

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL PORT OF SPAIN

a community of learners

1 International Drive, Westmoorings, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies

Telephone: (868) 632-4591/2, 633-4777; Fax: (868) 632-4595

Website: <http://www.isps.edu.tt>

Dear Prospective Teachers,

This guide has been produced in order to help give you information about ISPS. Selecting a new school and a new country is not an easy task, yet I hope this guide helps make your decision an easy one. As you will read, we are a small school, a young school, a dynamic school, and a school which is improving every year.

Since August 2002, our focus has been expansion of programme offerings, curriculum development and managing growth. Since June 2003, we have had K-12 Standards and Benchmarks adopted and published and have been using the "Understanding by Design" curriculum process to develop units for the curriculum. We have fully developed our High School and Middle School course offerings so that they reflect a programme which is challenging, broad, balanced and meets the needs of students enrolled at ISPS, including a Student Support team and a fledgling ESL programme.

The island nation of Trinidad and Tobago is a wonderful place to work and live. Although classified as a "developing nation", all 21st century amenities are readily available. The climate is ideal and the people are among the warmest and friendliest in the world.

Our vision is to become one of the premier international schools - an attainable goal yet not without a lot of hard work and dedication. I am looking for dedicated professionals who will help us fulfill this vision.

I look forward to speaking with you about ISPS and life in Trinidad and Tobago.

Eric Larson
Director

TRINIDAD and TOBAGO – GENERAL INFORMATION

Background

Christopher Columbus discovered Trinidad on his third voyage in 1498. The inhabitants on the island were the aboriginal people, the Caribs and the Arawaks. Since that time the country has been ruled by the Spanish, settled by the French, with the islands coming under British control in the 19th Century, and gaining independence in 1962.

The people of Trinidad and Tobago are mainly of African or East Indian descent. Virtually all speak English. Small percentages also speak Hindi, French patois, and several other dialects. Trinidad has two major folk traditions: Creole and East Indian. Creole is a mixture of African elements with Spanish, French, and English colonial culture. Trinidad's East Indian culture came to the island with indentured servants brought to fill a labor shortage created by the emancipation of the African slaves in 1833.

The twin-island republic is one of the most prosperous in the Caribbean, thanks largely to petroleum and natural gas production and processing.

Official Name

Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Location

Caribbean, islands between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, northeast of Venezuela.

Physical Area

Rectangular in shape, measures 60 km (37 miles) by (80 km (50 miles).

Total Area

5128 km² (1979 sq. miles)

Capital City

Port-of-Spain - Trinidad

Other cities

San Fernando, Chaguanas, Arima - Trinidad
Scarborough -Tobago

Population

1,056,608 (July 2007 est.)

Official Language

English

Ethnic Profile (2000)

37.5% African descent
40.0% East Indian descent
20.5% Mixed descent
0.8% European descent
1.2% Chinese and others

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Religions | Roman Catholic 26%, Hindu 22.5%, Anglican 7.8%, Muslim 5.8%, Pentecostal 6.8%, other 18.7% |
| Education | Years compulsory--8. Literacy--98%. |
| Climate | Tropical with a rainy season (June to December) and a dry season (January to May) |
| Natural Hazards | Outside the usual path of hurricanes and other tropical storms |
| Time Zone | Summer: EST (Eastern Standard Time), equivalent to GMT (Greenwich Mean Time)- 5 hours; winter: EST +1, GMT-4. Daylight savings time is not observed in Trinidad and Tobago. |
| Airports | Trinidad: Piarco International Airport, 27 km (17 miles) from Port of Spain (airport code "POS") Tobago: Crown Point International Airport, 10 km (7 miles) from Scarborough (airport code "TAB") |
| Airlines | Air Canada, American Airlines, BWIA International Airways, British Caledonian, Air Caribbean, LIAT, Surinam Airways, and several Charter Operators. |
| Customs | Travelers cheques and credit cards are accepted by most establishments. For Customs and Excise purposes only cash is accepted. |
| Currency | Trinidad and Tobago dollar: (TT\$) \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$100 \$1.00 = 100 cents: 1 cent, 5, 10, 25, 50 |
| Exchange Rate | A floating rate system is in force. Currently US\$1 = TT\$6.32; CDN\$1 = TT\$6.6 |
| Taxes | Departure Tax: TT\$100 (must be paid in local currency) |
| Hotel Taxes | Service Charge 10%, Hotel Room Tax 10% |
| Value Added Tax | 15% of goods and services |

Principal Banks

These agencies have their main corporate offices in Port-of-Spain and maintain international links through their affiliates in North America and Europe.

Citibank
First Citizens Bank
Scotia Bank

Republic Bank
Royal Bank

Banking hours are 0800 - 1400 hrs Monday to Thursday, 0900 - 1200 hrs and 1500 - 1700 hrs on Fridays.

Major shopping malls also either contain ABMs (Automated Banking Machines) or full service branches and generally keep later opening hours ranging from 0800-1800 hrs. The banking system features LINX, which enables client access to accounts from any ABM regardless of agency in the country. LINX can also be used to make purchases at retail outlets throughout the country. ABMs can also be used to access advance cash withdrawals for VISA, MasterCard and VISA Plus clients.

Telephone/Fax Code

1 (868) + seven (7) digit local number

Emergency Service

Police: Call 999
Fire & Ambulance: Call 990

Electricity

115 volts/230 volts (+/- 6%); 60hz

Business/Social Hints

Appointments should be made in advance.

For meetings, men should wear a lightweight suit; this may be alternated with blazer and tie. Women should wear equivalent suit.

It is customary to shake hands on meeting and taking leave. Business cards are exchanged after introductory formalities. Some companies/individuals are quite formal whereas others rapidly dispense with formalities once the initial introductions have been made.

Business Hours

Retail outlets: 0800 - 1600 hrs on Monday to Thursday and until 1800 hrs on Friday. Retail outlets based at shopping malls remain open till 2000 hrs.

Offices: 0800 - 1600 hrs Monday to Friday.

Mail Service is available from 0800 - 2100 hrs at the Piarco Airport.

General offices operated from 0800 – 1530 hrs. Duty free shopping is available at the Cruise Ship Complex, Piarco International Airport, and selected downtown Port of Spain shops.

Media, Press

Dailies: Trinidad Express, Trinidad Guardian, NewsDay
Tri-weekly: TNT Mirror
Weeklies: Catholic News, Tobago News, Bomb, Blast, Show Time

Media, Television

Broadcast: CCN 6 & 18; CNC3, Gayelle TV (channel 7).

Media, Radio

AM: NBS Radio (610 AM); Radio Trinidad (730 AM)
FM: Hott 93 (93.1/93.5 FM); The Rock (95.1 FM) WEFM (96 FM); Music Radio 97 (97.1 FM); 98.9 Yes FM (98.9 FM); 195.5; Marsala 101.1; 103 FM, Heartbeat 103.5; More 107.4; Ebony 104; Power 102, Sangeet Radio 106.1; Trini Bashment 91.9 Soca; Radio Toco 106.7.

The Economy of Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago has the most diversified and industrialized economy in the English-speaking Caribbean, and has earned a reputation as an excellent investment site for international businesses.

Air, sea and land transportation links are excellent, and telecommunications links with the Americas and Europe are completely modern.

There are large reserves of petroleum and natural gas, and well developed heavy industries – iron and steel, methanol and nitrogenous fertilizers and petroleum products. Tourism, mainly in Tobago, is a growing sector although not as important as in many other Caribbean islands.

The government economic policy is well in line with prevailing market principles: trade liberalization, open market-driven economy, promotion of private enterprise and foreign investment, rationalization of the public sector, and development of exports.

Education

The labour force is well educated with an adult literacy rate in the 95-99% range (2002). Primary level education is compulsory. Approximately 70% of the 12-15 age group

attend secondary school, the rest pursue other forms of training. The regional Caribbean Examinations Council, taken at form 5 (grade 12), is accepted as an entry qualification for higher education in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

After form 5 (grade 12), some students continue in secondary school for an additional two years to take the British Advanced Level” examinations of community standard, set up by the universities of Cambridge and London. Three private schools based on the American and Canadian education systems are open for enrolment.

Students may also attend other technical and vocational schools. The government also sponsors a Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP), whose 9-month courses turn out 8,000 students a year. The Trinidad and Tobago Hotel School offers courses for the hotel, catering and travel industries. Various other technical and vocational programmes exist.

The University of the West Indies (UWI) has one of its campuses at St. Augustine, Trinidad; the other two are at Mona, Jamaica and Cave Hill, Barbados. The St. Augustine campus offers undergraduate and post graduate programmes in the areas of Agriculture, Business Administration, Engineering, Humanities, Languages, Law, Natural and Social Sciences.

The UWI Institute of Business offers post graduate courses on business- related topics and develops in-house programmes for local companies. Their programme offerings include the Executive Masters of Business Administration (EMBA) and International MBA offerings.

Established in 2004, the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) is designed to as an “entrepreneurial university”, to discover and develop entrepreneurs. Its current programmes include maritime, energy production, teacher education, construction system and the English Technical Diploma leading to diplomas, bachelors and masters degrees.

The National Institute of Higher Education, Research and Technology (NIHERST), operates a college of health science, a college of nursing, a school of languages and an information technology college. The institute is also running a UNIDO funded project to develop software writing skills.

The Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, located at Mount Hope, is one of the leading facilities of its kind in the Caribbean. The complex comprising some seventy buildings is both a Teaching and Medical Science facility.

About Trinidad and Tobago – Geography

Geography

Trinidad and Tobago are the southernmost islands of the Caribbean archipelago, and are geologically an extension of the South American continent.

Trinidad is separated from Venezuela by the 11 km (7 miles) straits of the Gulf of Paria.

Tobago

Physical Area Fish-shaped, measures 42 km (26 miles) by 10 km (7 miles)

Total Area 300 km² (116 sq. miles)

Major Towns Scarborough, Roxborough, Charlotteville

Trinidad and Tobago comprises 5128 km² (1,980 sq. miles). The territory enjoys a tropical climate with average maximum temperatures of 32°C (89°F). Tobago's temperatures are cooler, owing to the more constant north east trade winds. There is a dry season from January to May and a wet season from June to December. Annual rainfall is about 200 cm (40 inches) over most of the country. Trinidad and Tobago is just south of the hurricane belt.

Branches of Government – Legislative & Judiciary

Government

Trinidad and Tobago achieved independence from Britain in 1962 followed by republican status in 1976. The twin-island nation is currently a member of the Commonwealth.

Fully democratic elections are held every five (5) years, since 1956. Universal adult suffrage, with a minimum voting age of 18.

A Bicameral legislature exists with the President as Head of State, Executive power lies with the Prime Minister and Cabinet:

- Lower House (elected) – House of Representatives
- Upper House (appointed) – Senate

The Tobago House of Assembly is responsible for administrative governance within Tobago. City and county councils are responsible for local governance.

Judiciary

The Judiciary comprises a Supreme Court and district courts. The Supreme Court consists the High Court of Justice and the Court of Appeals. The High Court is presided over by the Chief Justice and ten (10) puisne judges. The district courts are presided over by a Chief Magistrate and seven (7) senior and eighteen (18) stipendary magistrates. In these courts, the work of the Petty Civil courts and the courts of summary jurisdiction is conducted.

