

# TRINIDAD



SPRING  
2018

Trinidad Study Abroad Guidebook

Center for International Programs  
KALAMAZOO COLLEGE



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# Trinidad

## TRINIDAD STUDY ABROAD GUIDEBOOK

### INTRODUCTION TO THE TRINIDAD PROGRAM GUIDEBOOK

With your departure for Trinidad only weeks away, you have likely begun to wonder what it's really going to be like spending several months in Trinidad. What will you experience living and studying in Trinidad, and in traveling to other parts of the country? Are the people of Trinidad as open and friendly with foreigners as they're said to be? Just how much should you plan to pack in your suitcases? Hopefully, this guidebook can begin to answer these and other questions.

The information that follows is a collection of advice from the Center's experience in Trinidad. The Center for International Programs and Trinidad program staff members have added practical information as well. All information was accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of printing. When you return, we would greatly appreciate it if you could help us update this guidebook for the next year's participants.

Expect the unexpected. Ultimately, no written materials or any other suggestions are going to fully prepare you for what lies ahead. The best thing that you can do is commit yourself to keeping an open mind, remaining flexible, and being patient with yourself and others as you're adjusting to your new environment.

This document represents the most accurate information available at the time of publication. Statements contained herein are not contractual obligations, and verbal or other representations that are inconsistent with or not contained within the document are not binding. Kalamazoo College reserves the right to change, without specific notice, programs and the conditions under which they are offered. Please refer to the Kalamazoo College catalogue for complete details. *Revised January 2018.*

### Trinidad: by the Numbers

- Trinidad population: >1.2 million
- East-Indian 35.4%
- Afro-Trinidadian 34.2%
- Multi-racial 7.7%
- Other 1.3%
- Protestant 32.1%
- Roman Catholic 21.6%
- Hindu 18.2%
- Muslim 5%
- Languages: English, Caribbean Hindustani, French, Spanish, Chinese

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## I. BEFORE YOU GO...PREPARATION

### Introduction to Trinidad

Trinidad and Tobago is one nation comprised of two islands, situated at the southernmost end of the Caribbean chain, only seven miles off the coast of Venezuela. What makes Trinidad unique as a Caribbean island is its treasure of unusual plants and animals, and its industrial and economic importance in world trade. Not only does Trinidad's tropical climate host a wide variety of flora and fauna, making it a haven for eco-tourists, but the island has a great wealth of oil and natural gas reserves, which has made Trinidad an important center of Caribbean trade and economics.

Trinidad is an English-speaking island of 37 miles by 50 miles, with a population of approximately 1.3 million people. Trinidad's people are mainly of African and East Indian descent, and are largely Roman Catholic, due to their Spanish colonial past and also Hindu, due to the East Indian heritage. Columbus landed in Trinidad in 1498, and the Spanish settled the island a century later. The indigenous Arawak and Carib Indians were largely wiped out by the Spanish settlers, and those who did survive were gradually assimilated into the new culture. Trinidad remained under Spanish rule until 1797, when the British captured the island. Tobago was finally ceded to Great Britain in 1814, and the two islands were incorporated into a single colony in 1888.



Today the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is a parliamentary democracy modeled after that of the U.K. Although Trinidad gained independence from Britain in 1962, the nation did not adopt a republican constitution until 1976, when they elected their first president. Trinidad and Tobago's capital city, Port of Spain, located in the northwest part of Trinidad, is the main center of the Republic's government.

Trinidad does not observe Daylight savings time, and is therefore, one hour ahead of Michigan during the winter months. During the summer (April – October), however, Trinidad is on Eastern Standard Time.

### PROGRAM CALENDAR

Students' arrival: April 1, 2018

Students' departure: June 9, 2018

### PASSPORTS

You will need to have a valid passport to enter Trinidad. You may be required to apply for a residence permit after arrival. If this is the case, you will receive assistance with the process once you arrive on site.

Take plenty of photocopies of your passport, as a copy will be helpful if your passport is lost or stolen. You should carry a copy in your wallet instead of the passport itself. You will need to carry the actual passport, however, when you want to change money, or if you travel outside of Trinidad.

## FLIGHT CONNECTIONS

Please allow yourself plenty of time to check in at the airport, since the current increase in security typically means longer lines and therefore longer processing time. Airlines typically recommend arriving at the airport at least two hours early for domestic flights and three hours early for international flights. Airlines are also searching checked and carry-on luggage. Keep boarding passes and your identification (passport) easily accessible.

Please take care not to miss connecting flights. It is your responsibility to be in the boarding area at the appropriate time. Should you miss a connection, however, please note that you must be re-routed by an airline representative at the airport. Travel Leaders and/or Kalamazoo College can do nothing to alter your airline tickets at that point. Once you have had your airline tickets altered, you should contact Dr. Hamid Ghany, the Resident Director for your program so that she knows of your delay and can give you new arrival instructions. If you are unable to contact Mrs. Khan, contact the CIP or a member of the CIP staff (contact information can be found in the EMERGENCIES section), and we will try to assist you in informing the on-site personnel of your situation. If you reach an answering machine, please leave as many details as possible about your new flights in case we cannot contact you, including your full name, cell phone number, new flight number and new arrival time.

