



TRINIDAD & TOBAGO BY DEBBIE MARTY

Debbie and her family lived in Texas and Perth, more recently they moved to Trinidad and Tobago, these are some of their experiences and the things they wished they had known.



A job offer to work in Trinidad! My first reaction was excitement, I imagined tropical beaches, exciting new food, exotic flora and fauna and a more laid-back lifestyle. In many ways much of this proved to be true, see: [Flavour of Life in Trinidad](#) but I knew I still needed more information before we could really decide.

At the time of the offer, I worked for Outpost Houston as their Event Manager. Prior to that we were on assignment in Perth, Australia, so our experience of relocating with Shell had always been to a destination with an established Outpost to support us, Trinidad was a different story.

As a work location, Trinidad is relatively new to the Shell Portfolio, coming from the British Gas (BG) acquisition. At the time we moved there, there was no Outpost to provide a realistic impression about living in Trinidad with a family. That being the case I turned to google where I found some basic facts about the country and the odd travel guide, but little on how to organise essential things or what to expect once there.

I reached out to my network to try and fill in the gaps; seeking out families who were moving to Houston from Trinidad and speaking to colleagues already working there. I had questions about medical facilities, schooling for our daughters, bringing the dog with us, and getting a driver's license. From those initial discussions personal safety emerged as the most immediate concern. As luck would have it I had already organised a Personal Safety Workshop for Outpost Houston.

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The session was run by Justin Lamb, (Regional Security Analyst for the Americas at Shell) whilst the focus was not on Trinidad specifically, the content of the session provided valuable insights on personal safety while including content about living with high levels of crime and how best to protect oneself (see below for [Key Safety Tips](#) and behaviours).

I was very thankful for Justin's honesty; during the briefing he told us Trinidad had been upgraded to a moderate/high risk country. I had not appreciated that before the talk. Safety management in Trinidad needs a different mindset, one that you need to keep foremost in your thoughts without that becoming an unmanageable stress. It's not for everyone so the briefing was important to help us make our decision. I believe the more you know before you go, the better prepared you will be!



A FLAVOUR OF LIFE IN TRINIDAD



I was right about the food, our favorites include "doubles", a fried flour mixture topped with chickpeas and a variety of spicy sauces that can be found throughout Trinidad.

Another favourite is Richard's Shark and Bake, just as it sounds, shark meat, baked in a breadin. Richard's place is on Maracas Beach, both the beach and the food are well worth the visit!



Surprisingly oranges here are green, looking like large limes to the untrained eye. I enjoy watching the fruit vendor peel the oranges with this nifty spinning tool, which spirals the rind into a long ribbon.



Meat is largely imported and frozen which is in sharp contrast to our experience in the States; although 'wild meat' is most definitely fresh! Unfortunately, we lost our resident iguana as wild meat. Our girls had named him 'Spike Oswald' and had started to think of him as a pet, to the removal men he was definitely dinner.

Trinidad is the more industrial and populated island of the country. There are still beautiful areas to see, for instance, the lovely botanical gardens and Asa Wright Nature Center for those who enjoy plants and colorful birds.



The Caroni Swamp tour was a highlight for our family. The swamp is home to the national bird of Trinidad and Tobago, the scarlet ibis, and each evening around sunset the skies fill with shades of red feathery birds flying around. It is quite a sight when seen along with the wild flamingos in the area.

Along with several of the other Shell spouses/partners we toured the Angostura Rum Distillery, home of the almost 200-year-old famous bitters!

To find that gorgeous, turquoise blue water and those beautiful long stretches of sandy beach you need to visit the other half of the country, the Island of Tobago. It is more touristy than its sister with a more laid-back atmosphere.



One afternoon whilst there, we were very lucky enough to see a massive leather back turtle laying her eggs on the beach, usually this happens under cover of darkness.

Another major 'happening', is Carnival. It seems as if the country comes to a standstill with all the festivities with everyone 'liming' (Trinidad word for hanging out). There are loads of events for all ages including of course music, even Shell has its own steel pan group called The Invaders. All employees are given the opportunity to see them perform during the carnival season.



Despite my efforts to prepare for our move to Trinidad, the reality was still challenging in ways I had not foreseen. ([Back to main article](#))

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW!

There were aspects of living in Trinidad that we did not anticipate such as getting our driving licenses'. The current security advise is not to use public transport which makes a car and the ability to drive essential. Getting the license though was not straightforward!

A change in legislation meant that in addition to the written test, everyone is required to take the practical road examination.

My husband David, a driver of 31 years, failed the first practical. It took 5 appointments until we passed. Our story was not uncommon amongst our colleagues. We needed patience and to keep playing along and I admit our understanding of official hand signals and their application in road use has greatly improved and most importantly we are now both licensed to drive on the Island, which contributes to a sense of freedom as well as safety!

Whilst the patience required to resolve such issues is an attitude that can and must be cultivated if you are to really be comfortable in Trinidad, there was one area of Island living that I really wish I had had a more realistic understanding of before we arrived; this concerns the schooling of our two daughters who were in their 9th and 7th grades when we moved in October of 2017.

*"I never imagined that the adventure
would be without my daughters"*

On paper, (via google and the school website) it looked as if schooling would not be an issue, there was an International school, they had places for our daughters, they award an American high school diploma, combined these facts suggested the girls could continue their education where they left off in Houston. There was nothing on our radar that suggested this would be an issue. Even colleagues who had children the same age as our youngest didn't hint at any significant issues.

During the first week at their new school, it became clear that the transition would not be smooth. In discussion with my eldest daughter we estimated that academically the syllabus she was being offered was behind that of the school in Texas.

Like many parents we place a high value upon education, as a family we were all concerned about the impact this would have on our daughters' future education, it was perhaps the one time where patience did not seem the ideal response.

We talked with colleagues, and with the school counsellor; an option which we had not considered, but one that is a common choice for many expatriates to Trinidad was to send the girls to boarding school back in the US.

Our family motto is, "seize the moments"

This wasn't something that had crossed our minds when making the decision to come on this assignment; during those first thoughts I had of a tropical paradise, I never imagined that the adventure would be without my daughters.

My eldest daughter chose to return to the US. My youngest will do another year of schooling in Trinidad before joining her sister to begin high school. We are the third Shell family here in three years to leave for boarding school after attempting a year of the higher-grade levels. It is still early

days so it's difficult to know how this will affect our family, in the circumstances we felt it was the best decision we could make.

Our family motto is, "seize the moments" and we fully live this statement. Despite the hurdles we encountered, we found we can still experience and enjoy new adventures and new cultures. I share this story to help others make the best decision for them....

There is now a newly opened Outpost for Trinidad and Tobago, which means families and employees considering coming here can get the information we missed.

Key Safety Tips

All crime is a problem in Trinidad. You need to make yourself more aware of your surrounds and the measures you should take to minimise your risk. Shell Trinidad produces a comprehensive list of measures, below are some of the practices we follow.

At Home:

- Be vigilant when returning home, especially after dark.
- Windows and doors should be fitted with secure locks and bars.
- Colour code all house keys for ease of identification. (Shell policy: every door has a different key resulting in several keys for the house)
- Hold your keys in your hand ready to enter your home.
- Ensure the contract with the security firm is in place at the beginning of your residency.
- Complete the travel tracker to ensure you have working mobile numbers to connect with staff.
- Set your alarm always when at home or away.

Out and About

- Stay vigilant, look around when in public.
- Know who is behind you and around you.
- Take your mobile phone, ensure you have the security contact on speed dial.
- Reverse parking is recommended at all car parks.
- Lock your vehicle doors when you enter your car.
- Trust your gut instinct!