Natural History

Off Trinidad and Tobago, the confluence of the cool North Atlantic currents, the warmer Caribbean waters and the rich effluent of the Orinoco River creates coastal waters of unusual richness, teeming with many types of marine life. Trinidad and Tobago, originally part of the South American continent, has retained many of the plants and animals of South America, leaving the islands with a diversity of flora and fauna quite disproportionate to their size. In addition, to possessing the flora and fauna of South America, these islands are also influenced by their geographic location, being a perfect stopping point for Northern or Southern migratory birds, butterflies or anything drifting in the ocean or wind currents. Habitats include Tropical Rainforest, Savannah, Semi-deciduous Forest, Mangrove Swamp and Marsh Lands.

Flora and Fauna Highlights

Over 260 species of birds breed in Trinidad and Tobago. Over 150 migrate here from North and South America. Over 430 species of birds and over 600 species of butterflies have been recorded in Trinidad and Tobago. There is also an enormous variety of trees, orchids, shrubs, insects and other wildlife.

Ecotourism in Trinidad and Tobago

“The island itself is an unreal place where iguanas climb flaming immortelle trees, waterfalls pour from forest clefts, and reefs teem with Technicolor life so vivid that scuba enthusiasts refer to the place as the Disney of Diving. “

Rand Richards Cooper in Islands Jan/Feb 2004

The International School of Port of Spain A Short History – A Bright Future

The International School is a private corporation registered in Trinidad, and its sponsors are the Embassy of the United States of America, E.O.G. Resources Trinidad Limited, B.P. Energy Company of Trinidad & Tobago and British Gas Trinidad and Tobago Limited. It has been recognized by the Ministry of Education and represents a special effort on behalf of parents and businesses to provide a college preparatory, holistic education for students aged 4 – 18. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Tunny were the founding teachers and they started out at 18 Victoria Avenue in September 1994 with 50 students.

The teaching faculty, supported by a strong spirit of parent activism, led the way in promoting and establishing quality educational programs. By 1996, the school had completed an Accreditation process with the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges in the United States. With this recognition, the International School of Port of Spain had joined a unique group of schools located around the globe that served the growing needs of students from the local community and expatriate families of the business and diplomatic community. The student population began to expand by 50% every six months and was soon located at three separate sites.

From 1996 to 2000, the school focused on designing and building a permanent campus to support the stated educational philosophy and goals of the school. Through the collaborative efforts of the Ministry of Education, the Port of Spain Corporation and Guardian Properties Ltd., an appropriate site was secured. With the financial support of FINCOR and the appointment of Beaver Construction as the main contractor, building started in January 1998. Students moved to the new campus in May 1999 and during August of that same year, the entire facility went into use.

Enrollment steadily increased from 2002 through 2005 and ISPS began the 2005-2006 school year with 380 students. As a result of the growth the Board of Directors approved a 2-phase growth plan for the facility. Phase I included the expansion of selected classrooms and the cafeteria, and the construction of a new gym with Phase II creating a new Fine Arts Centre, creating classrooms for art, music, dance and drama, and a 400-seat theatre space.

ISPS now provides students a world class facility and has developed an enriching educational learning environment that rivals programmes around the world.

As a private institution with a public purpose, the Board of Directors, school administration and faculty remain committed to making The International School of Port of Spain an integral part of Trinidad and Tobago. Initiatives are underway to position the school as an important resource for college preparatory programmes, instructional technology, special needs education and teacher training. Students, faculty and parents have always been engaged with community outreach and service programs. These areas of involvement continue to grow.

Today the school has over 470 students representing 35 different nationalities with 38% of the students from Trinidad and Tobago. The success of The International School of Port of Spain has been a collective effort of parents, board members, faculty, administration and students. In a short time, it has established itself as a leading International School in the Caribbean. The institution continues to strive to meet the needs of both international families and long-term residents of Trinidad and Tobago.

Vision:

ISPS will strive to be one of the premier International schools.

Mission:

ISPS will provide an outstanding educational programme for both international and resident families who want their children to pursue higher education.

Educational Philosophy

The International School of Port of Spain (ISPS) provides a college preparatory, holistic education for children in grades Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12, providing them with the skills, knowledge and values necessary to be productive individuals in an interdependent world. Focusing on programs of study and requirements of universities in North America and abroad, ISPS strives to meet the needs of both international families and long-term residents of Trinidad and Tobago.

Acknowledging that each learner is unique and valuable, the ISPS nurtures love of learning, high self-esteem and appreciation for human diversity in a manner that supports high quality education. The school's Board of Directors works closely with the school's administration to meet the needs of the school community, while actively inviting parent, faculty and student participation in school life.

The ISPS offers an international education based upon a US curriculum model. The International School of Port of Spain utilizes the rich and diverse environment of Trinidad and Tobago and draws on the special qualities of the ISPS community to prepare young people for the challenges they will face as citizens of the twenty-first century.

The School: The International School of Port of Spain is a young school, having grown from 50 to 479 students in less than 13 years. It is operated by a Board of Directors composed of 4 corporate directors (US Embassy, British Gas, EOG Resources and BP) and 3 elected parent directors.

The students are about 38% Trinidadian, 22% North American and 40% from 35 other countries. Oil and gas-related industries are big business in Trinidad, and people in the petroleum industry represent a significant number of our parent community.

The Staff: There are 91 full time teachers. The majority are Trinidadians, a few “foreign residents” (usually married to Trinidadians), and a number of overseas hired teachers. Local teachers are well trained in a British-style system, and a pool of very well qualified Trinidadian teachers is at hand. However, overseas faculty members are sometimes needed in certain specialized areas such as Advanced Placement, which is not taught in Trinidad outside of ISPS, and Middle School, which is not part of the local system. All faculty members are called upon to share their knowledge and expertise in a collegial manner. All teachers play a key role in enhancing the academic and extra-curricular programs of the school.

The Curriculum: is international standards based and developed for a US model of delivery. The school offers many services, such as a learning support center, full-time nurse, and an expanding after school activities and athletics programme. ISPS will be authorized to deliver the IB PYP in August 2007 and plans are in place to introduce the IB Diploma programme by August 2008.

Technology: We have 250-networked computers, all Dell and IBM PCs and 27 MACs Minimac. All of these have Internet access and we have also introduced 4 mobile computer labs which are wireless.

The school has overhead projectors, TV/VCR setups on carts, and 34 multimedia projectors situated in classrooms, cafeteria and 2 available on request. Every classroom is equipped with a minimum of 2 computers, each teacher has his/her own personal workstation/Laptop.

School Day: Our school day for students is 7:30 a.m. to 2:15 p.m. Teachers, like everywhere, are expected to work longer on either end. Teachers should report ready for work at 7:15 a.m. and are expected to stay on campus until at least 3:00 p.m.

In addition, it is anticipated that teachers will offer an after school activity once a week, 2 of the 4 quarters.

The School Facility: ISPS moved into a new, purpose-built facility in May 1999. It is considered by those who travel around the area to be perhaps the best school facility in the Caribbean. The entire school, Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 12, is located in one building, which includes classrooms, a library-media center, 3 science labs, 3 computer

labs, a health clinic, gym, cafeteria, 2 small playfields and a Fine Arts Centre . The entire building is air-conditioned.

The School Neighbourhood: ISPS is located in the suburb of Westmoorings, which, as the name implies, is located next to the sea. The school itself is only 2 blocks from the sea, but direct access is next to impossible due to apartments along the oceanfront. The western end of the campus borders a tidal river that flows into the Gulf of Paria.

Although we are not on a beach, we are in a very convenient part of town. A modern shopping mall is only a 5-minute walk away. Here you can do your banking, go grocery shopping, see your travel agent, and visit KFC and Pizza Hut. Our senior students, with off-campus privileges, take full advantage of the internationally flavoured food court at The Falls at West Mall on their lunch breaks.

The remaining streets around the school are full of new, upscale homes. Because of the proximity to the school, this is a popular area for expat families.

School Contact Information:

Local Address

1 International Drive
Westmoorings
Trinidad and Tobago
West Indies

Skybox Mailing Address

#P.O.S. 1369
1601 NW 97th Avenue
P.O. Box 025307
Miami, Florida 33102-5307

Telephone: (868) 632-4591, 632-4592, 633-4777

Fax: (868) 632-4595

Website: <http://www.isps.edu.tt>

Further questions: E-mail any of us at ISPS:

Eric Larson, Head of School: elarson@isps.edu.tt

John Horsfall, High School Principal jhorsfall@isps.edu.tt

Alicia Solozano, Middle School Principal: asolozano@isps.edu.tt

Suzette Julien, Elementary Principal: sjulien@isps.edu.tt

High School Profile

The International School Port of Spain (ISPS) is a private, co-educational day school based on a US curriculum model. It offers a college preparatory holistic education, in English, from Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12. Graduates earn a U.S. High School Diploma. ISPS was founded in 1994 and has been accredited by The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools since 1996. Admission to the high school is non-selective.

ISPS's families are local nationals or members of the expatriate business and diplomatic communities of Trinidad & Tobago. The High School (Grades 9-12) includes 133 students from 16 different nations with approximately 62% being local and 23% from the USA.

Educational and experiential trips are considered an important part of the curriculum. Community service is actively encouraged. Sporting events, cultural programs, student government, Model United Nations, drama productions and interaction with other regional American/ International schools are scheduled throughout the year.

Faculty: Twenty-two full-time and one part-time faculty teach in the High School. All faculty members are university graduates. Of the twenty-three faculty members, sixteen hold advanced degrees, and have an average of fifteen years teaching experience. The average class size is 12.4 students.

Curriculum: Courses in the High School are college preparatory courses with Advanced Placement (AP) courses available. Classes are scheduled in eight blocks over a two-day A/B cycle, with classes being 85 minutes in duration. It is Board Policy that all students fill a minimum of seven of the eight blocks unless taking AP subjects.

Credit for AP courses: Most AP subjects fill two of the eight blocks, one on each of the two-day A/B cycle and are, therefore, two credit courses. AP Human Geography, AP Statistics and AP Psychology are exceptions in that they are offered every other day (like regular courses) and, as such, are single credit courses.

AP Subjects Offered in 2006-2007:

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| AP Calculus AB | AP English Literature |
| AP Statistics | AP Spanish Language |
| AP Human Geog. | AP Physics B |
| AP Psychology | AP Chemistry |
| AP Studio Art | AP Biology |
| AP US History | |

Graduation Requirements: In order to obtain a US High School Diploma from ISPS, students must earn a minimum of 26 credits while enrolled in grades 9 - 12. Of these, 15 must be from the five core academic areas of English, Math, Science, Social Science and Modern Languages. In addition to these, students must complete 2 credits in PE

and a half credit in Computer Technology. Electives and additional academic credits make up the required 26. Please note that although students may earn credit for high school courses done prior to 9th grade, all students must still earn the required 26 while enrolled in the high school.

| <u>Subject Area</u> | <u>Minimum</u> |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| English | 4 |
| Mathematics | 3 |
| Social Studies | 3 |
| Science | 3 |
| Foreign Language (same) | 2 |
| Total Academic | 15 |
| Physical Education | 2 |
| Technology | 0.5 |
| Electives/Other Academic | 8.5 |
| Total | 26 |

Elective courses are usually one semester (½ credit) courses. Some electives may be offered as full year courses. These include Art, Drama, Music, Dance and Technology.

Students are accepted into AP courses upon recommendation from teachers together with a minimum grade of “B” in pre-requisite courses. ISPS offers no Honors courses.