## AIRPORT SECURITY

Federally mandated airport security regulations require more time to properly screen travelers and their luggage. Participants are advised to contact the airline to find out how early to arrive at the airport. When reconfirming a flight, remember to check luggage and carry-on restrictions. All electronic items, such as laptops and cell phones, may be subjected to additional screening. If you bring a laptop, be prepared to remove it from its travel case so that both can be X-rayed separately. For further information on security measures, see the Federal Aviation Administration website at [www.faa.gov](http://www.faa.gov)

## MONEY

The monetary unit of Trinidad is the Trinidad and Tobago dollar. In January 2018, the US dollar is equivalent to \$6.76 TTD. Rates will likely change while you are there. Check the most recent currency exchange rates shortly before your departure in either The Wall Street Journal or the New York Times, or online. You will want to take some personal spending money with you to Trinidad for the occasional meal out, nightlife, personal travel, etc. One past participant said:

*I recommend that the students take about \$500 besides their stipend if they plan to stay in the country and not do too much traveling. If they plan to travel to other places or buy a cell phone, I would recommend they take approximately \$1000. I would divide the money into cash and a checking account/ATM debit account or credit card.*

NOTE: Cell phones in Trinidad cost around \$50.

You may find that some restaurants (especially in hotels) and the hotel taxis will take US currency. Prices may be higher if you are paying in US\$. Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) are also available in Trinidad. You might want to use your ATM as a backup instead of your sole source of cash as ATMs may not always be available or reliable as is typically the case in the US. Visa and MasterCard are also accepted at most establishments.

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## CLIMATE

Trinidad enjoys a tropical climate with average maximum temperatures of 89°F. 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. Although you will be staying in Trinidad during the dry season, islands in the Caribbean often get sun during the day, and light rain at night.

## PACKING AND LUGGAGE RESTRICTIONS

You will need to check with the airline to determine your luggage restrictions. Generally, the airline will allow you one checked suitcase, weighing no more than 50 lbs. You are also typically allowed one small carry-on bag plus one personal item (purse, small bag). Your carry-on must fit either in the overhead compartment or below the seat in front of you. Even if you're willing to pay overweight or excess baggage charges at the airport, we strongly encourage you to resist doing this and to pack as little as possible.

**PACK LIGHT!!** Few things are as disheartening as dragging around excess baggage or overloaded suitcases while traveling abroad, especially when you could have done without most of it. The best rule of thumb when packing is to pack everything you think you'll need, take out half, and then half again. Don't bring it if you can't carry it! Also remember that you will not have much storage space in your room.

A good packing tip is to carry a change of clothes and essential toiletries in your carry-on bag in case your luggage gets lost. For example, pack your underwear in two bags so you will be prepared in case one bag is lost. Make sure you can describe your suitcase including the brand in case it's lost.

Whatever shoes you bring, try to break them in before you go. It's no fun to have to stay home instead of exploring your new surroundings because of too many blisters.

Bring clothes that you can layer. Though Trinidad will be quite warm during the day, the evenings can be cool, so you'll need to pack clothing suitable for hot weather, as well as cooler weather, especially clothes that you can wear in layers (sweaters and pullovers are especially useful). Take some clothes that you don't care about wearing out, since frequent washing, different detergents, and extensive traveling will take a toll on your clothes. Clothes that are lightweight and easily foldable are the best.

**Jewelry:** It is a good idea to leave favorite jewelry items at home. Never pack anything valuable or sentimental. Costume jewelry is more practical than the real stuff, especially if it is lost or stolen.

**Electricity:** Trinidad has the same electricity specifications as the US. Therefore, any appliances you take with you, such as hair dryers, curling irons, and electric razors should not need adaptors.

## PACKING LIST

- Sunscreen (very important!)
- Jeans, pants, capris, skirts for women
- Sport coat/blazer: a classic black blazer is a good way to dress up jeans or skirts
- Sweaters and sweatshirts (one or two of each)
- A nice outfit (separates that will mix and match with your more casual clothes)
- One pair of dressy shoes (to match your nice outfit)
- Raincoat (not a must, but a waterproof pull-over is a great idea! It may rain at night)



- Folding umbrella—can also be bought on site
- Sturdy walking shoes
- T-shirts (good for layering and to reduce the amount of your laundry you do when you travel)
- Robe, pajamas and slippers
- Backpack (if you are planning to buy a backpack for traveling, buy one that has an attachable daypack)
- Two or three pairs of shorts for sports or lounging
- Underwear and socks (bring plenty of underwear, because in some cases, especially when traveling, laundry access may be limited)
- Toiletries
- Gifts for new friends (see suggestions in "Gifts" section)
- Pictures to share with your new friends (including K pictures, home pictures, and friends and family)
- Two to three towels (one for the beach, one for bathing) and washcloths
- Plastic baggies (large zip lock bags are great for holding wet towels and dirty laundry)
- Money belt or neck pouch
- Luggage locks

#### **ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO CONSIDER BRINGING:**

- Extra passport photos
- VISA or MasterCard credit cards or an ATM card
- A guidebook specific to Trinidad or the Caribbean: Lonely Planet is a good choice
- A Swiss Army knife: even the small models come equipped with useful tools (be sure to pack such a pocket knife in your check-through suitcase; if you put it in your pocket or carry-on bag, the airport security people will confiscate it)
- Contact solution/glasses (It's a good idea to bring a copy of your prescription with you in case they are lost or stolen)
- Journal
- Condoms
- Addresses and E-mails of friends and family at home
- Prescriptions (in original containers)
- Thumbdrive
- A three- or five-subject notebook (school supplies may be expensive there)
- Flashlight
- Bathing suit

Pack for your emotional self as well. Bring books, photos, small musical instruments, music, etc. or whatever can help pull you through difficult times.

