

# Trinidad & Tobago

It's Carnival in Port of Spain. Soca music throbs in the streets, and a woman furrows her brow, shaking and gyrating as the beads on her bikini seem close to flying off. She is Trinidad and Tobago. An East Indian couple serves pungent curried doubles at lightning speed on the street corner, fishermen plunk their catch on splintering docks as the new morning spreads over an azure ocean, an oil-industry businessman walks from crumbling streets into a modern air-conditioned building where he navigates the global economy for his nation, and a crazy-haired steel-pan player lays into an oil drum reaching a seventh-level of ecstasy – they are all Trinidad and Tobago.

National pride, a sordid history of slavery and indenture, and the love of music and limin' unite the myriad colors, ethnicities and cultures that make up the dual-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Dive in. Feel the rhythm of the islands and the people who love to see you dance. All the while, experience beaches so mesmerizing you'll forget your name, first-class diving through coral wonderlands, a Carnival to end all Carnivals, and luxuriant rainforests prime for bird-watching, hiking, and cycling.

But don't expect anyone to hold your hand. The oil and gas industry leaves tourism low down on the priority list. Upscale resorts and hotels are out there, and more so on Tobago, but generally you jump in the mix and accept the services that facilitate a sun-drenched ball, whether it be peaceful, sand-filled, rollicking, or all of the above.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 5128 sq km
- **Capital** Port of Spain, Trinidad
- **Country code** ☎ 868
- **Departure tax** TT\$100
- **Famous for** Carnival, calypso, soca, steel-pan music
- **Language** English, Hindi, Creole, Spanish
- **Money** Trinidad and Tobago dollar (TT\$); TT\$10 = US\$1.60 = €1.03 = UK£0.29
- **Official name** Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies
- **Phrase** You limin' tonight? (Are you hanging out tonight?)
- **People** Trinidadian or Tobagonian (formal); Trini, Bago'mon or Trinbagonian (colloquial)
- **Population** 1.3 million
- **Visa** Not necessary for US, UK, Canadian and most EU citizens; others see p773



## HIGHLIGHTS

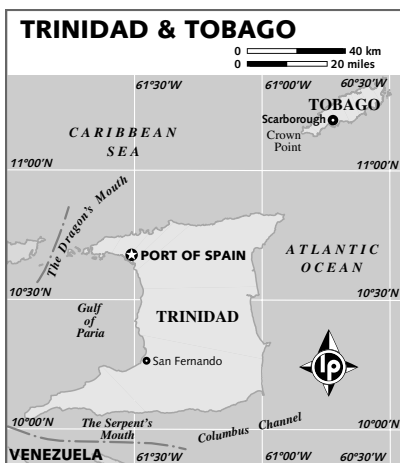
- **Port of Spain's Carnival** (p738) Wine and grine in Trinidad's bustling big city, which grooves to a permanent beat during the world's hottest Carnival
- **Bird-Watching** (p747) Spot hundreds of Trinidad's bird species at Asa Wright Nature Centre, or the scarlet ibis at Caroni Bird Sanctuary and sea birds galore on Little Tobago
- **Diving** (p758) Explore underwater canyons and shallow coral gardens in Tobago's crystal-clear waters
- **Northern Range** (p747) Hike or cycle in Trinidad's coastal mountain range, which boasts waterfalls, wildlife and ruggedly gorgeous coastline
- **Music** (p744) Savor the islands' music – whether it's soca, calypso, steel pan, or parang, it is inextricably woven into this culture that sings on the sidewalk

## ITINERARIES

- **Limin'** On Friday night, hit the St James nightlife in Port of Spain, then dance at Zen. On Saturday eat shark and bake on Maracas Bay and chill out on the beach till the DJ comes out at night. Take the ferry to Tobago on Sunday and stay in Buccoo, just in time for Sunday School. Hole up for the rest of the week in a guesthouse in Charlotteville, eating yummy local food, drinking Carib and taking in the rays on Pirate's Bay.
- **Outdoor Adventure** Mountain bike around rainforest-enveloped military relics in Chaguaramas, Trinidad. See the Nariva Swamp by kayak. Base in Grande Rivière for day hiking, turtle-watching and surfing. Cycle Toco to Matelot. In Brasso Seco, begin your two- to three-day coastal rainforest backpack to Blanchisseuse. In Tobago, explore the Forest Reserve. On Pigeon Point, learn to windsurf. Mountain bike to Highland Falls. Then, in Charlottesville, spend several days tramping in the 'bush' and sea kayaking.

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Because of Trinidad's southerly location, temperatures are equable year-round. Its average daily temperature is 27°C (80°F). For temperatures in Port of Spain, see the climate chart on p821. Average humidity hovers around 75%.



The only real seasons in Trinidad and Tobago are the rainy season (June to November) and the dry season (December to May). The high season is January to March, with a noticeable peak in February when Carnival draws hordes of visitors and the cost of hotel rooms skyrockets. Booking ahead is essential at this time.

Accommodations are cheaper and crowds almost nonexistent in the shoulder seasons – October to December and April to June – though you should do a little dance to ingratiate the rain lords.

Sitting outside the hurricane belt, the islands generally don't experience the severe storms like northerly islands.

## HISTORY

### Early History

Caribs and Arawaks lived alone on Trinidad until 1498, when Columbus arrived and christened the island La Isla de la Trinidad, for the Holy Trinity.

The Spanish who followed in Columbus' wake enslaved many of Trinidad's Native American inhabitants, stealing them to toil in the new South American colonies. Gold-hungry Spain gave only scant attention to Trinidad's land, which lacked precious minerals. Finally in 1592, the Spanish established their first settlement, San Josef, just east of present-day Port of Spain. Over the next two centuries the Spanish and French imported slaves from West Africa to cultivate tobacco and cacao plantations.

British forces took the island from the Spanish in 1797. With the abolishment of slavery in 1834, slaves abandoned plantations; this prompted the British to import thousands of indentured workers, mostly from India, to work in the cane fields and service the colony. The indentured labor system remained in place for over 100 years.

Tobago's early history is a separate story. Also sighted by Columbus and claimed by Spain, Tobago wasn't colonized until 1628, when Charles I of England decided to charter the island to the Earl of Pembroke. In response, a handful of nations took an immediate interest in colonizing Tobago.

During the 17th century Tobago changed hands numerous times as the English, French, Dutch and even Courlanders (present-day Latvians) wrestled for control. In 1704 it was declared a neutral territory, which left room for pirates to use the island as a base for raiding ships in the Caribbean. The British established a colonial administration in 1763, and within two decades slave labor established the island's sugar, cotton and indigo plantations.

Tobago's plantation economy wilted after the abolition of slavery but sugar and rum production continued until 1884, when the London firm that controlled finances for the island's plantations went bankrupt. Plantation owners quickly sold or abandoned their land, leaving the economy in a shambles.

## A Free Colony

In 1889 Tobago joined Trinidad as a British Crown Colony. Even though Trinidad and Tobago's demand for greater autonomy grew and anticolonial sentiment ripened, the British didn't pay attention until 1956, when the People's National Movement (PNM), led by Oxford-educated Dr Eric Williams, took measures to institute self-government. The country became a republic of the Commonwealth in 1976.

Frustration with the leftover colonial structure led to the 'Black Power' movement, which created a political crisis and an army mutiny, but ultimately strengthened national identity. Bankrupt and without prospects, the country's luck changed in 1970 with the discovery of oil, which brought instant wealth and prosperity. During the 1980s, when oil prices plummeted, a recession hit and political unrest ensued. Accusations of corruption and complaints from an underrepresented East Indian community led to the PNM's defeat in 1986 by the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR).

Corruption blossomed in a judicial system congested with drugs-related trials (the country is a stopover in the South American drug trade). In July 1990, members of a minority Muslim group attempted a coup, stormed parliament, and took 45 hostages, including Prime Minister ANR Robinson. Though the coup failed, it undermined the government, and the PNM returned to power.

Vast petroleum and natural gas reserves discovered in the late 1990s helped stabilize the economy. In 1995 Basdeo Panday of the United National Congress (UNC) beat the PNM's Patrick Manning in a controversial election, seating the first prime minister of Indian descent. A stalemated political process led Manning again to win the 2002 and 2007 elections for prime minister. The prime minister is the head of government, while the president (George Maxwell Richards) is the head of state.

Today, political parties are largely divided along ethnic lines, with the PNM being the predominant party of Afro-Trinidadians and the UNC representing the East Indian community. Local government is divided into three municipalities, eight counties and the island of Tobago. Tobago has its own legislative assembly and since 1987 has exercised an internal self-government to protect its interests.

### HOW MUCH?

- **Maxi taxi** TT\$3 to TT\$5
- **Diving certification** US\$375
- **Beach-chair rental** TT\$20
- **Bottle of Carib** TT\$9
- **Roti** TT\$12 to TT\$20

## THE CULTURE

Trinidadians and Tobagonians love to party and take every opportunity to shamelessly sing, dance and lime (hang out) whenever the whim hits. Official and unofficial celebrations are plentiful with lots of great food and rum. Most revolve around calypso (a popular Caribbean music developed from slave songs), its offspring soca (faster and very danceable)

or steel pan (music produced on oil drums), great food, and large amounts of rum. Like other Caribbean destinations, the pace is slow. Though their energy is bountiful, Trinis see rushing and stress as entirely unnecessary. Residents laugh easily and often, taking time to visit with one another and discuss everything from politics to the lyrics of the new soca tune dominating the airwaves.

Prime Minister Patrick Manning's plan to reach 'developed country' status by the year 2020 is an ambitious agenda, calling for dramatic reform of everything from education and employment to health care and poverty-reduction. Vision 2020's mission statement says:

By the year 2020, Trinidad and Tobago will be a united, resilient, productive, innovative and prosperous nation with a disciplined, caring, fun-loving society comprising healthy, happy and well-educated people...

It's a tall order. Over the past decade, Trinidad and Tobago has grown steadily every year, thanks especially to foreign investment and the oil and gas industry. But Vision 2020 demands more than economic growth and requires a total shift in mindset. It sounds idyllic in the prime minister's speeches, and many locals support the plan. However, others think it's an overzealous program that will entice foreign investment but ultimately deepen economic disparity. As politicians shake hands with CEOs over cocktails and garlic shrimp, 21% of Trinbagonians remain in poverty. Manning was re-elected in 2007, yet many people are unsatisfied with the progress of the administration, especially local environmentalists who have seen little change accompanying the prolific promises.

While business in the energy sector is booming, Trinidad and Tobago's government grapples with standard of living. Twenty-one percent of folks live in poverty, and many people live without easy access to potable water, adequate housing or quality health care. Working with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the government aims to halve poverty by 2015. There are government programs in place that pay the unemployed to do half-days of manual labor. You'll see young people loafing about in reflective gear doing 'road work.' Some say this 'easy money' isn't

helping the real problem and is even making it worse by keeping people slouched against government funding.

The average home in Trinidad and Tobago is a friendly place where stew is a-simmer and vibrant conversation fills the air. Traditional roles still dominate. Women cook, clean and take care of the kids. The inequality between women and men remains depressingly Stone Age. While women generally receive a higher level of education and fill about half the professional and management jobs, they earn about 50% less than men in equitable roles. In 2002, for example, professional women earned an average annual income of about US\$5500, while men at the same professional level earned US\$12,400.

Many men think it's natural for a man to 'stray' from a committed relationship, but they'd think it an unforgivable sin if a woman were to do the same. Things are slowly changing, however, as sassy Trinbagonian women gain more vital roles in government and demand better standards of treatment.

Of the country's 1.3 million inhabitants, just 54,000 live on Tobago. Trinidad has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the Caribbean, a legacy of its checkered colonial history. The majority is of East Indian (40.3%) and African (39.5%) descent. The remaining 20% of islanders are of mixed ancestry, but there are also notable minorities of European, Chinese, Syrian and Lebanese people. In addition, a community of a few hundred native Caribs lives in the Arima area.

Roughly a third of all islanders are Roman Catholic. Another 25% are Hindu, 11% are Anglican, 13% are other Protestant denominations and 6% are Muslim. Traditional African beliefs also remain strong in some areas, as does Rastafarianism.

## SPORTS Cricket

Introduced by the British in the 19th century, cricket isn't just a sport in Trinidad and Tobago, it's a cultural obsession. It's a necessity, like oxygen or rum. International cricket star Brian Lara – the 'Prince of Port of Spain' – hails from Trinidad and his popularity ranks up there with Jesus. When the West Indies team sweeps in for a test match, everything grinds to a halt as people stick to their TVs to capture the action.

The main venue is the Queen's Park Oval, home to the **Queen's Park Cricket Club** (☎ 622-4325; www.qpcc.com; 94 Tragarete Rd), a few blocks west of the Queen's Park Savannah in Port of Spain. The Oval, originally built in 1896, is the site of both regional and international matches and is one of eight Caribbean venues that hosted the 2007 ICC Cricket World Cup, holding 25,000 spectators and having the northern hills as a spectacular backdrop. Call the cricket club for ticket information.

## Soccer

Referred to as football in this British-influenced country, soccer is second only to cricket in the minds of spectators who cheer endlessly for the national team, the **Soca Warriors** (www.socawarriors.net). The team plays at the **Arima Municipal Stadium** (☎ 667-3508) in Arima and **Ato Boldon Stadium** (☎ 623-0304), a 30-minute drive south of Port of Spain in Couva. For information, contact **Trinidad & Tobago Football Federation** (☎ 623-7312; www.tffonline.com/cms).

## Cycling

Velodromes in Queen's Oval Port of Spain, Arima, and Skinner Park in San Fernando host cycling meets and sponsor road races. Tobago hosts two major cycling events: the Tobago Cycling Classic and the Beacon Cycling Series. For information on cycling events contact the **Trinidad & Tobago Cycling Federation** (☎ 624-0384). Also see the boxed texts, p749 and p764.

## ARTS

### Literature

Trinidad boasts a number of acclaimed writers, among them Samuel Selvon, Michael Antony, Earl Lovelace and CLR James. St Lucian native Derek Walcott, the 1992 Nobel Prize winner in literature, has lived on Trinidad for much of his adult life.

Trinidad's foremost literary figure is Vidiadhar Surajprasad (VS) Naipaul. Both praised for his artistic merit and harshly criticized for his unflattering portrayal of postcolonial societies, he has been coolly received in his native Trinidad, a country he has not inhabited for many years. VS' *A House for Mr Biswas* creates a vivid portrait of East Indian life on Trinidad. *Fireflies* and *Beyond the Dragon's Mouth* by Shiva Naipaul, VS Naipaul's younger brother, also adeptly depict Indian family life on Trinidad.

## Music

Stop for a moment on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago and listen. You'll likely hear the fast beat of soca playing on a maxi-taxi radio, or kids drumming on metal garbage cans, or a woman singing while walking home. Often festive, sometimes political or melancholy, music digs down deep to the core truth and emotion of island life.

Although Carnival happens in February, there's always plenty of great live music, especially in the months leading up to Carnival. Every day, music brings people together, regardless of age or race. In bars and outdoor venues, it's common to see young kids, teenagers and grandparents partying together.

### CALYPSO

A medium for political and social satire, calypso harkens back to the days when slaves – unable to chat when working – would sing in patois, sharing gossip and news while mocking their colonial masters. Mighty Sparrow, long acknowledged the king of calypso, has voiced popular concerns and social consciousness since the 1950s. Another famous calypsonian, David Rudder, helped revive the musical form in the mid-1980s by adding experimental rhythms, unearthing both the cultural importance and flexibility of calypso. Lord Kitchener (1922–2000) was an incredibly popular nationally and internationally famous calypsonian.

### SOCA

The energetic offspring of calypso, soca was born in the 1970s, and uses the same basic beat but speeds things up, creating danceable rhythms with risqué lyrics, pointed social commentary and verbal wordplay. Soca dominates the nightclub scene and rules the airwaves.

### STEEL PAN (STEEL BAND)

Rhythm and percussion are the beating heart behind Carnival. Traditionally, percussionists banged together bamboo cut in various lengths, or simply drummed on whatever they could – the road, sides of buildings, their knees. When African drums were banned during WWII, drummers turned to biscuit tins, then oil drums discarded by US troops. Today, drums come in a variety of sizes, each producing a unique note. Heard together, they become a cascading waterfall of sound. During Carnival, some bands are transported on flat-

bed trucks along the parade route. All bands aim to win Panorama, the national competition that runs throughout Carnival season.

### PARANG

Heard mostly at Christmas time, parang originated in Venezuela. Lyrics are sung in Spanish and accompanied by guitars and maracas. At first heard only in rural areas inhabited by Hispanic Trininis, parang has evolved into a nationwide phenomenon. At Christmastime, groups of parang carolers wander through neighborhoods, and appreciative audiences serve them food and booze.

### CHUTNEY

This up-tempo, rhythmic music is accompanied by the *dholak* (Northern India folk drum) and the *dhantal* (a metal rod played with a metal striker). Chutney songs celebrate social situations – everything from women witnessing a birth to men partying at a bar. It's a fusion of classical Hindu music with more contemporary sounds.

## ENVIRONMENT

### The Land

Geographically, boot-shaped Trinidad was once part of the South American mainland. Over time a channel developed, separating Trinidad from present-day Venezuela. The connection to South America is noticeable in Trinidad's Northern Range, a continuation of the Andes, and in its abundant oil and gas reserves, concentrated in southwestern Trinidad.

The Northern Range spreads east to west, forming a scenic backdrop to Port of Spain. The rest of the island is given to plains, undulating hills and mangrove swamps. Trinidad's numerous rivers include the 50km Ortoire River, and the 40km Caroni River dumping into the Caroni Swamp.

Tobago, 19km northeast of Trinidad, has a central mountain range that reaches almost 610m at its highest point. Deep, fertile valleys run from the ridge down toward the coast, which is niched with bays and beaches.

### Wildlife

Because of its proximity to the South American continent, Trinidad and Tobago has the widest variety of plant and wildlife in the Caribbean: 430 species of bird, 600

species of butterfly, 70 kinds of reptiles and 100 types of mammals, including red howler monkeys, anteaters, agouti and armadillos.

Plant life is equally diverse, with more than 700 orchid species and 1600 other types of flowering plants. Both islands have luxuriant rainforests, and Trinidad also features elfin forests, savannas and both freshwater and brackish mangrove swamps.

### Environmental Issues

Water pollution is a huge environmental concern on Trinidad and Tobago. Agricultural chemicals, industrial waste and raw sewage seep into groundwater and eventually the ocean. Reef damage is due mostly to pollution, as well as overuse.

Tourism strains the water supply, especially in Tobago, where resorts are plentiful and the freshwater supply limited. Be sure to conserve water. On Tobago, a resort filled with people taking extra-long showers can truly affect the freshwater supply.

Unsustainable development is rampant in this eco-destination. Deforestation and soil erosion are direct results. Sand erosion is a special concern on the northeast coast of Trinidad, where leatherback turtles lay eggs.

In Tobago, the health department 'fogs' mosquitoes with Malathion, which has serious negative impacts on other insects, snails, worms, crustaceans, fish, birds, toads and frogs, and reduces soil fertility. Get out of town for a while if they start to fog.

**Environmental Management Authority** (☎ 628-8042; [www.ema.co.tt](http://www.ema.co.tt)) is charged with monitoring environmental issues but, as in other developing countries, the pressure of 'progress' trumps preservation. **Environment Tobago** ([www.scoft.de/et](http://www.scoft.de/et)) is an informative source about issues facing the island.

### FOOD & DRINK

Trinidad and Tobago's food is a lovely fusion of Indian, Creole, Chinese and African. East Indian-influenced roti (curried meat or vegetables rolled up in flatbread) and buss up shut (like roti but the 'bust up shirt' is the flatbread used to scoop up the goodies) are hallmark lunches. 'Doubles,' a similar fast food, is curried chickpeas wrapped in mini-flatbreads. Another popular fast food is 'shark and bake,' a slab of fresh grilled or fried shark served in deep-fried bread – Maracas Bay is famous for it. Curried meats

and seafood are common, as is pelau (rice mixed with peas, meat and coconut). Coo coo and callaloo (okra-speckled polenta and coconut-infused greens) are sumptuous staples. Fried ripe plantains are a sinful favorite.

You'll find Creole and Chinese restaurants everywhere, and in the cities and bigger hotels you'll find more extensive international fare. East Indian and Seventh Day Adventists populations make vegetarian options prevalent. Soy milk is in most grocery stores.

A favorite of locals is KFC, with more locations per capita than anywhere in the world.

Tap water is safe to drink, when not drinking the Caribbean's premium beer, Carib, which hails from Trinidad. Another local beer, Stag, is promoted as 'a man's beer' for the slightly higher alcohol level.

The islands produce various rums. Though most touted are Royal Oak and Black Label, Puncheon is very popular and will knock you on your butt. Locally produced Hard Wine has a naughty infusion of herbs known to enhance virility. A variety of sweetened fresh-fruit juices are popular, such as sugar-cane and citrus juices, as well as a drink called *mauby* (made from the bark of the rhamnaceous tree, sweetened with sugar and spices) and milkshakes made with sea moss.

## TRINIDAD

Put the tourists of Trinidad in a room and you'll have an awkward party: on one side will be wallflower bird-watchers tangled in camera and binocular straps and on the other, the side with the bar, you'll have the party-hound Carnival fans turning up the music and tying their ties around their foreheads.

However, here's the secret: there's much more to Trinidad unseen through binoculars or beer goggles. Of course, the swamps and forests are a bird-watcher's dream, and Port of Spain's Carnival will blow your mind. Yet Trinidad is also laden with verdant hiking and biking trails that wind you to gushing waterfalls and deserted bays. The rural, untouristed northeast coast harbors rugged beaches of shocking beauty and a true taste of Trini life. In the southwest, you can par-

ticularly see how East Indian culture has fused with the other ethnicities of this island. Earthy curry fills the air and flamboyant temples come out of nowhere.

Trinidad tends to treat tourists in a blasé manner, sometimes like swatting a fly away and sometimes with an annoyed gesticulation to come closer, come closer. After all, the booming oil and gas industry is the real bread and butter. And maybe to you that's a boon. Genuine adventure, unfluffed by a traditional tourist industry, awaits you in Trinidad if you choose to accept.

### Orientation

Virtually the shape of a molar tooth sitting on its side, Trinidad is surrounded by four bodies of water – the Caribbean (north), Atlantic Ocean (east), Gulf of Paria (west) and the Columbus Channel (south) – making each coast a little different. Port of Spain, the country's bustling capital, sits along a wide bay on the Gulf, and most of the country's better-known attractions are within an hour's drive of the city. Driving, you could get from one side of the country to the other in less than three hours, maybe less if you're a pro at bumpy, winding roads.