RANKING POLICY: Due to small class sizes and the transient nature of our student population, **students are not ranked.**

SAT I score range:

| <u>Class of</u> | <u>Verbal</u> | <u>Math</u> |
|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| 2002 | 770 - 420 | 730 - 310 |
| 2003 | 680 - 460 | 730 - 450 |
| 2004 | 650 - 440 | 700 - 420 |
| 2005 | 620 - 450 | 690 - 400 |
| 2006 | 670 - 390 | 700 - 410 |

AP RESULTS, 2006

| Score | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Average |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| AP Biology | 5 | 2 | 3 | - | - | 4.2 (10) |
| AP Calculus AB | - | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2.6 (7) |
| AP Chemistry | - | 2 | - | - | - | 4 (2) |
| AP English Lit. | 2 | 7 | 4 | - | - | 3.8 (13) |
| AP Human Geog. | 9 | 9 | 4 | 3 | - | 4.0 (25) |
| AP Physics B | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2 | - | 3.5 (11) |
| AP Psychology | 2 | 8 | 2 | - | 3 | 3.4 (15) |
| AP Spanish Lang. | 2 | - | - | - | - | 5 (2) |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|------------------|
| AP Statistics | - | 1 | 2 | 2 | - | 2.8 (5) |
| AP Studio Art | - | 1 | 2 | 4 | - | 2.6 (7) |
| Total | 21 | 37 | 22 | 12 | 5 | 3.59 (97) |

Please note that 82 % of all grades were “3” or higher. Of the 47 students that took AP exams, 19 (40%) received AP Scholar awards. The national average is 18 percent.

Middle School Profile

The Middle School recognizes the development needs of young adolescents, and strives to provide a supportive climate which will enhance students' self-esteem and personal development. Middle School programs are diverse in nature. Choice and decision-making encourage ownership of knowledge and behavior.

Educational and experiential trips, including extended Outdoor Education experiences, are considered an important part of the curriculum. Community service is actively encouraged. Sporting events, cultural programs, student government, drama productions and interaction with other local and regional American/International schools are scheduled throughout the year.

FACULTY: Eight full-time faculty teach in the Middle School and another fourteen have shared teaching responsibilities between the Middle School and the Elementary or High Schools.

CURRICULUM: The Middle School schedule uses large blocks of time (60 -120 minutes) to allow students to explore their subjects in greater depth. Core classes are Integrated Language Arts/Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, Spanish, Health and Physical Education. The 7th grade offers an innovative integrated Language Arts/Social Studies, Science and Arts program called Watershed. Technology is integrated throughout the Middle School curriculum.

The Arts and Exploratory programs promote the all-round development of students. Students receive year-round instruction in Art and Drama and a semester each of Dance and Music. At the beginning of each quarter, students choose from a range of academic, vocational and recreational exploratory courses. Options for the 2006 - 2007 academic year include Odyssey of the Mind, Steel Pan, Web Page Design, Comics, Cooking and Embroidery.

GRADING SYSTEM: The school year consists of 180 instructional days divided into semesters and quarters. Progress reports are issued in the middle of each quarter and formal grade reports are issued at the end of each quarter.

| <u>Grade</u> | <u>Scale</u> | <u>Grade</u> | <u>Scale</u> |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| A | 95-100 | C | 74-76 |
| A- | 90-94 | C- | 70-73 |
| B+ | 87-89 | D+ | 67-69 |
| B | 84-86 | D | 64-66 |
| B- | 80-83 | D- | 60-63 |
| C+ | 77-79 | F | Below 60 |

Grading Codes also used:

O: Outstanding S: Satisfactory

NI: Needs Improvement

STANDARDIZED TESTING: The Middle School uses a standardized testing program as part of its holistic assessment of student progress and achievement. All students in the Middle School take the ERB Writing Assessment annually. In addition, students are assessed in Reading and Mathematics using the Progress Towards Standards Test.

HOMEROOM PROGRAM: This program provides a consistent and caring environment in the Middle School through the organization of a supportive and stable peer group. Through activities and discussion, Homeroom aims to help in each student's academic and personal development, as well as to build the community.

Elementary School Profile

Educational and experiential trips are considered an important part of the curriculum. Community service is actively encouraged. Sporting events, cultural programs, student government, and productions are scheduled throughout the year.

FACULTY: We have 13 classroom teachers, 6 classroom assistants and 8 specialist teachers in the Elementary School this year. Every teacher is properly credentialed to teach at the appropriate grade level. Our faculty's professional expertise is indicated by the fact that over 50 percent of the Elementary teaching staff has a master's degree.

CURRICULUM: ISPS offers an Elementary School program using a U.S. based curriculum model. Our educational purpose is to encourage students to become life long learners and to empower them to attain their highest potential and sense of self worth. This can best be accomplished by the implementation of a "child-centered curriculum". A child-centered curriculum promotes critical and creative thinking, provides for cooperative learning experiences, and allows for individual learning styles. Lessons relate to the real world and encourage problem solving through active involvement.

The diversity of the student body provides a richness that allows students to become more globally aware. Art, music, foreign language, computer technology, guidance and physical education provide a balance for whole person learners. Students are taught the necessary skills to prepare them for a college preparatory secondary education and for international schools elsewhere in the world. As an international school, we also focus on preparing students to be concerned and responsible world citizens.

GRADING SYSTEM: The school year consists of 181 instructional days divided into terms. A progress report is issued within eight weeks of the beginning of the school year or six weeks after the student's arrival in school. Formal reports are issued at the end of each term. Only term grades are entered on students' cumulative file.

DISCIPLINE AND CLIMATE FOR LEARNING: The elementary school recognizes good behavior with positive comments, stickers, house points, recognition at our weekly town meetings, and character cards. The guidance program provides opportunities for learning good work habits, developing problem solving skills, and engaging in self esteem activities. Our character education program is taught across the curriculum. The ISPS student handbook has guidelines on expectations for student's behavior.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: The staff strives to educate every student to his or her fullest academic potential. Our student population is very diverse and learning styles differ, we chart students' progress in a variety of ways. Test scores are only one measure. Achievement is also measured through teacher observation projects and portfolios containing various student assignments.

Students in grades 3-5 take the IOWA Test, to measure their academic progress in basic skills. ERB Writing assessment provides a direct measure of writing. This test is given in grades 3-5. These tests are given during the spring of each year.

COUNSELING AND SUPPORT SERVICES: A Student Support Team (SST) A school nurse five days a week Teaching Assistants to provide a variety of support services

- An after-school activities program
- An early morning reading and math program, *Reading Intervention for Student Success (RISS), *Math Intervention for Student Success (MISS)
- A parent volunteer for each classroom
- A Homework Pod

SPECIAL FEATURES:

- Six-Trait Writing Program
- Teachers trained in Junior Great Books
- Accelerated Reading & Math Program
- Music program introducing strings, guitar, recorder, pan, percussion and chorus
- Recognition for high scores in WordMasters Analogies Test
- Affiliation and Recognition with the Jane Goodall Institution
- Community Enriched Activities with the local zoo through *Roots and Shoots*
- Strong Character Education Program
- Summer program to support academics
- Iowa Test scores above the norms
- Student newsletter "Wazzup"
- Love and Logic Parenting Program
- Affiliation with local "WORC" (Wildlife Orphanage and Rehabilitation Center)

Weather: The weather, of course, is an attraction. Temperatures range between 26°C - 32°C (79°F - 90°F) year round and humidity averages 75%. (You will, however, need to bring your sweaters for school and movie theatres.) Tropical rains fall, usually about an hour a day, from June to January, but it's warm and sunny for most of the day. It's dry from February through May. Trinidad is not in the hurricane belt and severe weather is unheard of for decades at a time.

Language: English! Although we can see Venezuela from parts of the northwestern tip of Trinidad, Spanish is not widely used. Some people still speak Hindi in the southern and central regions.

Security Issues: Security problems have increased over the past 6 years. Port of Spain has unfortunately caught up with the rest of the world, and now security is an issue which should not be ignored. The residential areas, particularly the places where teachers are housed, are considered safe. Downtown Port of Spain, however, can be a different story, depending on the time of day, yet good judgment will help you.

Exchange Rates and Banking: During the first few days in the country, we will help you open a TT bank account at Royal Bank, which is located in a shopping mall only a 5-minute walk away from campus. You will receive an ATM card that allows you to make withdrawals in TT\$, 24 hours a day. Drawing off US accounts with ATM cards is generally easy and may be a more convenient option than loads of US cash or traveler's cheques. You might still, however, want to bring enough US\$ cash or traveler's cheques to get you through the first few weeks. Traveler's cheques, however, are returned at a lower rate than US cash at the bank.

You will have a checking account, and checks are accepted in most stores. The most convenient way to pay for routine shopping is by using your ATM card as a debit card as you check out at the grocery store, pay for your restaurant meals, or other retail purchases.

The TT dollar is fully convertible, is pegged to the US\$ and varies between 1US\$=6.20TT\$ to 1US\$=6.30TT\$. Your monthly salary will be paid in TT dollars directly into your Trinidad bank account on the 25th of each month.

If you find that you need some of your salary sent home, the school or Royal Bank can arrange a check in US\$ which you would then need to send via FedEx or DHL.

VISA and MasterCard are accepted in most stores, including grocery stores. If you are going to be using your US issued credit cards, you will have to arrange to have the statements sent to you in Trinidad, or have a family member/close friend take care of your account from the US.

Cost of Living in Trinidad and Tobago (prices as of January 2008):

| Travel (US\$) Round trip airfare to | Leisure/Shopping (US\$) | Prices in Supermarket (US\$) |
|---|---|--|
| Miami: \$500 New York: \$800 Dallas: \$1100 Los Angeles: \$1600 Tobago: \$51 Grenada: \$250 Barbados: \$285 Caracas: \$320 | One litre of petrol: \$0.50 DVD Player: \$150.00 Movie Towne Ticket: \$7.14 | One litre of milk: \$1.15 Loaf of bread: \$1.10 Bottle of water 1l: \$1.42 Bottle of Coke: \$1.10 Case of Coke: \$7.25 Bottle of Beer: \$1.58 Case of Beer (24): \$31.11 Bottle of Wine: \$16.15 Kg of sugar: \$1.90 |

Salaries are ample to live comfortably in Trinidad and Tobago as locally produced goods are reasonable. Imported goods, however, are a bit more expensive and it pays to compare prices upon arrival.

Most of our overseas hired staff live comfortably, yet you may not be making enough money to deal with financial obligations at home if you are paying off student loans, mortgages, or credit card bills. The same applies if you are worried about contributing to retirement accounts, even though the school does contribute 5% of your salary to a pension fund.

Although other islands are nearby, the cost of travel can be expensive as most of the other Caribbean islands are expensive in terms of accommodation and food.

Post (Sending Mail Out):

Mail can be sent in 3 ways: (1) send letters with anyone who might be traveling outside of the country, (2) use FedEx or DHL when it really has to be there in less than a week (Overnight? Don't believe it!), (3) use regular local post. There are TTPost outlets located in Carenage and Diego Martin, but the two most convenient locations, and on Tragarete Road and Wrightson Road.

It is suggested that overseas hire teachers set up electronic payments of their home bills, credit cards, etc. with their home banks to avoid late charges. Stick to e-mail when possible.

