

# Natural beauties

Whether clients want a sustainable stay or a spot that's close to Tobago's wildlife, nature lovers will find plenty to please at these hotels, says **Clare Voight**

**A** giant leatherback turtle hauls herself out of the waves and up across the sand, slowly and purposefully, under the moonlight. With a few loud, guttural grunts, she uses her strong flippers to dig, scooping the sand away to form angel-wing trenches. She heaves herself around to face the other way, the moonlight reflecting in her eyes, then carries on digging her curved trench.

Giant leatherbacks, along with hawksbill and green turtles, all come to Tobago's shores to nest, year after year.

We'd just arrived in Tobago from London, not long before the sun's peachy hues seeped below the horizon – and the last thing I'd expected to see while unwinding

with a beer at the hotel's beach bar was a turtle laying her eggs.

Yet it's just one of many magical nature experiences I'm lucky to have during a blissfully warm week in Tobago – an island that, along with its turtles, is home to plenty more wonderful wildlife besides, including about 260 different bird species.

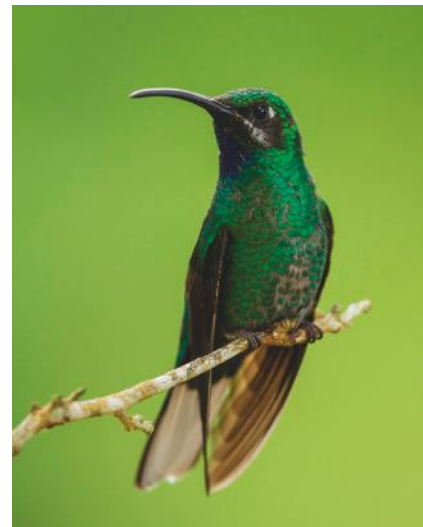
And although it is, of course, impossible to guarantee wildlife sightings, access to unspoilt nature is a given. Lush, rustic Tobago is much less developed than other Caribbean islands and is home to the oldest forest reserve in the Western Hemisphere (Main Ridge Forest Reserve), while more recently, its northeast area has been designated a Unesco Biosphere Reserve.

Scuba diving in Tobago  
PICTURE: Shutterstock/blue-ago.cz



# DESTINATIONS

## CARIBBEAN | TOBAGO



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Birdsong Lodge, Castara Retreats; white-tailed sabrewing; Starfish Tobago; Adventure Eco Villas; the pool at Starfish Tobago

PICTURES: Visit Tobago/Alex Treadway, Faraaz Abdool; Clare Vooght; Tobago Tourism Agency/Alexa Fernando

With few large hotel chains, accommodation is simple but affordable, with clean, comfortable and homely villas coming in at around £100 a night – many of them in close proximity to the action, when it comes to wildlife.

### FOR TURTLE SIGHTINGS... ...TRY STARFISH TOBAGO

In a sheltered bay on the western Caribbean side of the island, the rustic Starfish Tobago is where my wow moment with the turtle took place – in fact, turtles were spotted nesting here on two of the three nights we stayed. The bar is positioned just by the immaculate beach, ensuring that if a turtle does come here to nest, any guests who are enjoying a nightcap will have front-row seats (at a safe distance). Along with the beach bar, there's one buffet restaurant, one grill and another à la carte restaurant (which opens when the hotel is at full occupancy). Watersports such as kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding are also included, and there's a large pool with a separate Jacuzzi and kids' pool.

**Book it:** Gold Medal offers seven nights at Starfish Tobago on an all-inclusive basis from £1,489 per person, based on two adults sharing a Standard Sea

## top tip

Turtle-nesting season is from March to September, and common nesting sites include the aptly named Turtle Beach, Grafton Beach and Stonehaven Bay. Arrive early in the season to see adult turtles laying their eggs, or later in the season to see tiny hatchlings as they head out to sea.

