to Charlotteville on the Caribbean coast. Wander round the village and then take a 20-minute walk (steep) to Pirate's Bay for a swim and snorkel. Alternatively, go by boat (5 mins) to Pirate's Bay. Afterwards, drive South West down the coast following the new and incredibly scenic road down past Bloody Bay and back to Castara.

Little Tobago: boat trip and snorkelling (6 plus hours)

Drive up the coast, past Englishman's Bay and then across the spine of the

rainforest to the Atlantic coast. Meander up the dramatic coastline to Speyside and stop for lunch. From the Blue Waters Inn take a glass-bottomed boat across to the nature reserve island of Little Tobago for a nature tour, followed by a snorkelling trip on your way back to the mainland. The boat trip is approximately \$150 tt per person in addition to the fee to Porridge and Jeanell.

Argyle Falls: rainforest walk (3-4 hours)

The Falls are a one-hour drive, heading up the coast past Englishman's Bay, and then across the rainforest to the Atlantic Coast. They are a series of waterfalls and pools on several levels, surrounded by rainforest. There are usually visitors swimming in the lower pools, but the higher pools are little visited, probably due to the steep ascending path that needs to be negotiated. However, at the top, the reward is a series of tiny but powerful natural spa pools that are wonderful to sit in and contemplate the treetops. Argyle Falls are not recommended in heavy rainfall. There is an entrance fee (\$30tt with guide), so advice is available regarding conditions.

Richmond House (2-3 hours)

Richmond House is an old plantation house dating from 1766, with gardens and ten rooms. It is the only remaining such house on the island, the other having been destroyed by Hurricane Flora in 1965. Located just south of Argyle Falls, a trip here can be combined with a visit to the falls. Tours cost \$20 tt.

Arnos Vale: beach and snorkelling (3-4 hours)

Head inland and then down the coast in a southwesterly direction, through villages and a very rural landscape, to Arnos Vale, a small beautiful beach adjoining the Arnos Vale Hotel. The hotel has beautiful gardens and grounds to wander through, and serves drinks or lunch to non-residents. The beach is usually quiet and is set within a small bay that offers excellent snorkelling in calm weather. This journey can easily be joined to the Pigeon Point trip below.

Pigeon Point and Store Bay (3-4 hours)

Down toward the airport is the famous beach of Pigeon Point: the only beach on Tobago that you have to pay an entrance fee, but worth the trip for the turquoise shallow sea and the white sand beach; it can nearly always be counted on to be calm, and is a great place for young kids who are still diffident about the open sea. It is, however, quite commercial with bars, cafes and gift shops. A short distance away is Store Bay, made famous by Bob Marley: a great place to buy presents and souvenirs to take home, and to sample a take away roti from one of the many

places selling them.

Shopping with Porridge or Jeanell

Now that you have arrived, you may be kicking yourself about a few essential things you didn't bring with you or pick up from Pennysavers on your way up from the airport. Also, you have decided against car hire and are wondering how to get your hands on whatever it is that you need. The solution is to ask Porridge to take you to Scarborough. It's more fun with him, and he knows where to go, and he handles all the stress of parking. He even hangs around until you're ready to come home. He charges a modest \$150 tt for taking one person, \$100 tt per person for more than one.

Sunday School

For those of you that don't know, Sunday School is a night out limin' and dancing at Tobago's famous hot spot, which is more or less the whole village of Buccoo given over to Sunday night clubbing. Things start warming up with pan music and old fashioned waltzing, but it's fun to watch as the local partners sure do have style. Later in the evening (post 11 pm, and maybe even later) there are several music/clubbing venues, which are very modestly priced. The streets are streaming with friendly people (local and visitors) and there are plenty of places to eat and drink. Porridge knows how it all works and he usually has good intuition on what you are looking for. He steers you through it all with skill and humour, and usually you will find him leading the way onto the dance floor.

However, do take a little care to think through if this is the right place for you, especially if you have teenagers, or younger children. Some people (including Steve) have got bored waiting for the more 'club' music and atmosphere to get going; others (like Sue) really enjoy the pan music. Talk with Porridge about who is going and the projected time of return, since some are ready to leave by midnight while others would prefer to stay till the small hours.

Porridge drives you there, leaving between 7 and 8 pm, and brings you home. Sometimes it's just a couple, more often it's 6, 8 or 10 of you in his minibus. He charges \$150 tt per person to take you there and back. Porridge is very good in creating a fun atmosphere on these trips and people often offer him a drink. His policy is to only accept a carib when he has arranged an alternative driver for the evening.

Self managed trips

There are many dive centres and again you are spoiled for choice. We are not experts in this area and recommend that you visit www.myTobago.info, which has a comprehensive guide on diving, and dive centres.