West of the capital, a peninsula pointing toward Venezuela leads to Chaguaramas, one of the Caribbean's chief yachting centers. North of Port of Spain, the Saddle Rd becomes the North Coast Rd leading to popular north-coast beaches. East of Port of Spain is Piarco International Airport, and the key northern towns of Arima and Sangre Grande. Along the desolate east coast lie endless palm-fringed beaches. To the northeast is the remote Northern Range and the turtle-nesting areas of Grande Rivière and Matura. To the south of Port of Spain are Chaguanas – the heart of East Indian Trinidad – and San Fernando – the industrial center of the country.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

Trinidad's only airport, **Piarco International Airport** (P05; ☎ 669-4868), is 25km east of Port of Spain. There's a tourist office, car-rental booths, ATMs and eateries near the ticketing area. There's also luggage storage (TT\$15 per piece of luggage per day). A currency exchange office inside the terminal is open 6am to 10pm. For details of flights to and from Trinidad, see p774 and p774.





**BOAT**

Ferries run multiple times daily between Port of Spain on Trinidad and Scarborough on Tobago. See p775 for more information.

**Getting Around****TO/FROM THE AIRPORT**

Taxi fare from the airport to Port of Spain is US\$25 (TT\$150), and it's the easiest way to get to town. Alternatively, during the day (better if you aren't alone), take an Arouca route taxi (to the left outside the terminal) and get off at the Eastern Main Rd (TT\$4); from here, catch a red-striped maxi-taxi to the capital (TT\$5). Taxi fare to Maraval is TT\$180, and to San Fernando TT\$250.

**BUS**

Most buses traveling around Trinidad originate from the City Gate terminal on South Quay in Port of Spain. Bus service tends to be slow and notoriously unreliable. However, buses are a cheap way to get around if you're not in a rush. The red, white and black Express Commuter Service (ECS) buses are faster, more reliable and air-conditioned. They are geared toward commuters, so they run most frequently in the morning and afternoon. Check the **information/ticket booth** (☎ 623-7872; www.ptsc.co.tt; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri) at the terminal for schedules.

Buses from City Gate terminal:

Destination	Fare	Duration
Blanchisseuse	TT\$8	2hr
Chaguanas	TT\$4	1 hr
Chaguaramas	TT\$2	1hr
Maracas Bay	TT\$4	1hr
San Fernando	TT\$6	1½hr
Sangre Grande	TT\$6	1hr

**CAR**

A number of small, reliable car-rental companies operate on Trinidad. Prices average about TT\$300 a day, including insurance and unlimited mileage. Discounts are usually offered for weekly rentals. The following have offices in Port of Spain, as well as booths at Piarco International Airport:

**Econo-Car Rentals** (www.trinidad.net/econocar); Airport (☎ 669-2342); Port of Spain (☎ 622-8074; 191-193 Western Main Rd) Has reliable cars and cheap rates.

**Kalloos's Auto Rentals** (www.kalloos.com); Airport (☎ 669-5673); Port of Spain (☎ 669-4868; 31 French St) Also runs a taxi service (opposite).

**Singh's Auto Rentals** Airport (☎ 669-5417); Port of Spain (☎ 623-0150; 7-9 Wrightson Rd)

**Thrifty** (☎ 669-0602; www.thrifty.com) Doesn't have an office in Port of Spain, but can make pickup arrangements beyond the airport.

**MAXI-TAXI**

The main maxi-taxi terminal in Port of Spain for southbound and eastbound buses is on South Quay, adjacent to City Gate. Figuring out which maxi to catch can be a little confusing, so don't hesitate to call the **Trinidad & Tobago Unified Maxi Taxi Association** (☎ 624-3505). Depending on distance, maxis cost TT\$2 to TT\$5.

The maxi-taxi color-coding system:

**Green-band maxis** Serve areas south of Port of Spain, including Chaguanas and San Fernando (from San Fernando, maxi-taxis connecting to outlying areas have black or brown stripes), leaving from City Gate.

**Red-band maxis** Serve areas east of Port of Spain, including Laventille, Arima and Sangre Grande, leaving from South Quay, near City Gate.

**Yellow-band maxis** Serve Port of Spain's western and northern suburbs. Maxis to Chaguaramas via St James leave from the corner of South Quay and St Vincent St; maxis traveling to Blanchisseuse via Maraval leave from the corner of Prince and George Sts.

**ROUTE TAXI**

Within Port of Spain, the route taxi is the predominant mode of public transportation. Outside the city center, route taxis can be hailed along the route. Official taxis have an 'H' ('hired') on their license plate. Occasionally, drivers of private vehicles (with 'P' on the license plate) also offer route-taxi service, though it's best to be familiar with the driver or know they're legit before hopping in. Route taxis cost between TT\$2 to TT\$5.

Port of Spain route taxi pickup points:

**Route Taxis to Chaguanas** Corner South Quay and Charlotte St (east side).

**Route Taxis to Maraval** (circling the Savannah) On the corner of Oxford and Charlotte Sts.

**Route Taxis to St Ann's** (circling the Savannah) Corner Hart and Frederick Sts (south side).

**Route Taxis to St James** (via Tragarete Rd) Corner Hart and Frederick Sts (north side).

**Route Taxis to San Fernando** Corner South Quay and St Vincent St.

**TAXI**

Between 10pm and 6am there's a 50% surcharge on Trinidad's regular taxis. To call for a taxi, dial ☎ 669-1689 (airport), or ☎ 625-3032 (Independence Sq taxi stand), one of the

**QUICK REFERENCE: ESSENTIAL TNT TERMS****chip** – to rhythmically shuffle following soca trucks during Carnival**doubles** – two pieces of flatbread folded over curried garbanzo beans (*channa*); hot dogs are to NYC street food as doubles are to TnT**grine** – to *wine* in close proximity and in synch with someone else**jump up** – to dance enthusiastically**la blash** – a good time on the beach**lash out** – to party hard**lime** – to hang out, party or be unproductive**no problem** – commonly used phrase that could be the country motto**roti** – large soft flatbread wrapping a curried meat or vegetable middle**wine** – to roll your hips to the beat of soca

numerous stands in Independence Sq in Port of Spain. There's also a useful taxi stand near Queen's Park Savannah.

**Kalloo's Taxi Service** (☎ 622-9073; 31 French St; 🕒 24hr) has an office less than a block north of Ariapita Ave and is convenient after an evening of limin'. It also offers guides-for-hire services that will take you anywhere on the island (TT\$900 per day) and car rentals (from TT\$300 per day).

You can arrange island tours with individual taxi drivers. For an all-day tour, drivers will generally ask about TT\$400 to TT\$700.

**PORT OF SPAIN****pop 50,500**

'Leave as fast as possible,' many will advise about Port of Spain. One can understand why. This frantic metropolitan hub is bursting at the seams. The oil and gas business is booming and skyscrapers are being flung up everywhere. Materials and labor are being imported. As could be surmised, the traffic is horrendous, and public transportation is nonsensical improvisation. With all this going on, tourist infrastructure remains on the sidelines waving a wilting flag.

That being said, Port of Spain can grow on you. Its hot concrete streets and buildings simmer a melting pot of cultures like Indian, African, Chinese and Venezuelan. It's loud. People can be cheerful and crass, giving all sorts of attitude but afterwards quickly warming up to you. They unexpectedly break into song.

The downtown bustles with street vendors flanking the modern buildings and mall arcades. Ariapita Ave is hip, like a kiss on each cheek. St James is happening, like a low five. Laventille flips you the bird.

During Carnival season, it would be hard not to fall in love with this gritty mess of a city. Fetes rock all corners, steel-pan music fills the air around panyards, mas camps (see boxed text, p738) are hard at work on their costumes, and come Carnival Saturday through Carnival Tuesday, this city will school you on the most comprehensive partying in the world.

**Orientation**

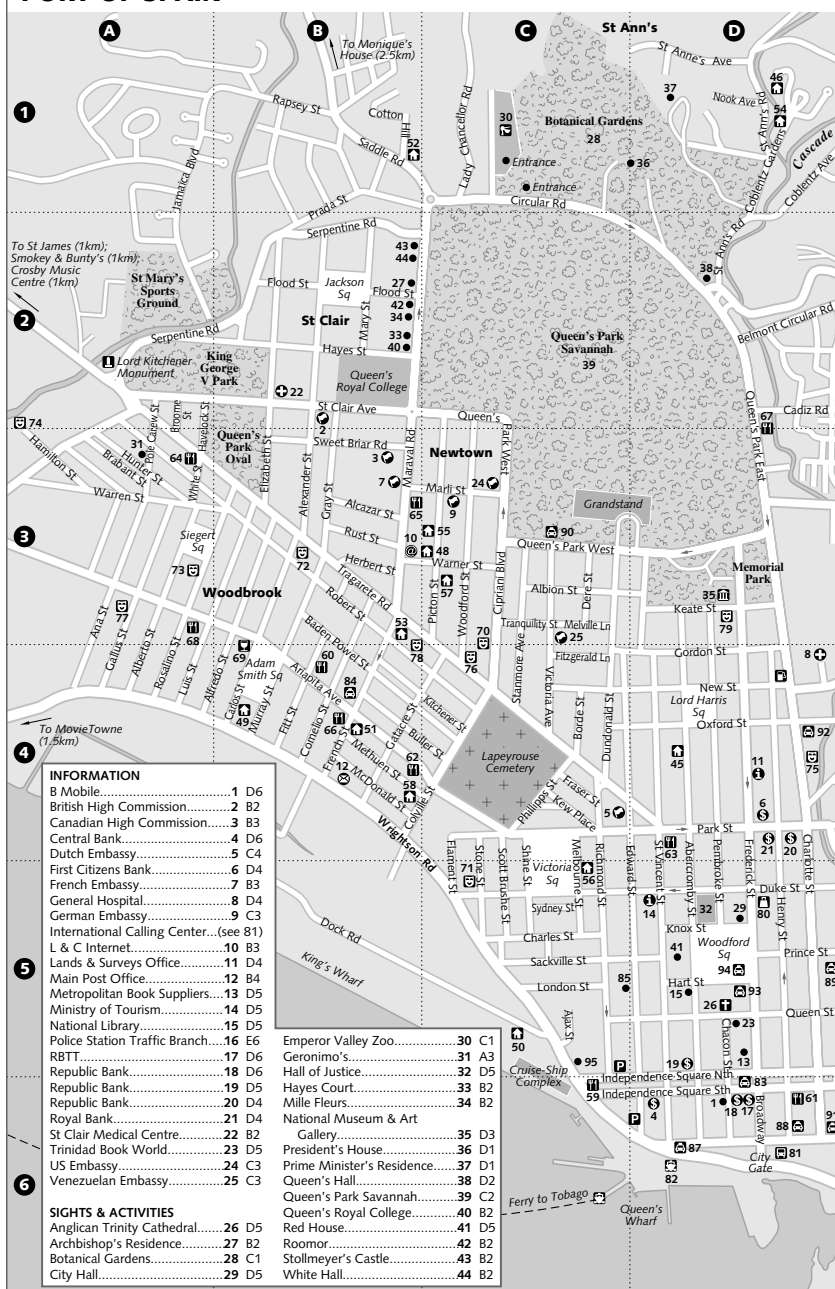
Port of Spain lies about 25km northwest of Piarco International Airport. Downtown is an area about 140 square blocks between Park St on the north side, Wrightson Rd to the west, St Ann's River to the east and the Gulf of Paria to the south. The 'center' of town is along Independence Sq, not really a square but two one-way streets running along a narrow pedestrian strip. Here you can pick up a route taxi and find travel agents, banks and cheap food. The south end of Frederick St is the central shopping area.

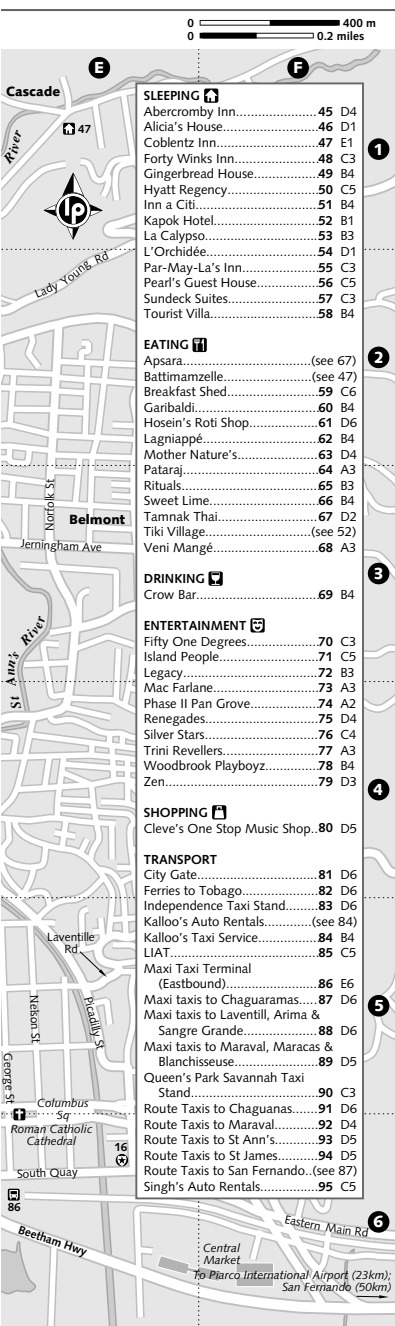
North of downtown, Queen's Park Savannah pulsates with cricket matches and cultural events, circumnavigated by the 3.7km Circular Rd. The northern neighborhoods of St Ann's, Cascade and Maraval are more relaxed. West of downtown, the lively areas of Woodbrook (where you'll find Ariapita Ave, which is famous for its restaurants) and St James, which has the most animated nightlife. East of downtown and St Ann's River is the Central Market. Further east are the poorer neighborhoods of Laventille (the birthplace of pan music) and Barataria.

**Information****BOOKSTORES**

**Metropolitan Book Suppliers** (☎ 623-3462; 13 Frederick St; 🕒 9am-5:30pm Mon-Thu, 8:30am-5:30pm

## PORT OF SPAIN





Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Upstairs in the Colsort Mall, with a great selection of Caribbeana.

**Trinidad Book World** (☎ 623-4316; cnr Queen & Chacon Sts; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Thu, 8:30am-5:30pm Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Good general bookstore opposite the cathedral also selling maps and local literature.

## INTERNET ACCESS

**International Calling Center** (City Gate, South Quay; per hr TT\$10; ☎ 6am-11pm) You'll find many centers like this downtown along Independence Sq.

**L and C Internet Services** (☎ 622-6467; 26 Maraval Rd; per hr TT\$10; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun)

## LAUNDRY

Public laundries are scarce, but many hotels and guesthouses have facilities or can arrange for it to be done.

## LIBRARIES

**National Library** (☎ 623-6962; www.nalis.gov.tt; cnr Hart & Abercromby Sts; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-noon Sat)

## MEDICAL SERVICES

**General Hospital** (☎ 623-2951; 56-57 Charlotte St) A large full-service hospital.

**St Clair Medical Centre** (☎ 628-1451; www.medcorp limited.com; 18 Elizabeth St) A private hospital preferred by expatriates. There are also smaller hospitals in the towns of Arima, San Fernando and Mt Hope, the latter near Tunapuna.

## MONEY

The major banks – Central Bank, RBTT, Republic Bank, Royal Bank and First Citizens Bank – all have branches on Park St east of Frederick St and on Independence Sq. Most are open 8am to 2pm Monday to Thursday, and 8am to 1pm and 3pm to 5pm Friday, and have 24-hour ATMs.

## POST

**Main post office** (☎ 669-5361; Wrightson Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) TT Post has outlets all over town.

## TELEPHONE

**International Calling Center** (City Gate, South Quay; ☎ 6am-11pm) This center has private calling booths for making international calls (TT\$1 per minute to the USA, Canada, UK and Europe).

**b Mobile** (☎ 824-8788; www.bmobile.co.tt; cnr Chacon & Independence Sq South; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, Sat 8am-1pm) For TT\$125 you can buy a cell phone and

use prepaid phone-card inserts (TT\$50 to TT\$1.00 per minute within Trinidad and Tobago and TT\$1 to TT\$1.25 per minute to the US).

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourism Development Company** (TDC; ☎ 675-7034; [www.gotrinidadandtobago.com](http://www.gotrinidadandtobago.com)) Has a helpful outlet at Piarco International Airport (☎ 669-5196; 🕒 8am-4:30pm).

**Ministry of Tourism** (☎ 624-1403; [www.tourism.gov.tt](http://www.tourism.gov.tt); cnr Duke & St Vincent Sts; 🕒 8am-4:30pm Mon-Fri) Provides useful information and brochures.

### Dangers & Annoyances

Port of Spain has a reputation for high crime and, although some of it is hype, some of it

is valid. Robberies, kidnappings and murders are increasingly common due to drug-related violence. Traveling solo at night is not a good idea especially if you're female and especially around Nelson St, the harbor and east of downtown. The Laventille neighborhood has been riddled with violent crime as of late. Also, be cautious when walking from your hotel, especially at night.

Since crime around Carnival has been increasing, the police have done a good job cracking down. If you use common sense, your Carnival can be safe.

Beware of parking downtown. The street signs can be confusing and police often tow cars. You're better off using a public parking

## CARNIVAL – BETTER GET READY

Several ideas float around about the birth of Carnival. Some say it's a spin-off of ancient Greece's Bacchus celebrations; others suggest Carnival was used by African slaves as a means of mimicking colonial authority while paying homage to African mythology and music. The majority of celebrants say Carnival (meaning 'farewell to the flesh') marks the approach of Lent, the ultimate indulgence before the upcoming sober disciplines.

Whatever the origin, Trinidad hosts the big daddy of Caribbean carnivals, and anyone can participate.

### PRE-CARNIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Pre-Carnival fetes, or parties, happen all month long and can take many different forms, held in a backyard or a club venue.
- Panorama, a steel-pan competition for the national title of best band, begins the Saturday two weeks before Carnival and culminates in the final competition on the Saturday before Carnival.
- Calypso Monarch semifinals, when the calypso stars of the year battle it out for the title of number one, take place the Saturday before Carnival.
- National Single Pan Bands final, International Soca Monarch finals, and Carnival King and Queen semifinals are on Carnival Friday.
- Kiddie Mas, which is painfully cute, takes place the Carnival Saturday and possibly on Sunday as well.
- Dimanche Gras has a fantastic show at Queen's Park Savannah with the crowning of Carnival King and Queen and Calypso Monarch finals.

### MAS CAMPS

Mas (masquerade) camp headquarters are workshops where respected designers create intricate and lavish Carnival costumes. Trinis save the whole year to buy the costume which costs between TT\$1500 and TT\$3500 and ensures two days of all-inclusive drink-filled parading and dancing. Foreigners can buy their costumes online, and they go quick so get one sooner than later.

If you would like to visit a mas camp or join a mas band (the collective group of masqueraders) for Carnival, here are some good choices:

**Mac Farlane** (☎ 628-4168; [www.macfarlanecarnival.net](http://www.macfarlanecarnival.net); 49 Rosalino St) This medium sized band enacts the traditional concept of Carnival by focusing on costume creativity and sets a precedent of theatrics and metaphorical presentation.

**Trini Revelers** (☎ 354-5911; [www.trinirevelersmas.com](http://www.trinirevelersmas.com); 35 Gallus Street) Strikes a nice balance between skimpy glam and traditional costumes; see p740 for an interview with a researcher for the Trini Revelers.

lot (TT\$35 per day). You bail out your car at the police station on South Quay.

## Sights

### QUEEN'S PARK SAVANNAH

'The Savannah' was once part of a sugar plantation and is now a public park. Appreciative residents play soccer and cricket and fly kites in the park's expansive grassy field. It's a great place to walk or simply hang out and people-watch, especially in the crowded early evening when the scorching heat subsides. Many people jog here despite the thick traffic zooming around the perimeter. You'll find fresh coconut juice and snow cones being sold and many benches on which to enjoy them. Concerts and

Carnival events take place on the **grandstand** at the south side of the park. The 3.7km road circling the park has one-way traffic, and locals call it the world's largest roundabout.

### MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

Along the west side of the Queen's Park Savannah are the Magnificent Seven, a line of seven eccentric and ornate colonial buildings constructed in the early 20th century. From south to north, they are the Germanic Renaissance **Queen's Royal College** (a boys' high school); **Hayes Court** (the Anglican bishop's residence); **Mille Fleurs** (headquarters for the Law Association); **Roomor** (a private residence); the Catholic **Archbishop's Residence**; stately **White Hall**

**Island People** (☎ 625-1386; www.islandpeoplemas.com; 11 Stone St) This and the next camp would be described as 'bead and bikini bands' and are highly popular.

**Legacy** (☎ 622-7466; www.legacycarnival.com; 88 Robert St)

## CARNIVAL MONDAY

### Playing J'ouvert

Mud Mas. Dirty Mas. Revelers have permission to indulge in their most hedonistic, crazy, ecstatic inclinations as they welcome in Carnival. At around 4am, partiers file into the streets and chip, jump up, wine and grine, slather themselves and others in mud, paint, glitter and/or chocolate, and basically go mad while following trucks blasting soca and selling alcohol. There's nothing official about J'ouvert, so get the scoop about different bands and locations on arrival. Playing is cheap or free. Remember to keep your street smarts and stay with your group.

### Playing Mas

Tens of thousands parade and dance in the street throughout the day and into the night, accompanied by soca trucks with DJs and steel bands. Playing mas on Monday is more informal than on Tuesday because players just wear band T-shirts, so it isn't as glittery and majestic as the Tuesday mas, but it can be arguably more of a party. Different sections can mix, and the tone is markedly more casual yet uproarious.

## CARNIVAL TUESDAY

### Playing Mas

Pretty Mas. This is the moment the entire country has prepared for. People put aside their identity for the day and enter into a world of fantasy and revelry as they flaunt the artistic genius and sumptuous displays of Trinidad's mas camp designers to the beat of booming soca.

### Last Lap

At midnight, Carnival culminates in a last lap around the Savannah – one last chance to go insane, dance and enjoy festival spirit before resigning to Lent or just getting back to the daily grind.

## WEDNESDAY

People traditionally go to the beach, most notably Maracas Bay, Manzanilla and Mayaro on the east coast, for one final post-Carnival lime. If you want to go Tobago's beaches, book the ferry or flight way in advance.

Locations, times, and prices of events change yearly. Information on the upcoming Carnival is available from the **National Carnival Commission of Trinidad & Tobago** (☎ 627-1350; www.ncctt.org).

(the prime minister's office); and **Stollmeyer's Castle**, built to resemble a Scottish castle, complete with turrets. Unfortunately, these buildings are not open to the public, but it's worth passing by for a look.

### EMPEROR VALLEY ZOO

Just north of Queen's Park Savannah is the 2.5-hectare **Emperor Valley Zoo** (☎ 628-9177; adult/child TT\$4/2; 🕒 9:30am-5:30pm), which opened in 1947. Though small, the zoo has an interesting collection of more than 220 animals, including many indigenous creatures like red howler monkeys, scarlet ibis, agoutis and various snakes. Several cats such as ocelots prowl around in cages, and you can get very close to a skinny and hot-looking Siberian lion.

East of the zoo is the entrance to the **Botanical Gardens** (admission free; 🕒 6am-6:30pm), which date from 1818 and have grand trees and attractive strolling paths, plus pavilions containing orchids and anthuriums. The **President's House** (closed to the public), a mansion originally built as the governor's residence in 1875, is adjacent to the gardens, as is the **prime minister's residence** (closed to the public).

