# Taboga Island Facts & Trivia

#### Learn more about this unique island...

- -Taboga Island is about 50 minutes or 12 miles away by boat from Panama City. Taboga is volcanic in origin and its coastal perimeter is about 8 miles long. The population of Taboga Island is approximately 1000 people.
- -Taboga was a favored site for vacation homes of a number of Panamanian governors and presidents, as well as pirates and conquistadors.



## **Pineapples & Pearls**

- -Taboga pineapples were said to have been first planted by Father Luque in the 1500's. They thrived well and were known for their sweetness. It is believed that Taboga Pineapples were exported to Hawaii. Due to the long and labor intense period from growth to harvest, not many are raised on the island anymore.
- -In the 1500's pearls were noticed to be in abundance by Governor de Avila who established a controlled pearl fishery on Taboga and Taboguilla Islands. Years later it was written that pearl oysters were still abundant and being dived for by African slaves. The fishery was strictly controlled and the divers had to find a fixed number of quality pearls a day. There is no longer a pearl fishery as they were overfished and are now considered rare.

## **History**

- -Indian gold is rumored to be buried on Morro Island, possibly in an old burial ground, and pirate gold in the caves and hidden spots in the mountains.
- -In the mid 1800's The Pacific Steam Ship Company was located on El Morro in front of Taboga Island. They had a fleet of 12 vessels and used Taboga to establish their mail and trade services between Chile and Taboga. From time to time there were from 100 to 700 workers employed, mainly from Scotland. They built and repaired passing ships, supplied water, storage facilities and operated a coal mill. They built warehouses for coal, oil, paint and metals. The coal stores, with up to 3000 tons, were conveyed to ships at the pier end on tracks by railway car. On the mainland the new Panama Railroad spelled the end of this prosperity. Rates were raised by the railroad and disagreements prompted the Pacific Steamship Company to move their base to the Peruvian port, Callao.
- -During gold fever in California, an English company set up a sawmill on Taboga to repair ships in transit to the US west coast.
- -La Restinga was the area where the largest hotel was built which later became Hotel Taboga. It was demolished in 2006.

-Aspinwall was a sanatorium built in 1885 by Universal Interoceanic Canal Company on Taboga Island for employees to rest and recuperate after falling ill while working on the French Panama Canal. Canal construction was first attempted by Frenchman, Ferdinand de Lesseps. Many workers contracted malaria, yellow fever and other diseases. It later became a hotel until it was demolished in 1945.

## **Military and Aviation**

-WWII: In the 1940's the US Navy who had a training base on Taboga, used the broad hill just under the Spanish Cross for their artillery practice. The military built bunkers, installed searchlights and anti-aircraft guns on top of the hills. The guns on Taboga and El Morro were used to increase the security of the Panama Canal which was considered at risk.

The last of the US Navy left Taboga in 1960, but the bunkers can still be seen. Taboga is still visited by retired US Navy servicemen every year, often with their families, who recall their special days on this peaceful Pacific island.

- -Taboga Island was the site of a German internment camp in 1917. The prisoners were later moved to New York under great protest.
- -Taboga was at the center of attempted Japanese espionage when Yoshitaro Amana, leader of a Japanese spy ring, planned to set up a business on Taboga so that the Japanese could study ships passing through the Panama Canal. He was exposed and deported to Japan.
- -Nearby where the old military bunkers were located at the top of the mountain (called the Watchtower) is a modern aviation tower which guides international flights to the Panama airports.

#### Religion

- -The first saint of the Western World, Santa Rosa de Lima was born on the island of Taboga and later moved to Peru. Her parents lived in a small house on the beach near Playa Honda. She was known for her kindness, and her fame spread; many of the suffering came to her for comfort and guidance.
- -The church of San Pedro on Taboga Island is said to be the second oldest in the western hemisphere.

#### Culture

-Paul Gauguin and painter Charles Laval came to Panama in 1887, running short of money they went to work on the French Canal. Gauguin lived on Taboga twice before departing for Martinique. Poets, painters, musicians, filmmakers and photographers still visit Taboga to this day because of its enchanting and endless inspiration.

#### **Nature**

- -The name Taboga came from an Indian word, Haboga, which is a type of fish found in Panama Bay.
- -Taboga is one of the world's largest refuges for the brown pelican, where each year between one third to one half of the world population between 35,000 and 100,000 nest on Taboga and Uraba Islands. May is the height of nesting season, but pelicans can be seen year round. Other seabirds seek refuge on Taboga including cormorants, boobies and frigate birds. Hawks, falcons and vultures plus a variety of smaller songbirds and hummingbirds can also be seen.

- -Humpback or Sei whales can be spotted in season on migration to and from their feeding zones, and all year round dolphins can be sighted.
- -Iguanas and their eggs were a favorite food of the island and are sometimes still illegally hunted today, though it is illegal. Hunters can sometimes early in the morning be spotted sneaking into the forested mountains with their rifles, machetes and dogs.
- -Although now sightings are rare, sea turtles can still be seen laying their eggs on the shores of Taboga on some of the hidden coves.
- -Taboga is home to a particular species of tiny green tree frog which is only found on the island. It morphed from the mainland frog and has a pattern which is slightly different.
- -Taboga Island has no large animals. To name a few of the smaller residents which can still be sighted: the Tamandua Anteater, 2 Toed Sloth, Nyecke (looks like a small rabbit or hedgehog), numerous butterflies, birds, purple land crabs, iguanas, and green dart frogs.

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