Receiving Mail From Abroad: Most of us get mail at school. For mail from family and friends, plus magazine subscriptions and bank statements, use the "sky box". This is a commercial service that receives our mail in Miami and sends it to us by courier. Letters and subscriptions should be addressed to the name of the recipient as follows:

(e.g. John Jones)
#P.O.S. 1369, P.O. Box 025307
Miami, Florida 33102-5307

Do not send large, heavy packages through this skybox. They are expensive, sometimes difficult to receive and they will either spend weeks at customs or you will receive expensive bills for them. You may not have as much trouble with smaller items such as books and DVDs, which should be sent to

POS 2239
7620 NW 63rd Street
Miami, Florida 33166

E-Mail: Your school e-mail address will be your first initial and last name, followed by @isps.edu.tt. For example, John Jones is jjones@isps.edu.tt. If your name is hyphenated, please check with the Network Administrator, for your exact address.

If you wish to have internet access at home, you will have to use a private provider. Internet access from home is fairly reliable, but currently only 33.6K dial-up access is affordable (approximately TT\$125/month). Broadband access (in the form of 128K ADSL) is now available but is about \$100 US per month.

Eating Out: The following is list of some favourite places and will give you an idea of what's available. Prices are inclusive of 15% Vat and 10% service charge.

Taxis: Taxis are everywhere. They travel regular routes and will stop for passengers until full. Some are just automobiles with "H"(hire) license plates. Others are vans which are called *maxi-taxis*. Rides in the Port of Spain/Western route average only TT\$5. A few teachers make good use of taxis such as for going home late when their spouse drives home early. However, because of the car provided by the school, taxi riding is not necessary.

Bicycles, Walking and Exercise: This, like many other countries, is a car society. Bicycles are not common and walking as a means of transportation is rare. Some teachers like to walk in suburban streets for exercise in the afternoons. Several health clubs are available nearby. Lately, faculty members and parents have enjoyed volleyball two evenings a week. A group of staff members has organized an aerobics class two afternoons a week.

Books: the selection in the local bookstores is limited, although prices are reasonable. Bring some recreational reading materials with you. Amazon.com provides quick service to Trinidad and has been useful to ISPS teachers. The daily newspapers are available at school.

Television: Cable TV carries the 3 Trinidad stations plus NBC, CBS, ABC, BBC, ESPN, Discovery, TLC, HBO, TMC, PBS and about 20 other options. PBS is not available on cable. The monthly cost is about TT\$150, depending on the package you choose.

Direct TV (Satellite): Also available and receives many channels including some in Spanish and other languages.

DVD Movies: Shops are widely available.

Cinema: Port of Spain has several movie theatres and one drive-in theater located in Curepe, East Trinidad. The majority of films come from the US and closely follows the release dates in the US. Movie Towne is a complex which mirrors the Cineplex experience in the US. The cost of a movie at Movie Towne is TT\$45.00.

Cell Phones: Cell phones are very popular in Trinidad. They provide an extra level of comfort for those late night trips to the airport to pick up friends. However, they certainly are not necessary and just as many teachers choose not to have them. Some cell phones from the US will work in Trinidad, if they are Tri band and unlocked, after purchasing a TSTT Sim Card. You can purchase cell phones at the mall (costs average between TT\$600 up to TT\$3000). You are advised to terminate service in the US and get local service in Trinidad and Tobago.

Telephones: You will have a telephone in your apartment. Local calls are charged but the rate is low. You may pay your phone bill at a bank or by calling the phone company and using a credit card.

Electricity: Electricity in Trinidad is 110 volts, 60 cycle. Outlets are essentially the same as in the United States, except that most apartments and houses have only two pronged outlets, so in the cases of certain appliances with a 3-prong (grounded) plug, adapters are needed. The average electricity bill is about TT\$700 – TT\$900 per month.

Water: The tap water is considered potable but many people choose to purchase bottled water or to filter tap water.

All apartments and houses have water storage tanks which work automatically. Generally, water is available from the household taps all of the time, except when the city for some reason skips a day and the household uses more water than usual from the tank. This may happen several times a year. At times the Water Authority may shut off water to an entire district for a number of days, you may need to call in a water company to fill your water storage tanks – teachers will be responsible for this cost.

Beaches: Trinidad is not known for its beaches. However, Maracas Beach is quite lovely, just like the picture postcards, and is only a 30-minute drive away from the school. Ex-pats and locals often go early on a weekend morning and return by noon. A few other beaches are 1 and 2 hours away, mostly on the northern and eastern shore.

Although the beaches are not next-door, the shoreline certainly is, and at least 2 restaurants are popular for their proximity to sailboats, blue water and lower stress levels. Many people from around the world dock their “yachts” (from sail boats to large

millionaire yachts) within 5 miles of the campus. Trinidad is famous as a haven from the larger storms which hit the rest of the Caribbean.

Medical Services: Routine medical and dental services are available in Trinidad. In the case of unusual or very serious illnesses, some people fly to Miami for treatment. Prescription drugs, eyeglasses and even your favourite over-the-counter drugs are best carried with you when you come to Trinidad. Although most everything is available, not all brands are available. The school's medical plan for overseas faculty will include local coverage, major medical, and will provide coverage when returning home.

Clothing: Trinidad is more formal than you probably think but shorts and tee shirts are fine after work, at the mall, and while sightseeing. Male teachers wear ties at work, and women wear skirts/slacks with a blouse/top. We don't wear jeans, shorts or tee shirts to school. As a concession to the heat, most women don't wear nylons anytime. Men need a jacket for a few special occasions. Evening events (receptions, cocktail parties and concerts) often require "elegantly casual" clothing. The school is fully air conditioned and sweaters are worn by some teachers during the day.

The malls have many clothing shops, and seamstresses and fabric shops are readily available.

Religious Worship: Trinidad is a very religious country. Not only are Protestant and Roman Catholic churches available but Hindu temples and Muslim mosques abound. You can expect to find a friendly place to worship whatever your faith.

Shopping: Shopping malls are convenient but you can save money and have an adventure by shopping downtown. There is also a Price Smart about 5 minutes from school. VISA and MasterCard are accepted in most stores.

Groceries: A number of supermarkets carry both local and imported products. In addition, small stands are a good source for fruits and vegetables. Not everything that you may be accustomed to is available, but specialty stores have a good assortment of imported foods. The essentials are all here and are readily available.

Taxes: Because of a tax treaty between the US and Trinidad, US nationals do not pay local taxes for the first two years. All US nationals from their third contract year will be expected to pay the local tax.

All other nationals pay 30% tax on their salary and benefits.

All employees of ISPS must pay the following mandatory government taxes: health insurance and national insurance. These taxes will be deducted from your salary on a monthly basis. The current total monthly deduction is about US\$33.00.

There are two ways to claim the foreign earned income exemption from US taxes for your ISPS salary and benefits:

1. Stay out of the USA for 331 days out of 365. This is called the “Physical Presence Test”. This is NOT the way most of us do it, as it involves keeping track of days, and involves staying overseas for most of the year.
2. Establish residence overseas for a full calendar year, called the “Bona Fide Resident” option. This is the way most of us do it as there is no limit to the number of days you can return to the States on holiday. This option requires at least a two-school-year stay overseas. Assuming that you move here at the beginning of a school year (August), you will not establish “bona fide” residence for a full calendar year until December of the following year!

(NOTE: We are not tax advisors. This is not an official statement but merely the experience of others who have taught in Trinidad. You should contact your tax person for official advice.)

Housing: The school provides your housing and you can expect to have an apartment, a flat or a townhouse, close to school. The accommodation will be furnished with a refrigerator, range, and basic living room and bedroom furniture, such as dinette with chairs, sofa, coffee table, occasional chairs, and beds. Most flats are either 2 or 3 bedroom. TV sets, pots/pans, plates, utensils, etc. are also included.

Laundry and Cleaning: Your apartment will have a washer and dryer. Professional dry cleaning is readily available.

Household Help: Many ex-pats and middle class Trinidadians employ someone to help around the house. Teachers who do this often share someone, using them only 1 or 2 days a week. These helpers do laundry, cleaning and will cook if asked. Salaries are about TT\$120 per day.

Automobiles: The school will provide a car with AC and automatic transmission to each teacher or teaching couple. They are of sufficient size for 5 adults, and are in good, not new, condition. Teachers are responsible for gas, and an insurance deductible of TT\$5,000. A maintenance company is responsible for oil changes and routine maintenance. In Trinidad, the customer pays quite a sizeable deductible amount for any accident. Driving is on the left side of the road.

Driver's License: New teachers will need to get a Trinidad driver's license. This involves studying a booklet of rules of the road and passing a written test. You will need a valid driver's license from your home country and 4 passport photos in order to get your Trinidad and Tobago license. It costs about TT\$200.00 to get your license and teachers are responsible for this fee.

Passports and Visas: The first requirement for your trip will be a valid passport for each member of the family. You will be asked by ISPS to fill out certain forms which are necessary to obtain your work permit. Every expatriate who works in Trinidad must have a valid “work permit”. A visa to enter Trinidad and Tobago is necessary and this can be arranged before your departure, or on your arrival in Trinidad.

Police Record: You will need to obtain a police certificate with respect to the previous five (5) years to ensure that you have a clean record when applying for your work permit. This can take 1 day in some US cities and 3 weeks in others.

Shipping/Settling Allowance: Overseas hired teachers will be given a shipping/settling allowance of US\$1,500 at the beginning and end of your contract period. When you depart Trinidad and Tobago for the last time, US\$1,000 will be given to you and US\$500 will be held from this allowance until all outstanding bills (electricity, phone, internet, etc...) have been cleared. The balance of the US\$500 will be sent to you.

You may use your allowance for excess baggage, air shipment, sea shipment, etc.... or to purchase materials on your arrival. Your allowance can also be used for such things as decorating touches for your apartment, any additional kitchen utensils, and the first big trip to the hardware store for that doormat or plastic waste paper basket you can't live without. Again, most flats have all the necessary items to "move in and live" yet you might want to use a portion of your allowance for settling. Some teachers select NOT to ship a personal computer and use the shipping/settling allowance to purchase one on their arrival.

Things You Might Want to Think About Bringing: Sheets & towels, US postage stamps, plenty of passport sized photos (you will need them to open a bank account, get a drivers license, etc....) – we suggest you bring at least 15.

Shipping

Use the school as your destination address for "used personal effects". Keep detailed lists of all items, as it is a tradition to check the contents of shipments at Trinidadian customs. June shipment from the US probably means an August/ September arrival. We cannot predict how long it will take, or when you should ship.

Health and Immunizations: Trinidad is a healthy place. You can safely eat the food and drink the water. No special immunizations are required. Check with your doctor about Yellow Fever and Hepatitis A & B (now available in a combined shot) and an updated tetanus shot. The risk is not high, but you may be doing some exotic traveling. Dengue Fever is a reality and requires that you avoid contact with mosquitoes. Common sense is called for.

You will be covered from the day of your arrival by the school's health insurance. The school's policy is through Aetna Global Benefits. In order to register each overseas hired teacher with AETNA, and in order to ensure coverage from the day you arrive in Trinidad, we will need your social security number.

Arriving at the Airport: You will be given immigration papers to complete on the plane. Fill the form in as if you are a first-time visitor to Trinidad. The Immigration officer will complete the details of your work permit etc. while you wait. Please use #1 International Drive as your intended address in Trinidad with a telephone number of 633-4777.

