

NATUR AL WON DER

DINING, DIVING AND LIMING IN TOBAGO
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One of the first things you'll notice on the scenic and winding drive from Tobago's Crown Point Airport towards your villa or hotel is the unapologetic, in-your-face liming. The Tobagonians make no secret of their passion for this activity which involves little more than sitting around and watching the world go by. Much to the surprise and bafflement of the tourists, large groups of families, friends and neighbors can be seen liming on the stoops and porches of their roadside homes, just whiling away the hours.

Of course, with the kind of views afforded by this uncommercialized island 20 miles off the coast of Trinidad, you'll quickly see why sitting and taking in the scenery is the national pastime. Bordered by the Caribbean Sea on one side







and the Atlantic Ocean on the other, Tobago is a haven of secluded beaches, hidden lagoons and romantic waterfalls. This is the sort of laid-back island locale that seems unchanged by the march of time. Even with the arrival of new and modern hotels and developments, the same rustic signs still adorn the storefronts of Scarborough, Tobago's capital city, and the same unpaved roads meander through the foothills of Main Ridge Rainforest, the western hemisphere's oldest forest reserve dating back to 1776.

Tobago's rough-and-tumble style finds a stark and most becoming contrast in the Stonehaven Villas. A member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, this pristine hillside property consists of 14 Arne Hasselqvist-designed villas. Each 3,700-square-foot French Colonial abode comes complete with a housekeeper, its own private infinity edge swimming pool and all the majestic views your heart can take. With three bedrooms per villa as well as a modern granite kitchen, Stonehaven is the ideal luxury home away from home for families, groups, honeymooners and destination weddings.

Those in search of a more traditional hotel experience will be hard-pressed to find anything that rivals the Coco Reef Resort. The first name in elegant Tobagonian accommodations, the Coco Reef has emerged as the area's premiere hotel and is as posh as anything you're likely to find on this casual island. Situated on a peaceful stretch of beachfront in the town of Crown Point, the hotel is in close proximity to the airport, the hustle and bustle of Scarborough and some of the island's best restaurants.

While the dining options in Tobago are certainly varied, this fishing village of an island is first and foremost a seafood lover's dream. Other local specialties include Creole dishes like *callaloo*, a coconut milk and spinach soup, the Indian-inspired street food favorite, *roti*, an absolute must if you're in Tobago, and the purely homegrown Crab and Dumplings, a dish whose tame name belies its exotic flavor and texture.

Many of the island's restaurants look like regular homes, situated in residential areas and surrounded by lawns and gardens. Take for instance, La Tartaruga in Bucco Village. This Italian restaurant features a covered terrace that looks more like a homey front porch, and a maitre d' who feels like a long lost friend. The same simple façade beckons at

another local favorite, the Creole-fusion Mot Mot Restaurant and Cocktail Lounge.

More formal dining options can be found along the beaches and at the hotels. The Coral Reef Restaurant at the Tobago Hilton provides both some of the finest international cuisine and the best service that Tobago has to offer. Café Coco in Crown Point is a recent addition to the Tobago restaurant scene. Opened by the owners of the Coco Reef Resort, but not on the resort's premises, the restaurant is the largest in Tobago and features a full Caribbean menu as well as décor that is a step above anything else found on this bastion of all that is mellow and unpretentious.

As delightfully eclectic as the dining scene is, it's the diving, snorkeling and swimming that are Tobago's main attractions. Debates over which is the best beach and where you'll find the clearest waters for diving are far more popular than where you can get the best roti (although this comes in a close second). Pigeon Point is the most peopled beach and ideal for swimming, however, you'll have to pay a small entrance fee to enjoy this well-trafficked local attraction. Englishman's Bay offers a quieter setting, brilliant views and calm waters ideal for swimming and snorkeling. As far as diving goes, the island boasts dozens upon dozens of dive sites, ranging from the easy to the expert, where you can observe such diverse marine life as manta rays, sponges and sea turtles.

For a change of pace, find a certified guide and seek out what adventures await in the Main Ridge Forest Reserve. Despite the damage wreaked by past hurricanes, much of the rainforest and its indigenous animal and plant life thrive on. Here you'll find 210 bird species, 123 butterflies and 16 types of lizards—and that's just for starters.

A true naturalist's paradise, Tobago is remarkable not only for its unsullied beauty but for its well-deserved reputation as quite possibly the most relaxed island in the entire Caribbean. Perhaps more than anything else about the island, it is this warm, carefree spirit that stays in visitors' memories and inhabits their dreams long after they've waved goodbye to its unspoiled shores. ■



