



# Canadian Sea Turtle Network's Field Trip to Trinidad

## Expedition Guide 2025

Updated: Jan 10, 2025



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## Trip Introduction

We are delighted that you want to join us on our Field Trip to Trinidad! The first time we went to Trinidad to see the leatherbacks nesting there was in 1999. Little did we know how important our collaboration with the Nature Seekers, a local environmental group, would become.

In the years that followed, we learned that the majority of leatherback turtles found in Canadian waters nest in Trinidad. So, understanding the challenges “Canadian” turtles face in the nesting environment is critical to protecting those animals.

It is logistically difficult for us to bring people with us on our field boat off Nova Scotia to see leatherbacks in Canada. We are excited to have the chance to bring you to see “Canadian” turtles down south.

**Where:** Matura, Trinidad

**When:** Session 1: April 21-29, 2025  
Session 2: May 1-9, 2025

The trip begins with a group pickup at Piarco International Airport 9:30am on the first day of your session. The field trip ends with a group drop off back at Piarco International Airport at 10:00am on the last day of your session.

**Basic Cost:** \$3,500 CAD, plus flight to and from Port of Spain, Trinidad

Please see section on “Expenses” on p. 15 for specifics. There is an optional single supplement fee of \$725 CAD if you wish to have a private room.

Spaces are limited (15 participants per trip) and your spot is confirmed when we receive your trip deposit. Submit your deposit by January 15th, 2025, to receive a \$250 coupon towards the balance of your trip!

All fees are due by April 1, 2025.

## About the Canadian Sea Turtle Network

The Canadian Sea Turtle Network (CSTN) is a Halifax-based charitable organization involving scientists, commercial fishermen, and coastal community members that works to conserve endangered sea turtles in Canadian waters and worldwide. The CSTN is a past winner of the Gold Canadian Environment Award for Conservation.

## About Nature Seekers, our research partners in Trinidad

Nature Seekers was founded in 1990 to protect nesting leatherback turtles in Trinidad and Tobago. The group worked to eliminate poaching of nesting female turtles and their eggs from Matura Beach. In addition to nightly beach patrols to ensure the safety of the leatherbacks, Nature Seekers is involved in other conservation initiatives such as waste recycling and reforestation. The group also leads evening beach tours to increase local public awareness about leatherbacks and the threats they face.



## The town of Matura

Our expedition is based in Matura, a small community in northeastern Trinidad where Nature Seekers has its headquarters. The village is surrounded by thick tropical forest with a wealth of wild fauna. Nearby is the Matura Beach Protected Area, where large numbers of leatherback turtles nest annually.

## About Trinidad

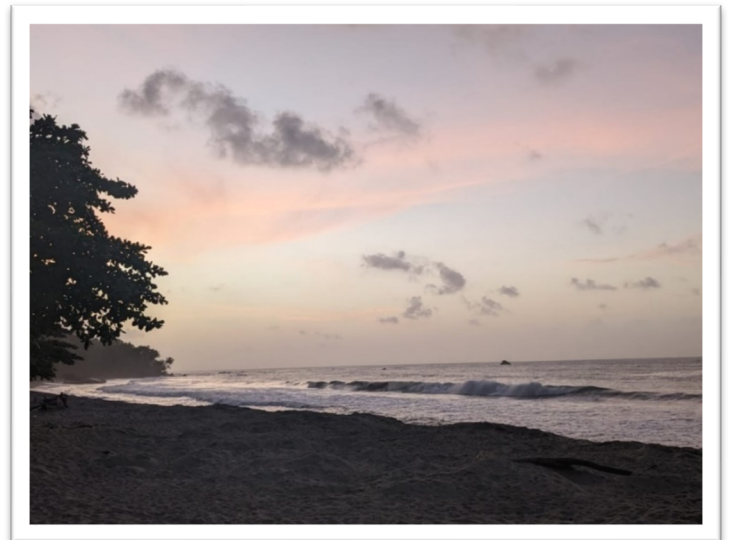
Trinidad is the southernmost island in the chain of Caribbean islands that stretches from Florida to South America. It is located less than 20 kilometres off the northeast coast of Venezuela, and this proximity means

that Trinidad is populated by flora and fauna more similar to South America than most of the more insular Caribbean islands. The island enjoys a warm, maritime tropical climate year-round.

