

# Trinidad and Tobago

By Tom Kirvan

## THE RHYTHM OF THE CARIBBEAN RESONATES

Situated just off the northeastern coast of South America, Trinidad is the larger of the two main islands that make up the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Known for its vibrant culture, diverse population, and rich biodiversity, Trinidad offers travelers a dynamic blend of natural beauty and cultural energy. With a population of approximately 1.3 million across both islands, most of whom live on Trinidad, this Caribbean nation has long been a crossroads of indigenous heritage, colonial legacy, and contemporary Caribbean life.

Trinidad lies just seven miles off the coast of Venezuela and is the southernmost island in the Caribbean. Unlike the region's more volcanic islands, Trinidad is geologically part of the South American continental shelf. This gives it a unique landscape of rolling plains, mangrove swamps, rainforest-covered hills, and offshore wetlands teeming with wildlife.

The capital city, Port of Spain, is located on the northwest coast of the island. It's a bustling metropolis and cultural hub, known for its colonial architecture, lively street life, and as the home of Carnival, the island's most famous celebration. From the business district to the vibrant art galleries, Port of Spain is the political and creative heart of Trinidad.

Trinidad's highest point is El Cerro del Aripo, standing at 3,084 feet above sea level. Located in the Northern Range, the peak is surrounded by dense tropical rainforest and is part of the Aripo Savannas and Heights – a region rich in endemic flora and fauna. The area is a favorite among eco-tourists, bird watchers, and hikers seeking adventure and seclusion in one of Trinidad's most pristine natural settings.

Trinidad's history is as complex and colorful as its culture. Originally inhabited by the Arawak and Carib peoples, the island was colonized by the Spanish in the 15th century, later changing hands to the British in 1797. The island's sugar and cocoa plantations relied heavily on enslaved Africans until slavery was abolished in 1834, after which indentured laborers from India were brought in – leaving a lasting mark on the island's culture, cuisine, and religion.

The population today reflects this diversity, with Afro-Trinidadian, Indo-Trinidadian, European, Chinese, and Middle Eastern communities contributing to the country's unique cultural mosaic. This fusion is especially evident during Carnival, a pre-Lenten festival marked by colorful costumes, soca and calypso music, and high-energy dancing in the streets.



## Fast Facts

Capitals: Port of Spain (Trinidad) and  
Scarborough (Tobago)

Population: 1.3 million

Economic engines: Oil and gas production,  
agriculture, and tourism

Highest Point: El Cerro del Aripo (3,084 feet)

### Primerus Member: Martin George & Company

Martin George & Company, a full-service law  
firm with offices in Port of Spain and Bacolet.



# Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad gained full independence from Britain in 1962 and became a republic in 1976. Today, it is one of the Caribbean's most industrialized nations, buoyed by rich reserves of oil and natural gas, but remains deeply connected to its cultural traditions.

## Five Must-See Destinations

- **Maracas Beach:** No trip to Trinidad is complete without a visit to Maracas Beach, the island's most popular and accessible stretch of sand. Nestled between the green hills of the Northern Range and the turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea, Maracas is famous not just for its beauty but also for its legendary street food – especially the “bake and shark” sandwich, a local favorite.
- **Caroni Bird Sanctuary:** Located in the Caroni Swamp, this protected wetland is a haven for birdlife and a must-see for nature lovers. The sanctuary is best known for the stunning evening roosting of the scarlet ibis, Trinidad's national bird. Guided boat tours glide through mangrove-lined channels, offering a front-row seat to one of the Caribbean's most mesmerizing wildlife displays.
- **Queen's Park Savannah & The Magnificent Seven (Port of Spain):** This massive open green space in the center of Port of Spain is more than just a park – it's a cultural and social hub. On its western edge stand the Magnificent Seven, a row of flamboyant colonial-era mansions showcasing Gothic, Moorish, and French architectural styles. Across the street, food vendors sell everything from coconut water to roti, making it a perfect stop for sightseeing and sampling local flavors.
- **Pitch Lake:** Located in La Brea, Pitch Lake is the largest natural deposit of asphalt in the world. This surreal, sticky landscape has intrigued visitors for centuries – including explorer Sir Walter Raleigh in the 16th century. Guided tours allow you to walk on the semi-solid surface and learn about its scientific, historical, and economic significance.
- **Asa Wright Nature Centre:** Situated in the lush Arima Valley, this former cocoa and coffee estate has been transformed into one of the most renowned birdwatching spots in the world. More than 160 species of birds have been recorded here, including hummingbirds, toucans, and motmots. Trails wind through the rainforest, offering immersive access to Trinidad's vibrant ecosystem.

Nestled in the southeastern Caribbean Sea, Tobago is the smaller and more serene of the two islands that form the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. With a population of around 60,000 people, Tobago offers a peaceful alternative to its bustling sister island, blending laid-back island vibes with vibrant culture, lush landscapes, and rich history. It's a place where rainforests meet coral reefs, and steelpan rhythms float on the sea breeze.

Tobago lies northeast of Trinidad, separated by about 20 miles of sea. At just 116 square miles, the island may be small, but its geography is diverse and breathtaking. Tobago boasts pristine beaches, rolling hills, protected rainforest, and coral reefs teeming with marine life. Its relatively undeveloped terrain makes it a paradise for eco-tourists and nature lovers.

The capital city of Tobago is Scarborough, located on the southwestern coast. While small in size, Scarborough is the island's main commercial and administrative center. It features bustling markets, colonial-era architecture, and panoramic views from Fort King George, a restored 18th-century fort overlooking the harbor.

Tobago has one of the most contested colonial histories in the Caribbean. Between the 1600s and 1800s, it changed hands more than 30 times among European powers – including the Dutch, French, British, and Spanish. This turbulent history has left behind forts, place names, and cultural influences from across Europe.

Unlike Trinidad, Tobago was primarily an agricultural colony and relied heavily on enslaved African labor to work its sugar and cotton plantations. After emancipation in 1834, many formerly enslaved people settled in rural villages and maintained cultural traditions that remain strong today.

In 1889, Tobago was politically united with Trinidad, and in 1962, the nation gained independence from Britain. Tobago has retained a distinct identity, with its own local government and a strong sense of community rooted in tradition, storytelling, and celebration.