Once this immigration form has been completed, the officer will send you to a different line to complete a visa waiver form. This form is only available at immigration and will unfortunately add about ½ an hour to your gaining entry into the country. You will be required to pay TT\$400 (or about US\$65) for the visa waiver form, yet the school will reimburse you for this sum.

Filling in the Customs Form: If you have electronic devices, camera equipment or anything of significant value, you may want to declare this when you first arrive. It is better to declare goods than go through the hassle of it possibly being confiscated. PLEASE ENSURE THAT the customs officer understands that you are entering the country for the first time with the intention of working at the International School of Port of Spain. This will help explain your luggage and possibly help save some time and questions at the customs checkpoint.

Air Travel: Overseas hired teachers will be given 1500\$US per year, at the beginning of each contract year (August), to cover the cost of travel to and from Trinidad. You will be required to purchase a round trip ticket the first time you come to Trinidad. This presents some problems as changes to arrangements may cost you extra. Consider carefully the type of ticket you purchase when first coming to Trinidad.

Pets: Don't even think about bringing one in. The quarantine period (6 months) makes bringing pets into the country quite difficult.

Further Resources on Trinidad and Tobago:

- www.trinidiary.com for updates on what's going on around town.
- www.escapeartist.com for articles about Trinidad and Tobago
- www.odyssei.com for articles on Trinidad and Tobago
- www.visittnt.com official visitors' site.
- www.trinoutdoors.com for advice on outdoor activities in Trinidad and Tobago
- <http://www.meppublishers.com/online/discover/trinidad/index.php?pid=2081>
Discover Trinidad

Rest & Relaxation

Carnival: An entire season of fun starting after Christmas and culminating in late February/early March with 2 days of masquerading in the streets of Port of Spain and other venues. The country comes to a complete stop on these two days of fun, parades dancing and music.

Music: This is the home of the steel drum band (called “pan sides”) and it’s fun to go to the “pan yard” in the evening to watch them practice. Some of them have 100 members. Calypso is also quite popular year round. Soca is a form of calypso. One can find West Indian music events to attend just about any time, but especially between Christmas and Carnival.

“Calypso and soca are two of the indigenous musical styles that make use of double even triple entendres in its lyrics. They can be songs of joy, sadness, political criticisms, social commentary, sexuality, or more. Trinidad & Tobago musicians use music to voice their support or objection to local and world issues. Since, outright profanity (you know, the “f” word and the “s” word) are ILLEGAL to use in public forums. Calypsonians and other Caribbean musicians have become masters at getting their points across with the creative use of English, French, Hindi and Spanish words.”

Carnival, Kaiso, Steel Pan, Limbo...

by [DeidraM](#), Apr 12 '00

Non-Caribbean music, such as classical music, jazz, and international pop is scarce. A local youth orchestra is good, but there is no professional symphony orchestra. Jazz can be found in a few clubs, but not on a regular basis. We are not on the international circuit for touring superstars of entertainment. Two local amateur choirs do a good job with a mixture of Bach, Broadway, Soca and other styles and are popular whenever they perform.

Diving: The water around Trinidad is not good for diving. The Orinoco River, South America, dumps silt into the ocean and the water is not clear. Tobago, on the other hand, has clear water and diving is considered good, if not spectacular. Snorkeling is also good in Tobago.

Boating: Sailing is popular and some teachers who are sailors have been known to crew for races, and/or own their own boats.

R&R in Trinidad: While Trinidad is not known for tourism, there are plenty of things to do on weekends. Among them are:

1. A visit to Maracas Bay, a nearby beach. (30 minutes away)
2. A visit to Toco and Grande Riviere, a series of beaches known for the hundreds of leatherback turtles that nest there from April to July. (2 hours away)
3. Chartering a sailboat for the afternoon. Current rates are affordable when 4 people split the costs. (5 minutes away)
4. Visiting Caroni Swamp Wildlife refuge, where boats take passengers out to see hundreds of beautiful Scarlet Ibis, the National Bird. (30 minutes away)

5. Visiting Asa Wright Nature Centre, known internationally for bird watching, but also wonderful for relaxing. Rooms are available for weekend stays. (1 hour away)

R & R in Tobago: Tobago, only 20 minutes away by air, is widely known for its beaches, diving, good food, and laid back lifestyle. It's a popular destination for ISPS teachers, whether for a weekend or during a longer holiday. BWIA flies the route about 10 times a day in a 60-seat passenger propeller plane. It's quite possible to leave school at 3:15 p.m. on a Friday, make the 5:00 p.m. flight, and be sitting on the beach by sundown. Tobago is still rustic and the few resorts are spaced far apart, so that one doesn't get a "Miami Beach" feeling. In fact, 4 cars at a traffic light are considered a traffic jam.

As a resident of the country, you will be eligible to receive up to a 30% discount at hotels in Tobago.

R & R in the Caribbean: The Caribbean is a big, big place! Don't expect to dart off to other islands casually. Having said that, certain nearby islands are accessible on 3 and 4 day weekends, and, of course, anything is possible during winter and spring breaks. Grenada, Barbados and St. Lucia are all an hour or less away by air. Guyana, although it is on the mainland of South America, was actually a part of the British West Indies, and is the only English-speaking country on the continent. Guyana is close, with several non-stop flights a day. The extent of your international travel will be limited only by your bank account and your energy level.

To be candid, most people who have visited Grenada, Barbados and St. Lucia return home to say that Tobago, which is far closer and cheaper, has better beaches.

R & R in South America: Check your globe. Trinidad is closer to Denver than it is to cities in Argentina! Unfortunately, travel to South America (except for Guyana and Caracas, Venezuela) is quite difficult and expensive. Most people who live in Trinidad, travel far more often to London than to Brazil, more to Miami than to Ecuador, and more to Toronto than to Venezuela. Because Trinidad is not Latin America, the airline connections from here are mainly to other English-speaking countries. The easiest way to reach most of South America from Trinidad is through Miami!

For those who can't live without a taste of Latin America, the place that is the most accessible is Caracas, Venezuela, with several non-stop flights a day from Port of Spain, but connections to the rest of the continent are poor.

Nature Reserves in Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad

| <i>Location</i> | <i>Area</i> | <i>Natural Attractions</i> | <i>Access Facilities</i> |
|--|----------------|--|---|
| El Tucuche Reserve or Northern Sanctuary, Maracas | 2313 acres | El Tucuche is the second highest peak at 3,072 ft. Forest with interesting flora and fauna such as the Giant Bromeliad, and exotic orchids. The Golden Tree Frog and various birds abound. They include the orange-Billed Nightingale Thrush. | Hiking only. Several trails can be used. Guides can be hired. The most popular trail is the Ortinola from the Ortinola Estate. |
| Valencia Wildlife Sanctuary, Valencia | 6,881 acres | At least 50 species of birds including antbirds and tanagers. Deer, wild pigs, agouti, tatoo, and iguana roam this area. | Easy access by roads, Guides can be hired. |
| Asa Wright Nature Centre and Lodge, Arima | 200 acres | Study and Conservation Centre. It retains some of its plantation history by the coffee, cocoa and citrus still found there. It has the only easily accessible colony of oil-birds. Rich bird life includes the Ruby-topaz humming-bird and the tufted coquette. | Guided tours provided through the centre and to other reserves. Accommodation and meals are available. It affords bathing at its water-fall fed pool. |
| Tel: (868) 667 4655; Fax: (868) 667 0493 | | | |
| Caroni Bird Sanctuary, Caroni | 337 Acres | The third largest swamp in Trinidad. At least 138 species of birds inhabit it. Of them the Scarlet Ibis. This provides the most spectacular sight when they return at dusk. Fish and Fauna abound. | Easy access by boat. Guided tours daily. |
| Contact: Mr. Winston Nanan; Tel: (868) 645 1305 Address: 38 Bamboo Grove Settlement #1, Uriah Butler Highway, Valsayn Post Office | | | |
| Bush Bush Wildlife Reserve, Nariva Swamp | 3,840 Acres | This area encompasses hard-wood forest and rich, varied, fauna. The Red Howler Monkey and the Weeping Capuchin are among more than 57 species of mammals. The Savannah Hawk and the Red breasted blackbird, reptiles and fish fauna are found here. | Access by boat only. |
| Wild Fowl Trust, Pointe-a-Pierre | 26 Hectares | The Trust breeds endangered species of waterfowl and birds and reintroduces them into natural wildlife areas. Indigenous waterfowls such as the Wild Muscovy Ducks and wading birds such as the Scarlet Ibis are kept. Brilliant hues are provided by the Tropical mockingbird, the yellow headed Amazon Parrots and Blue Gold Macaws. A library and small museum containing unique Amerindian artifacts are located at the Trust. | Easy access by car to the PetroTrin compound. Guided tours available. |

Tobago

| <i>Location</i> | <i>Area</i> | <i>Natural Attractions</i> | <i>Access Facilities</i> |
|--|-------------|---|--|
| Little Tobago or Bird of Paradise, Northeast Tobago | 250 Acres | Wild Fowls and 58 species of birds exist here. The Red-Billed Tropic bird can also be observed in its largest nesting colony in the North Atlantic. | Tobago tour operators provide guided tours, Boats available at Speyside. |
| St. Giles Island Northeast Tobago | 72 acres | Another seabird breeding colony. The Magnificent Frigatebird, Man-o'-War and the Red billed Tropic-birds abound here. 24 species of land birds can also be found. | Difficult access because Difficult access because rough sea. Small boats can land on very calm days. Deep sea fishing is done in these seas. |
| Turtle Beach Hotel, Plymouth, Northwest Tobago | | Turtle-nesting on the beach. | Can be viewed nightly during the breeding season from April to July. Lectures on all natural attractions are delivered every Tuesday at 6.00 pm. Mt. Irvine Hotel offers lectures at 5.45 pm on Monday |
| Grafton Beach Resort Black Rock, Northwest Tobago | | Turtle-nesting on the beach. | Can be viewed nightly during the breeding season, April to July. This resort has organised a " turtle watch " to protect this endangered species. |

Source: www.visitnt.com

Eco-Vacations in Trinidad and Tobago

Where in creation could compare?

2,300 species of flowering plants; over 600 different butterflies; over 400 species of birds. South America? No, just Trinidad and Tobago. Long the secret of wildlife film makers (David Attenborough has shot many sequences here), Trinidad and Tobago is a veritable ark of flora and fauna, awaiting exploration. ...

Hundreds of Scarlet Ibis flock home to roost, making a vibrant red blanket of trees. Take a boat through the Caroni swamp to witness the sight.

On the remoter coasts of both Trinidad and Tobago, giant set-turtles lumber up the beach to lay their eggs. Watch - but never disturb - as these dignified creatures dig, bury and return to the water.

In south east Trinidad, the manatees wallow in their ancestral waters. A trip across the Nariva Swamp can show them to you.

Asa Wright Nature Center offers shady pathways hewn through rainforest. Better yet, it offers a long, comfortable porch, where tea can be sipped and hummingbirds, tanagers and manakins gazed at. A short drive through the Northern Range will bring you there.

The Point-a-Pierre Wild Fowl Trust nurtures numerous species for return to the wild. A scenic drive south through the sugar-belt, and you're there.

Tobago boasts the first protected area in the northern hemisphere – the Main Ridge Forest – a reserve since 1776. Tobago dive sites compare to any in the Caribbean, and include Buccoo Reef, where even non-swimmers can feast on the beauty. Just off the north west coast are two of the region's most significant bird sanctuaries – Little Tobago and the sister isle of St. Giles.