### NATIONAL MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Housed in a classic colonial building, the **museum** (☎ 623-5941; museum@tstt.net.tt; cnr Frederick & Keate Sts; admission free; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 2-6pm Sun) contains interesting historical exhibits on Native American settlers, African slaves and indentured Indians. There are also geological displays, and explanations of colonial agriculture and the technology behind oil exploration. One room devoted to Carnival has a nice exhibit on the evolution of steel-pan instruments and a photo gallery of calypso greats. There's also a room full of costumes. On the top floor the art exhibits are intriguing and express the vibe of Trinidad and Tobago.

### INDEPENDENCE SQUARE

The hustle and bustle of downtown culminates along Independence Sq, two parallel streets that flank a promenade featuring benches, chess tables and food kiosks. On the west end of the promenade tower the Central Bank buildings, and the east end is marked by the commanding 1836 Roman Catholic Cathedral.

South of the promenade is imposing City Gate, a huge Victorian building that was

## BEHIND THE CARNIVAL SCENE

Enrico Rajah is a researcher for the Trini Revelers Mas Camp (p738).

### What role does Carnival play in Trinidad and Tobago's culture?

When the French came in 1863 they brought the Masquerade Ball. Their slaves watched on, adopted it, satirized it, and infused their own creativity. Now known as Carnival, it's still an outlet for people to express themselves in a way they never would in the day to day. For the two days of Carnival, people assume another character and live a fantasy. Problems are thrown aside, and come Wednesday, we are ready to face everything again.

### How has Carnival evolved? There seems to be controversy over the 'beads and bikinis' bands.

Well, it's always been lewd and vulgar. In the early 1900s it was called the Jammette Carnival, the Prostitute Carnival. In the more traditional Carnival, the costumes' main function is of artistic and cultural expression. Recently, costumes have gotten smaller and smaller, as well as showier...beads and bikinis. Some say it's a deterioration of tradition, yet it's what the people want, especially the younger generation. Therefore, 'beads and bikinis' bands are in fact expressing popular culture. Trini Revelers tries to strike a balance between the flashy outfits and traditional costuming.

### How do you go about creating costumes for your chosen theme?

A huge part of our band is education. For instance, in 2008's Que Viva Mexico theme, the cultures and traditions of Mexico were researched intensely so we could extract the most intriguing aspects of their culture and portray them accurately. And of course add our personal beautifying touch of Carnival. But we educate our players about the theme and significance of the costumes.

### What makes Carnival here stand out from other famous Carnivals in the World?

It's the best in the world. And what makes it so unique is that anyone can play mas and participate, whereas in other places like Brazil and New Orleans, people are mainly spectators. Everyone jumps up here.

formerly the city's train station. Today it's a transportation hub, the terminus for all buses and maxi-taxis. West of City Gate is King's Wharf, the landing point for anyone arriving by boat. It's also where you catch the ferry to Tobago. Nearby is the Cruise Ship Complex, with overpriced souvenir stalls pandering to tourists exhaled by giant ships.

### WOODFORD SQUARE

Sometimes referred to as the University of Woodford Sq because of its occasional use by soapbox speakers and gospel preachers, this public park marks the symbolic center of downtown. Dr Eric Williams, Trinidad and Tobago's first prime minister, lectured to the masses here about the importance of sovereignty, which later led to the country's independence from Britain. Woodford Sq remains a 'speakers corner' where people can express opinions. Upcoming discussion topics are posted on a chalkboard on the southeast corner of the square.

Surrounding the park are some interesting edifices, including **Red House**, the imposing red Renaissance-style parliament building constructed in 1906; and the contemporary steel-and-concrete **Hall of Justice** and **City Hall**. Opposite the square's southwest corner is the National Library (p737).

The majestic, Gothic-designed **Anglican Trinity Cathedral** at the south side of Woodford Sq dates from 1818. Its impressive ceiling is supported by an elaborate system of mahogany beams, a design modeled on London's Westminster Hall. Stained-glass windows open to the breeze, and there's a marble monument to Sir Ralph Woodford, the British governor responsible for the church's construction.

### QUEEN'S HALL

Right off Queen's Park Savannah sits this mural-festooned **theatre** (☎ 624-1284; [www.queenshalltt.com](http://www.queenshalltt.com); 1-3 St Ann's Rd; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri plus show times). It was built in the 1950s, when there was a palpable need to have a proper concert hall for the extremely talented musical and theatrical artists of Trinidad. Call for show information.

### Sleeping

Visitors to Port of Spain are generally here for cricket, Carnival, bird-watching or business. The average hotel guest isn't here to chill out on vacation (Tobago's beaches lure

those tourists), so many hotels offer efficient if slightly uninspired lodgings. Most places offer Carnival packages that are a set number of days and can be over twice the regular room price.

Rates listed below are high-season rates around the Carnival season, but other times places tend to slash their prices. Beware that sometimes hotels don't include a 10% service charge and 15% VAT in advertised prices.

### BUDGET

**Pearl's Guest House** (☎ 625-2158; 3-4 Victoria St; r US\$20) Bare-bones, cheap and centrally located, this most basic accommodation has a shared bathroom and kitchen. Its communal balcony is pleasant.

**Abercromby Inn** (☎ 623-5259; [www.abercrombyinn.com](http://www.abercrombyinn.com); 101 Abercromby St; basic s/d US\$27/41/52, deluxe s/d/tr US\$67/79/96; 🍷 📺) It provides basic accommodation, straight up. There are proper guest services, the rooms are clean, and it boasts a great location in the heart of Port of Spain. There's a deck and communal sitting room.

**Inn a Citi** (☎ 625-5911; [www.innacityplace.com](http://www.innacityplace.com); 37 Ariapita Ave; s/d with shared bathroom \$40/55, with private bathroom \$45/60; 🍷) Occupying a 2nd floor above businesses, this hotel has a homestay kind of feel and good guest services: laundry, kitchen facilities and cell-phone rentals.

**La Calypso** (☎ 622-4077; [lacalypso@tsitt.net.tt](mailto:lacalypso@tsitt.net.tt); 46 French St; r with shared bathroom US\$41, with private bathroom US\$65; 🍷) In the heart of Woodbrook's entertainment zone, this ultrasecure, non-linear structure has 18 basic, clean rooms in its crooks and crevices, some with Carnival-view balconies.

**our pick Par-May-La's Inn** (☎ 628-2008; [www.parmaylas.com](http://www.parmaylas.com); 53 Picton St; s/d incl breakfast US\$48/64; 🍷) In walking distance from Queen's Park Oval, the Savannah and Woodbrook is this secure and airy hotel adorned with a pleasant balcony and communal spaces conducive to conversation. Rooms are well cared for, the staff is professional and the price includes a continental breakfast, making it excellent value in Port of Spain.

**Tourist Villa** (☎ 627-5423; [touristvilla@fiberline.tt](mailto:touristvilla@fiberline.tt); 7 Methuen St; s/d/tr US\$55/65/75; 🍷 📺) This well-worn place on a quiet street has lots of balconies and a small pool. The rooms are unexceptional but acceptable.

**Sundeck Suites** (☎ 622-9560; [www.sundecktrinidad.com](http://www.sundecktrinidad.com); 42-44 Picton St; s/d/tr apt US\$60/75/95; 🍷) A block away from Par-May-La's Inn, and



owned by the same management, Sundeck offers no-frills suites, each with equipped kitchens and a small deck. Guests can enjoy mountain views from atop its broad 130-sq-meter rooftop deck.

### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Monique's Guesthouse** (☎ 628-3334; [www.moniques-trinidad.com](http://www.moniques-trinidad.com); 114-116 Saddle Rd; s/d/tr US\$65/70/80, with kitchen US\$70/75/85; 🍷 📺 🚿) In Maraval, 3km north of Queen's Park Savannah, Monique's has 10 pleasant rooms. Its hillside annex has 10 large studios with cooking facilities and balconies from which you can sometimes spot parrots in the treetops. Friendly owners, Michael and Monica Charbonne, organize nature tours for guests.

**Gingerbread House** (☎ 625-6841; [www.trinidadginbergbreadhouse.com](http://www.trinidadginbergbreadhouse.com); 8 Carlos St; s/d incl breakfast US\$65/95; 🍷 📺 🚿) In this renovated 1920s home you feel much like a house guest, staying in one of three high-ceiling rooms which are spacious and pleasantly decorated. There are a number of comfortable communal areas and the back deck has a creatively tiled mini-pool. Breakfast is included.

**Alicia's House** (☎ 623-2802; [www.aliciashousetrinidad.com](http://www.aliciashousetrinidad.com); 7 Coblenz Gardens; s/d from US\$75/83; 🍷 📺 🚿) You feel as though you're staying in a Trini's home at this bustling guesthouse whose kitsch is almost comforting. Just north of Queen's Park Savannah, it has simple rooms, some with shared bathroom. Meals are served in its restaurant.

**Forty Winks Inn** (☎ 622-0484; [www.fortywinks.com](http://www.fortywinks.com); 24 Warner St; s/d incl breakfast US\$94/109; 🍷 📺 🚿) Nicely located in Woodbrook, this vibrantly decorated house has five cheerful rooms and an intimate atmosphere. There is a patio on top, lush with plants, where you can enjoy the sunset.

**L'Orchidée** (☎ 621-0618; [www.trinidadhosthomes.com](http://www.trinidadhosthomes.com); 3 Coblenz Gardens; s/d/ste incl breakfast \$100/150/200;

🍷 📺 🚿) It's a cozy 12-bedroom inn that is tastefully done with pleasing color accents in the tile work and art on the walls. There's an adorable breakfast space. In the garden you'll find the inn's namesake growing. Offers wi-fi.

**our pick Coblenz Inn** (☎ 624-0541; [www.coblenzinn.com](http://www.coblenzinn.com); 44 Coblenz Ave; s/d incl breakfast US\$105/108; 🍷 📺 🚿) Somewhere between a European boutique hotel and B&B, the 16-room Coblenz Inn is a peaceful haven that feels far away from city chaos even though it's relatively close to the Savannah. The immaculate rooms are uniquely themed and decorated, and the sitting areas exude comfort with their sumptuous furniture, garden terrace and a reading library. With continental breakfast offered in the adjoining Battimamzelle restaurant (opposite), the Coblenz offers excellent value. Offers wi-fi.

**Kapok Hotel** (☎ 622-5765; [www.kapokhotel.com](http://www.kapokhotel.com); 16-18 Cotton Hill; s/d from US\$165/181; 🍷 📺 🚿) Not just a business hotel, the Kapok boasts an authentic Caribbean vibe. It's located toward the south end of Saddle Rd, throwing distance from Queen's Park Savannah. The rooms are decked out with rattan furnishings and high-speed internet. There's an outdoor pool, self-service launderette and two restaurants, including the popular Polynesian-themed Tiki Village (opposite).

**Hyatt Regency** (☎ 623-2222; [www.trinidad.hyatt.com](http://www.trinidad.hyatt.com); 1 Wrightson Rd; r from US\$300; 🍷 📺 🚿) Spanking new and taking up a fat piece of ocean real estate next to the Ferry Terminal is this luxury hotel with prices as high as its skyscraper building. It is arguably one of the most upscale hotels in the country with its army of staff presenting any amenities one could imagine.

### Eating

Pickup trucks selling coconut water (TT\$6) can be found around Queen's Park Savannah, and you can find places to grab a bite around Independence Sq. Local food suppliers shut down around 3pm. Dinner is only offered in more formal restaurants or international chains. However, St James neighborhood is your best bet for street food at night.

### BUDGET

**Hosein's Roti Shop** (☎ 627-2357; cnr Independence Sq South & Henry St; mains TT\$15-25; 🍷 lunch & dinner) On the south side of town, this is a hugely popular carryout for mini-rotis and dhal *puri* (a type of roti stuffed with split peas).

### EARLY FLIGHT?

The two species of hotels near the airport, dilapidated and expensive, creates a lose-lose situation. Of the latter species, **Piarco International Hotel** (☎ 669-3030; [piarcohotel@mailcity.com](mailto:piarcohotel@mailcity.com); 8-10 Golden Grove Rd; s/d US\$170/190; 🍷 📺 🚿) has clean, well-kept, unexceptional facilities with free airport transfers.

**Pataraj** (cnr Tragarete & White St; roti TT\$15-25; ☎ 10:30am-4, closed Sun) Right before entering St James, you'll find this eatery that serves some of the most mouth-watering roti in the city.

**Mother Nature's** (☎ 627-6986; cnr Park & St Vincent Sts; TT\$15-40; ☎ 5am-4pm Mon-Sat) Whole wheat roti? Yes, it exists here as well as dairy-free deserts (including a showcase of ice creams) and vegetarian dishes sieved from the local repertoire.

**Rituals** (☎ 622-1382; cnr Marli St & Maraval Rd; sandwich TT\$30; ☎ 6:30am-7pm) This coffee shop serves smoothies, coffee drinks (TT\$15 to TT\$20), paninis, bakery goods and bagel sandwiches. If you squint, you might think you're in Starbucks. Trinidad's business class comes here to tap the wi-fi and take refuge from the heat in the blasting air-conditioning.

**Breakfast Shed** (Wrightson Rd; mains TT\$40; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Right on the water, Trini women sell homemade food from stalls around the perimeter of an open-air, picnic-benched eating area. You can grab a fresh cane juice or sea moss shake at Mr Juice's stall. The large servings of Trinidadian fare include fish, dasheen (a type of taro), plantains, rice and other local favorites.

## MIDRANGE

**Sweet Lime** (☎ 624-9983; cnr Ariapita Ave & French St; mains TT\$50-190; ☎ lunch & dinner) This restaurant-bar has an open-air kitchen, plant-laden outdoor seating, and a pool room and dance floor in the back. The set-menu lunch is economical, local and heaping. The expensive dinner menu includes salads, grilled meats and fish, and vegetarian options. It's a wi-fi hot spot, sometimes.

**Lagniappé** (☎ 622-9764; 13A Ariapita Ave; mains TT\$70-100; ☎ 7am-5:30pm Tue-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) On Ariapita Avenue, this European bakery nestles into a cozy café space with a patio. It serves luscious salads, gourmet sandwiches, finely prepared local dishes, and has a lovely brunch on the weekends. The coffee drinks will lull you with their richness.

**Tiki Village** (☎ 622-5765; 16-18 Cotton Hill; mains TT\$70-140; ☎ ) The Kapok Hotel's Tiki Village has great views of the Savannah and downtown, an Asian-themed ambience, and a menu stocked with Chinese favorites that are infused with Polynesian and Trini flavors. It's very vegetarian friendly and has a lunch buffet served Monday to Friday.

**Veni Mangé** (☎ 624-4597; 67A Ariapita Ave; mains TT\$90-150; ☎ 11am-3pm Mon-Sun, dinner from 7pm Wed & Fri) West Indian flavor, art, foliage and enthusiasm infuse this vibrant restaurant. Serving Caribbean cuisine with classic French influences, it's considered one of the best spots for lunch (it's only open for dinner two days a week). Try the beef dumplings or the grilled fresh fish with tropical chutney. There are also veggie options.

## TOP END

**Tamnak Thai** (☎ 625-0647; 13 Queen's Park East; mains TT\$70-300; ☎ 11am-3pm & 6-11pm Mon-Fri, dinner only Sat & Sun) The outside patio has lovely tropical wood tables and a lily-pad pond while the inside is quiet and cool. Dishes include lemongrass-infused soups; seafood salad; vegetable, lamb and shrimp curries; and spicy tofu with vegetables.

**Apsara** (☎ 623-7659; 13 Queen's Park East; mains TT\$90-250; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Specializing in North Indian cuisine, Apsara is named after the dancers of the court of Indra, who, it's said, could move freely between heaven and earth. Favorites like tandoori, curry and biryani dishes will melt in your mouth. Vegetarians have many options here. Apsara shares a building with Tamnak Thai.

**Garibaldi** (☎ 772-2942; 32 Fitt Street; mains TT\$125-250; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) Although there are other good Italian restaurants in town, this one proves to be most authentic, serving delectable homemade pastas as well as lovely meat and fish mains. The decor is elegant with black-and-white pictures adorning the walls and simple table settings.

**Battimamzelle** (☎ 621-0541; 44 Coblentz Ave; breakfast & lunch TT\$175, mains TT\$200; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Brainchild of chef Khalid Mohammed, Battimamzelle (the local word for butterfly) appeals to more than just your salivary glands. A feast for the eyes, the vibrant decor mimics the colors of tropical birds, with yellow, green and red walls and colorful local art throughout. Nestled in the fabulous Coblentz Inn, the small restaurant boasts a creative menu featuring meats, seafood or whatever delicious, beautiful meal the chef wants to create.

## Drinking

The name of the **Crow Bar** (☎ 627-8449; cnr Ariapita Ave & Carlos St; occasional cover charge TT\$50) is never far from a Trini's lips when discussing popular

## PANYARDS

Panyards are little more than vacant lots where steel bands store their instruments for much of the year. Come Carnival season, panyards become lively rehearsal spaces, pulsating with energy and magnificent sound. Here, you can witness one of the most important and sacred parts of Trinidad's urban landscape. You feel the music, and you begin to understand it, relate to it and love it. Band members span gender and age; you could see an eight-year-old girl drumming alongside her great-grandfather.

Steel bands start gearing up for Carnival as early as late September, sometimes rehearsing and performing throughout the year. The best way to find out about practice and performance schedules is by asking around. You can also contact **Pan TrinBago** (☎ 623-4486; www.pantrinbago.co.tt).

Some popular panyards that welcome visitors:

**Phase II Pan Groove** (☎ 627-0909; Hamilton St)

**Renegades** (☎ 624-3348; 138 Charlotte St)

**Silver Stars** (☎ 633-4733; 56 Tragarete Rd)

**Woodbrook Playboyz** (☎ 628-0320; 27 Tragarete Rd)

places to go have a drink. Right on trendy Ariapita, the open-air bar has a nice sound system and serves them cold.

The suburb of St James, just west of central Port of Spain, becomes a hub of activity almost any evening. Rub shoulders with politicians, cricket stars or just about anyone at **Smokey & Bunty's** (97 Western Main Rd), a hole-in-the-wall watering hole and the center of St James action. A myriad of busy bars surround it if you want to hop around.

## Entertainment

Port of Spain's nightlife is especially happening Thursday through Saturday, but the St James neighborhood is known to always be rocking and the place find a proper lime when all else fails. Many times bars have live music or DJ's. Cover charges vary and can get up to TT\$100.

If you'd like someone to accompany you on your first night on the town, contact Gunda Harewood for an **evening entertainment tour** (☎ 625-2410, 756-9677; gunda@wow.net). An evening out might include visits to a couple of panyards, a local live band and guidance in choosing the best street snacks. About three hours of fun and transportation costs US\$45 per person.

## NIGHTCLUBS

**Zen** (☎ 625-9936; www.zen.tt; Keat St; 🕒 10pm-late Wed, Fri, Sat; cover TT\$60-100) Just behind the museum, this three-tier club is replete with slick modern decor and Buddha statues. Buddha probably wouldn't patronize this hot spot, with its VIP Champagne room, make-out

nooks and myriad dance floors, but you might want to shake it all night here to soca, hip-hop and other popular beats. A dress code is in effect.

**Fifty One Degrees** (☎ 627-0051; www.51degrees.com; 51 Cipriani Blvd; weekend cover charge TT\$100; 🕒 7pm-very late Tue-Sat) Not just a dance club, this Port of Spain nightlife waypoint has piano bar, comedy and live bands.

## CINEMAS

**MovieTowne** (☎ 627-8277; www.movietowne.com; Audrey Jeffers Hwy, Invaders Bay; tickets adult/child TT\$45/35; 🕒 ) Besides 10 wide-screen movie theaters, there's also a shopping mall, restaurants, and video arcades that collaborate to mirror megaplexes in any given American suburb. It's west of the center.

## Shopping

The central area of Port of Spain, especially around Independence Sq, Queen St and Frederick St, is filled with malls and arcades selling everything from spices to fabric by the yard. Music is the best souvenir to shop for in Port of Spain. Street vendors sell pirated recordings, or get originals at **Crosby's Music Centre** (☎ 622-7622; 54 Western Main Rd) in St James opposite Smokey & Bunty's, or at **Cleve's One Stop Music Shop** (☎ 624-0827; 58 Frederick St), in a small shopping center downtown. You can also pick up CDs at the airport.

## AROUND PORT OF SPAIN Chaguaramas

A 30-minute drive from the capital, Chaguaramas (sha-guah-*ra*-mas) was the

site of a major US military installation during WWII, and it was just in the 1990s when the land was fully handed back over to Trini possession. Now the harbor has a slew of marine facilities and is the hot spot for traveling sailors and yachties because it sits safely out of the hurricane belt and has comparatively inexpensive marina and dry-docking facilities.

There is a handful of internet cafes in town. **2M International Calling Centre** (106 Western Main Rd; per hr \$TT12) is a good one that has bulletins for people trying to hitch yachts to Venezuela or other islands while offering their services as crew members. Car-rental places also sprinkle the town.

Port of Spain's growing cycling community flock to Chaguaramas' 6000-hectare designated national park in order to train and recreate throughout its rainforest and bamboo forests. On old military grounds enveloped by bamboo forest, a local group of **mountain bike** enthusiasts have made 15km to 20km of single-track among towering stalks and roller-coaster riverbeds. A guide that knows the mountain-biking trails in and out is local Courtney Rooks (who rents suspension mountain bikes) of Paria Springs Tours (p749).

Furthermore, the town of Chaguaramas is the launching point for tours to a chain of five offshore islands, locally known as 'Down the Islands.' You can rent kayaks at the **Kayak Centre** (☎ 723-3348; per hr TT\$35). Boating tours, as well as hiking, swimming, and historical tours, can be arranged by appointment with the **Chaguaramas Development Authority** (☎ 868-634-4227; [www.chagdev.com](http://www.chagdev.com)). Popular tours include the boat trip out to **Gaspree Grande** (TT\$125, three hours), at the south side of Chaguaramas Bay, where you can swim in tidal pools and visit caves that drip with stalactites.

The most distant island, 360-hectare **Chacachacare**, was once a leper colony; camping is permitted on the now-deserted isle, replete with beaches and stunning cliff views of Venezuela. **Scotland Bay**, on the western edge, has a pleasant beach that's accessible only by boat. Arrange independent boat trips with boatmen at the Island Property Owners' jetty, on the west side of Chaguaramas. Expect to pay at least TT\$195 per person for Gaspree Grande or Scotland Bay. For fishing charters around the area contact **Classic Sport Fishing Charters** (☎ 680-1357; per day US\$750).

While you're there, you might want to check out the interesting **Chaguaramas Military History & Aerospace Museum** (☎ 634-4391; adult/child TT\$20/10; ☎ 9am-5pm), which depicts Trinidad and Tobago's complex military history.

## SLEEPING

**Bight** (☎ 634-4427; [www.peakeyachts.com](http://www.peakeyachts.com); 5 Western Main Rd; r US\$55; ☎) Simple, tidy rooms overlooking the bay make the Bight good value for the price. Its restaurant (mains from TT\$75; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) has terrace dining where people drink colorful cocktails. Inside there's a pool table, darts and big-screen TVs.