**NOTE:** Do not pack your passport, money, electronics or valuables in your checked luggage. Keep those items in a money belt or pouch on your person. Keep your carry-on with you at all times.

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## GIFTS

It is a nice idea to have small gifts from home to leave with new friends in Trinidad that you meet. Some good ideas include:

- T-shirts, sweatshirts, or other clothing items with Kalamazoo College logos
- Scenic potholders, aprons, place mats, mugs, glasses, or calendars
- Typical food items
- Items with the state bird or flower
- Pen-and-ink drawings or professional-quality photographs
- Any hand-made craft or jewelry

## BILLING

The Center for International Programs does not handle the billing for the program. The Business Office issues the bills and will send your bills for the program costs to your home address just prior to the beginning of each quarter that you are abroad, as when you are in the United States. For specific questions regarding your account, please contact Patrick Farmer in the Business Office at 269.337.7226 or at [Patrick.Farmer@kzoo.edu](mailto:Patrick.Farmer@kzoo.edu).

## HOUSING BACK AT K

You will need to submit a housing contract and proxy form to [housing@kzoo.edu](mailto:housing@kzoo.edu) prior to your departure. The designated proxy will choose a space on your behalf during the Fall Housing Selection Process. This process occurs during late Spring Quarter.

If you are interested in a living-learning house when you return, you must coordinate with the group you are hoping to live with so they can account for you during the LLHU Selection Process. This process occurs in Spring Quarter prior to the general Fall housing process. Should the proposal not be accepted and you are not offered the opportunity to live in a living-learning house, you will need to make alternate arrangements.

For specific questions regarding housing, please contact Stephen Sanney, Director of Residential Life, at [stephen.sanney@kzoo.edu](mailto:stephen.sanney@kzoo.edu) or 269-337-7520.

## FINANCIAL AID

Those of you receiving financial aid may have to take care of some items while you are in Trinidad. If you have further questions about your specific situation, please direct these to the Financial Aid Office, 269.337.7193 or [finaid@kzoo.edu](mailto:finaid@kzoo.edu).

## HEALTH AND MEDICAL ISSUES

You need to be up to date with your standard immunizations such as measles and tetanus. Please refer to your [Study Abroad Handbook](#) for the information on required and recommended immunizations. If you have any questions, contact the college Health Center at 269.337.7200 or your personal physician before you go. Of course, be sure to make doctor appointments if you are concerned about a particular problem (i.e., make a dentist appointment for that sore tooth, etc.) before leaving for Trinidad. You

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should also look at the information available from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) and the US Department of State ([www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov))

Common medical complaints experienced on study abroad include sore throats and stomachaches. Bring aspirin, yeast infection treatments, Midol, Roloids, cold medicine, laxatives, Pepto-Bismol and other medications you generally use if there is a brand that you cannot do without. Shampoo, soap, tampons, and sanitary napkins are sold in Trinidad.

As a registered student of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, you will have access to the campus clinic, known as the Health Services Unit. The clinic is open Monday through Friday during the regular University semester. There is also a pharmacy located in the clinic. The University maintains a teaching hospital on the island of Trinidad and the US embassy has provided a list of physicians that you should receive upon arrival. If you have any questions about healthcare please ask Dr. Hamid Ghany.

Watch out for too much sun. Be sure to bring sunscreen and be sure to use it, especially when you first arrive. The tropical sun is quite hot and you will burn very quickly. Likewise be sure to drink lots of water to prevent dehydration.

### **SMOKING ADVISORY**

In recent years in the United States, we have witnessed unprecedented public and private uproar and action against the smoking of cigarettes in public spaces including our own campus, many restaurants, and domestic airline flights. This is simply not the case in many countries around the world where the smoking of cigarettes is a time-honored tradition, habit, or enjoyment.

The bottom line is this—more people smoke abroad in public and private spaces than you may generally experience in the United States. It is prevalent and often unavoidable, particularly in public spaces. Be prepared. Your choice not to smoke or preference that others not do so will not necessarily have any influence within the local environment and if expressed, may be considered inappropriate or arrogant.

Your preference to live in a smoke-free environment will be considered by the local staff if you indicated it on the application—do not expect, however, that this will always be possible given the prevalence of smoking abroad. The program staff will endeavor to honor this preference but ultimately cannot guarantee it will be able to do so. This is not to say you should not express your desire to live in a smoke-free environment or to avoid smoking while abroad—just that to expect others to kick the habit out of deference to you while abroad is inappropriate.