## Turtles in Trinidad

Trinidad's beaches host one of the largest nesting colonies of endangered leatherback sea turtles in the world. Approximately 60% of leatherback turtles that forage in Canadian waters during the summer months originate from Trinidad's nesting population.

The major nesting beaches of Trinidad are protected and patrolled by community conservation groups, like Nature Seekers, who protect the turtles from poaching. However, the turtles still face threats both locally, like predation of eggs and hatchlings, and regionally, like entanglement in fishing gear.





## Leatherback research: How you will help

Each night during the sea turtle nesting season, the Nature Seekers patrol the nesting beach to prevent the poaching of leatherback turtles and their eggs. They conduct scientific research to allow them to assess the leatherback population size and trend as well as to monitor the reproduction of individual animals.

The CSTN is involved in a number of collaborative scientific initiatives with Nature Seekers, including satellite tagging “Canadian” turtles on the beach so we can learn about how the animals behave and where they go after they have nested. Sometimes we are lucky enough to follow the paths of these turtles right back to Canadian waters.

Although some activities may be subject to change and we can't guarantee that each volunteer will take part in each activity, volunteers on our field trip will likely have the chance to help:

- Record data on nesting leatherbacks (location, measurements)
- Visually scan leatherbacks for injuries
- Mark leatherbacks with flipper tags and passive integrated transponders (PIT tags)
- Help locate “Canadian” leatherbacks for further research by reading flipper tags on nesting animals
- Help clean up debris on the beach



We will ensure that you are trained in sea turtle identification, data collection, and in the use of research equipment. You will practice each research task with project staff and will be paired with members of the Nature Seekers until you feel comfortable working independently.

Please note that leatherbacks nest at night. We will be on the beach working until approximately 1 a.m. each evening. (You are encouraged to sleep late into the morning to accommodate this schedule!) Consistent, late-night activity in a warm, humid climate can be challenging and we will work to ensure that everyone is as comfortable as possible. It is important to make sure you eat and drink well. And we find that some of the best defences against becoming worn out in the field are a lot of laughter and a good team environment. We'll do our best to provide those as well! And, if you need a break, you can always let us know.



### [In addition to the turtles](#)

We are particularly excited about you experiencing our partnership with Nature Seekers. It is a collaboration and friendship that we are proud of and it offers you the chance to see how international environmental conservation works up close. Highly-migratory species, like leatherbacks, move through the political boundaries of many countries and so conserving them requires cooperation on a massive scale. This means creating relationships at the grassroots level and developing common goals across cultures, languages (although in Trinidad, there is no language barrier) and geography.

Conserving sea turtles in Canadian waters provides the CSTN with the unique challenge of working with conservation groups throughout the Caribbean and South America. Although the majority of the leatherbacks found in Canadian waters are from Trinidad, Canada is like the United Nations of sea turtles—we are also host each summer and fall to turtles that come from more than a dozen different countries, including Anguilla, Colombia, Costa Rica, United States, French Guiana, Guyana, Panama, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Grenada, St. Croix and Suriname. Our work with nesting beach organizations in each of these places is critical to our conservation of leatherbacks.

### [After work](#)

You'll have a chance to learn about Trinidad's natural environment through interaction with the Nature Seekers as well as during excursions to local ecotourism establishments. Although afternoon ecotourism excursions will be finalized closer to the start of the trip, you can review our sample schedule on page 10.