View room and travelling on May 10, 2024. Price includes coach transfers and flights from Gatwick. [goldmedal.co.uk](http://goldmedal.co.uk)

### FOR AN ECO-HIDEAWAY NEAR THE ACTION... ...TRY CASTARA RETREATS

This leafy hideaway sits up in the treetops, high on a rainforested hillside overlooking the golden sands of Castara Bay. The boutique, 17-room eco-retreat is ideal for clients seeking a sustainable stay near nature. It has a raft of sustainability initiatives – including a no-plastic policy, composting and no breakfast served in the resort, to encourage guests to get out and support the rest of the village.

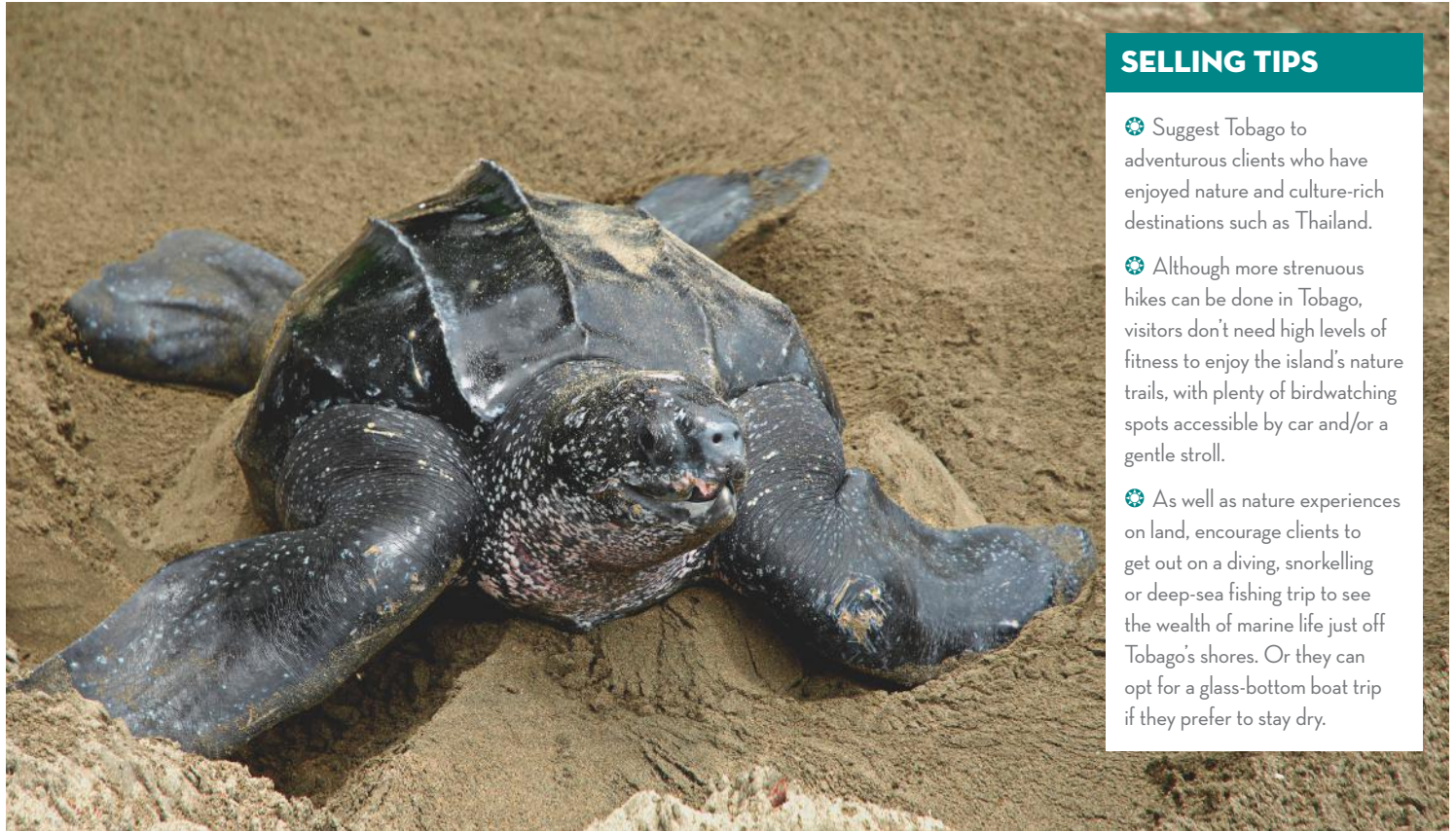
Just a few minutes into our site visit, we spot two stingrays moving through the waves below, and we're told iguanas are often seen here too. It's also a good jumping-off point for boat trips, snorkelling and island tours to see Tobago's birdlife, which ranges from hummingbirds to parrots.