You can snorkel from the Little Bay right from the shore. There are many sorts of coral and fish to be spotted. Our favourites are the families of squid that shelter near the rocks and the sting rays which never cease to inspire awe, but every time you go out you will see something for the first time. We have seen little turtles on several occasions and an octopus once. During the summer of 2004, one of our younger guests, Rob, compiled a comprehensive list of fish he had seen during his three weeks stay - it can be found in Hummingbird 1's Visitors' Book. Thank you, Rob!

The walk to the waterfall behind Castara does not need a guide and is magical. Follow your nose up the stream that you cross into the village. Cross the playing field and meander alongside the stream into the forest for about 10/15 minutes.

Englishman's Bay is only about 4 kilometres up the coast. It is wonderfully scenic and clean and unspoiled. It is a bit more popular nowadays with maybe 20+ people some days on the beach. There is also a craft shop and a small café that serves a good lunch.

The drive across the spine of rainforest to Roxburgh and on to Charlotteville is easy and takes about an hour or so. Stop for a freshly made fruit juice at the roadside stalls just before Roxburgh. Pirate's Bay is a half hour walk beyond Charlotteville and incredibly romantic.

Argyle Falls is worth a trip. We avoided it for 12 years as it involves local guides and negotiations re fees. But when we finally visited it was wonderful. Five levels of falls and pools deep in the rainforest. Make a half-day of it, climb to the top and spend a couple of hours sitting in natural rock spa pools overlooking the tree canopy. Sunbathe and re-enter the pools and let the water flow massage your back. Tell your guide to relax, go away or whatever. Or better still, ask someone local from Castara to go with you and act as your guide.

Boat Trips with Sunarise Tours

Many of our clients have enjoyed something special when they have been out on a boat trip in 'Sunarise' and a look at the comments in the Visitors' Books will reveal a host of enthusiastic comments as people describe the fun they had. As a consequence the trips have become a "must do" activity for many of our clients.

Sunarise Tours is a recent venture by Porridge and Sherwin for which we have

provided a new, well equipped boat for them to offer trips to our clients and others staying in the village. Our motivation is to ensure good comfort and safety for clients, with a boat purpose designed for tours, and powered by a state of the art low emission Honda 150 HP 4-stroke engine. In three years of running boat trips, we have never had an engine problem but we are also installing a small “come home” engine so we can always get the boat home in case of a problem.

A full complement of life jackets is on board and Sherwin and Porridge always carry cell phones. There is a large canopy for sun protection and clear gangways for ease of movement within the boat. Sunarise Tours operates with public liability insurance and has applied for registration as a professional tour operator. Porridge and Sherwin run a good boat trip where quality, service and safety are all given proper attention. We have not found an alternative boat trip provider who satisfies all these criteria. They also provide a back up Captain on each trip, which is run either by Porridge or Sherwin. The boat trip is a great day out but it's not a cheap day out. We have looked very thoroughly into the costs and are satisfied that the prices are not only competitive but also represent good value. We are happy to publish this to inform you about what is available but we do not accept any responsibility for your well being or safety should you take a trip.

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All day picnic trip - \$ 450 tt or £44 per person

One option is an all day trip to No-Man's Land, the Nylon Pool and the Coral Garden, with barbecue and drinks. Fishing is offered en route, and the catch can be barbecued for lunch or brought home. Stops for snorkelling or visits to isolated beaches if requested. The lunch at No-Man's Land often develops into a bit of a party with visitors from other boats, with music and limbo dancing. Talk with Porridge about what you would like.

An alternative is an all day trip, starting up the coast, to snorkel at Englishman's Bay and Back River, with fishing en route and sometimes out to the Sisters. Then sailing and fishing down the coast back past Castara to Big Bay for a barbecue and drinks. The merit of this trip is that Big Bay is idyllic, with good swimming and snorkelling, and is less likely to have the same level of party atmosphere as at No-Man's Land. Also, the Big Bay option is preferable for those who want to spend less time in the boat and more time on the beach and snorkelling. Lunch is a quality barbecue with chicken, fish and vegetarian food together with plenty of beers, rum punch, and soft drinks.

Talk with Porridge and see what suits you best. Often these trips include visitors

from other accommodations in Castara Retreats, or in the village. Our experience is that people bond well and form good friendships. If you want a private trip, then this can be accommodated too, but you will need to negotiate a special price for the exclusive use of the boat. Both trips are wonderful, and there are regular sightings of dolphins and turtles.