### **VEGETARIANISM**

Unless medically instructed to do so, people choose to follow vegetarian diets for reasons. It is, nevertheless, a choice that is not widely practiced, understood, or accepted in some parts of the world. For example—a meal that does not contain beef or goat, but does contain chicken or fish, is often considered vegetarian abroad.

A vegetarian practice may actually be held with disdain or suspicion abroad as many cultures place greater value and significance on the symbolic role of meat for special occasions such as celebrations, religious ceremonies, and honoring guests. If you follow a vegetarian diet, you should be aware that it is your responsibility to accommodate the local environment and to expect to be accommodated in this practice abroad is inappropriate.

While it does not always occur, you may find yourself in situations abroad where you will be expected to eat meat and by refusing when it is served to you, or prepared expressly for you, you risk offending your hosts—be aware of this and consider how you will respond. The important point is to be aware that your choice to follow a vegetarian diet, for whatever reasons, has consequences for you abroad and you are primarily responsible for preparing for these consequences and for responding carefully and respectfully in the local environment.

We do not expect you to abandon your vegetarian practice abroad—rather we expect that you will understand this is a choice you have made that may be challenged in your international experience and you should consider how you will most appropriately respond<sup>2</sup> within the local environment.

No special accommodations will be made for vegetarians during the various field trips. If you require a vegetarian diet and cannot eat what is available during such excursions, you will be responsible for paying for and providing your own meals at those times.

## II. YOU'VE ARRIVED!

### ARRIVAL IN TRINIDAD

#### AIRPORT AND CUSTOMS

On the plane you will be given immigration and customs form to fill out. Immigration information is on one side of the form, customs on the other. Upon arrival at the airport in Port of Trinidad you must first clear immigration. Be sure to get in the line for “visitors”, not the one for residents. Be prepared to show your acceptance letter for the program. You may be asked some questions about the program, so be sure to know the name of the university in Trinidad (University of the West Indies); the courses you’ll be taking;

GEND 2013 Men and Masculinities in the Caribbean  
 GEND 2903 Social Media and Gender  
 GEND 3039 Gender and Development with Reference to Caribbean Society

and the name of the resident director (Dr. Hamid Ghany. After immigration you will pick up your luggage and then go through customs. You will be met at the airport by program staff and be taken to your housing.

#### LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

The Resident Directors will provide information on local transportation during your on-site orientation.

#### SAFETY

As its name implies, Port of Spain is a busy Caribbean port city. You should take care as you move around the city and be aware of your surroundings at all times. Locals do not walk in the city at night, either alone or in groups, and you should not either. If you are going out, book a taxi from a reputable firm or catch a ride with one of your Trinidadian friends.



Use of normal common sense and caution will serve you and your money well in this regard: women should get used to holding on to their purses while they walk, and men should not carry their wallets in their back pockets. Also be sure to keep your eye on your belongings on the beach while you swim! You should also make photocopies of relevant pages in your passport. You should carry these copies with you in place of your passport while walking around Trinidad. Only bring your passport with you when cashing traveler's checks or traveling out of the city. Also leave a copy of your passport at home at all times, both in Trinidad and in the States.

Please make sure that you read the [Responding to Physical Assault and Sexual Assault while on Study Abroad](#) section in the Study Abroad Handbook to be prepared in case you or a friend ever find yourself in such a situation. It is always best to be prepared.

It is also a good idea for safety reasons not to call attention to the fact that you are foreign. Foreigners are easy targets for pick pocketing and mugging, so be smart. It's not a good idea to stand in the middle of a public place, loaded down with backpacks, speaking loudly. In addition, experience has shown time and again that drunken students are the easiest and most common targets of mugging. Please be careful and limit your consumption.

Finally, please remember that all narcotic drugs are illegal in Trinidad and Tobago...in any quantity!

### **WATER AND OTHER BEVERAGES**

The tap water in Trinidad is considered safe to drink, although most local people boil their water or drink bottled water. You may want to begin with bottled water and then see how you adapt to the local water. You will also find lots of tropical juices available.

### **EMERGENCIES**

**In case of an emergency, you should first contact:**

► Dr. Hamid Ghany (office: 868-662-2002 ext. 82037)

They will contact the appropriate people on site. In case you cannot contact any of the above, you should follow the instructions given to you in the orientation in Trinidad.

**You can also call one the following numbers of the International Programs staff:**

#### **Center for International Programs**

Voice 269.337.7133 | Fax 269.337.7400 | E-mail [cip@kzoo.edu](mailto:cip@kzoo.edu)

#### **Alayna Lewis, Program Manager**

Cell 269.251.8876 | E-mail [alayna.lewis@kzoo.edu](mailto:alayna.lewis@kzoo.edu)

#### **Margaret Wiedenhoefft, Acting Director**

Cell 269.267.5800 | E-mail [mwieden@kzoo.edu](mailto:mwieden@kzoo.edu)

In metropolitan areas of Trinidad, the emergency number is **999**. Everyone on the program needs to know how to use the local phone system!