**Coral Cove Hotel** (☎ 634-2040; Western Main Rd; r US\$90; ☎) This is another little hotel near the water that is unremarkable but clean and near a handful of restaurants.

**CrewsInn Hotel & Yachting Center** (☎ 634-4384; [www.crewsinn.com](http://www.crewsinn.com); Point Gourde; s/d US\$177/194; ☎ ☎ ☎) As the highest-end option in town, its bright rooms all have patios and complete amenities, though are arguably overpriced. This hotel-and-marina complex houses the open-air upscale Lighthouse Restaurant (mains from TT\$100; open breakfast, lunch and dinner), the main draw of which is the covered deck overlooking the marina.

## EATING & DRINKING

Most of the marinas have somewhere to munch seafood and sip a Carib. The clubs here are only rented out for events so the limin' is low-key.

**Roti** (Power Boats, Western Main Rd; rotis from TT\$18; ☎ 11am-1pm) There's a nameless blue roti hut tucked in a corner of the Power Boats Marina that serves terribly famous roti and buss up shut. The hut serves food until it runs out, so get there sooner than later.

**Café Feoloh** (☎ 634-2436; Coral Cove Marina; set lunch TT\$40; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This eatery has a French feel with smoking allowed, crepes served, and a wall lined with French novels. However, the set lunch is local fare. Dinner is by reservation only.

**Sails** (☎ 634-4426; Power Boats Marina; draft beer TT\$8; ☎ 11am-12am) This popular hangout has seating on the water, pool tables inside and steel pan on Sundays. You can get bar and grill food here as well as shepherd's pie and some local food such as callaloo soup.

**Lure** (☎ 634-2783; [sweetwatermarina@tsst.net.tt](mailto:sweetwatermarina@tsst.net.tt); Sweet Water Marina; ☎ dinner) Yachtie-recommended

and touted as the best eats in Chagaramas, this high-end harborside restaurant is a great place to run away from Port of Spain for a nice dinner out. It has a variety of seafood, meat, and pasta dishes, and the Paella Marina for two (TT\$285) surely won't disappoint. The open-air bar on top hosts karaoke on Fridays.

### Mt St Benedict

A Benedictine **monastery** sits on 240 hectares on a hillside north of Tunapuna, 13km east of Port of Spain. Though not a major sight in itself, the monastery attracts people who want to stay or eat at its secluded guesthouse, bird-watch or walk in the rainforest. Today, the monastery is home to just 20 aging monks.

The thickly wooded hills behind the monastery provide hiking opportunities and possible glimpses of hawks, owls and numerous colorful forest birds, and maybe a monkey. A favorite **hike** is to the fire tower, which offers good views and birding. It takes about half an hour one way from the guesthouse.

**Pax Guest House** (☎ 662-4084; www.paxguesthouse.com; s/d incl breakfast US\$55/92, dinner extra US\$10; ♿) is a restored colonial house and the oldest guesthouse in the West Indies. Pax welcomes visitors from all over the world who come to do research, write poetry or study wildlife. Hosts Gerard and Oda welcome visitors as though they're family, and bend over backwards to arrange day trips, transportation and bird-watching hikes. As a birding expert, Gerard has excellent guide contacts. A peaceful retreat, the guesthouse's 18 rooms feature teak floorboards, washbasins and fine views, but no TVs or telephones. Some rooms have simple twin beds, others antique four-poster queen-size beds; some have private bathrooms. Unless you have a car, it's inconvenient to get around, so rates include a full breakfast; the healthy multicourse dinner (US\$10) is local, delicious fare.

Nonguests can come for dinner or a delightful afternoon tea with scones or Trinidadian sweet bread (dessert cakes or rolls). Reservations are essential for meals but not necessary for tea (served from 3:30pm to 6pm).

To arrive at Mt St Benedict from Port of Spain, take the Eastern Main Rd then St John's Rd 3.3km north. For public transport, take a maxi to Tunapuna and get off at St Johns Rd where you will usually get a maxi up to

Pax within an hour before 5pm. Leaving Pax, maxis start around 6am.

### Asa Wright Nature Centre

A former cocoa and coffee plantation transformed into an 80-hectare nature reserve, the **Asa Wright Nature Centre** (☎ 667-4655; www.asawright.org; adult/child TT\$60/36) blows the minds of bird-watchers and makes a worthwhile trip, even if you can't tell a parrot from a parakeet. The center has won a number of ecotourism awards, lauded as one of the 'world's ultimate outposts.' It constantly seeks to buy land for the land trust.

Located amid the rainforest of the Northern Range, the center has attracted naturalists from around the world since its founding in 1967. The property has a lodge catering to birding tour groups, a research station for biologists and a series of hiking trails. Day visitors can only view the center on a guided tour (10:30am and 1:30pm); reservations should be made at least 24 hours in advance.

Bird species found here include blue-crowned motmots, chestnut woodpeckers, channel-billed toucans, blue-headed parrots, 14 species of hummingbird and numerous raptors. The sanctuary is home to the elusive nocturnal guacharo (oilbird). To protect the oilbirds, tours are limited. Guests staying at the center's lodge can view them for free (nonguests TT\$150).

The **lodge** (☎ 667-4655, in the USA 800-426-7781; s/d summer US\$125/155, winter US\$180/225; ♿) has some rooms in the weathered main house and others in nearby cottages; all are quite simple with private bathrooms. Rates are high but include three ample meals a day, afternoon tea, and rum punch each evening. During high season there is a minimum of a three-day stay that includes an oilbird cave tour. Guests are also offered excursions to other natural areas in Trinidad for an extra cost. Airport transfers can be arranged for US\$50 per person, round-trip. Nonguests can eat at the lodge, but reservations must be made 48 hours in advance, except for lunch.

The Centre is about a 1½-hour drive from Port of Spain. At Arima, 26km from Port of Spain, head north on Blanchisseuse Rd, turning left into the center after the 7½-mile marker sign. A taxi to Asa from Port of Spain that would take you there and back (essentially an all-day affair) costs about TT\$400 to TT\$600; one-way is TT\$100. For public

## WORD ON THE BIRD

Trinidad and Tobago is excluded from many Caribbean birding books because of the sheer magnitude of additional species here – about 430 in total. Torn from Venezuela, these islands share mainland diversity in their swamps, rainforests, ocean islets, lowland forests, and savannahs. Thus, birders love to indulge their hobby in a top-notch locale while enjoying a gorgeous island.

## HIGHLIGHT BIRDING SPOTS

### Trinidad

- Asa Wright Nature Centre
- Caroni Bird Sanctuary
- Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust
- Mt St Benedict
- Brasso Seco

### Tobago

- Little Tobago
- St Giles Island
- Grafton Caledonia Wildlife Sanctuary
- Tobago Forest Reserve

## ACCOMMODATIONS

In Trinidad and Tobago, there are a number of lovely hotels and guesthouses situated at prime birding sites that cater to bird-watchers. These quiet and peaceful retreats connect you with savvy guides, and you can practically bird-watch from your room. On Mt St Benedict in Trinidad, Pax Guest House (opposite) is a birder's haven. On Tobago, there are some great choices: Cuffie River Nature Retreat (p763), Adventure Eco-Villas (p763) and Arnos Vale Hotel (p763).

## BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

*A Guide to the Birds of Trinidad and Tobago* by Richard Ffrench has good descriptions but limited plates. Detailed plates can be found in *A Guide to the Birds of Venezuela* by Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee and William H Phelps Jr. In addition to James Bond's well-regarded *Field Guide to Birds of the West Indies*, there's *The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists Club Trail Guide*, describing hiking trails on the islands, complete with sketch maps.

transportation, take a maxi to Arima and catch another maxi going up Blanchisseuse Rd; they are most frequent during going-to-work and getting-off-work hours.

## NORTH COAST

Following Saddle Rd north from Port of Spain, the road becomes the North Coast Rd, climbing over the mountains of the Northern Range through a forest of tall trees, ferns and bamboo while hugging the Caribbean coastline. Just east of Maracas Bay, you'll come across quieter and less commercial **Las Cuevas Bay**, a beautiful U-shaped bay; there's surfing at its west end and calmer conditions at its center. Finally, you'll hit the settlement of Blanchisseuse before the road passes a small suspension bridge and narrows into impassability.

Maxi-taxis and route taxis travel to Maracas Bay, but transport to Blanchisseuse is far less frequent.

## Maracas Bay

Just 40 minutes' drive from Port of Spain, Maracas Bay has Trinidad's most popular beach. The wide, white-sand beach, thick with palm trees contrasting against the backdrop of verdant mountains, remains an irresistible lure for both locals and travelers.

In summer the water is mostly flat, but at other times the bay serves up good waves for bodysurfing. There's a lifeguard, changing rooms (TT\$1, open 10am to 6pm), showers, picnic shelters and huts selling cold Caribs and infamous shark and bake. You can also rent beach chairs, hammocks and umbrellas. On weekends the beach gets pretty crowded

### AMERINDIAN LEGACY

In Arima, there remains a small community of Amerindian descent who still follow some traditional customs. Arima has the **Amerindian Museum** (Clever Woods; admission free; ☎ 8am-4pm) displaying artifacts, and local shaman **Cristo Adonis** (☎ 395-0999; www.kacike.org) will show you around or take you on an educational hike where you learn about the medicinal plants and spirituality of the Amerindians.

and a DJ will be most likely spinning. During the week it can feel almost deserted. On Mondays the locals tend to get together and play music.

Right on the bay, **Maracas Bay Hotel** (☎ 669-1914; www.maracasbay.com; Maracas Bay; r US\$70; 📶 📺 🚿) is the only hotel in Maracas and is accordingly overpriced. Its rooms are simple, a bit musty, face the ocean, and have balconies. Its restaurant (mains TT\$60 to TT\$150) is under a giant pagoda and has both bar food and seafood and meat dishes. To grab a beer and lime with the locals, head to **Arnold's on the Bay** (beer TT\$10), a small, open-air dive bar on the western side of the bay.

### Blanchisseuse

pop 800

The road narrows east of Maracas Bay ending up at the tiny village of Blanchisseuse (*blon-she-suh-ze*), where beautiful craggy coastline dotted with weekend homes can seem romantic or harsh, depending on your mood. The three beaches aren't the best for swimming, especially in the fall and winter, but the surfing can be okay.

Laundry inspired the town's name. Village women who washed their clothes in the nearby Marianne River were called 'washerwomen' and this was translated to *blanchisseuse*, the French word for 'launderer,' during the French occupation.

Blanchisseuse makes a great base for hiking, especially to **Paria Falls**. The trailhead starts just past the suspension bridge that spans the Marianne River, just before the end of the North Coast Rd. About two hours each way, the hike winds through the forest, over the Jordan River to the spectacular waterfalls, where you're greeted with a clear, refreshing bathing pool. Keep on going for 20 minutes

and you'll hit **Paria Bay**, a picturesque, deserted beach. Continuing east will lead you on a scenic coastal hike that dumps you out in Matelot. From Blanchisseuse to Matelot is around 32km. Backpacking is possible and having a guide is suggested because parts of the trail aren't well marked and in the past there have been warnings of assaults on foreigners. **Eric Blackman** (☎ 669-3995) can arrange a guide or short kayaking trips to the Three Pools, three luscious pools found less than a mile up the Marianne River. There are trails flanking the river if you want to meander up there yourself.

If hiking is not your thing, you can go to Blanchisseuse Fishing Port and hire a fisherman to take you (from TT\$250) to and from Paria Bay or **Madamas Bay**, which will most likely be deserted.

Hotels in Blanchisseuse don't have such a stringent service-industry standard, but you can hear or see the ocean from most. Ask around for guesthouses for a more intimate Trini experience.

Casual and comfortable, **Almond Brook** (☎ 758-0481; trellxtc@hotmail.com; Lamp Post 16, Paria Main Rd; r incl breakfast TT\$250) has three pleasant, clean rooms. The appealing communal deck outside the rooms looks to the ocean. There's a large shared kitchen and meals can be arranged (TT\$40 per person).

A professional, well-run place owned by boisterous, welcoming German Gottfried Franz, **Laguna Mar** (☎ 669-2963; www.lagunamar.com; 65½-mile marker, Paria Main Rd; r TT\$400; 📶 📺) comprises three buildings on the hillside at the end of the road, plus a four-bedroom cottage. Try to snag a room in the far building, which has a righteous common room with shared kitchen and deck.

A marvelous French woman, Ginnette Holder, and her Trini husband take care of three comfortable, endearing cottages by a rocky yet gorgeous section of coast at **Second Spring** (☎ 669-3909; secondspring@trinidad.net; Lamp Post 191, Paria Main Rd; studio/cottage US\$60/100). They can arrange meals; count yourself lucky if Ginnette cooks for you.

**Los Cocos** (meals TT\$90), a small, cozy place near the end of the road and under the same ownership as Laguna Mar, can do meals such as fresh curry fish or chicken platters if set up with a bit of notice.

If you are planning to stay in Blanchisseuse for a while, shop for provisions before com-

ing, as the nearest grocery store is in Maraval. Booths here will sell you basics.

## BRASSO SECO

This friendly village (pop 350) in the middle of lush rainforest can no longer thrive on an illustrious agriculture economy and therefore its Tourism Action Committee has begun a small ecotourism initiative. If you want fantastic hiking or bird-watching in the rainforest, but don't need frilly accommodations and are interested in experiencing rural Trinidad, this is the place for you.

There are some spectacular day hikes of varying lengths to waterfalls: Double River Waterfalls, Madamas Falls and Sobo Falls. The

13km trek to Paria Bay from Brasso Seco is one of the most gorgeous in Trinidad, passing the famous Paria Falls. Also, you can arrange to scramble up Cerro del Aripo, the tallest mountain in Trinidad (941m).

You can make the hike to Paria Bay into a fine coastal backpacking trip with camping on beautiful bays by continuing all the way to Matelot to the east. There's basic beachside shelter and facilities at **Tacaribe** (☎ 330-7546; campsite TT\$100), 11 miles from Brasso Seco, that you could use overnight before ending up at Matelot.

Guides can be arranged through the **Tourist Action Committee** (☎ 669-6218; www.brassosecoparia.com; day hike per group TT\$300, multiday hike per person

## CYCLING TRINIDAD

The traffic, crazy drivers and narrow roads are out of hand near cities. However, if you love cycling and have an adventurous streak, there are some spectacular rides for you in the more remote areas and back roads. Plus, mountain biking is a great way to experience the natural glory of the island.

### 'Best of' Road Rides

- Toco to Matelot Out-and-Back (about 48km) – Absolutely stunning coastal scenery with lots of hills and very little traffic (the road ends in Matelot). Eating post-ride at Mrs Bravo's Sea Sands Camp (p753) in Toco is highly recommended.
- Blanchisseuse Rd (39km) – Once you're out of Arima, any part of this road is gorgeous: it heads straight through the heart of the Northern Range passing through rainforest and by small farms. Asa Wright Nature Centre is great for lunch, with the turnoff to Petite Marianne Waterfall halfway back down to Blanchisseuse. There are big ascents and descents.
- Chaguaramas – There are some beautiful, flat roads with little traffic in Chaguaramas' national park.

Also try the ride from Maracas Bay to Blanchisseuse and Cora River

While riding, beware of dogs (they usually are all bark, but are disconcerting), narrow roads, blind corners, honking (not malicious, usually jovial, but disconcerting) and opportunists (go with a guide or in a group, especially if you're female).

## Mountain Biking

Nature guide Courtney Rooks of Paria Springs Tours (see following) knows mountain biking in Trinidad. He may have even made the trail. Chaguaramas and Brasso Seco have beautiful rides. Courtney has suspension rentals.

## Guides & Rentals

**Anton Roberts** (☎ 763-2013) He's a cycling guide who will show you Trinidad's road rides.

**Geronimo's** (☎ 622-2453; 15 Pole Carew St) A reliable bike shop in Port of Spain that rents good bikes and sells quality merchandise.

**Paria Springs Tours** (☎ 622-8826; www.pariasprings.com; tours per person US\$75-100) The company to go to for mountain biking.

**Pathmaster** (☎ 374-7847; www.thepathmaster.com) Andy Whitwell's guides provide reliable, professional service and rentals, as well as the highest prices.



per day TT\$300). **Carl Fitzjames** (☎ 718-8605) is one of the few guides in the country who will lead multiday camping treks in the rainforest.

Rosa is famous for being a whiz in the Caribbean kitchen, and staying in **Rosa's** (☎ 664-6753; r incl 2 meals TT\$300) back bedroom is a yummy and authentic experience of rural Trinidad. Or stay at the **Pachenco's** (☎ 669-6139; person incl 2 meals TT\$250) house (by the church) with three bedrooms and a sitting area. It's basic and does the trick. You eat Ms P's homemade meals next door.

## WEST COAST

### Caroni Bird Sanctuary

Caroni Bird Sanctuary is the roosting site for thousands of scarlet ibis, the national bird of Trinidad and Tobago. At sunset the birds fly in to roost in the swamp's mangroves, giving the trees the appearance of being abloom with brilliant scarlet blossoms. Even if you're not an avid bird-watcher, the sight of the ibis flying over the swamp, glowing almost fluorescent red in the final rays of the evening sun, is not to be missed.

Long, flat-bottomed motorboats, holding up to 30 passengers, pass slowly through the swamp's channels. To avoid disturbing the birds, the boats keep a fair distance from the roosting sites, so bring along a pair of binoculars. Expect to also see herons and egrets, predominant among the swamp's 150 bird species. Note that during the summer months very few ibis are sighted, but the trip is still worthwhile.

The main companies offering tours of the swamp are **David Ramsahai** (☎ 663-4767), **Nanan's Bird Sanctuary Tours** (☎ 645-1305; nantour@tstt.net.tt) and **Sean Madoo Tours** (☎ 663-0458). All the companies offer 2½-hour tours, starting at 4pm daily, for US\$10 per person. Reservations for the tours are recommended, but if you just show up you'll probably be able to find space on one of the boats. If your main interest is photography, the light is more favorable in the morning. Morning tours, which leave at 4:30am, can be arranged through David Ramsahai.

The sanctuary is off the Uriah Butler Hwy, 14km south of Port of Spain; the turnoff is marked. If you don't have your own vehicle, Nanan's Bird Sanctuary Tours provide transport from Port of Spain for an extra US\$35 per person. Many guesthouses and hotels in Port of Spain also arrange trips.

### Carapichaima

The Carapichaima area is between Chaguanas and Couva and is easily accessed from the north by the Uriah Butler Hwy. This region is the heart of Trinidad's East Indian population. Their forbears mostly came to Trinidad as indentured servants between 1845 and 1917 to compensate for the labor loss when slavery was abolished, and they now own most of south-central Trinidad. Roti eateries are all over and Hindi temples are hard to miss.

### CHAGUANAS

Chaguanas (sha-gwon-as) comes alive during the annual festivals of Phagwa and Divali (see p771), which celebrate Hindu traditions. Along the main road south of Chaguanas, potters make the touted **Chaguanas pottery**, including *deya* (tiny earthenware lamps) and other ceramic items using traditional methods.

### WATERLOO TEMPLE

This tranquil, almost surreal Hindu temple (donation suggested; ☎ 8am-3pm Tue, Thu & Sat, 9-11am Sun) sits at the end of a causeway jutting 90m off the central west coast. Its formal name is Siewdass Sadhu Shiv Mandir, after its creator. Grateful for his safe return from India through the WWI-embattled waters of the Pacific, Sadhu committed himself to building a temple. Construction began in 1947 on state-owned land. When the state demolished his efforts, Sadhu began building out in the sea, carrying each foundation stone on his bicycle to the water's edge. When he died in 1970, his work was still incomplete. In 1994 the Hindu community completed the temple. It is accessed through the Waterloo Bay Recreation Park. The site is a common place for Hindus to throw their loved ones' ashes to sea. Visitors are welcome, with no admission charge.

To get to Waterloo, travel south from Port of Spain on the Uriah Butler Hwy to Chaguanas, then 58.5km on the Southern Main Rd to St Mary's. Turn west on the Waterloo Rd until you reach the temple. Alternatively, take a maxi-taxi to Chaguanas (TT\$6), then another to St Mary's (TT\$2), from where you can get a route taxi (TT\$3) to the temple.

### INDIAN CARIBBEAN MUSEUM

Just inland from Waterloo Temple, this very interesting museum (admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm

Wed-Sun) is dedicated to the East Indian history and experience in Trinidad. For being just one large room, it does a comprehensive job presenting Trinidad's East Indian roots. Some gorgeous antique sitars and drums are displayed as well as photographs and informational displays about early East Indian settlers. Other highlights include local art, traditional Hindi clothing, a display of a traditional East Indian Trini kitchen (replete with a *chulha*, the earthen stove where roti is made), and crazy pictures of Brits with their East Indian indentured servants.

### DAVENNA YOGA CENTRE

Just look for the giant, towering monkey-god statue. Bereft of yoga and meditation classes, the impressively garish Davenna Yoga Centre is not so much a Hindu spiritual center as an intended tourist site. The only Southern Indian-style temple in the western hemisphere, it's an incredible sight to behold in the middle of a small Trinidadian town. Take the Chase Village exit from the highway and a kilometer down the road you'll see the turnoff for Orange Field Rd; the Davenna Yoga Centre is a couple of kilometers down.

### Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust

This is a special place. Despite being in the midst of the island's sprawling oil refinery a few miles north of San Fernando, **Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust** (☎ 658-4200, ext 2512; adult/child/teen TT\$10/3/6; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun), a wetland sanctuary, has an abundance of birdlife in a highly concentrated 26 hectares. There are about 90 bird species, both wild and in cages, including endangered waterfowl, colorful songbirds, ibis, herons and other wading birds. In a 20-minute stroll around the grounds, you can easily spot a few dozen species.

A nonprofit organization, the trust is an environmental education center that rehabilitates and breeds endangered species. The birds are released into the wild, where they bolster natural populations. The visitors center has small exhibits and a gift shop.

Reservations should be made a day in advance, so the refinery guards know you're coming. Several entrances lead into the surrounding PetroTrin Oil Refinery, and gate access to the sanctuary occasionally changes, so get directions when you make reservations.

### San Fernando

pop 75,300

Trinidad's second-largest city, San Fernando is also the center of the island's gas and oil industries. Anyone looking for real cultural immersion will enjoy San Fernando, as few tourists come through the town. Most of the action happens at shops and stands around Harris Promenade or you can find great views on San Fernando Hill.

As the transportation hub for the region, maxi-taxis and route taxis run regularly to Port of Spain and other outlying areas. Most of the town's hotels cater to visiting oil and gas types who are in town on business.

This 40-room, family-owned **Tradewinds Hotel** (☎ 652-9463; www.tradewindshotel.net; 36-38 London St; s/d US\$109/120, ste s/d US\$153/164, all incl breakfast; ♿ ♻️ 🚿) offers reasonable value. It has an outdoor pool, bar, restaurant, spa and gym. Room configurations range from a small standard room to the deluxe suite with kitchen and Jacuzzi.