## Excursions & Activities

Below are the tentative activities for our trip (please note they are subject to change). All excursions and activities are included in the base tour cost. Excursions are optional (except for orientation), and there are plenty of activities available at the guesthouse and around Matura if you'd prefer to skip a planned excursion.

### Orientation

*Activity level: Low*

Learn more about the work of the Canadian Sea Turtle Network, the work of Nature Seekers, and the unique partnerships among turtle conservation groups internationally.

### Craft Program

*Activity level: Low*

The Turtle Warrior craft program employs local artisans in producing crafts from recycled materials. Visit the craft program, see how materials are recycled and crafts are produced, and make a few crafts of your own!

### Bajnath's estate

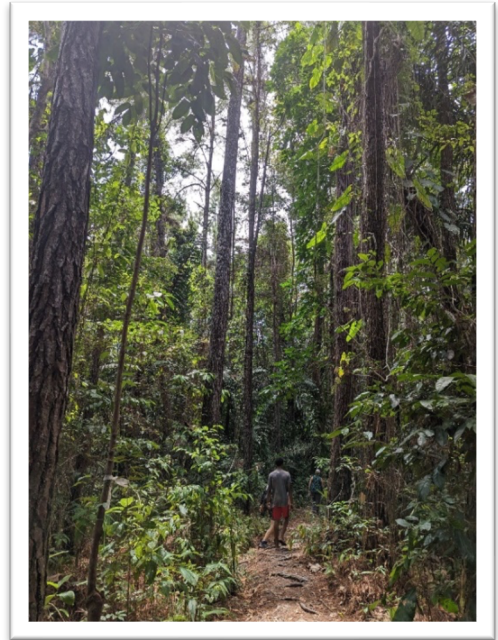
*Activity level: Low (bird watching) or Moderate (optional hiking and swimming)*

Visit an eco-operated lodge within the Matura Forest Reserve. Spend your morning watching the hummingbirds from the observation deck, or hike through the forest to find natural swimming pools!

### Beach/River kayaking

*Activity level: Low (beach visit) or Moderate (optional river kayaking)*

Explore the Salybia River landscape by kayak, with the opportunity to spot incredible local flora and fauna along the route. Prefer to soak up the sun or wade in the ocean? You can do both on the beautiful beach at Salybia.





### Caroni Swamp tour

*Activity level: Low (seated boat tour)*

Boat through the spectacular mangrove forests of the Trinidadian coast, while herons swoop nearby and tree boas snooze overhead. At dusk, we will witness the world-famous flocks of scarlet ibis (the national bird of Trinidad) returning to their roosts for the night.

### Northeast Coast & Grande Riviere

*Activity level: Moderate (beach walking on uneven terrain)*

Join a local guide for a day trip heading to the north coast of Trinidad. We'll make stops at scenic lookouts throughout the drive. Our destination is a guided tour at Grande Riviere, the densest leatherback nesting beach in the Northwest Atlantic!

### Hike to & swim at Mermaid Pool

*Activity level: Challenging (hiking steep inclines, uneven terrain with handholds along trail)*

Join a local guide for a hike along the Matura River through pine and Mora Forest to Mermaid Pool, a unique limestone formation that creates three distinct natural swimming pools. Have a refreshing dip in the clear turquoise waters.





## Sample Schedule

Below is a **tentative** schedule for our trip (please note that the activity schedule is subject to change).

<b>Date</b>	<b>Day-time Activities</b>	<b>Night-time Activities</b>
Day 1	- Airport pick-up (9:30am) - Daytime beach tour	- Intro to leatherback beach work
Day 2	- Morning rest - Orientation / Training	- Volunteer beach work
Day 3	- Morning rest - Excursion: Bajnath's Estate	- Volunteer beach work
Day 4	- Morning rest - Excursion: Northeast Coast Tour	- Visit Grande Riviere Beach
Day 5	- Morning rest - Excursion: Visit local craft program	- Volunteer beach work
Day 6	- Morning rest - Excursion: Beach/kayak day	- Volunteer beach work
Day 7	- Morning rest - Excursion: Mermaid pool	- Volunteer beach work
Day 8	- Morning rest - Excursion: Caroni Swamp	- Volunteer beach work
Day 9	- Morning airport drop off (10:00 am)	