One thing is certain. Trinidad and Tobago are poised to become a mecca for eco-tourists. Why not discover them now, before the rush?

THINGS TO DO IN TOBAGO

by Carib Traveler

Tobago is just 32km, 20m, off the northeast coast of Trinidad. Tobago has a central hilly range with a flat area in the south and west of the island where much of the tourism has developed. This area, influenced by the presence of fringing offshore reefs, has distinct beaches with soft powdery white or cinnamon brown sand. The island also has an agrarian base being noted for the production of sugar, cocoa, coffee and citrus products at various times in the past.

Trinidad & Tobago...Rain forests and coral reefs, mountain hiking, rare birds, scuba diving, nature, sailing, golf, and, of course, there's almost always music. Combine all this with the fact that Trinidad and Tobago are two of the most southern of the Caribbean islands, and they become an almost irresistible destination. Discover tranquil, deserted beaches. Some of the friendliest people in the Caribbean, who want to make your stay enjoyable. Discover Buccoo Reef, one of the most accessible coral reefs in the Caribbean, with a fascinating underwater world. Golf under the palm trees on the 18 hole championship course at Mt Irvine. Fine restaurants, inexpensive hotels to 4 and 5 star resorts.

Tobago is a tranquil place to enjoy golden rays, rainbow sunsets and unforgettable beauty. Tobago, Trinidad's small companion island, lies a scant 20 miles - 32 kilometers - to the northeast. This pocket paradise contains some of the world's loveliest beauty spots, including large groves of coconut palms, miles of unspoiled beaches and the famous underwater delights of Buccoo Reef and Nylon Pool. Go diving with Mantas and meet a people with a quiet pride and a relaxed way of life, rich folklore and customs and a unique history.

As for Tobago, it is also a unique diver's paradise. With Speyside on the Atlantic coast, discover large schools of Manta Rays, unlike the other Caribbean islands where you'll be lucky to find one or two, infrequently.

The island, regarded as a prize possession, was fought over by British, French and other colonial powers changing hands at least 25 times. These colonial settlers have left their mark on Tobago's past by way of the various place names such as Glamorgan and L'Anse Fourmi and ruins of forts and sugar mills and water wheels that dot the landscape.

Go diving with Mantas and meet a people with a quiet pride and a relaxed way of life, rich folklore and customs and a unique history. Have an authentic Tobago Wedding and complete the picture of the perfect vacation. The ideal getaway... Visit Tobago and you will certainly find a personal paradise.

Scarborough (the capitol city) Tobago's chief town is draped on a hillside overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and is the centre of business and administration on the island. Founded

by the Dutch who settled the island this town boasts of an excellent harbour, the seeming focus for a bustling town.

Upper Scarborough features the former site of the Tobago House of Assembly. This Georgian styled mansion which overlooks James Park, previously the original Market Square, is the lone remnant of colonial era architecture. Most of the buildings from this era were lost in the 1789 fire that razed the town. Fort King George anchors the upper reaches of Scarborough. Other significant sites are St. Andrew's on the Hill.

The Botanic Gardens separates Upper Scarborough from Lower Scarborough. This breath of green in the town's flow down to the sea celebrates its centenary in 1998. The Gardens with its many exotic plants and shrubs makes a pleasant spot to stop when moving between the two halves of the town.

Lower Scarborough runs along the Atlantic Ocean, which crashes against this shore with vigor and energy, much like the people who inhabit the town. The main features here being the market, a colourful arrangement of people, stalls and produce ranging from flowering plants, to fruits and vegetables. Nearby are stores, banks, the Scarborough library and the Tourism Information centre in the NIB Mall.

POINTS OF INTEREST

BOTANIC GARDENS: Seventeen acres of tropical trees and shrubs that run from the Claude Noel Highway at the northern end of Scarborough southward. Exotics like the African Tulip can be found here. There are entrances at either end.

FORT KING GEORGE This fort, built in the 1780's is perhaps Tobago's best preserved historical site. The approaches to the fort take you past the current hospital facilities, the prison and onto the grounds. There are several cannon emplacements, barracks and officer's mess and even sculptures, although these are more recent artifacts. The grounds are excellently manicured and offer magnificent views of the coast. It is a popular venue for art displays having also a souvenir shop on the compound.

TOBAGO MUSEUM The museum, located in the Barrack Guard House of Fort King George, has artifacts from Tobago's early history on display. Amerindian artifacts, military relics and documents from the colonial period are also on display. Opens Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm. Telephone 868-639-3970.

Things to do in Tobago - brought to you by TobagoGuide.com - all you need to know about Tobago!

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TOURISM INFORMATION

Soak In Tobago's Scenic and Cultural Charms
by **Marlene Goldman**, TobagoGuide.com

"There's one road coming into Tobago and one road going out. The people I don't see on the road coming in, I see on the road going out," our driver said after honking and waving to just about every local resident we passed. His statement wasn't as much of an exaggeration as it sounded. There is one spiraling main road heading up the Atlantic side of Tobago and another winding along the Caribbean side, with a handful of roads twisting through the mountainous interior.

In our case, we were headed back from a traditional dance performance in Patience Hill, one of Tobago's many villages hosting the annual Tobago Heritage Festival. The festival is designed to demonstrate the island's African roots and Caribbean culture, and also to help distinguish Tobago from its larger sister island of Trinidad, which lies just 21 miles away.

The differences between Trinidad and Tobago, which are actually one country, are pointed. Trinidad, known for its elaborate Carnival celebration, which rivals that in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro, is home to a population primarily of Eastern Indian descent. While the developed Trinidad harbors 1.3 million people, Tobago houses just 50,000. The people of Trinidad follow Catholic, Hindu, and Muslim religions, while Tobago remains mostly Protestant. Where Trinidad is one of the few Caribbean countries with little beachfront appeal, attracting visitors instead with its vibrant nightlife and legendary calypso performers, Tobago lures visitors, including vacationers from Trinidad, to its pristine shoreline.

It's that shoreline, ringed with coral reef systems, that has made Tobago renowned for its diving and snorkeling opportunities, namely around Buccoo Reef and Store Bay in the southern region near Crown Point. Along the northeast, the reef system near Speyside and the tiny island of Little Tobago attracts underwater enthusiasts, as well.

But the Heritage Festival is Tobago's chance to flash its cultural riches. The two-week event, held at the end of July into early August, includes a mixture of presentations and performances, from music and dance to unique sports such as goat racing.

Speeding Goats in Trinidad and Tobago

Though goat racing is traditionally featured around Easter time, it is showcased during the festival. Goat racing is serious business in Tobago, namely in the town of Buccoo. The Buccoo Goat Race Festival, which traditionally takes place Easter Tuesday, has been around for more than 75 years. At first the venue was along a village road, called Chance Street, but over the years it has moved to a plot of public land.

Trainers raise and condition their goats like horse breeders do their thoroughbreds, and jockeys get to know certain goats much like they do in horse racing. But in goat racing, the jockeys run alongside their goats, holding them with a sturdy rope. The jockeys and goats line up in the starting gate, and once the gates are open, humans and goats dart across a grassy field at lightning speed. Like horse racing, there is a board listing the

numbers of each goat and their names, which tend to take on a Caribbean flavor, such as Rum Punch. Betting is the norm, though that takes place more often during the Easter runs.

Even more entertaining is the crab racing event. The distance of the crab run is thankfully much shorter, as the crab racers can usually barely get their charges to move forward. This race calls for audience participants to line up holding a crab on a rope with one hand and a stick with another. The object is to prod the wayward crustaceans over the finish line. Crabs seem to have far less of a taste for victory than goats, as many would rather snap aimlessly with their claws than crawl in a straight line.

Another customary event is the calypso contest, which calls for participants to perform original material in front of a set of judges and large audience. Many of the singers follow the style of such Trinidad stars as Lord Kitchener and the Mighty Sparrow, though not all quite hit that caliber. Still, the amateurs take the contest seriously, dressing in colorful garb and singing praises about Tobago's culture or commentaries about the political state of affairs in Trinidad and Tobago.

Ole Time Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago

The Heritage Festival also offers a taste of Carnival, which is celebrated in Tobago, though not as elaborately as in Trinidad. During the festival, the entire town of Plymouth is overtaken at 5am by revelers turning out for J'ouvert, which is one of the most raucous events during Carnival. Everyone crowds onto the street, dancing to the sounds of steel pan bands or Carnival music pumped out of speakers. Men and women good-naturedly gyrate together to the beat, and those women unattached will find themselves the partners of whichever man stands behind them. It is tradition to cover the body in paint and mud, and there are some participants with buckets of one or the other that will make sure that everyone ends up smeared with each. Though the faux J'ouvert doesn't compare with the one during Carnival, it does offer a taste of the energy that overtakes these islands during Carnival.

During the two-week festival, there are also storytelling presentations, folk singing, and reenactments of old-time weddings. Weddings are based on the style of those in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, with a splash of African color in the wedding party's attire. The courtship codes are also performed, as the potential husband must prove his worthiness to the parents of the bride. Weddings culminate with thousands of guests dancing through the streets in a grand procession, to the sounds of the tambrin and fiddle.

The ironically named Sunday School is another tradition in Tobago. Rather than following its religious connotations, on Sunday evenings the locals pour into the streets to dance to blaring music, play casino-style games, and basically socialize. Buccoo is one of the main spots for Sunday School, though the partying takes place in different spots around the island.

The Heritage Festival is as much for the local people of Tobago as for the travelers, though it is certainly a way for Trinidad and Tobago to introduce the unacquainted with the lesser known of the two islands.

Trinidad, A country of Seasons

By : Alexander Varga, November 2004

Trinidad is a country of seasons. Your average, myopic meteorologist might suggest otherwise: there is a wet season and a dry season. Though this too is true, my two years spent in Trinidad have been marked not by the fall of rain but by celebrating the diversity this country has to offer.

When I first arrived in August of 2003, the new school year was quickly approaching. It was a season of anticipation and rebirth. Trinidad, too, feels this way, for they celebrate both their Independence Day and Republic Day in August and September. I remember being whisked away by the throngs of anxious Trinis as I tried to navigate my way into the Savannah for the fireworks display. (I also distinctly remember how strange it was that people gave their dogs very potent tranquilizers during these firework displays so that they would not bark themselves into a frenzy). Though I have seen more than a few firework displays in my life, this one was special.

September comes and goes with the blink of an eye. The new school year starts and the month is gone before you know it. The Intercol football season begins then and I have fond memories of attending many matches at Hasley Crawford Stadium. My favorite part was always watching the nutsman effortlessly lob bags of salt nuts or fresh nuts into crowds of hundreds with pinpoint accuracy. The rhythm sections, too, were something to behold: anything metal (pans, hubcaps, wheels) that could be banged upon for the sole purpose of creating noise were the core instruments and tools of any skilled rhythm section.

You know its November when the sound of firecrackers and bursting bamboo abound in the nights that precede the Hindu celebration of Divali- The Festival of Lights. A trip to Santa Cruz or Chaguanas will allow a spectator to see some beautiful displays of candles and bamboo. Personally, I like to celebrate Divali in my own way. The day begins with a half a dozen doubles- plenty pepper, plenty shadonbenny, and lots of cucumber. A healthy quantity of either rum or Scotch is then consumed until hunger sets in again. The celebration ends with a goat roti - plenty pepper, spinach, but hold the pumpkin.

