

Introduction to SFS Site and Students

Where is The School for Field Studies (SFS) Marine Resource Center located?

The SFS research site is located on South Caicos Island. South Caicos Island is one of the Turks and Caicos Islands. These islands are located in the West Indies, a series of island chains that separate the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean Sea. South Caicos is about 600 miles southeast of Miami, Florida and about 890 miles northwest of Puerto Rico.

What is the geology of South Caicos Island?

The island is located on the southeastern edge of the Caicos Bank, a flat-topped undersea mountain. Over the bank the ocean is only 10 to 12 feet deep. But at the bank's edge, the depth drops off quickly to more than 6,000 feet. The island itself is about 2 miles wide and 5 miles long.

How's the weather?

The climate in South Caicos is hot and dry. The temperature is usually in the 80's. Hurricanes are frequent during the wet season from October through January, but it only rains an average of 28 inches per year.

What is the history of South Caicos?

The original inhabitants of the Turks and Caicos Islands may have been there when Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon visited in 1512, though they were gone from

these islands by 1550. In the mid-1600s, Bermudans began to develop the island's salt industry. After the American Revolution, British loyalists emigrated to the island and tried to farm cotton, but this was unsuccessful due largely to the shortage of water.

When farming was abandoned, the island focused on salt production. Salinas, or sea water evaporation ponds, were developed in the center of the island and salt became the main industry. After World War II, competition from other salt producers began to affect the Turks and Caicos salt industry. In 1964, salt production stopped on South Caicos. Today, small scale fishing is the main industry. Conch and spiny lobster are the chief exports.

What is the government of South Caicos?

The island has been under the British flag for most of the past 400 years. Today the Turks and Caicos are a British Dependent Territory. The island language is English. The local currency is the U.S. dollar.

What is life like on South Caicos?

Almost everyone on South Caicos lives in the town of Cockburn Harbor. The population is about 800 to 1,000. Most of the islanders are of black African or mixed descent.

The School for Field Studies Handbook for student researchers gives this description of island life:

“The number of cars and trucks on the island is growing, but many people still get around by foot. Donkeys, cows, chickens, and pigs roam loose. Many locals carry their household water daily from a municipal supply. Telephone service is good but expensive. Basketball and soccer are the most popular local sports. There are a number of small stores, restaurants and 7 churches.”

Everything is imported by air or sea, and most items are subject to a 30% duty. Prices, therefore, average nearly 200% of mainland U.S. rates. Many things we take for granted are not available locally and can only be imported with two weeks notice.

**Who are the student researchers?
What are they doing while living on South Caicos Island?**

The student researchers are college students selected by The School for Field Studies who have come to South Caicos to learn about marine life and get involved in a real research project. They take courses, write papers and work with scientists to collect data about the waters and reef surrounding South Caicos. Working with the people of the island, the students use their research results to develop programs that help protect the island and surrounding waters.

Where will the SFS students live and what will they do each day?

The SFS students live in dormitory rooms at the Center for Marine Resource Studies, in Cockburn Harbor, South Caicos. It is not luxury living. Students help cook their own food—with only one choice at each meal and no snacks, unless they bring their own. The Center's only source of freshwater is captured rain water, so water conservation is an essential part of life. Only one quick cold-water shower a day is allowed. There are no washing machines. Laundry is washed in saltwater by hand with a quick freshwater rinse.

Students are expected to be physically fit and are busy from morning to night. A typical schedule is:

- 0730. Breakfast
- 0830 to 1200 . Lectures
- 1200. Lunch
- 1300. Field work, generally including scuba diving or snorkeling
- 1830. Dinner
- 2000. Research workshop or lecture