## Where You Will Stay

### Pickup & Dropoff

The field trip begins with a group pickup at Piarco International Airport at 9:30am on the first day of your trip session. Your trip leaders will meet you in the seating area under the mural just outside the baggage claim hall. The group will then depart for Matura, approximately an hour's drive away. The trip will conclude with a group drop-off back at the Piarco Airport at 10:00am on the final day of your trip session.

Our group occupies all available rooms in Suzan's guest house, and we have multiple trip sessions planned for 2025. Because of this, we are unfortunately not able to accommodate you at the guest house prior to the beginning of your field trip session or after it concludes. If you're looking for accommodations for before or after your field trip, there are several hotels near Piarco International Airport with free shuttles to and from the airport. Please let us know if you'd like a few recommendations!

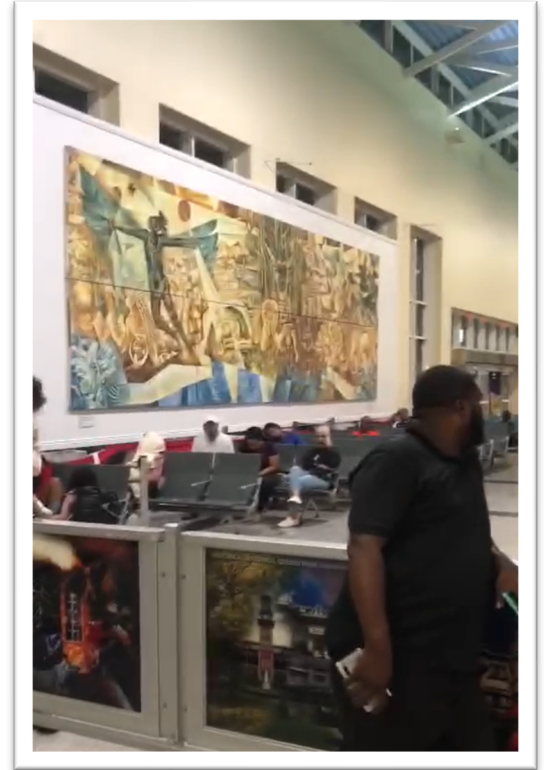
The scheduled group pickup and drop off are included in the base tour cost. **If you book flights that arrive outside of these times and you require a private transfer to Matura, this transfer must be**

**booked ahead of time and will be subject to an additional fee.**

### Suzan's Guest House

The group will stay at Suzan's Guest House in Matura, Trinidad. The Guest house is next door to Nature Seeker's main office. Please note that you may be asked to provide the following information about your accommodations upon arrival at Customs and Immigration:

Suzan's Guest house  
16.5 KM Toco Main Road  
Matura, Trinidad, West Indies  
+1 (868) 319-0172 or +1 (868) 668-7337  
natureseekers@gmail.com



Group meeting spot at Piarco Airport



## Notes on Accommodations

- Rooms will be shared (2 people) unless you choose to pay a \$725 Single Supplement Fee to have a private room.
- If you are travelling with a friend or family member, you will be paired up in a room. If you are travelling solo and prefer to not pay the single supplement fee, you will be paired with a fellow participant of the same gender.
- Pillows, bedding and bath towels are provided.
- Most rooms have air conditioning.
- There is minimal hot water in the showers.
- The tap water in the guest house is safe to drink.
- For charging personal electronic devices, the guest house has electricity (110V with standard North American style plugs with two blades and a grounding pin).
- The guest house has free WIFI, though it may have limited reach and connection speed. If you require consistent network access throughout the trip, please purchase a travel data plan for your cell phone.
- There is a common area with a TV, a porch at the front of the house, and a veranda at the back of the house for use during leisure time.
- The guest house is a non-smoking environment.
- The guest house is inland, about 20 minutes away from the beach, and nightly transportation for volunteer work is provided via project bus or truck. Truck travel may include travelling on quiet roads in the back of a pick-up truck.
- There are no restaurants in the village, but there are two convenience stores next door to the guest house where you may purchase additional snacks and drinks (bottled water, pop, chocolate bars, nuts, chips, etc.).