As far as the accommodation goes, expect treehouse-like apartments with their own kitchens, lounge areas and sun decks (with fresh, locally made bread delivered to the room for guests staying longer than four nights). ➤



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### SELLING TIPS

- Suggest Tobago to adventurous clients who have enjoyed nature and culture-rich destinations such as Thailand.
- Although more strenuous hikes can be done in Tobago, visitors don't need high levels of fitness to enjoy the island's nature trails, with plenty of birdwatching spots accessible by car and/or a gentle stroll.
- As well as nature experiences on land, encourage clients to get out on a diving, snorkelling or deep-sea fishing trip to see the wealth of marine life just off Tobago's shores. Or they can opt for a glass-bottom boat trip if they prefer to stay dry.

ABOVE: A turtle lays her eggs in the sand PICTURE: Tobago Tourism Agency Limited

Elsewhere in the resort, there's a yoga deck overlooking the sea and a hip cafe serving barista-made coffees.

**Book it:** Caribtours has seven nights in a Firefly one-bedroom apartment on a room-only basis from £1,239 per person, based on two sharing, departing June 7, 2024. Price includes flights from Gatwick, airport lounge access and private transfers.  
[caribtours.co.uk](http://caribtours.co.uk)

### FOR A HUMMINGBIRD HAVEN... ...TRY ADVENTURE ECO VILLAS

Adventure Farm and Nature Reserve is the biggest conservation effort in Tobago, and visitors are treated to colourful hummingbirds, which pause to drink from feeders, in this tranquil nature reserve and fruit farm. Other birds that visit include mot motts, woodpeckers, doves, tropical mockingbirds and many more. Plenty of lizards, opossums, iguanas and red squirrels also frequent the park.

After exploring the conservation area's shaded paths, flanked by mango and citrus trees, clients can wander along raised wooden walkways to one of the two rustic, cobalt blue-painted wood cabins (also known as the Adventure Eco Villas) that overlook the lush reserve. Kitchens make this a good self-catering option, with restaurants nearby too. Suggest this to clients who are keen to visit Tobago for its wealth of birdwatching hikes; staff can also arrange fishing, scuba diving, snorkelling,

## fast fact

Tobago's wildlife showstopper is, arguably, the hummingbird. The island is home to six species, most of which can be seen year-round – as can many of the island's other bird species.

sailing and birdwatching trips. And as night falls, clients can expect the trees around their home for the week to be illuminated by fireflies.

**Book it:** From \$140 per night, room-only.  
[adventure-ecovillas.com](http://adventure-ecovillas.com)

### FOR A NATURE-INSPIRED RETREAT... ...TRY SHEPHERD'S INN

Room options at the boutique Shepherd's Inn include Pond (by the pool) and Pasture (set around verdant tropical gardens), or families can book into the Little Bo Peep and Bo Peep suites, which have two and three rooms respectively.

Sustainability minded guests will love that the resort has been certified by Green Key, an international standard in sustainable tourism with about 3,200 sites around the world. Its sustainability practices include cleaning without harsh chemicals and more-efficient air con that uses a non-harmful gas, while scraps from the kitchen go to a local farmer. Book nature lovers into the aforementioned Pasture rooms, where flowers and plants have been selected to attract hummingbirds. Lizards are often spotted at the hotel too, and staff can arrange bespoke wildlife tours anywhere on the island for guests who want to see particular animals.

**Book it:** From £90 per person, per night, based on two people sharing, on a bed and breakfast basis.  
[shepherdsinntobago.com](http://shepherdsinntobago.com)