The hotel's **Treehouse Restaurant** (dinner mains US\$110-300; ☎ 5am-midnight) serves up good breakfasts, sandwiches, seafood and meat dishes. Views from the patio are spectacular.

### Pitch Lake

Some 22km southwest of San Fernando near the town of La Brea is **Pitch Lake** (☎ 651-1232; tours TT\$30; ☎ 9am-5pm). Once thought of as a punishment of the gods by the Amerindians, this bubbling lake of pitch is perhaps Trinidad's greatest oddity. Bird-watchers will find it of interest as well for the species it attracts. This 40-hectare expanse of asphalt is 90m deep at its center, where hot bitumen is continuously replenished from a subterranean fault. The lake, one of only three asphalt lakes in the world, has the single largest supply of natural bitumen, and as much as 300 tons are extracted daily. The surface of Pitch Lake looks like a clay tennis court covered with wrinkled elephant-like skin. During the rainy season, people sit in its warm sulfurous pools. On the tour, the guide sagely takes you across via the solid parts. High heels are not recommended. Call ahead to book a tour or you can just show up.

### EAST COAST

Trinidad's east coast is wild and rural. The mix of lonely beaches with rough Atlantic waters, mangrove swamps and coconut plantations creates dramatic scenery. It's deserted

most of the year, except for holidays, especially post-Carnival when people flood in for beachside relaxation.

Few hotels operate on the east coast. Sometimes people will come down for a weekend beach lime, but places are mainly patronized the week after Carnival. Rates listed here are for the high season (January to May) and drop dramatically in the low season.

Long, wide and windswept, **Manzanilla Beach**, the main beach, has caramel-colored sand, palm trees and white-beach morning glory. The strong winds and tempestuous waters make swimming a challenge, but the post-Carnival crowd comes in droves to play in the surf and sun. A public beach facility at the northern end has changing rooms, snacks and lifeguards.

The immaculate 16-room family-run **Hotel Carries on the Bay** (☎ 668-5711; rUS\$385; ♿) sits on the main road as you approach Manzanilla Beach. Just steps from the beach, its bright, spacious rooms are some of the best maintained in the area. The restaurant here serves three meals (TT\$25 to TT\$45) a day.

Right on the north end of Manzanilla Beach, **D' Coconut Cove** (☎ 691-5939; 33-36 Calypso Rd; s/d US\$925/1125, upstairs room add TT\$400; ♿) is a cheerful all-inclusive hotel (except alcohol) that has 12 spacious, uniquely decorated rooms with private decks overlooking the beach. The indoor-outdoor restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The Manzanilla-Mayaro Rd, along the east coast, is narrow but traffic is light. Cows and water buffalo roam freely, coconut palms and orange heliconia line the roadside and you can easily spot vultures, egrets and herons along the way.

The road continues south, skirting the freshwater **Nariva Swamp**, an international Ramsar-protected site with more than 6000 hectares of wetlands of 'international im-

portance.' A few tour guides offer boat trips through the swamp but tours must be arranged ahead of time. Winston Nanan of **Nanan's Bird Sanctuary Tours** (☎ 645-1305; nantour@tsst.net.tt; tours per person US\$100, minimum 2 people) has day-long trips including lunch and transportation from Port of Spain. **Paria Springs** (☎ 622-8826; www.pariasprings.com; per person US\$95) offers kayaking tours of the swamp coupled with expert birding guides and is one of the best ways to experience the swamp. **Caribbean Discovery Tours** (☎ 624-7281; www.caribbeanandiscoverytours.com) also offers kayak tours.

After crossing the Ortoire River, Trinidad's longest, you'll encounter a couple of small settlements with simple wooden houses on stilts before reaching the small beach town of **Mayaro**, where a sign points west to San Fernando, 56km away. Mayaro has a smattering of accommodation options. Eats can be found in town or on Church St. There is a small, minimally maintained beach facility. At the festive **Mayaro Entertainment Center** (☎ 310-0806; 37 Radix Village), which is an open-air restaurant 1km away from the beach, you will find live music on the weekends, traditional food and a small connected hotel with basic rooms (room TT\$350). **Moondrop Beach Resort** (☎ 678-4915; cnr Church & Gould St; apt TT\$500; ♿) also rents a couple of self-sufficient beachside apartments.

Several houses further south are available for rent to primarily local families, who bring their own bedding, food and cleaning supplies. If you're traveling with friends, these can be quite a good deal for a peaceful stay. **BBS Beach Resort** (☎ 678-4310; apt TT\$450) has four four-bedroom apartments with full kitchens.

## NORTHEAST COAST

'When you out, you out. When you in, you in,' is what they say about this remote area. Tourism, for the most part, hasn't caught

### EFFICIENCY DEFICIENCY: NO PROBLEM, MON

One of the most magical things about Trinidad and Tobago is the warm, laid-back attitude of the people. Somehow, the vibe infuses your soul and you can relax in a way incomprehensible at home.

There's a price, however. A restaurant might close because staff is limin'. The bus might decide to charter itself for a family beach trip. Your taxi driver could be late because he was waiting for doubles. Service-industry folk prioritize animated cell-phone chats. No problem.

Sometimes you want to tell them where to put their relax. Yet, this is the way of things. Try to go with the flow, appreciate it for what it is, and you'll be less stressed.

onto the rugged coastline beauty with waterfalls, hiking trails, swimming holes and rivers nearby. Not to mention San Souci, one of its beaches, is one of the best places to surf on the island, with lesser places in Grand Rivière and Matura Bay. This region is also the epicenter of leatherback turtle conservation on the island. Accommodations aren't abundant but you can find some nice places to hang your hat.

Inaccessible from Blanchisseuse, this quiet region is bounded by Matelot in the north and Matura in the southeast. The area is accessed via Arima or Sangre Grande (known as Sandy Grandy), where the Eastern Main Rd forks and the Toco Main Rd extends northeast along the coast. Getting here is easiest by far with your own vehicle, but it's possible to arrive via public transportation through the Sangre Grande hub.

## Toco

Sleepy to the point of catatonic, this little village is near some deserted, picturesque beaches and has some modest guesthouses, none with signs. A highlight is the **Sea Sands Camp** (☎ 670-8356; Paria Main Rd; per person incl all meals TT\$90) run by local herbalist Mrs Bravo. Her hostel-like guesthouse by the ocean has several rooms filled with bunk beds with foam mattresses. The accommodations are clean, but extremely basic. The treasure here is the homey, good-humored atmosphere that provides you with the experience of real Trinidad. If bunk beds aren't your thing, you can still call ahead and arrange a mostly organic meal of some of the best local food and juices on the island. Mrs. Bravo sells homemade Noni wine, local remedy teas that she harvests herself, and the acclaimed sea moss. Local surf spot **San Souci** is a short drive (or nice bike ride; see p749) away.

A lighthouse here marks **Galera Point**, which offers fantastic views of the dramatic coastline, and nearby is a tiny cultural **museum** located in the school and open weekdays.

## Grande Rivière

pop 350

This tiny coastal village now has a number of small nature-oriented resorts that cater to foreign bird-watchers, sea-turtle fans, and general lovers of the outdoors. Though some sections of beach are surfable in winter, other parts are gentler.

Based in a tiny office here is **Grand Rivière Nature Tour Guide Association** (☎ 469-7288; 117 Hosang St), a local group dedicated to protecting the turtles. It offers night-time turtle tours (TT\$65) on the beach and provides the required permit during the turtle season (March to August). The tours explain this ancient, endangered species and educate about the importance of conservation. The association also offer bird-watching excursions and hiking tours (US\$20 to US\$50) to waterfalls, swimming holes and seldom visited natural wonders in the area.

You can ask locals about guesthouses, but the majority of official tourist accommodations here are higher-end. There's no significant place to buy groceries, so hotels provide meals from their restaurants.

The five bungalows dappling **Acajou** (☎ 670-3771; www.acajoutrinidad.com; 209 Paria Main Rd; bungalow US\$110) are beside the mouth of a river flowing into the ocean. The decor is simple and fresh with rich wood and bright white linens and cushions. French doors open to hammocked patios that look towards the ocean. No air-conditioning, TV or phones makes this a fantastic retreat.

The adorable, well-done rooms at **Le Grande Almandier** (☎ 670-1013; www.legrandealmandier.com; 2 Hosang St; s/d/ste TT\$538/675/1000; 📺 🚿) have quaint balconies overlooking the sea, and their laid-back café has rooftop seating. Of Grand Rivière's beachside accommodations, this is the best value.

Local art and murals adorn the beachside **Mt Plaisir Estate Hotel** (☎ 670-8381; www.mtplaisir.com; Grande Rivière; r incl breakfast TT\$633, ste TT\$945). Its rooms feature teak floors and handcrafted furnishings. It offers airport shuttles (TT\$630, one way). The restaurant (mains TT\$90 to TT\$150) serves fresh seafood, organic fruits and vegetables and homemade bread.

## Matura & Around

The most developed **turtle conservation** effort underway in Trinidad is run by **Nature Seekers** (☎ 727-3933; www.natureseekers.org) in Matura, which runs educational programs and turtle tours (TT\$90) in Matura Bay. **Earthwatch** (www.earthwatch.org) supports Nature Seekers' effort by contracting it for volunteer programs. Independent volunteering can happen when Earthwatch isn't there, but tours run the whole turtle season (March–August).

Volunteers stay in Nature Seekers' basic **guest house** (dm/r TT\$250/350, incl meals TT\$375/475).

The only other official accommodation nearby is in Salybia (Sally Bay). **Salybia Nature Resort & Spa** (☎ 668-5959; www.salybiareort.com; Mile 13.75, Toco Main Rd, Salybia; r TT\$1125-TT\$2175; 🚻 📺 🚿) frequently hosts conferences, and the rooms are overpriced, some of them showing their years. Check the must-factor before deciding. The grounds are replete with lush tropical landscaping, a pool, waterfall and a tumultuous beach.

Right across from the resort is a sign for the **Rio Seco Waterfall Trail** in Matura National Park, which leads to a swimming hole and a waterfall. It's a 45-minute hike from the trailhead.

## TOBAGO

While Trinidad booms with industry and parties all night, tiny Tobago (just 42km across) slouches in a deck chair with a Caribe in hand watching its crystalline waters shimmer in the sun. Though Tobago is proud of its rainforests, fantastic dive sites, stunning aquamarine bays and nature reserves, it's OK with not being mentioned in a Beach Boys song. It accepts its tourists without vigor, but rather with languor, and allows them to choose between plush oceanside hotels or tiny guesthouses in villages where you walk straight to the open-air bar with sandy bare feet, and laugh with the locals drinking rum.

When Hurricane Flora ripped by in 1963, she basically blew away the agro-based plantation economy. The government then turned its rebuilding efforts to tourism. Though there's enough infrastructure to make navigating Tobago easy, it's not over-run...yet. Don't dally in visiting because times are changing. Sleepy Tobago is increasingly being woken by a jostling tourism industry that loves it for its great value, beauty and genuinely friendly culture.

### Orientation

Most of the white-sand beaches and tourist development are centered on the southwestern side of Tobago, starting at Crown Point and running along a string of bays up to Arnos Vale. The lowlands that predominate in the southwest extend to Tobago's only large town, Scarborough. The coast beyond is dotted with small fishing villages and the

interior is ruggedly mountainous, with thick rainforest. Divers and snorkelers, and those seeking mellow days visit the easternmost villages of Speyside and Charlotteville. The nearby uninhabited islets of Little Tobago, Goat Island and St Giles Island are nature reserves abundant in both bird and marine life.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

Most people get to Tobago by taking the 20-minute flight from Trinidad (see p774), although a couple of airlines now offer direct flights from Europe. The Crown Point International Airport, like Tobago, is small, relaxed and rarely rushed.

#### BOAT

A slower, less expensive alternative to flying to Tobago is to take the ferry from Port of Spain, Trinidad, to Scarborough, Tobago (see p775).

### Getting Around

Getting around any of Tobago's small towns is easy on foot. Buses and route taxis aren't as readily available as they are on Trinidad, but there's enough to get you from point A to point B.

#### BICYCLE

There are rental places on the island, and biking is a fine way to navigate around the towns, and sometimes town to town, on Tobago.

#### BUS

There is a regular bus service from Scarborough to Crown Point, Plymouth (via Buccoo and Mt Irvine) and most villages on the island. The Scarborough bus terminal is a short walk from the ferry terminal off Milford Rd on Sangster Hill Rd. Buses to/from Crown Point (TT\$2) and Plymouth (TT\$2) run frequently from dawn to 8pm. Service decreases at night and on weekends.

Other departures from Scarborough are: Charlotteville via Speyside (TT\$8, 1½ hours, seven departures from 5am to 6pm), Parlatuvier via Castara (TT\$6, 45 minutes, departures at 6am, 2:30pm, 4pm and 6pm) and Roxborough (TT\$5, 30 minutes, six departures from 6:30am to 4pm).



Note that buses aren't reliable and you don't always know if they'll come (see boxed text, p752).

### CAR

If you want a leisurely drive around the island, you could consider renting a car for a day or two. You must be over 25 to rent a car on Tobago, and rates can be slightly higher than on Trinidad. Gas stations are sparsely scattered around the island, so it's wise to fill up when you can. The following agencies are at or near Crown Point International Airport:

**Auto Rentals** (☎ 639-0644; airport)

**Baird's Rentals** (☎ 639-2528; airport)

**Spence's Car Rental** (☎ 639-7611; Store Bay Rd, Crown Point)

**Thrifty Car Rental** (☎ 639-8507; airport)

### MAXI-TAXI

Tobago's maxi-taxis have a blue band. These taxis mostly serve locals and travel can be excruciatingly slow.

### ROUTE TAXI

In lower Scarborough, taxis to Plymouth, Castara, and Parlatuvier depart from opposite the market (TT\$5 to TT\$8), and taxis to Crown Point leave from in front of the ferry terminal (TT\$6). In upper Scarborough, taxis to Speyside and Charlotteville leave from Republic Bank by James Park (TT\$12).

### TAXI

Taxis are available at Crown Point International Airport and charge about TT\$25 to hotels around Crown Point, TT\$30 to Pigeon Point, TT\$50 to Scarborough, TT\$60 to Mt Irvine or Buccoo and TT\$260 to Charlotteville. There's a taxi stand at Club Pigeon Point.

## CROWN POINT

Home of the island's airport, quickly sprawling Crown Point on Tobago's southwest tip is the tourist epicenter, offering a relatively wide range of accommodations, restaurants, and some nightlife. The area's attractive beaches and extensive services make many tourists stay put. Even though you can look to the fringes for a good roti, anyone wanting to appreciate Tobago's cultural charms should plan to push eastward to explore other parts of the island.

## Information

In Crown Point, Republic Bank, at the airport, and RBTT, next to the Clothes Wash Café, have 24-hour ATMs. You'll also find banks and ATMs in Scarborough. In Speyside there's no ATM. Charlotteville has an unreliable one.

**Clothes Wash Café** (☎ 639-0007; Airport Rd; ☎ 8am-9pm) Check your email (per hr TT\$20) during the spin cycle at this internet café-slash-laundry. You can use the coin-operated washers and dryers (about TT\$30 each load) here, or drop it off and they'll do it for you for around twice as much.

**RCS** (☎ 631-8597; Spence Plaza, Milford Rd; per 30min TT\$10; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) On the 2nd floor in Spence Plaza, you'll find flat-screen computers.

**Tourist office** (☎ 639-0509; Crown Point International Airport; ☎ 8am-10pm) The staff provide comprehensive information and can help you book a room or find hiking and bird-watching tour guides.

Anyone needing medical services should head to the **Scarborough General Hospital** (☎ 639-2551; Calder Hall Rd; ☎ 24hr), a 15-minute drive away.

## Sights & Activities

In Crown Point, it's all about the beach and the water, and a couple of great beaches deliver.

### BEACHES

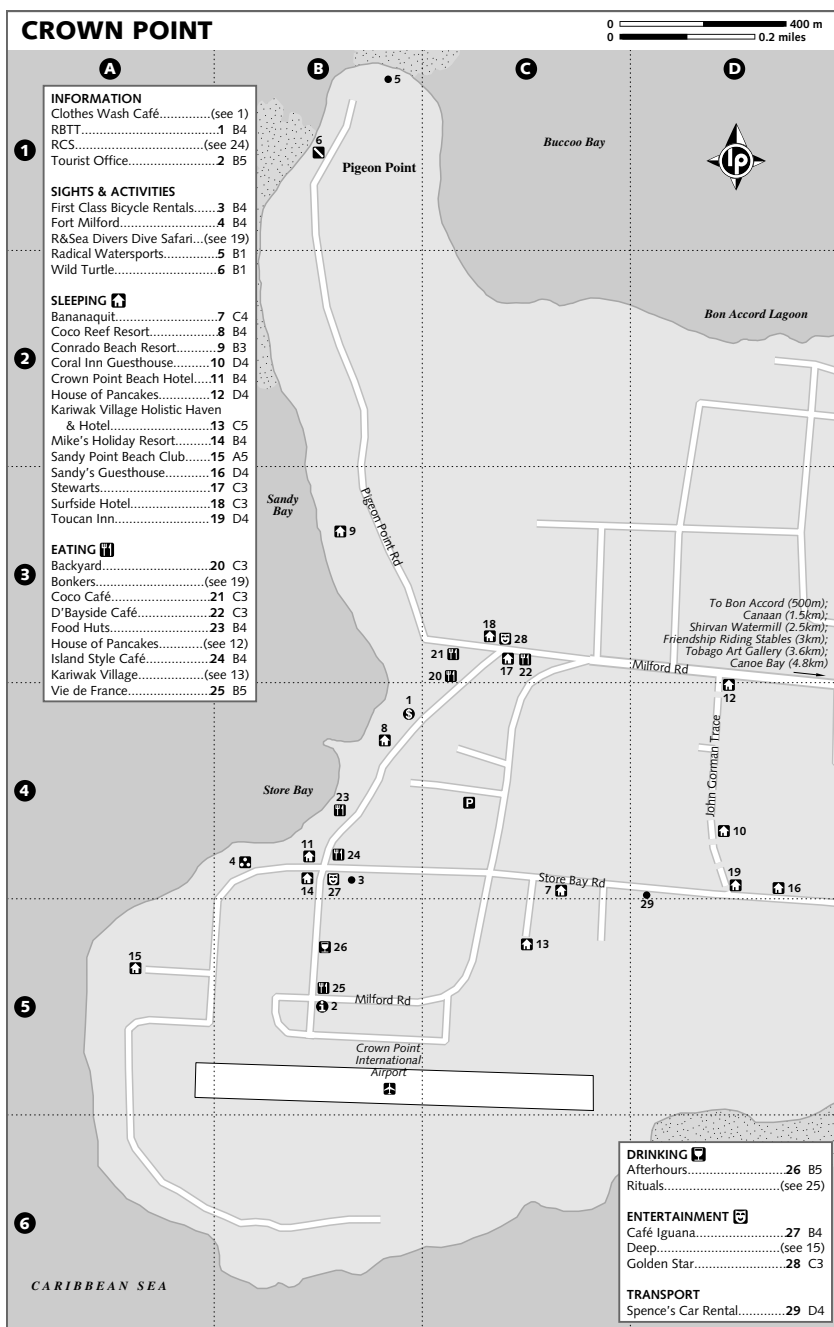
#### Store Bay

You'll find white sands and good year-round swimming at Store Bay, the body of water close to Crown Point on the west side. It's a center of activity where vendors sell souvenirs and hawkers push glass-bottom boat tours of Buccoo Reef. The facilities include a clean rest room (TT\$1). Several food huts here serve up delicious local food (see p760). It's just a five-minute walk from the airport and there's no admission fee. At times, the glass-bottom boat pushers can be overly persistent.

#### Pigeon Point

You have to pay to get access to **Club Pigeon Point** (admission TT\$18, weekly pass TT\$75; ☎ 9am-7pm), whose facilities are harmoniously landscaped. It's the fine dining of Tobago's beaches, with bars and snack bars, toilets and showers spread out along plenty of beachfront. The postcard-perfect, palm-fringed beach has powdery white sands and clear aqua water.

The wind here is a huge draw for windsurfers and kitesurfers who weave and flip around





their aquamarine playland. **Radical Watersports** (☎ 631-5150; windsurf boards per hr TT\$250, kayaks per hr TT\$100; ☎ 9am-5pm), at the northernmost end, is the center of these wind sports, providing quality rental and lessons. It also rents kayaks that can be paddled east towards the mangrove-y 'No Man's Land' and deserted beaches. Vendors rent out beach chairs for TT\$20 per day. It's just 1.5km north of Store Bay, about a 15-minute walk from the airport.

### Canoe Bay

Accessed by a dirt road a few miles east of Crown Point, **Canoe Bay** (adult/child TT\$15/10) is a gorgeous shallow bay that's popular with picnicking families. The lone hotel here is Canoe Bay Beach Resort (opposite).

### DIVING

Stupendous water clarity, giant shoals of tropical fish, stunning corals, a variety of dive sites and excellent operators make diving on Tobago some of the best in the Caribbean. Whether you want to do mellow coral-seeing dives or current-zipping drift dives past huge turtles and sharks, Tobago's got it all. Although serious divers tend to stay up at Speyside and Charlotteville, dive operators in Crown Point run trips all over the island. There is one recompression chamber on the island, in the east-coast village of Roxborough.

Numerous dive operators vie for your business here. With diving, you often get what you pay for, so be wary of operators offering cheap trips – it can mean shoddy equipment and unprofessional divemasters. Upscale operators at the Hilton and Coco Beach hotels provide quality service.

Also recommended:

**R&Sea Divers** (☎ 639-8120; [www.rseadivers.com](http://www.rseadivers.com); Toucan Inn, Store Bay Rd; dive US\$40) Safe, professional and friendly, R&Sea is a Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) facility that's been around for a long time. Staff will pick up divers at any hotel.

**Wild Turtle Dive Safari** (☎ 639-6558; [www.wildturtle.com](http://www.wildturtle.com); Pigeon Point Rd; dive US\$40) Certified by PADI and diver recommended, it offers open-water dive certification (US\$375) as well as refresher, advanced and divemaster classes. The overnight Dive Safari (US\$325) includes five dives and camping on a remote beach.

### OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Other sights include the remains of **Fort Milford**, a crumbling coral-stone fort built by the British in 1777. Today, it's a small park,

but a bit of the old fort walls and half a dozen cannons remain. It's a five-minute walk southwest of Store Bay.

In between Scarborough and Crown Point is Lowlands, where **Tobago Art Gallery** (☎ 639-0457; [artgal2@hotmail.com](mailto:artgal2@hotmail.com); Hibiscus Drive, Lowlands; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) is located. The studio houses some impressive, beautiful pieces from local artists.

Rent a bike from James Percy of **First Class Bicycle Rentals** (☎ 494-2547; per day TT\$60) by Café Iguana. He even has tandems. It's a fantastic way to tool around the area. Rental prices decrease when renting for multiple days.

Near Canoe bay, **Friendship Riding Stables** (☎ 620-9788; [www.friendshipridingstables.com](http://www.friendshipridingstables.com); 90min ride TT\$250) will take you on an equestrian adventure. Sometimes there are volunteer positions available at the stable.