## What you will eat

The guest house staff shop for food, set the menu, prepare the meals, and clean up afterward. It is important to note that serious food restrictions, such as allergies, can usually be accommodated if we have advance notice. (Please be sure to note this information on the Field Trip online registration form.) Meals are typically served buffet-style. Below is a list of a selection of the foods you may be served. Please note that you may have different or additional choices as well. This list is meant to give you a general idea of what you might expect.



### Breakfast

Traditional fried bread, cereal, salt fish, plantains, pancakes, eggs, French toast, local fruit

### Lunch/Dinner

“Brown down” (spicy Creole dish of stewed chicken/beef/fish), pelau (rice, peas, and chicken/beef/fish), callaloo (spicy soup), vegetable side dishes of ochro rice, green figs, yams, plantains, sweet potatoes, cassava pie, and eddoes (similar to sweet potatoes)

### Snacks

Roti (thin, unleavened bread), other homemade bread, pastries, local cheeses

### Beverages

Water, coffee, tea, fruit juices, fruit punch

Please note: Deserts are not often served with meals. If you have a sweet tooth, please pack your favourites with you!





## Field Trip Expenses

The base tour cost is \$3,500 CAD. This covers the cost of your accommodations, meals, transportation to and from the airport, transportation to and from the field site, all group excursions, and transportation to and from any excursions.

**Optional:** To secure a private room, there is a Single Supplement Fee of \$725 CAD.

This money is payable to the Canadian Sea Turtle Network. The first payment is a \$500 CAD non-refundable deposit that guarantees your place on the trip. A maximum of 15 participants per session will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

**Early Bird Special:** If you pay your non-refundable deposit by January 15, 2025, you will receive a code for \$250 CAD off the remainder of the fees.

All fees (deposit + trip balance + single supplement, if applicable) are due by **April 1, 2025**. If payment is not received by this date, we will assume you are not travelling with us, and you will forfeit your deposit and your place on the trip. After April 1, 2025, when all fees are due, the total amount of \$3,500 (\$3,250 for early-bird travellers) becomes non-refundable except under exceptional circumstances decided on a case-by-case basis.

### Payments can be made by:

#### Credit card

Visit our online store at: [www.seaturtlestore.ca](http://www.seaturtlestore.ca)

#### Interac e-transfer

Please use the password "LEATHERBACK" and send to:  
[kmartin@seaturtle.ca](mailto:kmartin@seaturtle.ca)

#### Certified cheque

If you choose to send a certified cheque, please call us at (902) 423-6224 to let us know when you have mailed it. Please send the cheque to:  
Canadian Sea Turtle Network (Field Trip)  
2037 Kline St  
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3L2X4