- Always agree your price in advance. Clients who book more than 1 trip may receive a reduction. Children under 14 years are half price, providing they are with 2 or more adults.
- There are life jackets for each occupant, and we strongly recommend that children always wear one. Talk with Porridge on this in advance and indicate your wishes. Please do not be shy to check on this important safety matter.
- The captain does not drink alcohol during the trip.
- If you choose to go on a boat trip with anyone else, we strongly recommend that before you commit, that you check on safety matters, including the provision of life jackets, cell phones, water and soft drink provision over and above alcohol, and that the boat has two engines.
- Porridge is safety conscious and does not offer boat trips when the sea is heavy.

Local People

People can be taken at face value and are nearly always trustworthy. A number of people locally will offer boat trips, fishing trips, guided tours of the rainforest. Try to agree a price in advance of the trip. Some will say “give me whatever you think” and then it is up to you. For rainforest walks, employ an expert. Newton George and his team are knowledgeable.

If you indicate you are open to visitors, there will always be takers for a Carib or a rum punch on the deck. However, if you need your privacy, indicate this politely and clearly and people will back off. Women on their own have to be rather firmer, but their position will be respected as long as they don't give out mixed messages.

The only animosity towards white people that we have heard about in the village is when people take photos of the fishermen when the seine nets are being pulled in. It is important to ask permission first and to respect their wishes.

Tips/Service Charges

Hotels and smart restaurants charge 25% in various taxes. Local cafes and bars do not charge this tax.

Tips for taxis and meals are like anywhere else - give what you feel is appropriate.

You will receive help in many ways from local people. Occasionally they ask for something. They are usually poor, so give something to reflect their service.

Porridge, Jeanell and staff associated with Castara Retreats will offer you many kind services. Do ask them if there is a charge and if not, offer them something if you valued their service.

Language

English is the spoken and written language, but there is a strong dialect which you will hear when locals talk with one another.

Electricity

The house is on a 110-volt system so many UK electrical goods won't work. There can be electricity cuts (usually short lived) so bring a torch (flashlight), night light candles, matches and a lighter.

Shopping

Castara shops provide basic daily necessities. However, if you are not too tired from your flight, it may be an idea to stop at the supermarket near the airport and

one of the roadside greengrocers in the Crown Point area of the island before heading up to Castara, since there will be wider choice. If Porridge has picked you up he will know exactly where to go. It is not a bad idea anyway to stock up on heavier items such as Carib or Stag beers, or wine, if you want it. Porridge will carry them up the hill when you arrive at Castara Retreats. During national holidays (Christmas, New Year, Carnival etc) it is wise to stock up in advance as many places close or run out of things. You may also find that any of the little shops in the village choose to close for a day for no discernible reason.

Scarborough is the place to go for such things as camera batteries, clothes, etc. and there will always be the day when there is no butter or pineapple in the village and you are feeling quite desperate for some cornflakes or whatever, though they usually sell all of these things in the village.

We have discovered over time that the best way of proceeding is to ask locals where to buy things. People can appear a little reserved, but this is usually shyness, and they are invariably helpful. The following are a few of the key shops:

- Max and Hazel's supermarket (just behind the fishermen's cooperative, and confusingly called L & H) stocks a surprisingly wide range of goods given how small it is. If you don't see what you need, ask Max - it may be hidden round the back, or he may be expecting a delivery that afternoon. He is the only person in the village happy to change US dollar travellers' cheques provided he has enough cash in his till.
- DJ's at the junction has a supply of fruit and vegetables - sometimes a wide selection, sometimes not! He also sells phone cards. He usually has butter, cheese, frozen chicken and a selection of tinned items as well as things like lentils, beans, rice etc.
- The women of the village bake fresh bread and yummy coconut turnovers on Wednesdays and Saturdays in the communal wood-fired clay oven, at the back of the school near the beach. They are ready for sale from 11 am or so. Worth a visit even if you don't buy anything!

Currency

The local currency is TT dollars with exchange rates as follows:

- \$6 tt to \$1 US

- \$10 to £1 sterling

You will need local currency for shopping and eating out in Castara. You can pay Porridge and for trips in US dollars. Max, at the supermarket, will cash US Travellers' checks for you if he has enough money in the till.

Credit cards are widely accepted down the bottom end of the island near the airport and in Scarborough.

ATM /ABM cash dispensers are found at the airport, in Scarborough at the banks and now in Castara (ask Porridge for directions) and accept MasterCard, Visa, Cirrus and Plus cards. Locals say the service in Castara can be a bit erratic so don't count on it working.

Internet Facilities & Telephone

There are internet facilities in Castara. The Naturalist Guest House at the end of the main beach has an Internet Cafe in operation right behind their beach bar. There is also a wireless connection there, and some clients have been able to access it with their laptops. The cost is believed to be around £3 per day. Also there are several well-advertised internet cafes in Scarborough.