### III. THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

#### RESIDENT DIRECTOR

Dr. Hamid Ghany is the academic coordinator of the program and will act as Resident Director. Dr. Ghany is also the academic liaison for the program. The Resident Director is the students' coordinator for the programme and will assist you in settling into your new housing and will accompany you on field trips in Trinidad and Tobago. Dr. Ghany is also a valuable resource concerning intercultural information.



#### UNIVERSITY SETTING

The University of the West Indies has campuses in Jamaica, Barbados, and an Open Campus with Centers on 16 different islands, in addition to Trinidad (St. Augustine). The University has some 7,000 students on the St. Augustine campus who are enrolled in the faculties of Engineering, Food & Agriculture, Humanities & Education, Law, Medical Sciences, Science & Technology, or Social Sciences. The

regular second semester runs from early January to early May, with a summer term from late May to early August. Your program will bridge the end of the second semester and the beginning of the summer term. Expect your new Trinidad student friends to be busy with exams beginning in the middle of April.

The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine has a fairly new Sports and Physical Education Centre, which will house both academic and recreational programs. There is a cost of \$100TTD per semester to use the gym. The Student Activities Centre offers students not residing in the campus dormitories a place to study, and some recreation activities as well. The Student Guild organizes a number of student activities throughout the term.

#### ON-SITE ORIENTATION

After your arrival you will have an orientation to the University, Trinidad, the Port of Spain, and your academic program. More information will be available in your arrival packets.

#### CLASSES AND CREDITS

Your program will enroll you in three courses for three Kalamazoo College units.

#### COURSES

GEND 2013 Men and Masculinities in the Caribbean

GEND 2903 Social Media and Gender  
GEND 3039 Gender and Development with Reference to Caribbean Society

## LIVING IN TRINIDAD

### THE STUDENT RESIDENCE EXPERIENCE

At the time of printing, housing is being arranged on campus at the Sir Arthur Lewis Hall of Residence. Rooms may be singles or doubles and students will have to provide towels, linens (sheets, pillowcases) and kitchen utensils. Pillows will be provided and a shuttle service is available daily.



The 110 sq. ft. single room is very compact and incredibly comfortable. Each room is equipped with the following:

- Sink
- Single bed with built in storage drawers
- Computer Desk and Book Shelf
- Single closet with separate drawer space
- Ceiling Fan (no air-conditioning)
- Chair

### MEALS

You will receive a stipend from the CIP to cover your meals and some local transportation during the program. Lunch tends to be the big meal of the day in Trinidad. There is a coffee house on campus and several little cafés in the Student Activity Center and the JFK Quadrangle where you can buy a complete lunch for about TT 30-45 (about US\$5-7.00). There are numerous restaurants near campus and at the two malls, which are a short taxi ride away.

### TELEPHONE USE

Most public phones on Trinidad require the use of a telephone card. You can purchase these at the bookshop on campus or at one of the small shops outside the campus gates. Students can purchase a prepaid mobile phone on campus for approximately US\$20.00. The cost for calls to the USA is approximately .10 cents (US) per minute. NOTE: You are responsible for all phone charges, whether using a telephone card or renting a mobile. Plan on mobile charges being more expensive than in the U.S., and unfortunately your U.S. mobile phone will most likely not work in Trinidad. Check with your U.S. mobile provider before you go to be sure. You may also consider using apps such as WhatsApp and WiFi, where available, to communicate with home.

### EMAIL

Email is available on campus in the main library as well as in selected computer labs. You will be given information about access and open hours during orientation. Remember there are 7,000 UWI students besides you who want to use the email. Plan on having far less access to email in Trinidad than at "K". There are several Internet cafés near campus, if you need more internet time.



**LAUNDRY**

Coin laundry facilities are available on campus. Laundry service (drop off) is also available near campus.

**LEAVING YOUR DORMITORY AT THE END OF THE PROGRAM**

When you check-in at your housing, you will receive information about how to care for your unit and how to clean it before you depart.

**IV. ADAPTING TO TRINIDAD'S CULTURE****TRINIDAD: THE COUNTRY**

Besides the challenge of adjusting to a new culture (which will be discussed further below), students will be faced with the task of adapting to a new country. Trinidad is a developing country in a tropical region. Adapting to these physical conditions alone will require you to make significant changes to your lifestyle—changes which may cause you to feel more limited in your freedom and choices than you would at home. Be prepared.

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

Trinidad's infrastructure is different, assuming you grew up in the U.S. This is evident by a lack of infrastructure in some sectors or what appears as “uneven” development of infrastructure in others. Controls on pollution and pesticide use are not as strong (or are not enforced), nor are policies on environmental protection. Stray dogs live in the streets and in and around market places. Not every street has sidewalks and some streets have partially constructed ones. The wide range of choices you are used to having regarding your food, reading material, recreation and choices of medical care will not be available. Keep in mind, though, that it will be your experience of these kinds of conditions and others that will contribute to your understanding of the context in which the struggle for sustainable development is taking place.