### Sleeping

Crown Point has inexpensive guesthouses and luxury resorts. Most accommodations have a kitchenette or access to one. Unless otherwise indicated, all accommodations are less than a 1.5km walk to the airport and to the Store Bay beach.

### BUDGET

**House of Pancakes** (☎ 639-9866; [kittycat@tstt.net.tt](mailto:kittycat@tstt.net.tt); cnr Milford Rd & John Gorman Trace; dm TT\$95, r with shared/private bathroom TT\$195/265; ☎ ☎) Over the years this friendly operation has catered to budget travelers and continues to keep its prices reasonable and facilities hospitable. The three rooms are simple, with shared or private bathroom. Guests have shared kitchen facilities.

**Sandy's Guesthouse** (☎ 639-9221; Store Bay Rd; s/d with fan TT\$135/180, with air-con TT\$270/360; ☎) Stay with Valerie and Hugh Sandy and you stay in a welcoming Tobagonian home. The rooms and shared kitchen facilities are scrubbed attentively.

**Stewarts** (☎ 639-8319; Airport Rd; s/d TT\$150/170, d with air-con TT\$320; ☎) Right where Milford Rd forks you'll find this economical option with shared kitchen facilities and balconies.

**Surfside Hotel** (☎ 639-0614; [www.surfsidetobago.com](http://www.surfsidetobago.com); Pigeon Point Rd; r from TT\$250-350; ☎ ☎) This hotel used to be a budget deal for scrounging travelers. Now it's still a good place to meet people from all corners, even if prices have risen. The self-catering rooms are still solid value. Extra Dive Shop makes its base here.

**Coral Inn Guesthouse** (☎ 639-0967; John Gorman Trace; s/d US\$40/60; 🏠 🚿) This clean guesthouse quietly set back from Store Bay Rd has self-contained apartments with two bedrooms each. The friendly owner, Veda Gopaul, lives upstairs. Rates are negotiable for longer stays.

**Scarborough House** (☎ 730-1764; [www.scarboroughhousejs.com](http://www.scarboroughhousejs.com); 24 Dillon St, Bon Accord; s/d US\$40/60; 🏠 🚿) Joyce Scarborough provides you with an intimate experience in her columned home. The downstairs contains a variety of self-contained apartments, and there's a cute pool in the back. Name your breakfast, American or local (US\$7), and Joyce will whip it up. It's in Bon Accord, east of the center.

**Mike's Holiday Resort** (☎ 639-8050; Store Bay Rd; apt TT\$300; 🏠) Centrally located in the heart of Crown Point, Mike's has 12 clean, modern apartments with large kitchens that are updated and cheerful. In a town of skyrocketing prices, this is a deal.

**Bananaquit** (☎ 639-9733; [www.bananaquit.com](http://www.bananaquit.com); Store Bay Rd; studio/loft US\$60/65) The arrangement of these spacious 14 apartments around the courtyard garden creates a community feel. The lofts upstairs can sleep up to six people. Guests can use the pool at neighboring Store Bay Resort. It's a five-minute walk to Store Bay beach.

**Canoe Bay Beach Resort** (☎ 685-4785; [www.canoebaytt.com](http://www.canoebaytt.com); Canoe Bay; s/d TT\$400/460; 🏠 🚿) Set on 17.6 hectares in Canoe Bay, this resort is a quiet, low-key place featuring 18 apartment-style villas, a bar, restaurant and several huts along the beach.

## MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Conrado Beach Resort** (☎ 639-0145; [www.holidayintobago.com/conradobeachresort.html](http://www.holidayintobago.com/conradobeachresort.html); Pigeon Point Rd; s US\$90-110 d US\$100-115; 🏠 🚿) A short walk from Pigeon Point, this no-frills beach resort proves to be good beachside hotel value. Sand and surf are at stumbling distance. The rooms are clean, many with ocean-view balconies. There is a restaurant and bar on-site.

**Crown Point Beach Hotel** (☎ 639-8781; [www.crownpointbeachhotel.com](http://www.crownpointbeachhotel.com); d studio US\$90, cabana US\$100, 1-bedroom apt US\$130; 🏠 🚿) Somewhat clinging to yesteryear, this hotel enjoys a good beachfront location next to Fort Milford. All rooms have kitchenettes and views of the ocean. There's also a pleasant pool, tennis courts and a restaurant.

**Toucan Inn** (☎ 639-7173; [www.toucan-inn.com](http://www.toucan-inn.com); Store Bay Rd; r US\$100-120; 🏠 🚿) This 20-room hotel creates an intimate, relaxing atmosphere with four circular duplex cabins arranged around a pool and a section of rooms wrapping around a lush garden. The simple rooms have teak furnishings and comfortable beds. Also on the grounds is the Bonkers bar-restaurant. It's a 10-minute walk to Store Bay.

**Sandy Point Beach Club** (☎ 639-0820; [www.sandypointbeachclub.com](http://www.sandypointbeachclub.com); Sandy Point; apt US\$100-250; 🏠 🚿) A good-value option for families or bigger groups, this resort mostly rents its comfortable, well-attended apartments for week-long stays. The apartments range in size from studios to four-bedroom units that sleep 10. Shuttles to other beaches run daily.

**Summerland Suites** (☎ 631-5053; [www.summerlandsuites.info](http://www.summerlandsuites.info); Roberts Street, Bon Accord; 1-bedroom apt/2-bedroom apt TT\$540/660; 🏠 🚿) Set in a quiet Bon Accord neighborhood, these new self-contained suites are slickly laid along a long skinny pool. The apartments are meticulous with updated, tasteful furnishings.

**Kariwak Village Holistic Haven & Hotel** (☎ 639-8442; [www.kariwak.co.tt](http://www.kariwak.co.tt); r from US\$150; 🏠 🚿) Off Store Bay Rd, just a two-minute walk from the airport, Kariwak nestles in lush landscaping. The duplex cabanas line paths that wind through tropical gardens. It's both rustic and refreshing. There's an organic herb garden, two pools (one with waterfall), and free yoga and tai chi classes. The Kariwak Village restaurant serves some of Tobago's freshest, tastiest food.

**Coco Reef Resort** (☎ 639-8572; [www.cocoreef.com](http://www.cocoreef.com); r low/high season from US\$310/460; 🏠 🚿) Coco Reef pays elegant homage to luxurious colonial architecture, but a real highlight is the gorgeous Cuban art that lavishes the entire facility. Rooms overlook pretty Coconut Bay, and guests enjoy top-tier amenities and excellent service. The resort is just next to the Store Bay parking lot off Milford Rd. Offers wi-fi.

## Eating

**D'Byside Cafe** (☎ 708-4406; Spence Plaza, Milford Rd; roti TT\$15-20; 🕒 7am-10pm Mon-Sat) Tucked a bit off of Milford Rd, this local haunt has tasty rotis and fresh juice. The interior has air-con and outside there are umbrella tables.

**Vie de France** (☎ 631-8088; mains TT\$20-50; 🕒 6:30am-8pm) Don't let the name fool you. This is the closest thing to an American diner that you'll find in Tobago, replete with greasy

spoon faves. Just across from the airport, it's a great place for a preflight bite. Plus, the coffee shop Rituals is attached for your caffeine fix.

**Island Style Café** (☎ 708-4406; Spence Plaza, Milford Rd; roti TT\$25-30; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Sat) Locals stop by here for breakfast bake that you can load with interesting goodies, to grab a roti, or for barbecue dinner. It's cheap, local and yummy.

**House of Pancakes** (☎ 639-9866; cnr Milford Rd & John Gorman Trace; mains TT\$35-80; ☎ breakfast) Lauded as the best breakfast in town, there are flapjacks, fresh juices and smoothies, and omelets served until noon on a pleasant wooden deck.

**Backyard** (☎ 639-7264; Milford Rd; mains TT\$35-80; ☎ noon-7pm Mon-Fri) It's a treat to visit this colorful roadside café that brings a European spin to local ingredients. The dishes are light and flavorful and the juices – like papaya guava (TT\$18) – are lovely. It's vegetarian friendly.

**Bonkers** (☎ 639-7173; Toucan Inn, Store Bay Rd; breakfast & lunch mains TT\$40-70, dinner mains TT\$70-200; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This veranda restaurant and bar serves tasty breakfasts, sandwiches, salads, and fish and chips. On Mondays and Wednesdays there's live steel pan or African drumming at 7pm.

**Coco Café** (☎ 639-0996; Old Store Bay Rd; mains TT\$50-150; ☎ dinner) Candlelit and breezy, the wistful ambience, complimented by friendly staff, leads you to a lovely experience. You won't go wrong choosing from its cocktail or seafood menus.

**our pick Kariwak Village** (☎ 639-8442; Kariwak Village Hotel; breakfast TT\$70, dinner from TT\$120; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Beneath the thatched roofs and coral stone walls of this open-air restaurant, the Kariwak chefs create masterpieces of Caribbean and Creole cuisine using fresh ingredients including organic herbs and vegetables from the garden. Breakfast includes a healthy bowl of fresh fruit, eggs, fish, homemade granola and homemade toast. At lunch and dinner, you can do no wrong with the specials, usually featuring grilled fish and seafood. There are vegetarian options, too.

**Shirvan Watermill** (☎ 639-0000; mains TT\$75-180; ☎ dinner from 6:30pm, closed Mon) On Shirvan Rd between Crown Point and Buccoo Bay, this longtime popular restaurant sits under a coral-columned gazebo beside the mill of a former sugar estate. It has lovely outdoor dining and some of the island's best food, such as delicate soups and salads, meats, chicken Creole and lobster.

The best place to each lunch is at the row of food huts opposite the beach at Store Bay. Several huts run by local women offer delicious heaping local dishes like rotis, shark and bake, crab and dumplin', and simple plate lunches for TT\$20 to TT\$50. **Sylvia's** (☎ 7am-4ish) has delicious oil down (breadfruit sautéed in a curry sauce) amongst other scrumptious local dishes. Also, across from the airport starting around 10am (ending when all is sold) a lady sells doubles for TT\$2.50 a pop out of the back of a car and is known throughout the island.

There are several minimarts on Store Bay Rd but for big grocery shops head east of Crown Point to **Pennysaver's** (Milford Rd), near Canaan. Also, in Bon Accord, tiny **E and F Health Foods** (☎ 639-3992; 7 Alfred Crescent, Bon Accord; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) sells whole wheat bakery items and freshly ground peanut butter.

## Drinking

**Afterhours** (☎ 639-8397; ☎ 10am-late) Karen Quashie runs this reliable bar-restaurant that serves food and drinks when most of quiet little Tobago is head to pillow.

## Entertainment

**Café Iguana** (☎ 631-8205; www.iguanatobago.com; cnr Store Bay & Milford Rds; ☎ 6-10pm Thu-Tue) This stylish, casual hangout serves up good cocktails and live jazz-inspired tunes. The menu offers good local cuisine, but most folks come for the Friday and Saturday night jazz music.

**Golden Star** (☎ 639-0873; cnr Milford & Pigeon Point Rds; occasional cover charge TT\$30) Like a rice staple in Crown Point's entertainment menu, it may not be the saucy exotic main, but it satiates you. This locally popular club features live steel bands, Afterwork Lime with DJs, and, occasionally, local bands.

**Deep** (Sandy Point Beach Club, Sandy Point; cover charge TT\$40; ☎ 10pm-late Thu-Sat) DJs spin soca, salsa and merengue at this dance destination.

**Shade** (☎ 639-9651; Bon Accord; ☎ 6pm-late) Locals, foreigners, tourists all flock to Shade for a proper party lime. It's probably the hippest place on the island to wine and dine.

## BUCCOO

If you stay in Buccoo, people in other parts of Tobago will raise their eyebrows and possibly say, 'Ah, going local.' The narrow tan-sand beach of Buccoo Bay doesn't compete with the generous white sands of Store Bay,



access (TT\$20 per hour). A mas camp is based here during the Carnival season.

## LEEWARD ROAD

The stretch of coastline from Mt Irvine Bay to Plymouth has exclusive resorts hugging their own bays; elegant villas; and a golf course. Like a sloppy adolescent propping its feet on the table in a fancy living room, Black Rock's tiny Pleasant Prospect is right in the middle. It's a teeny surfer haunt: a cluster of cheap unofficial accommodation, eateries and a few good places to lime.

## Sights & Activities

A roadside public recreation facility at **Mt Irvine Beach**, 200m north of Mt Irvine Bay Hotel, has sheltered picnic tables and changing rooms, plus a good beachside restaurant (see Surfer's Restaurant & Bar, opposite), roti shacks and a decent craft shop. Surfers migrate here from December to March. You can rent sit-on-top kayaks and surf boards on the beach. Also, Frankie Tours and Rentals (p773) is based in the parking area.

On a rocky hill at the north side of Stone Haven Bay is **Fort Bennett**, about 500m west of a marked turn-off on the main road. The British built the fort in 1778 to defend against US enemy ships. Little remains of it other than a couple of cannons, but there's a good view of the coast.

Turn right off the main road by Mt Irving Golf Course and you'll see signs leading you to **Kimme's Sculpture Museum** (☎ 639-0257; Bethel; admission TT\$20; 🕒 10am-2pm Sun or by appointment). German eccentric Luise Kimme sells and displays fantastic, 2m to 3m wood-and-metal Caribbean-themed sculptures from her whacked-out mansion.

**Grafton Caledonia Wildlife Sanctuary** (🕒 8am-4pm) is right by Grafton Beach Resort – fol-

low signs inland, and it's a short walk to the sanctuary. After Hurricane Flora in 1963, Brit Eleanor Alefounder converted her 36 hectares into a bird sanctuary. There are some short hiking trails, and the bird-watching is touted as some of the best on the island. The birds come out of the rafters at the 4pm feeding time. Her family rents out the simple yet spacious **estate house** ([www.graftonhouse-tobago.com](http://www.graftonhouse-tobago.com)) on the property.

## Sleeping

Resorts and rental villas dominate on this stretch of coastline, but Pleasant Prospect has a handful of unofficial guesthouses.

**Two Seasons** (☎ 729-9329; Pleasant Prospect; r US\$15-25) Right above the Fish Pot restaurant, this basic four-room apartment has a shared balcony, living room and bathroom. It's pretty darn clean for housing a jovial, limin', surfer crowd. Your experience here will be interactive.

**Seahorse Inn** (☎ 639-0686; [www.seahorseinn.tobago.com](http://www.seahorseinn.tobago.com); Stone Haven Bay; r incl breakfast summer/winter US\$175/135; 🍷) A nice contrast to the big resorts, this lovely guesthouse, just below the Grafton Beach Resort, is a low-key establishment with four spacious rooms with teak floors and broad balconies facing Stone Haven Bay.

**Villas at Stonehaven** (☎ 639-0361; [www.stonehaven.villas.com](http://www.stonehaven.villas.com); US\$400-950) is one of several companies that rent out villas. This could be a good choice for families or groups who plan on staying longer than a few days.

An exclusive, all-inclusive resort, **Le Grand Courland Resort & Spa** (☎ 639-9667, in the USA 800-655-1214; [www.legrandcourland-resort.com](http://www.legrandcourland-resort.com); Stone Haven Bay, Black Rock; r US\$318-402; 🍷 🍷 🍷) overlooks Stone Haven Bay. Rates include high-class amenities, drinks and all meals. Under the same ownership is **Grafton Beach Resort** (☎ 639-0191, in the USA 800-223-6510; [www.grafton-resort.com](http://www.grafton-resort.com); Stone Haven Bay; d garden view/ocean view US\$185/195; 🍷 🍷 🍷), a cheaper all-inclusive across the street.

## Eating & Drinking

Pleasant Prospect has a cluster of local bars, eateries, and even a Rituals coffee shop. Each hotel mostly has its own restaurant.

**Joanne's Fingerlickin' Tasty Food** (Pleasant Prospect; TT\$25-35; 🕒 lunch) A food booth that has delightful local fare, fresh juices and homemade baked goods.

**Fish Pot** (☎ 635-1728; Pleasant Prospect; mains TT\$30-80; 🕒 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed-Fri) Very reasonable

### YOGA, ANYONE?

Some upscale hotels on Tobago offer yoga classes free to guests, but outsiders can join for around TT\$50. Call for scheduling. Here are some options:

- Le Grand Courland Resort & Spa (right)
- Kariwak Village Holistic Haven & Hotel (p759)
- Blue Haven Hotel (p766)

and recommended around the island, this laid-back restaurant specializes in seafood and is equipped with an open-air patio. There's music on Friday nights.

**Surfer's Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 639-8407; Mt Irvine Beach; mains TT\$60-150) This casual spot serves up delicious fish stew, fish and bake, and sandwiches.

**Seahorse Inn Restaurant & Bar** (Seahorse Inn, Stone Haven Bay; mains TT\$70-200; ☎ lunch & dinner) Sitting alfresco amid a tropical setting overlooking the water, with the sound of waves crashing below, this special restaurant specializes in gourmet Creole cuisine.

In Pleasant Prospect, the Oceanview Bar is an unpretentious bar nooked into a cliff overlooking the ocean. It's a great place to snag a beer after a day of sand and surf. It has barbecue Fridays as well. Right across the road, Moon Over Water also is a good place to hang with folks.

## ARNOS VALE ROAD

You could just call it the Rodeo Dr of bird-watching. There are a smattering of nature reserves as well as lovely higher-end accommodations which cater to nature lovers and bird-watchers.

Quietly plush and decadently verdant, **Arnos Vale Hotel** (☎ 639-2881; www.arnosvalehotel.com; Arnos Vale Rd; r from US\$215; 🏠) is frequented by nature lovers wanting retreat and premium bird-watching. The lovely veranda restaurant is known for its afternoon tea (TT\$60). The rooms are fresh feeling, with tranquil balconies. Amenities include a pool, bar, gym, pleasant strip of beach, massage services, airport transfers, car rentals and tour arrangements.

**Adventure Farm and Nature Reserve** (☎ 639-2839; call to arrange visit) is a 5-hectare working organic estate that has retained about a hectare of wild area, which is home to a wealth of bird species and is revered for its hummingbirds. You can also come to learn about tropical agriculture practices, buy organic fruit, or take some short hikes around the estate.

**ourpick Adventure Eco-Villas** (☎ 639-2839; www.adventure-ecovillas.com; Arnos Vale Rd, Adventure; s/d/ste \$100/150/200; 🏠) is run by owner Ean Mackey who cares for the two lovely on-site cottages which have updated kitchens, hardwood floors, tons of windows that open into the forest, a huge bath tub, and a spacious

deck. You feel a part of the environment as if you were camping, but you're actually in a styled-out cottage.

Follow signs off Arnos Vale Rd down a rough road for 20 minutes to the charming, secluded **Cuffie River Nature Retreat** (☎ 660-0505; www.cuffieriver.com; Runnemedo; r from US\$150, for full board add per person US\$60) at the edge of the rainforest. Utterly designed for bird-watching fanatics, it has a highly trained birding guide on hand to lead hikes around the area. The spacious, comfortable rooms equipped with balconies are flooded with natural light. There is also an ecofriendly swimming pool and a number of fresh-water springs nearby. Full board (of tasty food, much of it harvested locally) is offered. Alternatively, you could enquire about the two self-catering apartments.

## PLYMOUTH

Though the largest town on the west coast, Plymouth is home to just a few thousand inhabitants and isn't a major destination. At the end of Shelbourne St is the **Mystery Tombstone** of Betty Stiven, who died in 1783, presumably during childbirth. Her tombstone (that seems to fascinate people) reads cryptically, 'She was a mother without knowing it, and a wife without letting her husband know it, except by her kind indulgences to him.'

Plymouth was the first British capital of Tobago, and it was here that the British built **Fort James** in 1811, the remains of which stand 200m west of the tombstone. Affording extraordinary views of Great Courland Bay, this small hilltop fortification remains largely intact.

Coming back from Fort James, turn right after the bus stop and continue 150m to the **Great Courland Bay Monument**, an odd concrete creation honoring the early Courlander colonists who settled the area in the 17th century.

## CASTARA & AROUND

About an hour's drive from Plymouth, Castara is a fishing village that has become popular with tourists not wanting the inundated Crown Point scene. People love the wide, sandy beach, relaxed atmosphere and picturesque setting. However, the village is on the cusp of feeling overcrowded itself during high season. Snorkeling is good in the calm inlet to the right of the main beach. **King David**

**Tours** (☎ 660-7906; www.kingdavidtobago.com) is based here, providing hiking and boating tours.

North of Castara, the road winds past a stretch of coast that's punctuated by pretty beaches and villages, unhurried places with kids playing cricket on the road. At **Englishman's Bay**, a superb undeveloped beach shaded by stands of bamboo and coconut palms draws snorkelers to its gentle waters – a coral reef lies 20m offshore. Eula's Restaurant, serving overpriced roti and fat plates of local fare, caters to the handful of visitors. Rustic latrines are provided.

## Sleeping

If you ask around, you'll find unofficial guesthouses that accommodate Castara's tourist overflow.

**Riverside Cottage** (☎ 764-8715; r US\$35-50) Set off the main road, this guesthouse is run by a local family and the handful of clean rooms could capture the flavor of a bona fide Tobagonian house. The rooms share a kitchen.

**Naturalist Beach Resort** (☎ 639-5901; www.naturalist-tobago.com; d apt US\$45; 🍷) This cheerful, family-run place is at beach level, and its cozy (but well-used) apartments include kitchens, fans and air-con, and are all different; some have water views, others don't. The newer 'Blue Marlin Suite' (US\$120) enjoys a primo beachfront spot. The resort has an internet café and restaurant. Airport transfers can be arranged.

**Alibaba's Beach Apartments** (☎ 686-7957; www.alibaba-tours.com; Depot Rd; r US\$75; 🍷) This well-run bunch of apartments have magnificent beach-facing balconies, kitchens, and comfortable rooms with bamboo and seashell

details. Alibaba's Tours is conveniently run out of the hotel and will take you on boat, jeep, rainforest or island tours for US\$70 to US\$100 per person.

**Sandcastles** (☎ 635-0933; www.sandcastlestobago.com; r incl breakfast US\$75-125; 🍷) This friendly place set on a cliff 10 minutes' walk from the beach has two self-contained apartments with dramatic views. Owners Adam and Rea are welcoming and helpful.

## Eating & Drinking

**Almond Tree** (☎ 638-3595; mains TT\$35-75; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This beachfront, open-air eatery has appealing plates of local food.

**Boat House** (☎ 660-7354; mains from TT\$60; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Between the colorful decor, bamboo detailing and beachside ambience, this restaurant achieves a festive atmosphere. The seafood dishes are accompanied by fresh vegetable side dishes and salad. On Wednesdays it has an extensive menu and Steel Pan.

**Margarite's** (mains from TT\$65; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This cute eatery right off the main road serves up local specialties. The menu changes regularly.

**D Lime** (☎ 733-6983; beer TT\$8) Just off the beach, this small open-air bar sometimes has music and always has a cold one.

