

B. On the Trail

- **Effectively navigate** the trail in a manner to “stay found” (leave markings, blazing etc.)
- **When hiking in groups** there must be a minimum of two (2) Hike Leaders per group. Each group should be self-supportive with safety equipment (*See Essential Equipment and Supplies for Hike Leaders*) and Hike Leaders should keep sight or contact with each other.
- **There should always be a lead hike leader** and a tail hike leader whose job it is to guide the hikers through and to ensure that no one is left behind. If the hike is broken into groups for management purposes, each hiking group should be led by a Hike Leader and a Hike Leader brings up the rear of the group.
- **Maintain radio contact** with other groups.
- **Do not allow** hikers to walk alone or run on forest trails.
- **Educate hikers on flora and fauna** (as a means to establish trust from among hikers and to control the pace of the hike).
- **The lead Hike Leader(s) must be on the look-out for snakes.**
- **Block off-trails with freshly cut bush.**
- **On wet hikes**, check water depth and current speed before entering, and distribute life jackets where applicable.
- **Plan toilet trips and rest stops.**

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- **If you do get misplaced**, it is important not to panic.
 - **Try communicating** with your emergency contact. (*See Emergency Response Protocol*)
 - **Sit**, think about and discuss your next move among your Hike Leaders.
 - **Try to retrace your steps** to where you think you went off the trail while looking for markers. Blaze trees (back and front) to mark your trek and for ease in retracing your steps. Get to high ground and try to identify some landmarks. Once it is determined that you are unable to safely make it back before dark, a decision should be taken during daylight hours, to spend the night. It is safer to spend the night as comfortable as you can than to proceed in the night risking exhaustion and injury. If someone knows you are overdue, help will come.
 - **If you have to spend the night** you should do the following: clear an area, build a shelter, start a fire, prepare a meal, post sentry, get some rest.
 - **Ensure hikers take all litter** with them during and after the hike in order to maintain the natural integrity of the existing landscape.
- ### Hiking Etiquette
- Sometimes the action of hikers may come into conflict with other users of the land. Hiking etiquette has developed to minimize such interference. Common hiking etiquette includes:
- ✔ When two groups of hikers meet on a steep trail, a custom has developed in some areas whereby the group moving uphill has the right-of-way.
 - ✔ Hikers generally avoid making loud sounds, such as shouting or loud conversation, playing music, or the use of mobile phones. However, hikers make noise as a safety precaution through the use of whistles or bells.
 - ✔ The feeding of wild animals is dangerous and can cause harm to both the animals and to other people.
 - ✔ Offer assistance to other hikers on the trail as needed. As members of a hiking fraternity, hikers will respond to distress calls and in emergency situations.
 - ✔ Hikers tend to avoid impacting on the land through which they travel. Hikers can avoid impact by staying on established trails, not picking plants, or disturbing wildlife, and carrying garbage out. The Leave No Trace movement offers a set of guidelines for low-impact hiking: “Leaving nothing but footprints. Take nothing but photos. Kill nothing but time. Keep nothing but memories.”

D. Water Hikes (River/Beach)

In addition to following the general planning procedures above, the following should be noted:

- **Safety Equipment** – Rope, Life-saving floatation device, life jackets, whistle, first-aid kit, waterproof light.
- **Before embarking on a water hike**, hike leaders are advised to check weather advisories for unusual weather, flood conditions and heavy tides.
- **A Hike Leader first checks the water** for depth, debris, logs, rocks, and then ropes and other safety arrangements are put in place before hikers are allowed to enter.
- **If unsafe** flood conditions or rough seas are experienced, do not enter the water. Set back and observe from a safe distance.
- **Never attempt** to cross swollen rivers. Avoid turbulent seas.
- **Life jackets** must be worn by everyone (swimmers and non-swimmers).
- **A life-saving device** should be placed in or near water’s edge for a quick response.
- **Hike Leaders should be strategically placed to observe and respond to any emergencies.**
- **Ropes** may be extended across water bodies/pools and fastened at both ends to facilitate group control.
- **Rope coils** must be loosened to avoid tangles when thrown in cases of emergency.
- **Diving** head first is prohibited. Jumping is allowed only on instructions from the Hike Leader.

E. Post Hike

- **Do a return head-count.** Report your return to the local police station.
- **Conduct a post-hike briefing** with hike leaders (SWOT Analysis).

GUIDELINES TO CONDUCT / PLAN A HIKE

Hiking is done year-long in Trinidad and Tobago during both wet and dry seasons.



173 BELMONT CIRCULAR ROAD, BELMONT, PORT OF SPAIN,
TRINIDAD. W.I.

681-8079 | 678-1484 | 624-1132

hikingassociationtt@gmail.com

HATT-Hiking Association of Trinidad and Tobago



There are no restrictions

to walking on the roads and trails
except where they pass through
private property when permission
must first be obtained.

1. Risk Assessment

Hiking is an outdoor adventure
with some inherent risk.

The risk can be managed and reduced to an acceptable level if proper training and safety precautions are observed and the natural environment is treated with the respect it deserves. The relevant insurance coverage and liability waivers are also other mechanisms that can be used to manage the liability risks associated with hiking. It is important to identify and assess the risks when planning a hike.