**DOING WITHOUT**

In addition to adjusting to the conditions mentioned above, there are things you will have to give up to live in Trinidad—and this may be hard at first. Eventually, though, you may realize that you don't necessarily “need” what you thought you did. Not everyone misses the same things and different people react differently to the sacrifices they must make. For some people, not having their own car may prove frustrating since possibilities for travel will be limited. For others it might be the unavailability of certain foods, or not being able to maintain a vegetarian diet. For some people it's hard to find clothes or shoes that fit or suit their taste.

You will also have to adapt to a new city and a new community. This means using a map to learn where things are and making use of public transportation. In a new community where you don't know anyone, your usual support systems will not be available. It's important to consider beforehand how you will cope in such circumstances. Your routine will be different. You may find structure where you don't want it and none where you do. This is a normal part of cross-cultural learning and adaptation.

Finally, you will have to give up some control over your health. Sickness—especially that which you've never experienced before (like food poisoning)—is inevitable. It's quite common for one's digestive system to have a negative reaction to a completely new environment—new food, new water, etc. It's not uncommon for people to have at least one bout of food poisoning, which typically involves vomiting and diarrhea. You



might also find yourself more susceptible to other kinds of infections. A balanced diet and plenty of sleep will help you to maintain your health.

## TRINIDAD: THE SECOND CULTURE

In addition to adapting to Trinidad as a country, you will be learning to adjust to a second culture. Learning to live in a new culture requires a great deal more than a list of do's and don'ts, or a brief description of the cultural traits of a society. For one thing, any culture is much too complex to narrow down to a definitive description. Descriptions can describe general characteristics, but they will not explain each specific encounter. Secondly, and more importantly, adaptation has as much to do with understanding oneself and one's own culture as it does with understanding a different culture.

As individuals, we are cultural beings with ways of behaving and perceiving which we do not always identify as springing from our culture. It is when we attempt to understand, or become a part of, another culture that we come to see that many of our values, beliefs and behaviors stem from our own cultural background. Interaction in a new cultural environment can cause conflict both within oneself and between oneself and the new culture. Some of this conflict is inevitable. However, by understanding yourself as a product of your own culture and of your own personal background, you will have a much easier time observing your interactions and learning to adapt to a new set of behavioral ground rules.



The task of culture learning requires a high tolerance for ambiguity and a patient willingness to work through culture shock in a constructive manner. Students must be willing to learn from situations where they may have mis-communicated or failed at communication. They will be expected to examine how their own cultural expectations may have interfered with interpretation, to use their observation skills to pick up on other clues as to what may be happening, and to reserve judgment while remaining tolerant of ambiguity, until they reach understanding.

Learning a second culture not only affords students an understanding of the new culture derived from first-hand experience, it simultaneously gives them an awareness of their own culture that they never have had before. With familiar surroundings and friends taken away, students are led to examine not only their culture, but themselves as well. One student participating in an intensive study abroad program wrote, "I'm learning to enjoy being with myself, independent and alone from lifelong cultural props. It's great!"

Such awareness of one's own culture and self ultimately allows students to live more responsibly as members of the global community.

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR A POSITIVE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

While common sense will get you through a lot of potentially awkward situations in an unfamiliar culture, you should be aware of a few cultural differences that exist between Trinidad and the U.S.

- Respect people's privacy. Living with other people requires a great deal of patience and flexibility

- Be aware of other people's living habits. It's better to organize cleaning duties than just assume that people will do them.
- Avoid wearing a hat in the house, in class or while eating out (baseball hats on women or men earn strange looks and are considered rude)
- Don't be surprised if some students walk around barefoot or go to class without shoes.
- Be open to the new and different. Being intolerant of food that you have never tried demonstrates very poor manners and will be offensive to your hosts.
- Refrain from chewing gum often.
- Don't put your feet on furniture, whether at home or in class.
- Of course, there's no guarantee that if you do fail to observe some or all of these norms, you'll be openly criticized.

## **CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT**

Over the period of your stay in Trinidad you will probably learn the most from living daily in a different culture. The real challenge, frustration, and joys of living in a new cultural environment lie in the day-to-day experiences—the morning walk to the university, a trip to the market, a meal with your friends... It is an immensely rich and rewarding experience, and one that you can anticipate with pleasure.

However, everyone has bad days once in a while, some people more than others. It is normal to feel like you just want to go home—everyone has felt that way at some point in her or his travels. Students who have been abroad in the past offer the following advice:

- First of all, be prepared to have unhappy days and know that they will pass. Remember that people of Trinidad have bad days, too. If someone in your living quarters is having a bad day, don't take it personally and automatically think they're unhappy with you. If they seem to be bothered about something, ask them. If it is something to do with you, it is most likely a simple misunderstanding. Don't let problems fester.
- Talk to others in your group, perhaps with someone who's having a good day but who can relate to your feelings.
- Try doing something that will involve you in the present; simply doing something can work wonders. For example, if you have nothing to do one Saturday and are feeling homesick or miserable, give yourself a task that will help you get to know the local culture better—like going to a local church, searching for a specific item in the market, going to a café in a different part of town, etc. Immerse yourself and keep busy.
- Getting involved is the best cure for the “blues.”
- Sometimes, though, you might find that you need to be away from people and/or the local culture for a while, so you might choose to hole up with a book, listen to music, or write letters.
- Keep a journal, even if you haven't ever done so before. You'll enjoy it more than you can imagine when you return from study abroad.
- Be patient with yourself! There will be times when you feel you are the only one who is miserable and having a bad day—you're not.
- If you are having any problems, discuss them with someone in the University of the West Indies International Office.
- Lastly, just tell yourself that you can do it. You can and will survive in a different culture.
- You'll learn that everyone has her or his own way of coping in a different culture and what might help some people some of the time won't help everyone all of the time. But this learning process, coming to really know yourself in a way you haven't before, is part of the adventure.