## PARLATUVIER

Just west of Bloody Bay is Parlatuvier, a tiny fishing village on a striking circular bay. A smattering of guesthouses and rooms for rent are popping up because people are drawn to its seclusion and bright waters. It's still low key, but won't stay this way for

## CYCLING TOBAGO

Tobago has less traffic than Trinidad, especially on the remote eastern part of the island. Small Tobago has some nice roads, usually hilly, that bring you through amazing landscapes: Roxborough–Parlatuvier Rd, which passes straight through the forest reserve; Arnos Vale Rd to Mason Hall; Buccoo to Charlotteville along the northern coast. If cycle touring is your shtick, it's possible to circumnavigate the island.

For mountain biking, a guide is suggested. Contact **Mountain Biking Tobago** (☎ 681-5695; www.mountainbikingtobago.com; PO Box 1065, Bon Accord; per person US\$40). Owner Sean de Freitas is a straight-shooting guide who provides solid rentals and cycling equipment. He'll show you the mountain biking that Tobago has to offer. The Highland Falls ride is particularly awesome, ending up at a splendid swimming hole and waterfall. He also guides road rides.

Besides renting from Mountain Biking Tobago, beater bikes are rented near the Crown Point area, or you can rent a bike in Trinidad and bring it over on the ferry, or BYO. You'll be limited with skinny tires due to road conditions. Beware of blind corners, narrow roads and dogs.

## TOBAGO FOREST RESERVE

The paved Roxborough–Parlatuvier Rd crosses the island from Roxborough to Bloody Bay, curving through the rainforest. The 30-minute drive through completely undeveloped jungle passes pretty valleys and mountain views, making it the best drive on the island.

The road passes through the Tobago Forest Reserve, which was established in 1765 – this makes it the oldest forest reserve in the Caribbean. A number of trailheads lead off the main road into the rainforest where there's excellent bird-watching.

Three-quarters of the way from Roxborough, the **Gilpin Trail** branches northeast to Bloody Bay, a 5km walk through the rainforest. Authorized guides at the trailhead charge US\$20 per person to take you down to a waterfall, or US\$50 for a two-hour hike through the forest to the Main Ridge lookout hut, a bit further down the road. Rubber boots, walking sticks and rain gear are provided for managing the muddy trails. The lookout hut affords scenic views of Bloody Bay and the offshore Sisters Rocks. On a clear day you can see Grenada 120km away. Reputable guides include Castara-based David Williams of **King David Tours** (☎ 660-7906; www.kingdavidtobago.com).

long and might soon go the way of Castara, its tourist-filled neighbor.

If you're up for **waterfalls hikes**, there are several from Parlatuvier. Walk up the river across from the Riverside Restaurant for a rocky 45 minutes till you hit the waterfall. For a shorter, easier hike, walk up the rough road lining the river across from Jetty Rd to check out waterfalls and beautiful dipping pools.

Further on east, at Bloody Bay, you can catch the Roxborough–Parlatuvier Rd through the Tobago Forest Reserve (see the boxed text, above).

You can stay at **Toni's Guesthouse** (☎ 635-0040; apt TT\$200-250) whose four spacious, clean apartments look over the bay. There's also self-contained apartments at **Parlatuvier Tourist Resort** (☎ 639-5639; r TT\$150; 📶), above Chance's grocery store. The only restaurant in town is **Riverside Restaurant** (☎ 639-4935; mains TT\$75-110; 🍷 lunch & dinner), which caters to tourists driving through and serves local fish and chicken plates.

## SCARBOROUGH

pop 16,800

Located 15 minutes' drive east of Crown Point, Scarborough is the island's only city, a crowded port with bustling one-way streets and congested traffic. Tobagonians come here to bank, pay bills or send packages. There are some good places to grab a bite and a neat public market, but most people will want to push onward. If you arrive late or leave early, there's fine accommodation.

## Information

There are branches of Republic Bank and Scotiabank just east of the docks, both equipped with ATMs. There's another ATM right outside the ferry terminal. There are no reliable ATMs in eastern Tobago.

**MG Photo Studios** (☎ 639-3457; Scarborough Mall; per 30min TT\$10; 📷 8:30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat; 📶) Across the ferry terminal, in the Scarborough Mall; it has internet access.

**Post office** (Post Office St; 📧 7:30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) There's a TT Post postal outlet in the ferry terminal too.

**Scarborough General Hospital** (☎ 639-2551; Calder Hall Rd; 🏥 24hr) On route to Fort King George, it handles most emergencies and medical issues on Tobago.

### Tobago House of Assembly Tourism Branch

(☎ 639-4333; Mount Mary Rd; 📧 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) The main office is on Mount Mary Rd, past the esplanade west of the cruise-ship complex. There's also an office at the ferry terminal.

## Sights & Activities

The **Botanical Gardens** (admission free; 🌅 dawn-dusk) occupies the 7 hectares of a former sugar estate. It's a pretty place, with a variety of flowering trees and shrubs, including flamboyants, African tulips and orchids (in an orchid house).

Immediately beyond the hospital, **Fort King George** (admission free; 🌅 daylight hr) sits on a hill at the end of Fort St. Built by the British between 1777 and 1779, it's the only substantial colonial fortification remaining in Tobago and is worth a visit for its history and magnificent coastal view. Benches under enormous trees allow you to gape at the harbor and observe



exotic birds darting about. Cannons line the fort's stone walls.

The officers' quarters now contains the small but worthy **Tobago Museum** (☎ 639-3970; tobmuseum@tstt.net.tt; admission TT\$10; 🕒 9am-4:30pm Mon-Fri), which displays a healthy collection of Amerindian artifacts, maps from the 1600s, military relics, a small geology exhibit and a very interesting collection of watercolor paintings by Sir William Young that depict Tobago from 1807 to 1815.

## Sleeping

Those arriving on the evening ferry will find a couple of cheap guesthouses a short distance from the waterfront.

**Sandy's Bed & Breakfast** (☎ 639-2737; www.tobagobluecrab.com; cnr Robinson & Main Sts; r US\$60; 🍷) Behind the Blue Crab Restaurant, amicable owners Ken and Alison Sardinha rent out three rooms in their home. The rooms are pleasantly simple with pine floors, nice furniture and views overlooking Rocky Bay.

**Hope Cottage** (☎ 639-2179; hcghtobago@hotmail.com; Calder Hall Rd; r per person with shared bathroom TT\$100, s/d with private bathroom TT\$150/250; 🍷) A solid budget option, Hope Cottage is found near Fort King George, a half-hour walk uphill from the dock (taxi TT\$15 to TT\$20). Within this former home of 19th-century governor James Henry Keens (acting governor from 1856 to 1857 and buried in the backyard), guests have access to a big kitchen, TV room, dining room, backyard and front porch.

**Blue Haven Hotel** (☎ 660-7400; www.bluehavenhotel.com; Bacolet Bay; low/high season d US\$185/238, ste US\$275/355; 🍷 📺 🚿) Robinson Crusoe supposedly was stranded at this beach, but today it's home to the Blue Haven, a romantic, tastefully done resort hotel. Amenities here include a beachside pool, tennis courts, wi-fi and spa services, and each room has an oceanfront balcony.

There are a few reasonably priced accommodation options perched on a hillside overlooking the bay along the Windward Rd to Bacolet Bay. **Sea View Guesthouse** (☎ 639-5613; s/d TT\$180/240) is an economical option looking over the ocean with self-contained apartments. **Della Mira Guesthouse** (☎ 639-2531; s/d TT\$220/270; 🍷 📺) has friendly staff that run a clean hotel with a little ocean-view restaurant. Some rooms have sea-view balconies and are good value.

## Eating & Drinking

**Patsy's Doubles** (double TT\$2.50; 🕒 from 4pm most days) Found in the parking lot just east of the ferry terminal, Patsy is known throughout the island for her lovely bundles of garbanzo and flatbread goodness.

**Lal's Roti** (☎ 639-3606; Dutch Fort; roti TT\$10-18; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) Locals say the tasty rotis here are the best in town, and there's an open-air space to munch on your hot curried feast.

**Ma King's Dinette** (Wilson Rd; mains TT\$35-65; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Opposite the market, this popular eatery offers all sorts of local specialties, like cassava and fried fish. Plus, it has fresh-squeezed juices and a soy dish option.

**Ciao Café and Pizzeria** (☎ 639-3001; Burnett St; from TT\$40; 🕒 lunch-late Mon-Sat, lunch only Sun) Both locals and foreigners come to lime at this adorable café, side by side with an authentic Italian pizzeria. You'll find the best homemade gelato (TT\$11 to TT\$17) in Trinidad and Tobago here.

**Shore Things** (☎ 635-1072; Old Milford Rd, Lambeau; mains TT\$50-120; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Even though it's a couple kilometers west of the city, this is one of the most pleasant oceanside cafes on the island, serving crepes, fresh juices and salads. It also sells local art and tasteful souvenirs.

**Blue Crab Restaurant** (☎ 639-2737; www.tobagobluecrab.com; cnr Main & Robinson Sts; lunch TT\$55, dinner mains TT\$85-165; 🕒 lunch Mon-Fri) A family-run restaurant with pleasant alfresco seating and good West Indian food. You'll have a choice of fresh juice and main dishes such as Creole chicken, flying fish or garlic shrimp. There is dinner by reservation on Monday and Friday.

**Barcode** (☎ 635-2633; www.barcodetobago.com; cover varies; 🕒 7pm-close) A popular nightclub with a wide variety of rums and a dress code. It also has pick-up service.

## WINDWARD ROAD

Just east of Scarborough is the more rural part of the island. It is less appealing to tourists because the beaches have darker sand and tend to be rough. The Windward Rd, which connects Scarborough with Speyside, winds past scattered villages, jungly valleys and white-capped ocean. You'll see signs for a lonely guesthouse or two. Exploring this part of the island, beyond just passing through, would require your own vehicle or bike. The further east you go, the more ruggedly beautiful the scenery becomes. Although much of the road is narrow and curvy with a handful of blind

corners, it's drivable in a standard vehicle and bikable if you're gutsy and fit. If you were to drive straight through from Scarborough to Speyside, it would take about 1½ hours.

Five miles east of Scarborough is Granby Point, a jut of land separating Barbados Bay from Pinfold Bay. In 1764 the British established a temporary capital on the east side of Barbados Bay and built **Fort Granby** at the tip of the point. Little remains other than a solitary soldier's gravestone, but day-trippers will find a couple of hilltop picnic tables, a gorgeous ocean view and a brown-sand beach with changing rooms.

Past Goodwood, you'll see signs for **Rainbow Nature Resort** (☎ 660-4755; [www.mckennas-rainbow.com](http://www.mckennas-rainbow.com); Lure Estate, Goldsborough; tour TT\$50). The signs will lead you down a rough dirt road past a big organic farm for 15 minutes by car. The resort charges a bit much for the small, darkish rooms (US\$70 to US\$120), but it offers two-hour tours to waterfalls, around the organic farm, and through the forest. **Rainbow Waterfall** is a 25-minute hike from here, and the **Two Rivers Waterfall** is a 90-minute hike down a rough dirt road.

The triple-tiered, well-touristed **Argyle Falls** (admission TT\$40; ☎ 7am-5:30pm) are just west of Roxborough; the entrance is 600m north of the Windward Rd. This has become very popular (it's a cruise-ship excursion), so go early to skip crowds. On top of admission, you pay one of the heckling guides US\$10 to lead you on the 20-minute hike up to the falls. Guides swarm the entrance; official guides wear khaki uniforms and carry ID. At 54m, this is Tobago's highest waterfall, cascading down four distinct levels, and each level has its own pool of spring water. **Roxborough** has a gas station and a few stores where you can pick up snacks.

## SPEYSIDE

The small fishing village of Speyside fronts Tyrrel's Bay, and attracts divers and birders. It's the jumping-off point for excursions to uninhabited offshore islands, including Little Tobago, a bird sanctuary 2km offshore, and St Giles Island. Protected waters, high visibility, abundant coral and diverse marine life make for choice diving. Nondivers can take glass-bottom boat/snorkel tours. Speyside funnels visitors into high-end, diver-oriented hotels much more than its neighbor Charlotteville, where mixing with the locals is more of a

possibility. There's a public beach with facilities at the south end of the bay. There are no ATMs in town.

## Sights & Activities

Also known as Bird of Paradise Island, **Little Tobago** was the site of a cotton plantation during the late 1800s. In 1909 Englishman Sir William Ingram imported 50 greater birds of paradise from the Aru Islands, off New Guinea, and established a sanctuary to protect the endangered bird. In 1963 Hurricane Flora devastated the habitat and decimated the flock.

Now managed by the government, Little Tobago remains an important seabird sanctuary and will prove to be decadent for bird-watchers. Red-billed tropic birds, magnificent frigate birds, brown boobies, Audubon's shearwaters, laughing gulls and sooty terns are some of the species found here. For those who want to hike, the hilly, arid island, which averages just 1.5km in width, has a couple of short trails with captivating views.

Several operators run glass-bottom boat tours. The trip to Little Tobago, a 15-minute crossing, includes bird-watching on Little Tobago and snorkeling at Angel Reef. Masks and fins are provided. **Frank's** (☎ 660-5438; Batteaux Bay; tours US\$20; ☎ 10am & 2pm), based at Blue Waters Inn, and **Top Ranking Tours** (☎ 660-4904; tours US\$20), departing from the beach near Jemma's restaurant, are recommended.

The diving at Little Tobago is some of the region's best. For details, see p56.

## Sleeping

**Top Ranking Hill View Guest House** (☎ 660-4904; [www.caribinfo.com/toprank](http://www.caribinfo.com/toprank); s/d US\$45/75; ☎) Reached via a series of steps from Top Hill St, about a 10-minute walk from the beach, this guesthouse is a quiet retreat that has clean, nicely furnished rooms with one or two double beds. Wraparound balconies provide excellent views of both the ocean and rainforest. Top Ranking also runs boat tours and has a minimart (at the bottom of the steps).

**Speyside Inn** (☎ 660-6642; [www.speysideinn.com](http://www.speysideinn.com); 189-193 Windward Rd; s/d US\$85/130; ☎) Quite lovely, this butter yellow hotel houses bright balcony rooms looking over the ocean, and cottages nestled out back in the jungly landscaping. Extra Divers shop makes its home here.

**Manta Lodge** (☎ 660-5268, in the USA 800-544-7631; [www.mantalodge.com](http://www.mantalodge.com); s/d with ceiling fan US\$95/115, with

air-con US\$115/135, all incl breakfast; 🍷 🍷) Catering to divers, this is a modern plantation-style house fronting the beach. Its airy rooms have wicker furniture and ocean-view balconies. The ground-level bar-restaurant opens onto the small pool. The hotel is also home to the reliable Tobago Dive Experience dive shop.

**Blue Waters Inn** (☎ 660-2583; www.bluewatersinn.com; Batteaux Bay; r from US\$200; 🍷 🍷) The most upscale place to stay and geared to divers, Blue Waters sits on pretty Batteaux Bay, just 1km from the main road. The rooms all have patios and great views. Guests get use of tennis courts, beach chairs and kayaks. There's also a restaurant, bar, spa services and Aquamarine Dive, a full-service PADI dive center.

## Eating

Choices are slim in Speyside, but the following are good.

**Veryln's Roti Shop** (roti TT\$15; 🍷 lunch) Coming into town from the west, there's a bright yellow shack right before the beach facilities where Veryln sells her delicious roti and homemade baked goods.

**Redman's** (mains TT\$50; 🍷 lunch & dinner, closed Sun) A raised-deck affair, this local hangout is cheaper and less refined than Jemma's and Birdwatchers.

**Birdwatchers Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 660-5438; mains TT\$70; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Kick back on the candlelit deck and enjoy fresh seafood and cold beers at this friendly place. The menu changes with the catch of the day.

**Jemma's** (☎ 660-4066; mains from TT\$80; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner Sun-Thu, breakfast & lunch Fri) Nestled in a tree-house setting and blessed by sea breezes, Jemma's boasts excellent atmosphere and food. The cuisine features fresh local food, including fish, chicken and shrimp dishes, and prices are on the higher end. It doesn't serve booze but you are welcome to bring your own.

## CHARLOTTEVILLE

There are about four winding kilometers over the mountains from Speyside to Charlotteville, a delightful little fishing village nestled in aquamarine Man of War Bay. This secluded countryside town accepts the trickle of off-the-beaten-track tourists with mostly jovial spirits and occasionally apathy. Less hoity-toity than Speyside, the tourist services are still good. A couple of internet cafés line the main drag and a semifunctional ATM is be-

side the police station. Tickets for an unreliable bus to Scarborough can be bought at the gas station (TT\$8). A maxi taxi (TT\$12) might come before, so you can wait till you see the bus, then join the rushing crowd to buy your ticket.

## Sights & Activities

A palm-studded brown-sand beach good for swimming edges **Man of War Bay**, the large, horseshoe-shaped harbor that fronts the village. When it's calm, there's excellent snorkeling and fantastic beach limin' at **Pirate's Bay**, 800m across the point at the north side of Charlotteville, and good snorkeling around **Booby Island**, just southwest of the village.

An excellent way to see the bay and arrive at snorkeling sights is via kayak. **Tobago Seakayak** (☎ 320-0885; www.seakayaktobago.com; 17 Charlotteville Estates; 3hr kayak/snorkel tour per person US\$40, rental per hr US\$15) has a nice fleet of sea kayaks and accompanying equipment. Kayak fishing trips can also be arranged. **Workshop Sea Tours** (☎ 660-6281; www.workshopseatours.net; Bay St), based right in town, also offers fishing charters (US\$250), snorkel (per person US\$40) and offshore island tours, and bird-watching excursions. The office has laundry and internet services.

Scuba divers should contact **Charlotteville Adventure Dive Centre** (☎ 660-6176; www.banana-boat-tobago.com; 6 Mac's Lane, Banana Boat, Campbelton; dive US\$40). Located in Banana Boat, this full-service PADI-certified dive center rents out full gear and offers a variety of dive trips and certification. Packages include quaint, colorful, clean accommodations.

If you are up for some exploring on dry land, take a walk to the site of the old **Fort Campbelton**, on the west side of the bay, which offers a good coastal view; or take a more substantial hike up **Flagstaff Hill**, a popular spot to picnic and watch the birds circling St Giles' Island. Also, you can bag the tallest peak in Tobago, **Pigeon Peak** (576m), from Charlottesville. Peter Trotman, manager of Tobago Seakayak, knows the area well and will guide hiking and bird-watching trips. Many of these trails and old roads are patronized by recreational bikers, though there is no bicycle rental in town.

## Sleeping

Besides the following listings, there are several small, unofficial guesthouses in Charlotteville.

**Charlotte Villas** ([www.charlottevilla.com](http://www.charlottevilla.com); US\$55-130) In the south part of town, these three fully equipped, high-ceiling apartments are spacious, simple and relaxing with tons of natural light flooding in.

**Cholson Chalets** (☎ 639-8553; 74 Bay St; studio US\$40, 2-bedroom apt with kitchen US\$60, per extra person US\$12; ♿) Cholson Chalets is a clean, well-run place just steps from the ocean. The fresh green-and-white beach house exterior complements the fishing-town vibe. It has nine units of varying size equipped with kitchens.

**Man-O-War Bay Cottages** (☎ 660-4327; [www.man-o-warbaycottages.com](http://www.man-o-warbaycottages.com); Charlotteville Main Rd; 1-/4-bedroom cottage US\$60/155; ♿) Plotted in a little botanical garden, with lots of tropical trees, ferns and flowering plants, these 10 simple cottages with kitchens and screened, louvered windows are open to breezes and sounds of the surf. Naturalist Pat Turpin owns the cottages; you'll find them beachside, about five minutes' walk south of the village.

**Top River Pearl** (☎ 660-6011; [www.topriver.de](http://www.topriver.de); 32-34 Spring St; r from US\$70, apt from US\$105-160; ♿) Although it's not on the beach, this guesthouse, just 180m up Spring St from the waterfront, is a treat with its laid-back coffee bar and expansive bay views. With furnishings built from local teak, mahogany trimmings, and red-tiled floors, each of the four immaculate apartments has a balcony with ocean views, plus minikitchen.

## Eating & Drinking

**Banana Boat Beachfront Bar** (☎ 660-6176; 6 Mac's Lane; mains from TT\$45; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is a chilled-out place to kick back with fellow divers and travelers. The kitchen riffs on local fare: coconut curried shrimp with veggies (TT\$85), crab claws (TT\$45), and salads topped with feta made from local goat's milk. You can also rent rooms here (single/double US\$35/55).

**Gail's** (☎ 660-4316; mains from TT\$50; ☎ 7pm-close, closed Sun) Located at the northern end of the waterfront, Gail's serves up freshly caught fish with fantastic local side dishes. Many of the ingredients come straight from Gail's garden.

**Sharon's & Pheb's** (☎ 660-5717; Bay St; mains TT\$60-80; ☎ lunch & dinner) Doing amazing things with fresh fish, beef, chicken and vegetables, most of which grow nearby, chef Sharon cooks up truly fantastic local cuisine. Don't miss out on barbecue Wednesdays. There's indoor or outdoor seating.

**Top River Pearl Cappuccino Cafe** (☎ 660-6011; 32-34 Spring St; cappuccino TT\$20; ☎ 8:30am-6:30pm Mon-Sat) Within a guesthouse, this breezy outdoor café provides proper cappuccino and espresso. Plus it whips up breakfast, pasta dishes, and milkshakes blended with fresh fruit.

A handful of family-run restaurants in Charlotteville offer good, economical food. Most are open for lunch and dinner, except during the rainy season, when hours become more sporadic. Jane's Quality Kitchen provides seating in the shade of an almond tree with excellent views of the bay and local limin'. G's Tasty Kitchen, an open-air eatery by the waterfront, serves a mean roti (TT\$15), plus fish and chicken plates (TT\$40). At the beach facility, there are restrooms and the Charlotteville Beach Bar & Restaurant, which dishes up all the local favorites as well as cocktails; it also has DJs on the weekend.

There are a couple of minimarts in town. Along the waterfront are small huts selling rotis, baked goods, and fresh produce.

# DIRECTORY

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Both islands have good-value guesthouses and small hotels. Airport tourist offices can help you book a room, but finding a room on Trinidad and Tobago is seldom a problem, except during Carnival season when reservations should be made far in advance (FYI: rates increase dramatically).

Trinidad and Tobago is less expensive than many places in the Caribbean, so budget options abound (from US\$20 night), especially in the low or shoulder seasons (roughly April to early December) when hotels dramatically drop rates.

Each year, the **TDC** (☎ 675-7034; [www.gotrinidadand Tobago.com](http://www.gotrinidadand Tobago.com)) publishes a small *Accommodation Guide* and it also features updated listings of B&Bs, guesthouses and hotels on its website. On Tobago, try the helpful **Tobago Bed & Breakfast Association** (☎ 639-3926; 1-3 Crooks River), if you can get hold of them.

A 10% hotel room tax, 10% service charge, plus the government's 15% value-added tax (VAT) can add 35% more to your bill. Most advertised accommodations rates include the tax and service charge, but not always.

## ACTIVITIES

See p773 for tour operators.

### Bird-Watching

See p747 for information on Trinidad and Tobago's fantastic bird-watching.

### Cycling

Trinidad and Tobago have some wonderful cycling opportunities; see p749 and p764, respectively, for details.