Come December, Christmas is in the air. Coming from New York, witnessing a Christmas celebration in the Caribbean has to be one of the most culturally shocking things I have had to deal with. Seeing Christmas lights hung on palm trees and canned snow sprayed liberally across window displays reminds one quickly of one's surroundings. Though I have been back home both years to celebrate Christmas with my family, the days that build up to Christmas in Trinidad are marked with Parang festivals. Parang is a type of Christmas music rooted firmly in the culture of Trinidad stemming from some of the earliest Spanish settlers. The songs are all sung in Spanish and each concert is a competition. The best Parang bands are then allowed to compete in the steep, steep hills of Paramin. The Parang shows are usually raucous events which are fueled by the generous swilling of puncheon and whatever other white lightning happens to be available.

January and February are arguably two of the wildest months in Trinidad as far as the seasons are concerned. January is fete season, the season responsible for priming an entire country for the two days of mad dancing and savage mirth known as Carnival. Every weekend in January, one could go to a fete where for a set ticket price, one could see the latest and greatest soca and calypso bands and eat and drink for the better part of eight hours. Each fete has its own theme or character and each celebration brings with it the anticipation of Carnival. Carnival itself is almost too wacky for words. What possesses a country of over a million people to all show up in the streets the same day wearing next to nothing and drinking and dancing with wild abandon is beyond me. All that I know for sure is that every other country in the world ought to take a hint from this small Caribbean island and follow suit.

March and April are next in line. The post-Carnival Lent vibe is felt by the masses and it's a time to relax. A trip to Tobago or another island is ideal during this time. I spent many weekends on beaches along the north coast during this season. It is officially the dry season, so the sun is out and the rain does not chase you from the ocean to scramble to your towel to preserve its dryness. This is a tranquil season punctuated by small getaways and healthy doses of liming.

By the end of the school year, things really start to unwind. May and June offer many the anticipation for two months of summer freedom. Everyone seems to be in a good mood and the atmosphere around ISPS is fun. With the end so near, I felt the urgency to do a bunch of things I wanted to do in Trinidad but never had time to: a trip to the pitch lake in southern Trinidad, a scarlet ibis tour, a long and scenic drive up to Toco. The seasons in Trinidad bleed into one another and there always seems to be something to look forward to. The diversity of the people here and their culture provides many wonderful activities that keep the calendar booked. My time in the nation of Trinidad and Tobago has been very special to me and I will miss her dearly when I go.

**“Trinidad
Paradise found!**

By Carol J. Craig-November 2007

This is my first full time experience working overseas and living abroad. I had spent summers volunteering in Kenya in a small village on the coast of the Indian Ocean for the past three years so I had some familiarity of residing out of the U.S. but not on a long term basis. I decided that I was ready to give overseas teaching a try since I liked my Kenyan experience so much. I went to the Search Associates job fair at the Hyatt in Boston. I loved the fair right away-so many interesting people with fascinating life stories. I knew I was going to love my decision to become one of them. The first day I managed to secure six interviews and my last one happened to be with the International School of Port of Spain in Trinidad and Tobago. I had chosen this school as my number one choice because I liked the description of the school and I had been to Trinidad and Tobago on a diving vacation two years earlier so I knew I would enjoy being there. They

had a position open in a unique science program that I thought sounded fantastic. The fact that I am a scuba diver made this an ideal choice for me. I also loved the idea of moving to such a diverse nation. After meeting with the director, Barney Latham, I felt this would be a good fit and I scheduled a second interview for the following morning where I signed the contract.

I arrived in Trinidad in mid-August where I met Mr. Latham who took me to my apartment. It was so beautiful and spacious, much nicer than I had expected and I was thrilled. I stood on my balcony enjoying the view and saying to myself "Wow, look what you've dreamed up for yourself now!" I was living in the Caribbean and getting paid and all before retirement age. Where I come from no one does this until after retirement and here I was. I met the other new teachers a couple of days later and we were treated to some fantastic excursions. We went to Fort George, Asa Wright Nature Center, toured Port of Spain, and went to Maracas, a beach on the North coast. We ate rotis, doubles, and bake and shark-all local cuisine that is very tasty. At night we were guests at several local restaurants-my favorite was the Crews Inn on the docks in Chaguaramas. We also got settled in with details like bank accounts, driver's licenses and other basic necessities of life. This was a wonderful orientation week.

The next week the entire staff was back at school and we did the usual orientation things that one would expect before the school year commenced. It was a bit chaotic as there is an incredible amount of construction going on at I.S.P.S. Many people had changed rooms or were displaced while their new class rooms were being constructed so everyone pitched in to help each other and made it work. School started as scheduled and the energy of the students made us remember why we were there and everything went smoothly. The teachers at I.S.P.S. are all extremely professional and a pleasure to work with. Their love and commitment towards the children is outstanding and I knew I would fit in well with this team. I am amazed as I write this that four months have passed already and how much I have fallen in love with the seventh graders that I teach. I get so much good energy from these young adults, I thank my blessings everyday. The school houses K-12 very efficiently. I am a science teacher in the middle school and rarely see the elementary or high school students. This is an important feature to the parents of our students.

We have many holidays here at I.S.P.S. Trinidad claims to be the nation with the most celebrated holidays of any country worldwide. I believe it-just look at the school calendar. I am eagerly awaiting Carnival which is the most famous holiday on the island. What has fascinated me is all of the Hindu celebrations-I am a Unitarian Universalist and am interested in all religious holidays and the Hindu festivals are so colorful and full of significance. If you like to party, or "lime" as the locals call it, then I.S.P.S. in Trinidad and Tobago is for you. There is plenty to do here besides "liming" as well. There are many museums, a zoo, botanical gardens, religious sites, and natural wonders to explore.

The island is beautiful with coastal ranges, forested lands, incredible swamp lands and spectacular beaches on the northern and eastern coasts. The pitch lake in La Brea is a

must see natural asphalt lake and it exports its resource to the U.S. and Europe. The people of Trinidad and Tobago are one of its greatest assets, they are friendly, welcoming and love their music. This place has the best music going on all the time...reggae, soca, steel pan, parang...this is a great place to come if rhythm is your thing. In my spare time I go hiking, swimming, practice yoga and meditation and some times just drive around getting to know the island. I go to Tobago diving and beaching on long weekends but you can go anytime because it is a 25 minute flight or a short ferry ride away. I have also taken a couple of trips to Grenada which is a lovely peaceful "spice" island just 30 minutes away by air. There is plenty to do at night as well although I do not go out much at night as my own personal preference. Many of the younger teachers go to bars, movies, plays and concerts on a regular basis and they seem to be busy all the time.

I do most of my shopping for produce at the farmer's market in downtown Port of Spain on weekend mornings. The price of produce is excellent and I love supporting the local farmers. I eat a primarily vegetarian diet so I like buying the freshest produce I can find and there is a whole area at the market dedicated to fresh seafood and meats. All my friends say what they buy there is of excellent quality even if it doesn't come on shrink wrapped Styrofoam trays. There are also several chains of grocery stores available that will provide you with everything you need and I honestly cannot say there is anything that I have wanted that I couldn't find somewhere.

There are two areas of concern that exist here in Trinidad. One is the traffic congestion and the other is the high incident of crime that seems to be rampant throughout the country. Both are issues that all developing countries struggle with and eventually get sorted out...call it growing pains if you will. This nation has had a boom in its economy over the past decade or so and more and more people are getting cars and this has lead to major traffic congestion. This is something the current administration is working on but it seems like slow progress. Fortunately for us expatriates, we are not really inconvenienced by this because we live very close to the campus and we don't have to commute daily through the worst of the traffic problems. You will encounter it when you head to the airport or on trips into Port of Spain if you go during high traffic volume times. I try to plan my travel accordingly to minimize my irritation and stress levels. The crime situation has gotten rather out of hand but I just behave responsibly and keep aware of my surroundings and have had no trouble. The headlines report bad news regarding crime daily but it is the same back home in the U.S. so I don't give it a lot of attention. If you travel in groups, don't behave foolishly and remain aware you should have no problems. Security is everywhere you go; so come to Trinidad and enjoy life on an island. You will love it here just as I do. If you are looking for a great place to work and live then the International School at Port of Spain is for you.

Perks and Challenges of Life in Trinidad

By Theresa Koesterer, January 2007

After many years working in a school district in the States, I was looking for a new opportunity, experience and challenge. I didn't go to the ISS Job Fair in Boston in February 2006, with any idea of a plan to move to any particular place. I planned to look at what was available, something that was just the right match. I think I have found it at ISPS.

Living in Trinidad provides just the right amount of challenge. I look at most things in life from the perspective of the "T". That is - the perks on one side of the "T" and challenges on the other side. Some of the challenges have been driving on the left, parking a car in a space of one designed for a motorcycle, figuring out the banking and bill paying system, the traffic and road conditions. Security issues are on the forefront of everyone's mind at this time but I haven't had any problems. If you use caution and common sense about where and when you go out you shouldn't have problems.

Items on the other side of the "T" definitely outweigh the challenges. I live within walking distance from school, so don't have to drive as much as others. The people I have met at school and in my housing area have been very friendly and helpful. The food is great and plentiful – although, a bit more expensive (especially if you need imported items). Trinidad has all of the conveniences of grocery stores, hardware stores and malls. The infrastructure is good as far as having electricity, water, public transportation, etc.

I have found ISPS to be a school of individuals really dedicated to the kids and what is in their best interest. From the teachers and administrators to the assistants, cafeteria, janitorial and security staff, everyone is genuinely caring and hard working. The students come from diverse backgrounds and meld together in an interesting and understanding way. Having three schools under one roof and sharing facilities can be somewhat complicated but the staff here seems to have that under control.

Outside of school I enjoy outdoor activities of tennis, walking and hiking and there has been plenty of opportunity for this. I also enjoy reading and the library at ISPS has more than an adequate supply of current books and magazines. There has also been the opportunity to visit other Caribbean islands, bird watch, and enjoy great music and dance. I'm looking forward to my first Carnival!

Trinidad; A land of contrasts!

by Todd Lineback, September 2005

Jen and I arrived in Trinidad in August 2005, and have successfully settled into our lives here in Port of Spain. The weather is very nice, although a little hot; it's not as humid as DC. Trinidadians are generally very friendly and have a carefree air about them. The flora is lush, as you would imagine for a rain-forest, and there are lots of birds and frogs.

I haven't seen many of the frogs, but they are quite loud at night. There are all kinds of birds, the most conspicuous of which are the white egrets.

With respect to the food, this is a rather unique island in the Caribbean in that there is a stronger Indian rather than African cuisine influence. Needless to say, the curries are exquisite. The primary catch is called kingfish, a hearty white-meat fish. Our favorite meal thus far, though has been shark. At restaurants and from the street vendors, you can have callaloo (kind of like creamed spinach, only made with okra), roti (kind of like a burrito only with emphasis on chick peas), and hot doubles (kind of like a fluffy taco only with emphasis, again, on chick peas), all of which are ubiquitous, inexpensive and very tasty. On Queen's Park Savannah, our taxi driver asked us if we were thirsty while giving us a driving tour of the city. Upon hearing yes, he pulled right over next to the park and we witnessed a machete-wielding man hack at some coconuts he'd grabbed from the back of his pickup. In moments, we were sipping fresh coconut milk from straws sticking out of coconuts. Then we were instructed to pull it apart, which we did, and with a cutting from the side of the nut itself, we gouged out and ate the tender coconut jelly!