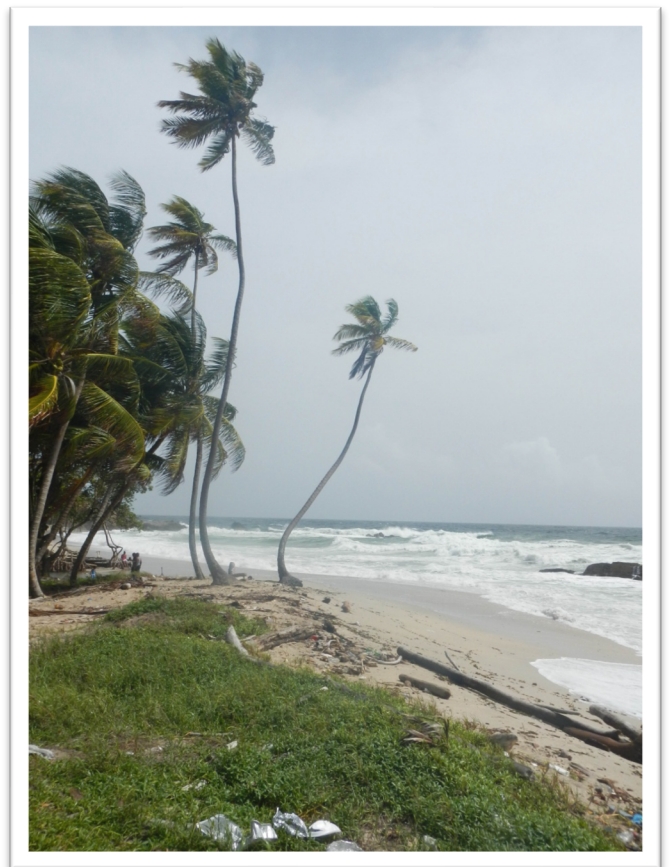
## Cash & Spending Money

There are very few opportunities for shopping throughout the field trip. However, Nature Seekers do have a shop with crafts, jewelry, and souvenirs available to purchase. If you're looking to purchase any of their handmade sea turtle crafts, please plan to bring cash for this as there is no credit card machine available. CAD, USD, and GBP are all accepted by Nature Seekers, as well as local currency TT. If you plan to use currencies other than TT, please bring small denominations (ex. \$5, \$10, \$20 bills) as it can be difficult to make change. There are convenience stores in Matura where you may purchase additional snacks and drinks (bottled water, pop, chocolate bars, nuts, chips, etc.).

Exchange of TT for foreign currency can be difficult to arrange, so it is important to only exchange what you plan on using and budget accordingly. Other than TT, USD is most often accepted throughout Trinidad. Please note that debit cards, credit cards, and traveller's cheques are generally not accepted. Previous field trip participants have spent anywhere from \$75-250 USD on snacks and souvenirs through the week, depending on personal spending habits.

## Additional expenses

- You are responsible for the cost of your flight to and from Port of Spain, Trinidad. Your flight must allow you to arrive in Trinidad before the 9:30 am group pickup on day 1 of your trip session.
- Should you miss the group pickup on day 1 of the trip, you are responsible for the cost of a private transfer to the guest house in Matura. Please contact us to book your transfer.
- You are responsible for the cost of **mandatory travel health insurance** while you are on the trip.
- You are responsible for the cost of optional trip cancellation insurance, should you choose to purchase it.
- You are responsible for the costs of any vaccines you choose to have.
- You are responsible for any spending money you may wish to bring with you.
- You are responsible for any gratuities you would like to leave the local cooking, cleaning and driving staff. These tips are left at your discretion and are not mandatory, although they are appreciated.





## Checklist

- Submit your online registration form to the CSTN.
- Pay your Field Trip deposit to as soon as possible to secure your spot on the trip.
- Submit your signed waiver (mandatory) to the CSTN.
- Pay the balance of your Field Trip fee to the CSTN by April 1, 2025.
- Book flights in and out of Port of Spain, Trinidad, and make any additional travel arrangements you require. Please note: Your flights should arrive in Trinidad before the group pickup on day 1 of your trip and depart Trinidad after the group drop off on the last day of your trip.
- If you are arriving early or planning to stay later than the last day of your trip, please ensure you you're your own accommodations and transportation booked.
- Purchase travel health insurance if you are not covered by your personal insurance policy. **Health insurance is mandatory for this trip.**
- Consider purchasing trip cancellation insurance.
- Make sure your passport is valid until 90 days after your trip. If you are travelling from outside of North America, check travel visa requirements.
- Consult a physician to review the health risks of travelling in a tropical, developing country and to ensure that you have any vaccinations or medications you may need.
- Consider increasing your physical activity in advance of the trip to help prepare you for walking long distances over the sand each evening.
- Review the packing list to ensure that you have all clothing and supplies that you will need. Please note that there are no shopping options for clothing or field supplies upon arrival in Matura.
- Leave copies of your passport, travel health insurance, airline tickets and any credit cards you plan to carry with a trusted friend or relative. You will be required to provide your emergency contact information when you register for the trip.
- Ensure that you have sufficient funds in cash (Trinidad and Tobago dollars or U.S. dollars) upon arrival in Trinidad, as debit/credit point of sale machines and ATMs are generally not available in Matura.