## **GENDER RELATIONS IN TRINIDAD**

You'll most likely observe different gender dynamics in Trinidad, and what seems like discrimination to a US American person. At the same time, Trinidad is undergoing a tremendous amount of change, so gender dynamics are in a great deal of flux. Asking about these things with your Trinidadian friends can bring on heated (and fun) discussions as they try and figure things out as well.

Depending on the context, relationships between young men and women (even those in college) can be more formal than here in the U.S. Public displays of affection, even holding hands between the sexes are frowned upon—but are becoming more common by the more “daring” young people.

US American women are stereotyped as being “easy” (this is the result of US American media) so you should be wary of men who approach you. For men, be aware that there are many preconceptions about why men come to Trinidad. It is always better to go out in groups, to avoid embarrassment for all concerned, and to be considerate of your female friends.

## **SEXUAL HEALTH**

Issues of sexuality can be complex in your own cultural environment, and much more so in one with which you are less familiar. While living in a culture that is not your own, it is more challenging to evaluate situations and to assess risks for emotional distress, disease, and assault as a result of intentional or non-intentional sexual contact. Sexually transmitted diseases are prevalent everywhere in the world, and the HIV virus can lead to death. We strongly recommend that students educate themselves on safe sex practices, pack condoms from the U.S. when they are traveling abroad, and be cautious about their sexual activity while abroad. For further information regarding HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, please consult with Kalamazoo College's Health Center or your physician.

Learning about Trinidad culture with regard to acceptable and safe sexual behavior, is one of your responsibilities as you prepare for and experience study abroad. It is also very important that participants understand the local norms and cultural patterns of relationships between genders. What are the local dating patterns? Is it the custom for females to have male friends (or vice versa) or is that considered unusual? If you accept a drink or some other “gift”, are you tacitly consenting to sexual activity? If you invite a member of the opposite gender into your living space, is it culturally and/or legally acceptable for him/her to expect intimate contact? Is the legal definition of “consent” different from the definition in the U.S.? -- Most of the time, it is different.

At a minimum, you must be aware that some behaviors that may be culturally and legally acceptable, and seemingly safe, at home may not be in Trinidad – and vice versa. In particular, the CIP is aware that homosexuality is illegal as well as taboo. Certain behaviors will also communicate different messages in Trinidad than they do in the U.S. Dr. Ghany and Ms. Khan and other program staff members will give you guidelines to the local cultural norms for relationships between genders and laws regarding this issue.

## **BECOME FAMILIAR WITH TRINIDAD & THE U.S. BEFORE YOU GO**

### **GETTING TO KNOW TRINIDAD**

Talk to the former participants! One of the best ways to start preparing for your experience is to do some background reading and research on Trinidad. Familiarize yourself with the current political situation.

### **KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE U.S.**

Some people have had the embarrassing experience of learning that people abroad seem to know more about U.S. history and politics than they do themselves. This often tends to be the case in many countries throughout the world. You can expect to be asked your opinion about current events and U.S. politics -- you can also expect to hear the opinions of others, and not all of them will be complimentary of the U.S. Should such a situation arise, the best advice is to remain respectful, even when disagreeing, and to resist the temptation to criticize Trinidad, as you are a guest. Start keeping abreast of current events and continue to do so while you're in Trinidad.

It will be helpful if you are in the position to talk in your political science course about U.S. government and politics. Your professor and classmates will be particularly interested in hearing from students who have experience with and/or can talk about issues and institutions in the U.S. such as local, state, and national government; multiculturalism, domestic violence, and of course the U.S. presidential election.

### **SPEAKING TRINIDADIAN?**

While English is the most commonly spoken language in Trinidad, Americans are unfamiliar with much of the slang that is present in the Trinidad dialect. Be prepared to hear new phrases and different pronunciations from what you are used to.

### **SOME PLACES TO CONSIDER VISITING AND THINGS TO DO**

Trinidad is the home to 2,300 species of flowering plants, over 600 butterflies, over 400 species of birds, and various species of mammals. Therefore, the island offers many opportunities to view these treasures first-hand.

- Watch turtles, including the endangered Leatherback, the Green Loggerhead and the Hawksbill, nest on Trinidad's north and east coast beaches.
- Nariva Swamp, where manatees swim
- Asa Wright Nature Center (offers various hiking trails through the rainforest)
- Maracas Waterfall
- Blue Basin Falls
- Paria Waterfall
- Tobago (offers wonderful scuba diving and snorkeling)

#### **For further information on guided tours and hikes contact:**

The Forestry Division  
Long Circular Road, St. James, Trinidad  
Tel: (868) 622-3217

Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club  
c/o The Secretary, Errol Park Road, St. Ann's  
Port of Trinidad, Trinidad  
[www.ttnfc.org](http://www.ttnfc.org)



Dr. Ghany, may be able to refer you to a person or agency who can assist with inter-island travel.