Trinis are proud of their nation and that comes through in conversation. From Carnival and other festivals, to the steel pan drum, to the rich ecology, to the great food, to the beaches, to the interesting history, they clearly have plenty to be proud of. All conversations with Trinis tend to make their way to the subject of Carnival sooner or later. There are many other celebrations throughout the year, but this is the one of which they are most proud. One of the smaller celebrations is Independence Day. The country of Trinidad and Tobago was given its independence in 1962 ending British rule. There will be fireworks in the capitol city's square: Queen's Park Savannah.

While this is a country full of wealth from natural gas and oil, it is still a developing country. Shanties often stand next to modern structures and line the hillsides. Being an island nation, everything is smaller: the houses, the streets, the cars and trucks, the buildings, etc. During the first few days being carted around in taxis, I saw my life flash before my eyes many times as the driver passed many a car traveling in the opposite direction at speed on a windy mountain road that, in the US, would have only been wide enough to deem a one-lane road. Both Jen and I are now comfortable driving on the left, something that seemed more daunting than it was difficult, and we're beginning to pass cars traveling in the opposite direction by just slowing down now rather than pulling over and stopping as we started off doing.

Surviving Cultural Shock is Key to Working Abroad

by Geoff Choo (source: techrepublic.com)

(NOT an ex ISPS teacher)

Published: July 28 2003

Contrary to what you may think, the hardest part of working abroad isn't finding a place to stay or learning the language. It's learning to cope with the cultural shock. The anthropologist Kalvero Oberg first coined the term *cultural shock*. He reported that cultural shock was caused by the "anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" while living and working in another culture.

These cues are part of everyday life, and include the myriad signs, gestures, facial expressions, and customs that help us cope with daily life. When we enter a new culture, these cues are usually not present or so different that they're no longer comprehensible to us.

"When an individual enters a strange culture," wrote Oberg, "all or most of these familiar cues are removed. He or she is like a fish out of water. No matter how broad-minded or full of good will he may be, a series of props has been knocked out from under him."

This is what happened to Lara, a young American IT consultant our company relocated last year to our southern European headquarters. Three weeks after she arrived in Europe, Lara sent a desperate e-mail begging to return home. "The people are so unfriendly," Lara wrote.

"They eat at strange hours and I'm starting to get allergic to the local food. I can't get anything done because their way of doing business is so disorganized and so inefficient. It's all just a big mess. And to top it all off, I think I'm developing a terrible skin itch because of the water. I want to come home!"

What Lara and other IT consultants encounter on their initial assignment abroad is culture shock, which involves five distinct stages that you need to move through to have a successful relocation or assignment abroad.

Learn to recognize the signs

While you can't prevent cultural shock from happening, you can take steps to minimize and mitigate its effects. Your first step should be to recognize when you're suffering from cultural shock. People often associate cultural shock with frustration, irritation, fatigue, anxiety, and depression. You can't cope. You isolate yourself to escape. You turn aggressive toward your host culture.

But there's more to the picture than that. Way back in 1958, Oberg first observed that cultural shock didn't happen as a series of random events. There was a definite pattern to the condition and it evolved over a series of five stages.

Stage 1: The honeymoon

The first couple of months of living abroad are typically a honeymoon period when everything's new, exciting, and fascinating. Everything seems to happen like a dream and you're happy to have accepted this posting.

"Things went fairly smooth for me during my first couple of months in Europe. I was really jazzed about living in a new place and being able to experience new sights and sounds," Lara said when asked about her first impressions. "There were some minor hiccups along the way but I accepted them as part of the game. My European colleagues treated me like visiting royalty. I got treated to lavish dinners and they brought me to all the coolest places in town. Everything seemed really new and challenging and fascinating!" she added.

But as everyone knows, no honeymoon lasts forever.

Stage 2: The rejection

Soon enough, the sheen rubs off the new, exciting, and fascinating experiences and you have to come back down from the clouds and actually live and work in this place. Suddenly you'll start to discover that your ways of doing things—professionally and otherwise—just don't work in the new environment. Stores aren't open when you need them, and the phone operator doesn't speak English well. Leisure time is frustrating because the television programs and the films are dubbed in another language.

As your troubles add up and no one wants to lend a hand to help, you start thinking the locals are either incapable of understanding your problems or just don't care. This in turn triggers the emotion that is one of the surest signs of culture shock: hostility to the new environment. You begin to hate your host country and everyone and everything connected with it.

"Around November, it began getting much colder and I'm not just talking about the weather. It's like all of a sudden, everything became much more difficult," said Lara.

"What were minor inconveniences before became insurmountable obstacles. I began seeing (and feeling) the small differences between here and home—small differences that began to get on my nerves. When I tried to explain my problems to my new colleagues, they got really puzzled over my reaction to what they saw as the norm. These people didn't seem to care about what I was going through. I concluded that they were all selfish and insensitive people," she said to her boss. "I'm normally a very easygoing person but all of a sudden I felt very sad, lonely, and lost. I had trouble sleeping at night. I probably alienated whatever friends I had left with my terrible temper and general lack of patience. I blamed the natives of my host country for all the problems I was having here, and I concluded that the people here did not like foreigners," she added.

Stage 3: The regression

Once you start rejecting your host culture, it's much harder to regroup and recast your attitude. You can either decide to try again—approach everything again with a smile on your face and change your attitude—or you can take the easy road and just withdraw further into your shell.

In the latter case, the signs for failure in the new locale are pretty clear: You refuse to continue learning the local language, make friends among the locals, or take any interest in the local culture. And worst of all, you begin to believe that people are out to cheat or swindle you just because you are a foreigner.

Following this path will inevitably increase your isolation because people will sense the antagonism and begin to avoid you. You'll then have no choice but to seek out other disgruntled souls to grouse about the host country and the people and their strange practices. Everybody feels better bashing the local culture, but it never occurs to anyone that the problem may lie with themselves instead, as Lara's feedback illustrated:

"I figured that I was just wasting my time trying to learn the local language and culture, since no one seemed to appreciate my efforts," she said.

"So I took the decision to only hang out with people who spoke English, especially if they were Americans. I bought a DVD set so I could finally watch a film without those irritating subtitles and I joined an expatriate support group. It was great to meet with other people who hated this country as much as I did. Why did I ever leave home? Things were so much better back home!"

Stage 4: The acceptance

If you can make it through stage 3, the road to getting over cultural shock typically gets smoother. One day, you'll find yourself beginning to smile or even laugh at some of the things that caused you so much grief at the start.

When this happens, you're on the road to recovery. As you begin to become more comfortable with the local language and customs, your self-esteem and self-confidence will return. Your affection for your new home will grow from reluctant acceptance to genuine fondness. You'll finally understand that it's not a matter of whether here is better than there: There are different ways to live your life and no way is really better than another. It's just different. You'll wonder what all the fuss was about in the beginning.

"I lost my way one day and I unexpectedly found myself in a particularly dodgy part of town. I saw a young unkempt girl approaching quickly toward me. My initial thought was that she was going to rob me and take all my credit cards," said Lara on how her acceptance stage began. "I was surprised when she asked me if I was lost and whether I needed help. When she saw that I didn't really understand her directions, she went out of her way to personally guide me to where I had to go to. That event triggered a sort of

realization that maybe the people here weren't so bad after all," she added.

Lara actually managed to laugh about getting lost in one of the roughest parts of the city, and began to feel a little guilty about how badly she had been treating her friends and colleagues.

"From that day onwards, I made the resolution to try a little harder to fit in. I began taking language classes and tried to participate in as many local social events as I could schedule into my PDA. I began going out with my coworkers and I even made the effort to cook a couple of local dishes for them," she said.

Stage 5: The re-entry

Many times, it's just about the time where things begin to jell that you may realize that your assignment is ending and the time has come to pack up and return home.

Most start thinking about how nice it will be to return to familiar surroundings, back to friends and family and all the things you love and cherish. But the re-entry can be much harder than most realize.

When you slowly forced yourself to like and love your new home, you probably had to confront your long-held beliefs and attitudes and gradually deconstruct them to make room for new values and ideals. You adopted new habits and a new lifestyle and it can be difficult to go back to your old life. Things change and people change.

It will take a while to reacquaint yourself with the cues and signs and symbols of your home culture. Give yourself time to adjust. You can minimize the re-entry shock by understanding your reaction and taking things with a positive attitude.

Going with the flow

Self-awareness is the best strategy for overcoming cultural shock. As Lara said, you can't stop cultural shock from happening, but you can minimize the downtime you spend in the three vicious downward cycles of rejection, regression, and re-entry. Remind yourself of the following:

Ignorance is not bliss. Culture shock is here to stay, whether you like it or not. It will probably affect you one way or another, but it doesn't last forever. Learn to recognize the signs and understand where you are in the process. Sitting around being negative and critical will just deepen your gloom. Try to look for the positive side of the worst situations.

Don't blame it on the bossa nova. When you're down and in trouble, remember that the problem probably isn't so much in them as it is in you. So stop whining and shape up or ship out.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Adapting your style to the local customs may be tough, but it will pay off in the long run. Coming with guns slinging and imposing your way of doing things is not a good approach, although it happens more than you would think.

Set a goal and stick to it. The busier you are, the less time you have to think about your sad situation. Try to organize something pleasant to look forward to each day. Set goals for yourself—making a new friend each day, for example—and stick to them.

The best of both worlds

When it comes down to it, the number one way to get past cultural shock is to understand that it's not a matter of which culture is better. You have to learn to neither completely reject your own culture nor that of the new one. The better you get at conveying openness and comprehension across cultural borders, the easier it will be for you to enjoy the richness of the best of two worlds. Remember that your colleagues who have spent assignments as visitors in the United States have gone through the same types of experiences, too.

Lara hung in through the cultural shock and eventually fell in love with the country (and one of the natives too, apparently). The company is currently having problems convincing her to return to home base, but that's another story.

Rules to live by for ex-pats

“My own first rule is to look for the distinctive good in any place and try to learn from it. The nature of expatriation is to live in a place very different from your own. You can either rail against these differences, or you can exult in them. In Japan, for example, the people around me are much more comfortable listening than speaking (especially with strangers), and they know how to make silence eloquent. I, therefore, though a verbal person, try to do without words in Japan.

“A similar rule is **not** to spend too much time in the company of other ex-pats. Fellow travelling foreigners can always afford a sympathetic ear, good counsel and a remedy for homesickness, but they can also wrap us in the particular fretting of an alien. Because the conditions around us will never change, the thing to do is to **accept** our circumstances and make the most of them.

“An ex-pat also has to develop, in most places, a strong sense of himself, as he would not have to do at home, where he is more or less typical. Part of the challenge of being an ex-pat is that those around you are likely to see you as something special, a symbol of opportunity. The hazard of being an American is that we come from the place that, to most of the world, is an epitome of power and influence. We can seem glamorous, or desirable, to those around us – as someone to be envied, or, more dangerous, befriended – and the ex-pat must neither be outraged nor flattered.

“Perhaps the most important rule of all for being an ex-pat is that you must learn to see the world through the other’s eyes. That is the whole point of travel. Of course, but what can be easy and exhilarating on a two-week trip to Mexico can be more punishing when one is sent there for five years. You are a guest in someone else’s house, in effect, and you must accept the host’s assumption – how he sees and decorates his world.”

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