## Travel tips

- Trinidad's official language is English.
- Trinidad's time zone : -4 GMT/UTC. However, Trinidad does not recognize Daylight Savings Time. That means that during the trip, Trinidad time is equivalent to Eastern Standard Time.
- Do not bring more luggage than you can carry and handle on your own.
- If you are checking your luggage, please ensure that you pack an extra set of field clothing and personal essentials in your carry-on bag in case your luggage is lost or delayed.
- Check your airline's baggage policy to ensure you are familiar with weight limits, liquid restrictions, fees for checked bags, etc.
- Note: Camouflage clothing and luggage are illegal in Trinidad and Tobago and will be confiscated.



## Suggested packing list

### Documentation

- This document for reference
- Passport
- Photocopies of your passport, flight itinerary, health insurance, and credit cards in case the originals are lost or stolen
- Documentation for travel health insurance (**mandatory**)
- Documentation for travel insurance (optional)
- Documentation for travel by minors (if necessary)

### To wear during field work

Please note that your clothes and shoes will become dirty with sand and/or soaked with salt water during your beach work. Please pack accordingly and prepare to dress in layers. Also, at this time of year, Trinidad is prone to sudden downpours. This means effective rain gear is important (although sometimes it rains with very little notice, and you just get wet!).

- Long-sleeved or short-sleeved quick-drying athletic shirts
- Lightweight, quick-drying athletic pants  
long pants are recommended for beach work!
- Comfortable, worn-in, closed-toe hiking or running shoes
- Light sweater or hoodie for windy nights
- Waterproof jacket or rain poncho  
Previous participants have found it most comfortable and convenient to throw a rain poncho over themselves & their backpack during sudden downpours.
- Plenty of socks  
Quick-drying styles recommended, e.g., merino wool



## Field supplies

- Small daypack large enough for personal gear  
Some people choose to bring a waterproof cover for their daypack in case of downpours.
- Drybag to protect phone/camera from water and sand  
Some travellers choose to use a Ziploc bag for these items; however, these can tear, so be sure to have several extras with you and make sure they are well sealed when you are using them.
- Batteries/chargers for all electronic gear
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen lotion with SPF 30+
- Wristwatch
- Headlamp with red light option. Please note that nesting sea turtles are disrupted by white lights on the beach, so we are only able to use red lights while working with the turtles. The beach is quite dark, and past travellers have found having a few extra red lights on hand was beneficial for beach work and navigation. In addition to your headlamp, you may find it helpful to bring options such as a handheld flashlight with a red light option, or clip on red lights to attach to your backpack.



## To wear during activities/leisure

- Swimsuit
- Light, casual clothing to be worn in the guest house, in town or on excursions  
Please note there is A/C only in the guest rooms.
- Sandals
- Sun hat
- Sunglasses