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## TRAVEL/VACATIONS

### TIPS ON INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Avoid traveling alone. This will ensure that you don't have to deal with illness, theft, or emergencies by yourself.

- Take some kind of pouch for documents, money, and tickets. The best rule is never to remove it. Sleep with it and take it in the shower if you have any doubts.
- When traveling, keep documents with you, not in luggage or in a checked bag.
- Plan an itinerary and leave it with Dr. Ghany and Mrs. Khan. Also, make sure that someone in the U.S. has a copy.
- Call home at regular intervals, especially if there is an itinerary change.
- Talk to security personnel concerning where you will enter boarding areas, which plane, train, or bus is yours, etc.
- Be wary of complete strangers who approach you and offer you rides. As is expected here in the U.S., never accept a ride from a stranger when you are alone. Hitchhiking is dangerous and violates College policy (and can lead to your dismissal from the program).
- Always carry your passport with you while traveling to other countries.

## V. RETURNING TO THE UNITED STATES

### YOUR RETURN FLIGHT TO THE U.S.

The airlines require that any change after departure must be done in person directly with the airline. This means the bearer of the ticket (i.e., you, the student) must make this change personally, and pay any change charges will be applied. Remember, if you need to change the return date on your ticket and your ticket was arranged by Travel Leaders, please contact Ms. Bev Gould at [bgould@travellers.com](mailto:bgould@travellers.com)

### PREPARE FOR YOUR RETURN

As you are preparing to leave, please remember the following:

- Do not take back items made of animal hides or any agricultural products, as you will not be able to pass through U.S. customs.
- Don't forget to set aside some U.S. cash for the trip home.

## READJUSTMENT

Going home is usually a very exciting prospect. Most students look forward to seeing family and friends they have missed, eating food you haven't had for so long and enjoying activities that may not have been possible during study abroad.

Remember that returning home is also a transition very similar to your arrival in Trinidad. Just like your arrival, you can expect to feel frustration, anxiety and confusion at home, on your campus, and with your friends. Craig Storti puts it this way in *The Art of Crossing Cultures*:

*"The problem is this word home. It suggests a place and a life all set up and waiting for us; all we have to do is "move-in." But home isn't a place we merely inhabit; it's a lifestyle we construct (wherever we go), a pattern of routines, habits and behaviors associated with certain people, places and objects-all confined to a limited area or neighborhood. We can certainly construct a home back in our own culture-just as we did abroad-but there won't be one waiting for us when we arrive...In other words, no one goes home; rather we return to our native country and in due course we create a home."*

At the foundation of this transition is the task of determining what to do with the changes that have occurred while you were away and the changes that have taken place within you as a result of your time in Trinidad. Life for your family, friends and teachers probably will not be the same as when you departed, but you were not there to gradually adjust to those changes with them. And they have not been able to get used to the things that are different about you.

Hardly anyone avoids the discomfort of this period of growth, but the good news is you will eventually find a way to include your new ideas, skills and outlook in your life back in the U.S. Here are a few questions to consider before your return. Your answers may help you recognize the changes that have occurred during your sojourn.

- What have I learned about Trinidad's culture that I did not know previously? In what ways has this changed my view of Trinidad?
- By being abroad and able to compare my culture with a different culture, what have I learned about the history, values and traditions that make up my home culture?
- While I was away, what significant events have occurred in my country, my family, in my hometown, among my friends and on campus?
- How have my personal values changed because of my study abroad experience?
- In what ways have my stereotypes or biases changed?
- What new skills have I developed (e.g. adaptation skills, second language proficiency, sensitivity, etc.) and how might I maintain them?
- How can I express these changes to my friends, family and teachers?
- What might I do to continue to deepen my understanding of Trinidad?

As when you were abroad, be patient with yourself! Continuing to write in your journal about your feelings and experiences will help you to weather this difficult time.

## RETURNING HOME



Contrary to popular belief, returning from several months abroad can be equally or even more stressful and difficult than beginning your study abroad experience. You will find that you have changed in several ways during your experience. Coming home can be difficult, as life has continued for family and friends while you have been gone as well. Just as when you were struggling with adaptation to Trinidadian culture, it is wise to give yourself some time to adjust when you return.

All of the members of the Center for International Programs staff have also experienced this challenge, and we encourage you to feel free to talk with us, or someone in the Counseling Center if you are having problems adjusting, or if you just need to talk. When you return to campus, we will invite you to attend a “Reintegration” celebration, where faculty, staff, administrators and international students gather to welcome you back. In addition, we provide many opportunities for students to continue their study abroad experience through activities and functions on our campus. We welcome your participation. The Center has also instituted a team of peer advisers, composed of seniors who have gone on study abroad who want to help future participants preparing to go overseas. You can apply for this program during your junior year Spring term.

**HAVE FUN!**



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