### Diving & Snorkeling

Tobago is most definitely a diving destination. You won't break the bank, and you'll see top-notch coral outcrops, marine life and underwater landscapes. An enclave of operators are located in Crown Point (p758), but they take divers to sights all over the island. The other big concentration of dive shops is in Speyside (p767), where the posh hotels sport their own shops. Both Speyside and lower-key Charlotteville (p767) are closest to the best dive sites near Little Tobago (p767).

### Fishing

Tour companies in Tobago (p773) take people on popular rum-and-fish boat trips, and have more serious sport-fishing expeditions as well. On Trinidad you'll find a number of fishing charters in the yachtie haven of Chaguaramas (p745).

### Hiking

Trinidad and Tobago are endowed with some fantastic hiking opportunities. In Trinidad, Brasso Seco (p749) has a local cooperative that has knowledgeable hiking guides. In Grand Rivière (p753) there is also a locally

based organization that provides guides that show you some off-the-beaten track walks, plus there are some spectacular trails near Blanchisseuse (p748).

Tobago has its fantastic forest reserve (p765), snaked with trails, in the middle of the island, and there are also opportunities for hiking on the east side near Charlotteville (p768). There are some shorter strolls in Grafton Caledonia Wildlife Sanctuary (p762), through the Adventure Farm and Nature Reserve (p763), near Rainbow Nature Resort (p767), and on Little Tobago (p767).

### Kayaking

On Trinidad you can rent kayaks in Chaguaramas (p745). Arranging a kayaking tour through local operators to go to Nariva Swamp (p752) is the best way to see wildlife. You can also arrange tours to various other locations on the island.

On Tobago you can hire kayaks and a guide in Charlotteville (p768) and tootle around to white-sand beaches. You can also rent kayaks at Mt Irvine Bay (p762), plus the more upscale hotels often have kayaks for their guests.

### Surfing

Although Trinidad and Tobago are not renowned spots for surfing, you can still find surfers having good days in winter at Sans Souci Beach, near Toco, on Trinidad, and at Mt Irvine Bay (p762) on Tobago. You'll have to ask the surfers at Mt Irvine to find out other secret spots around the island.

### Windsurfing & Kitesurfing

On Tobago, Pigeon Point (p756) is *the* place, and it's given a hearty thumbs up by the windsurfing community.

## PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers & Magazines** There are three daily newspapers: the *Trinidad Express*, *Newsday* and the *Trinidad Guardian*. *Discover Trinidad & Tobago* is a helpful tourist magazine found at tourist offices and many hotels.
- **Radio & TV** There are two local TV stations: the Information Channel (channels 4 and 16) carries CNN newscasts, and the state-owned TTT (channels 2, 9, 13 and 14) shows a variety of programs. About 15 independent radio stations blast the airwaves.
- **Electricity** The electric current is 115/230V, 60hz. US-style plugs are used.
- **Weights & Measures** Trinidad and Tobago uses the metric system. Highway signs and car odometers are in kilometers, but some road markers still measure miles.

## BOOKS

For details on Carnival and the music associated with it, grab a copy of Peter Mason's *Bacchanal* or Peter van Koningsbruggen's *Trinidad Carnival: Quest for a National Identity*. And for those interested in food, *Callaloo, Calypso & Carnival: the Cuisine of Trinidad & Tobago*, by Dave deWitt and Mary Jane Wilan, has recipes and tidbits on the country's exotic flavors. *Sweet Hands: Island Cooking from Trinidad and Tobago* by Ramin Ganeshram is a worthwhile cookbook. For bird-watching guides, see p747. For Trinidad and Tobago literature, see p730.

## BUSINESS HOURS

**Bars** ☎ noon to midnight

**Banks** ☎ 8am to 2pm Monday to Thursday, 8am to noon and 3pm to 5pm Friday.

**Offices** ☎ 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday.

**Post offices** ☎ 8am to 3pm Monday to Friday

**Restaurants** ☎ 11am to 10pm; nontourist restaurants close at 3pm

**Shops** ☎ 8am to 4pm Monday to Wednesday, to 6pm Thursday and Friday, to noon Saturday; however, most malls are open later and all day Saturday.

**Tourist offices** ☎ 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to noon on Saturday

## CHILDREN

Kids of all ages flock with their parents to Tobago's beaches, and most facilities are family oriented. In Trinidad, the tourism is less family oriented, but higher-end hotels usually accommodate children. During Carnival, Kiddie Mas is a sight not to miss, whatever age.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Tobagonians warn of rampant lawlessness in Trinidad, and Trinidadians say crime is increasing in Tobago. While such claims substantiate a real crime increase, they tend to exaggerate the dangers of travel on the islands. At night, avoid walking alone at night, especially around dark, desolate areas and particularly in Port of Spain. Theft can be a problem, especially in touristy parts of Tobago, so keep an eye on your valuables.

The perceived (often real) disparity between 'rich' travelers and 'poor' locals is sometimes too much to bear. Paranoia is unnecessary, but you should be aware of your belongings, and avoid carrying large sums of cash. When you go to the beach, even the more remote ones, don't bring anything of value.

Some travelers find the aggressive selling tactics of souvenir hawkers or boat-ride sellers annoying. Just be firm but polite and you'll usually be left alone. Women may also feel frustrated by the overt attention of men, but – again – be firm but polite. While flirting will invite more hassle, a friendly, formal greeting can be disarming. Whether you're male or female, a 'good morning' is the first step to befriending a local.

Trinidad and Tobago gets its share of nose-see-ums (tiny fleas that munch on your skin), especially in the afternoon and early evening. Mosquitoes in the rainforest can also be a bother. A good, strong bug spray will make you a much happier person.

If you've traveled around other Caribbean islands you may have encountered a lax attitude toward drugs. Beware – smoking pot in Trinidad and Tobago is a serious offense and getting caught can quickly ruin your holiday.

AIDS and HIV is an increasingly dire problem in the Caribbean, and Trinidad and Tobago is not excluded, especially Tobago. UNAIDS reported that 27,000 people were infected in 2006. If you do choose to have sexual relations, always use a condom. For the most current information, check out [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org). The national AIDS hotline is ☎ 625-2437.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

All of the following are located in Port of Spain:

**Canada** (☎ 622-6232; Maple Bldg, 3-3A Sweet Briar Rd)

**France** (☎ 622-7446; Tatil Bldg, 11 Maraval Rd)

**Germany** (☎ 628-1630; 7-9 Marii St)

**Netherlands** (☎ 625-1201; Life of Barbados Bldg, 69-71 Edward St)

**UK** (☎ 622-2748; 19 St Clair Ave)

**USA** (☎ 622-6371; 15 Queen's Park West)

**Venezuela** (☎ 627-9821; 16 Victoria Ave)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Trinidadians and Tobagonians love to celebrate life, and this is reflected in the many events held throughout the year. Trinidad's main annual event is Carnival (see the boxed text, p738), which formally begins two days before Ash Wednesday, in early February.

Several East Indian festivals, primarily in Trinidad, the dates of which vary with the lunar calendar, draw large crowds.

**Phagwa** A Hindu festival celebrating spring and harvest, with lots of dancing, and singing of Hindi folk songs. It

all culminates when participants are sprayed with *abeer*, a lavender-colored water. The main events take place in Chaguanas, on Trinidad, in March.

**Hosay** This three-night Muslim celebration in March/April commemorates the martyrdom of the prophet's grandsons. Key events include the parading of brightly decorated replicas of the martyrs' tomb, and the Moon Dance, in which a dancing duo cavorts through the streets to tassa drums rhythms.

**Easter Weekend** The entire village of Buccoo, on Tobago, celebrates Easter, featuring goat and crab races.

**Pan Ramajay** A competition of small steel bands, held in May.

**Tobago Heritage Festival** Tobago celebrates traditional culture, food and lifestyle in this two-week outpouring of creativity in July. Each village has its own celebration.

**Emancipation Day** This public holiday on August 1 celebrates the abolishment of slavery in 1834 with cultural events and a power-boat race from Trinidad to Tobago.

**Caribbean Latin Jazz Festival** Held in September.

**World Steel Band Festival** Held in October.

**National Pan Chutney Competition** In November.

**Divali** The Hindu festival of lights, held in November. Elaborate towers are constructed of thousands of *deya* (tiny earthenware lamps). Festivities take place in and around Chaguanas, on Trinidad.

**National Parang Competition** Held in December.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Though not as bad as some other Caribbean islands, Trinidad and Tobago still is pretty closed to the idea of same-sex relationships. Due to the macho nature of the men, they feel especially threatened and can be derogatory towards homosexuality in order to hide their insecurity. There are enclaves of places, such as the more touristy spots or upper-echelon spots in metropolitan areas, where being out and expressing affection is OK. Just be wary that there may be negative repercussions in the wrong places.

## HOLIDAYS

Carnival Monday and Tuesday, and some religious festival days, are unofficial holidays, with banks and most businesses closed.

**New Year's Day** January 1

**Good Friday** Late March/early April

**Easter Monday** Late March/early April

**Spiritual Baptist/Shouter Liberation Day** March 30

**Indian Arrival Day** May 30

**Corpus Christi** Ninth Thursday after Easter

**Labour Day** June 19

**Emancipation Day** August 1

**Independence Day** August 31

**Republic Day** September 24

**Christmas Day** December 25

**Boxing Day** December 26

**Eid Ul Fitr** (Muslim New Year) Late December/January

## INTERNET ACCESS

Internet service is widely available in bigger cities and in most smaller towns as well. The rate is about TT\$10 per half hour. Some hotels will have access for guests. Wireless is slow to become prevalent but is coming around.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Go Trinidad and Tobago** ([www.gotrinidadandtobago.com](http://www.gotrinidadandtobago.com)) TDC's website, with good information on hotels, transportation and current events.

**Ins and Outs** ([www.insandoutstt.com](http://www.insandoutstt.com)) Good information on restaurants, bars and entertainment.

**myTobago** ([www.mytobago.info](http://www.mytobago.info)) Has tourism information plus a forum for visitors and locals to exchange ideas and information.

**Trinidad and Tobago Guide** ([www.trinidad-guide.info](http://www.trinidad-guide.info)) Not as flashy as other sites, but provides good practical travel information.

## MAPS

The tourist office distributes free, reasonably good maps of both Trinidad and Tobago. Detailed topographical maps (TT\$23 each) can be found in Port of Spain at the **Lands & Surveys office** (Frederick St) and at **Trinidad Book World** (☎ 623-4316; cnr Queen & Chacon Sts; 🕒 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Thu, 8:30am-5:30pm Fri, 8am-1pm Sat).

## MONEY

The official currency is the Trinidad and Tobago dollar (TT\$). Banks will exchange a number of foreign currencies, but you'll generally get better rates for US dollars or euros. In this book, we quote rates as they are given in Trinidad and Tobago, whether it be in TT\$ or US\$. Tipping is not expected, but when done, conveys you are really satisfied.

## POST

Postcards to any country are TT\$3.25; letters (20g) cost TT\$2.50 to send to other Caribbean countries, TT\$3.75 to the USA, Canada, the UK or Europe, and TT\$4.50 to Australia, or anywhere else in the world.

## TELEPHONE

The country's area code is ☎ 868. When calling from North America, dial ☎ 1-868 +

the local number. From elsewhere dial your country's international access code + (☎) 868 + the local number. Within the country, just dial the seven-digit local number (as we have listed in this chapter).

Public phones are numerous but many nonfunctional. Your best bet is to purchase a Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT) phone card, use calling centers, or if you're needing to make calls frequently, it's easiest and cheap to get a cell phone.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourism Development Company** (TDC; ☎ 675-7034; www.gotrinidadandtobago.com) Has an office at Piarco International Airport.

### Tobago House of Assembly Tourism Branch

(☎ 639-4333; Mount Mary Rd; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) There's also a branch at the ferry terminal.

## TOURS

See also individual towns and locations for more tour operators. For a list of approved tour guides: www.gotrinidadandtobago.com.

## Tobago

**David Rooks Nature Tours** (☎ 756-8594; www.rooks.tobago.com) Operated by perhaps the most renowned naturalist in the country. David Rooks, former president of the Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalist Club (☎ 624-8017; www.wow.net/tfnc), lives in Charlotteville and leads three-hour bird-watching trips on the island (US\$85 per person).

**Frankie Tours and Rentals** (☎ 631-0369; www.frankietours-tobago.com; Mount Irvine Beach facilities; tours per person US\$15-75) Offers turtle, bird-watching and rainforest tours as well as glass-bottom snorkel tours around the island, 24-hour taxi service, and car rentals.

**Grand Slam Charters** (☎ 683-1958; Crown Point) provides offshore fishing charters (US\$300 to US\$500 for up to four people) or a righteous lime on his snorkel tour charters which include drinks, a barbecue and sound system. Additionally inshore fly-fishing trips (US\$170 for one to two people) are offered to conquer the elusive bonefish.

**Mountain Biking Tobago** (☎ 681-5695; www.mountainbikingtobago.com; per person US\$40). Owner Sean de Freitas is a straight-shooting guide who provides solid rentals and cycling equipment. He'll show you the mountain biking that Tobago has to offer.

**Tobago Tours** (☎ 631-2246; www.tobagotour.com; Pigeon Point; from US\$50 per person) Will take you to snorkeling sites all over the island, hiking, bird-watching, and can arrange fish-and-rum boat tours.

## EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- **Ambulance** ☎ 999
- **Fire** ☎ 990
- **Police** ☎ 999

## Trinidad

On Trinidad, these companies are recommended for island-wide tours and adventure activities:

**Island Experiences** (☎ 625-2410, 756-9677; gunda@wow.net) Highly recommended. Gunda Harewood offers 'ecocultural tours' (TT\$75 to TT\$95 per person) throughout the island. Tours aim to show the country's underbelly and to impart local knowledge and lore. Gunda also does the excellent evening entertainment tour through Port of Spain (p744).

**Caribbean Discovery Tours** (☎ 624-7281; www.caribbeandiscoverytours.com) A big, professional company offering island and city tours, hiking, kayaking and bird-watching.

**Paria Springs** (☎ 622-8826; www.pariasprings.com) Run by a local mountain biker and wildlife expert, tours include bird-watching, cycling, hiking and kayaking.

**Pathmaster** (☎ 374-7847; www.thepathmaster.com) This efficient and professional upscale operator offers adventure activities.

**PTSC Know Your Country Tours** (☎ 624-9839) Started as a way for locals to learn more about their country, the Public Transport Service runs weekend-only minibus tours of Trinidad that cost TT\$30 to TT\$80.

## TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Seeing as tourist infrastructure is already wobbly here, Trinidad and Tobago does not stand out as a destination that has extensive facilities for travelers with disabilities. However, the higher-end hotels and resorts should be able to accommodate.

## VISAS

Visas are not necessary for citizens of the US, Canada, the UK or most European countries for stays of less than three months.

Visas are required by citizens of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India, and some other Commonwealth countries (including Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Uganda). In most countries, visas are obtained through the British embassy, or you can pay TT\$400 to TT\$2000 upon arrival. For more, contact **Trinidad and Tobago Immigration** (☎ 669-5895; www.immigration.gov.tt).



## WOMEN TRAVELERS

A woman traveling alone, especially on Trinidad, is about as common as snow. Men will stare, make kissy noises, hiss, or offer to be anything from your protector to your sex slave. Says one Trini woman, 'Trini men feel compelled to let women know they are noticed and appreciated.' While the constant attention can wear on your nerves, most men are harmless. Your best bet is to smile politely, or ignore it altogether and move on.

# TRANSPORTATION

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Entering Trinidad & Tobago

Provided that you have a valid passport (US citizens see the boxed text, p830), coming and going from Trinidad and Tobago is easy. When you arrive, you'll fill out an Immigration Arrival Card. Customs officials require that you fill out the line that asks you where you are staying; if you don't know where you're staying, list any local hotel.

A TT\$100 departure tax must be paid upon departure, payable in TT or US dollars (about US\$16). For the ferry to Venezuela, it's TT\$75. At the Trinidad airport, the fee can be paid via a special ATM machine. Keep your receipt, or you'll have to pay it again at security.

### Air

Airports in both Trinidad and Tobago handle international air traffic, but the bulk of international flights arrive and depart from Trinidad.

### AIRPORTS

**Crown Point International Airport** (TAB; ☎ 639-8547; www.tntairports.com) Located in Crown Point, 11km southwest of Scarborough, on Tobago.

**Piarco International Airport** (POS; ☎ 669-8047; www.piarcoairport.com) Located 25km east of Port of Spain, on Trinidad.

### AIRLINES

Airlines flying to Trinidad:

**Air Canada** (☎ 1-800-247-2262; www.aircanada.com) Toronto

**American Airlines/American Eagle** (☎ 1-800-233-5436; www.aa.com) Miami, San Juan

**Caribbean Airlines** (☎ 625-8246; www.caribbean-airlines.com) Antigua, Barbados Caracas, Fort Lauderdale, New York, Toronto

**Continental** (☎ 1-800-523-3273; www.continental.com) Houston

**Delta** (☎ 1-800-21-1212; www.delta.com) New York  
**LIAT** (☎ 625-9451; www.liatairline.com) Anguilla, Antigua, Barbados, Curaçao, Dominica, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Nevis, St Kitts, St Vincent, San Juan, Santo Domingo, St-Martin/Sint Maarten, St Croix, St Lucia, St Thomas, Tortola

Airlines flying to Tobago:

**British Airways** (☎ 0844-494-0-787; www.britishairways.com) London

**LIAT** (☎ 625-9451; www.liatairline.com) Antigua, Barbados, Grenada, St-Martin/Sint Maartin, St Kitts, St Lucia, St Vincent, Tortola

**Virgin Atlantic** (☎ 454-3610; www.virgin-atlantic.com) London

## Sea

### CRUISE SHIP

Cruise ships dock on the south side of Port of Spain. The large cruise-ship complex contains a customs hall, souvenir and clothing shops, car-rental agencies, taxis and a couple of local eateries. There's a smaller cruise-ship facility in central Scarborough on Tobago. See p830 for more information on cruises.

### FERRY

A ship leaves for Guiria, Venezuela, at 9am on Wednesdays (arrives at 7am) from **Pier One** (☎ 634-4472) in Chaguaramas. It takes 3½ hours, costs TT\$404 and there's a TT\$75 departure tax.

### YACHT

Out of the hurricane path, Trinidad and Tobago is safe haven for yachters. Trinidad's Chaguaramas Bay has the primary mooring and marina facilities as well as an immigration and customs office for yachters. Tobago is an upwind jaunt, but sometimes yachts moor at Charlottesville or Scarborough. TDC publishes an online **Boater's Directory** (www.boatersenterprise.com), with an array of information for yacht travelers, or try the **Trinidad and Tobago Sailing Association** (☎ 634-4210).

## GETTING AROUND

### Air

Flying between Trinidad and Tobago is an easy 20-minute flight costing TT\$300 per

person each way. The checked baggage weight allowance is 20kg. While it's wise to book in advance, it is often possible to buy tickets at the airport on the day of departure. **Caribbean Airlines** (☎ 625-8246; www.caribbean-airlines.com) has a monopoly on these interisland flights.

## Boat

While the trip between Queen's Wharf in Port of Spain (Trinidad) and the main ferry dock in Scarborough (Tobago) was formerly a five-hour boat ride, the government has now leased 'Fast Ferries' that make the interisland journey in a mere 2½ hours; the journey costs TT\$50 one way. It's a cheaper, comfortable way to travel, except if you are prone to seasickness. There is a bar, cafeteria and deck, and movies are played in the air-conditioned interior.

Usually there are two to four departures daily from both islands, in the morning and afternoon. Around the Carnival season, it's best to buy your tickets as far as possible in advance. The office doesn't answer phones on weekends, but you can go down and buy tickets day of. For availability call the **Port Authority** (☎ Trinidad 625-3055, Tobago 639-2181; www.patnt.com). Schedules are online.

## Bus

Buses on both islands provide a substantial means of transportation for locals. Many people take buses to and from work in neighboring towns, and children depend on buses to get to and from school. Buses offer travelers an inexpensive way to get around, especially on longer cross-island trips, but beware that buses are slow and unreliable. For shorter distances, travelers are better off taking maxi-taxis or route taxis. Check the bus information for Trinidad (p734) and Tobago (p754).

## Car

### RENTAL

Driving yourself can be a great way of getting around the islands. Car rentals start at about TT\$300, and include insurance and unlimited mileage. See p734 (Trinidad) and p756 (Tobago) for more information.

## ROAD RULES

Cars drive on the left, and the car's steering column is on the right (as in the UK). Your

home driver's license is valid for stays of up to three months.

Twisting, narrow roads and fast, horn-happy drivers can make driving on the islands an adventure; in Port of Spain, traffic, complicated roads and poor signage can make driving a white-knuckle experience. Your best bet is to study a map before you get in the car, take a deep breath and practice Zen-like patience. You will get the hang of it, and you'll find driving much easier if you simply relax a little and follow the flow. Be aware that fellow road users will stop suddenly to drop off a friend, say 'Hi' to a neighbor or pick up a cold Carib. Sometimes they'll simply stop, while other times they'll wave an arm up and down to signal they are about to do something.

The ignored speed limit on highways is 80km/h, and 50km/h to 55km/h on city streets. Gas is about TT\$2.75 a liter for regular and it will cost TT\$120 to fill a tank.

## Hitchhiking

Hitching a ride is very common with islanders, especially with children, who hitch to and from school, and with workers trying to get home at night. However, hitching is not a safe mode of transportation for foreign visitors, especially women (your want of a ride will be misconstrued for a want of other things).

## Maxi-Taxi

Maxi-taxis are 12- to 25-passenger minibuses that travel along a fixed route within a specific zone. They're color-coded by route and frequently reflect the personality of the driver – you may hop on a bus blazoned with 'Jah Mon' and booming with Rasta music, or catch a ride on a bus dedicated to Jesus. Regardless, maxis run 24 hours, are very cheap and are heavily used by the locals; catching one can be a great cultural experience. Rides cost TT\$2 to TT\$12, depending on how far you go. You can flag a maxi at any point along its route, or hop on at the appropriate taxi stand. Keep in mind that, due to their frequent stops, maxi-taxis will take a long time to get from A to B.

On Trinidad, many maxi-taxis operate out of the maxi-taxi terminal adjacent to City Gate. For information on Trinidad's maxi-taxi color-coding system, see p734. On Tobago, all maxis have a blue band.

For information about maxi-taxi routes, contact **Trinidad & Tobago Unified Maxi Taxi Association** (☎ 624-3505).

### Route Taxi

These taxis are shared cars that travel along a prescribed route and can drop you anywhere along the way. They look like regular cars, except that their license plates start with an 'H' (for 'hire'). See p734 (Trinidad) and p756 (Tobago) for island-specific info.

### Taxi

Regular taxis, locally called 'tourist taxis,' are readily available at the airports on both islands, the cruise-ship complex on Trinidad and hotels. These vehicles are unmetered but follow rates established by the government; hotel desks and the airport tourist office have a list of fares. Make sure to establish the rate before riding off. For island-specific taxi information, see p734 (Trinidad) and p756 (Tobago).