## Personal supplies

- Personal toiletries (e.g., toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, etc.)
- Hair ties, headband, or similar if you have long hair  
It is always windy on Matura beach, and you will want to keep your hair out of your face while your hands are busy!
- Antibacterial wipes and/or hand sanitizer
- Personal first aid kit and medications. We will have a group First Aid kit.
- Glasses and contact lenses  
If you wear glasses, pack an extra pair and/or extra wipes for cleaning. Your lenses will become coated with salt spray while on the beach.
- Cash spending money in Trinidad and Tobago ("TT") or U.S. dollars (See "Additional Expenses")
- Camera with memory cards/film and charger/batteries  
Please note that there are strict rules about photographing leatherbacks on the nesting beach because the light from a flash would disturb the turtles. This is serious because a flash or white light can cause a turtle to abort its

nesting attempt. We will try to provide an opportunity for you to photograph a nesting leatherback and to obtain a photograph of you with a nesting turtle. However, these opportunities will be limited. They will also be authorized and supervised by the Nature Seekers. Again, these restrictions are for the well being of the leatherbacks.

## Optional items

- Binoculars for bird watching
- Ear plugs or a sleep mask  
There is sometimes an enthusiastic rooster in the area that may wake you. Some people prefer to bring ear plugs for that reason. The rooms stay relatively dark during the day, but some people still prefer sleep masks.
- Dried snacks or sweets (granola bars, pretzels, cookies, etc.) from home.  
If you choose to pack food, check to make sure you are bringing snacks that are allowed through Customs and Immigration.
- Walking stick or trekking poles (for easier navigation of the uneven terrain on the beach)
- Preferred coffee or tea  
Instant coffee is served at the guest house. If you'd prefer, you're welcome to bring your own coffee & brewing mechanism (e.g. a pour-through cone).
- Book, journal, games, earphones, etc., for recreational time



## Trip Safety

Updated: 2025 Jan 10

Safety is a primary concern for us, and we take seriously any risk advisories issued by the [Government of Canada](#) or the [U.S. State Department](#). We understand there's inherent risk to international travel and each traveller may have different comfort levels. Our safety protocols for the field trip are below.

- We do not visit Port of Spain as part of our tour.
- Most of the trip will be spent in Matura, a remote village on Trinidad's East coast. The CSTN has been travelling to Matura for 20+ years and our group is well known (and well loved!) in the village. This is where the guest house is located, as well as the Nature Seekers (our research partners) main office.
- Our group will be accompanied by a local guide from the Nature Seekers for the entirety of the trip. This includes all transportation and excursions. While the guides may change throughout the week, someone from Nature Seekers will be with us from the first airport pick up to the final airport drop off!
- Depending on the final size of the group, we will be travelling in either a large van or a coach bus. The group will always travel to excursions together- we don't take public transit, taxis, or split up the group at any point. The only exception to this may be the nightly trips down to Matura beach from the village. We often take trucks with the Nature Seekers. Some volunteers may choose to head back to the guest house earlier than others, but everyone will travel with someone from Nature Seekers.
- Matura Beach, where we will work with leatherbacks, is a very remote beach with only one access road from the village. It's also a protected beach, where permits are required to access the beach. The cost of your permit is covered in the tour cost. Nature Seekers host guided tours on this beach, and they are also responsible for checking beach permits. At the beach entrance, Nature Seekers have a small office where tour groups meet, and permits are checked. There is no easy way to get to the beach without passing the Nature Seekers office.
- Our work on the beach will also be done with Nature Seekers guides present. The first night, we'll likely stay as a group and attend a Nature Seekers tour to experience our first nesting leatherback! Night 2, we'll split up into small groups (each with a Nature Seekers guide) for hands-on training. We'll stay in small groups each night on the beach for the rest of the trip.
- We always setup a WhatsApp group for participants ahead of the field trip. This will provide an opportunity for travellers to chat about their flight plans and meet up along the way (or at the Piarco Airport) if they'd prefer to not travel alone.
- Group leaders will always have a cell phone with them. Families at home will be provided with the group phone number in case of emergency.

These are just a few ways that we try to make the trip as safe as possible. If you have any questions, please let us know by reaching out at 902-423-6224 or [fieldtrip@seaturtle.ca](mailto:fieldtrip@seaturtle.ca).