(See Guidelines for Conducting a Hiking Risk Assessment)

2. Hike Ratings

Always assess and
determine the rating of the
hike you are conducting.

The hike rating should be communicated to all participating hikers prior to registration and at the time of registration.

The topography of a hiking trail (gradient of the terrain) will dictate your pace and stride. Walking uphill puts pressure on the legs and will require taking shorter steps while walking downhill could be more difficult because of the constant pressure on your joints. However walking downhill is less tedious.

Walking in the dark is not recommended unless properly planned for. Remember it gets dark in the forest early between the months of October and January when daylight hours are shorter.

Risks to manage / mitigate

- Slips, trips, falls
- Fatigue, cramps, allergies
- Heat stress (hyperthermia), hypothermia
- Fainting brought on by heat and fatigue
- Blisters, cuts, fractures, sprains
- Poisonous snakes, scorpions, centipedes
- Wild animals
- Bee stings, insect bites, bush irritants, pricks
- Poisonous plants and fruits

**Symptoms include feeling cold and tired, lack of muscular co-ordination, slurred speech, blurred vision, irrational behaviour.*

Other Risks include:

- Uneven surfaces / steep or slippery slopes
- Lost / misplaced hiker / left alone on trail
- Blocked trail / lost trail / landslides
- Changed weather conditions / swollen river
- Slow hiker / late return / night hike
- Trap guns / illegal activity / bandits
- Symptoms of exhaustion*
- Crossing rivers
- Persons who cannot swim / drowning

CONSIDER HIKEING TIME, TERRAIN, OBSTACLES OR SPECIAL FEATURES, RIVER CROSSINGS ETC.

Hike Rating Guide:

Easy (E): Up to 4 miles round trip and less than 800ft elevation gain;

Moderate (M): Up to 10 miles round trip and 800ft to 1200ft elevation gain;

Challenging (C): Up to 12 miles round trip and 1200ft to 2500ft elevation gain;

Difficult (D): Over 12 miles round trip and more than 2500ft elevation gain.

3. Planning Ahead

All hikes, no matter how short or the rating, require planning.

At the beginning of each hike, hikers shall be informed of the rating of the hike and all details with regard to the physical requirements of the trail. This will save you inconvenience and discomfort. Unless you intend to camp, you should aim to return before dark.

Planning Essentials:

- **Knowledge of Trail:** Inquire from authorities if the area is safe. Get information on the hike terrain, destination capacity, any special feature. A community contact should be established prior to the date of the hike. Register with the local police station.
- **Determine** where possible that the intended trail is suitable for passage. Also be familiar with any alternative routes.
- **Scout** the trail to confirm suitability (cut and mark trail if necessary), look for suitable parking for vehicles and make community contact prior to the date of the hike.
- **Designate a 'leader'** and a 'tail man' from among your Hike Leaders. For every 10 to 12 hikers there should be one (1) Hike Leader. Leaders should be easily identifiable with uniquely coloured/printed t-shirts (*preferably colours with high visibility*).
- **Ensure** that all equipment to be used on the hike is packed and in good working condition. (*Follow Ten Essentials Plus*)

4. Hike Procedure

A. Assembly Point Briefing

- **Verify** that all participating persons are registered to hike (personal details and emergency contact) and confirm that they know the intended destination and the hike rating.
- **Conduct a hike briefing** with hikers before the start of any hike giving guidelines and special instructions. Physically check the group for any signs of potential trouble, e.g. obesity, poor footwear, hand bags, jewellery, no or inadequate hiking supplies etc.
- **Ask** about medical and/or special physical disabilities.
- **Minimum group size** for any hike is 3 hikers (including scouts).

- **Check** weather reports when venturing into rivers especially in the rainy season. Be vigilant and be prepared for unexpected flood conditions. Do not be afraid to turn back.
- **Plan** an alternate route (*This is especially important for river hikes*).
- **Let someone know** where the group is going and expected time of return or check in at the nearest police station, indicate number of persons and names of hikers. (*Emergency Preparedness/Police notification*)
- **Please provide the following information to the nearest police station:**
 - Name of the club
 - Hiking destination
 - Number of hikers and each of their names and an emergency contact for each hiker
 - Names of all Hike Leaders and telephone numbers.
- **Children under the age of five (5) years** should be allowed on any hike rated Moderate (M) and lower. No babes in arms/harness should be allowed on any hike.
- **No pets should be allowed on the hike**, since they could be disruptive and have a negative impact especially around other animals.
- **Designated family hikes must be rated and specially planned** to accommodate children for efficient management, and maximum enjoyment.

- **Inform** hikers about the expected conditions on the intended route, the terrain and any special features or risk areas requiring special attention. Describe hike destination and hiking procedure.
- **Identify** possible safety issues and mitigation measures. (*Identify any potential emergency situations*).
- **Introduce** Hike Leaders and invite questions from the group.
- **Identify the lead Hike Leader and a tail Hike Leader.** For every 10 to 12 hikers there should be one (1) Hike Leader (*This Ratio could change depending on level of difficulty*). Alternatively, hikers can be placed into separate groups while maintaining Hike Leader to hiker ratio.
- **Do a head-count at the start of the hike.** Ensure all hikers are accounted for periodically and at the end of the hike.
- **Plan rest stops** and give an estimated return time.