UK triband mobile phones work well in Tobago. It may be worthwhile visiting TSTT (Tobago Telecommunications) in Scarborough to buy a local Sim card. We suggest that you take advice from your service provider in the UK as to how to ensure your mobile phone will operate on the island. Recharging: remember that the electricity voltage on Tobago is 110 volts; some phones have dual voltage chargers, others not. Car 'cigarette lighter' charger systems seem to be universal.

Porridge now rents local mobile phones for £2 per day. These are very useful if you need to make local calls or indeed if you want to be contactable by friends and family back home. You can arrange to hire a phone once you arrive in Castara or you can email Porridge in advance at sugartucky@gmail.com

Doctors/Health

There is a health centre just before L&H supermarket, where a qualified nurse will offer advice. A doctor visits the health centre once a week, currently on a Tuesday, but check with Porridge in case the day changes. Visiting Scarborough hospital is to be avoided - there are long delays before you are seen, apparently.

myTobago.info has kindly allowed us to publish a list of doctors, dentists and pharmacies from their web site - a comprehensive list can be found there; we thought it would be helpful to clients to have some key phone numbers to hand, though we have listed the complete pharmacy list because there are so few on the island:

	Name	Address	Phone no
Pharmacies	Dove Drugs	Carnbee (in front of Pennysavers)	639 2976
	Pharmax Pharmacy	South West City Mall, Canaan	631 1030
	Ross Budget Drugs	Main St, Scarborough	639 2658
	Scarborough Drugs	Carrington St/Wilson Rd, Scarborough	639 4161
	Sinanaan's Pharmacy	Milford Court, Bon Accord	660 8255
	Tobago Pharmacy	31 Carrington St, Scarborough	639 3784
	Tsoi's Pharmacy	Scarborough Mall, Scarborough	639 3383
	Uptown Drugs	Main St, Scarborough	639 1426
Doctors	Dr Mentor Melville (does house visits)	Milford Court, Bon Accord	639 1722
	Dr Mohamed	Aquatech Plaza, Carnbee	631 0533
	Dr Gillian Wheeler (Paediatrician)	Triangle Building, Scarborough	639 1115

Dentists	Dr Addison Moore	2 Robinson St, Scarborough	639 3568
	Oracare Dental Centre	Tateco House, Wilson Hs, Scarborough	660 6725

Mosquito repellents are a good idea. We used to buy those that have 50% Deet because there have been a few instances of dengue fever - now found in the Caribbean, Florida, Mexico, and South America, as well as all of the Far East. There is a very low risk of catching it, but be aware that it is only carried by day time biting mosquitoes and the risk goes up in highly populated areas with the possibility of poor sanitation. However, we now use citronella oil mixed with coconut oil base, which we find very effective.'

For advice on vaccinations etc we suggest you talk to your doctor. Make sure your polio and tetanus are up to date. We were recently advised by our GP to vaccinate against hepatitis A (after 10 years of being completely lax).

Climate

The official view from Discover Tobago is ' a warm tropical climate tempered by trade winds. The average daytime temperature is 29°c (83°F), with maximums in the low to mid 30s. The early months of the year are dry and sunny, June to December is the wet season, but rain tends to fall in short sharp bursts, and most days have plenty of sunlight.' We were there last August and probably had the best snorkelling and calmest seas of all our times there - so it's wonderful even in much of the rainy season, though there can be wet periods of several days later on in the rainy season, especially around full moon/new moon time.

Please consult www.myTobago.info for an accurate and ongoing weather outlook provided by the inimitable Paul Tallet.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temp (°F)	86	86	86	88	89	88	87	88	88	88	87	87
Temp (°C)	31	31	32	32	32	32	31	31	32	32	32	31
Sunshine	7	8	8	8	8	6	7	7	7	7	7	7
Rainfall (in)	4	2	2	2	5	9	9	8	7	8	9	8
Rainfall (mm)	69	41	46	53	94	193	218	246	193	170	183	125

After Hurricane Ivan, we feel that we should add something about this devastating force of nature. July to September is the hurricane season. Trinidad and Tobago lie to the south of the hurricane belt and have not experienced widespread destruction since Hurricane Flora in 1963. Hurricane Ivan thankfully only brushed Tobago in passing, causing no serious structural damage. It was a frightening experience, especially for those who are old enough to remember Hurricane Flora. So no guarantees, clearly, but it's very unlikely.

More Information

A very informative, non-commercial, website set up by two lovers of Tobago is <www.mytobago.info> - this site also has a forum for past and future visitors to the island. If you have a question, you will find it answered here, almost certainly. There are also very useful articles on a host of topics from bird watching to sandflies. There are also article on Scuba Diving and Snorkelling.

Another good website with lots of information is www.simplytobago.com From there are links to further sources of information, including the Tourist Agency. There is also a terrific article on bird watching that is worth a visit if you are at all interested in birds.