

Trinidad and Tobago

Location

The Republic of Trinidad & Tobago is located in the southern Caribbean, northeast of the South American country of Venezuela and south of Grenada in the Lesser Antilles. It is located between 10° 2' and 11° 12' N latitude and 60° 30' and 61° 56' W longitude. The country shares maritime boundaries with Barbados to the northeast and Guyana to the southeast. It covers an area of 5,128 square kilometers and consists of the two main islands, Trinidad and Tobago, and numerous smaller landforms. Trinidad is the larger and more populous of the main islands. Tobago is much smaller, comprising about 6% of the total area and 4% of the population. The country also lies outside the hurricane belt.

Geography

The terrain of the islands is a mixture of mountains and plains. The highest point in the country is found on the Northern Range at El Cerro del Aripo, which is located at 3,085 ft above sea level. Trinidad is made up of a variety of soil types, the majority being fine sands and heavy clays. The alluvial valleys of the Northern Range and the soils of the East-West Corridor are the most fertile. Even though it is located just off shore from South America, Trinidad & Tobago is generally included as part of the West Indies by virtue of its geographical and historical heritage in the Caribbean.

Climate

The climate in Trinidad & Tobago is tropical. There are two seasons annually, the dry season for the first six months of the year, and the wet season in the second half of the year. Winds are mostly from the northeast and also have northeast trade winds.

History

American Indians of South American decent originally settled both Trinidad and Tobago. Pre-agricultural Archaic people first settled Trinidad at least 7,000 years ago, making it the earliest-settled part of the Caribbean. Agriculturalists settled Trinidad around 250 BC and then moved further up the Lesser Antillean chain. At the time of European contact Trinidad was occupied by various Arawakan-speaking groups including the Nepoya and Suppoya, and Cariban-speaking groups such as the Yao, while Tobago was occupied by the Island Caribs and Galibi. The American Indian name for Trinidad was Kairi, which is usually translated as “The Land of the Hummingbird”, although others have reported that it simply meant island. Christopher Columbus encountered the island of Trinidad on July 31, 1498 and named it after the Holy Trinity. Columbus reported seeing Tobago, which he named Bella Forma, but did not land on the island.

Important Dates

Trinidad & Tobago celebrate a lot of the same holidays as the United States do on the same dates such as Christmas, New Years, and Easter. Other important dates include Carnival in February and March and precede Ash Wednesday, Indian Arrival

Day on May 30th, Labor Day on June 19th, Emancipation Day on August 1st, and Independence Day on August 31st.

Population

Of the country's 1.3 million inhabitants, roughly 96% reside on the island of Trinidad with the rest of the 4% in Tobago. The ethnic makeup of Trinidad and Tobago reflects a history of immigration. Two major ethnic groups, the Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians, account for almost 80% of the population, while people of Mixed-race, Euro-Trinidadian/European, Chinese Trinidadian/Chinese and Arab-Trinidadian/Syrian-Lebanese descent make up most of the rest of the population.

Currency

Trinidad & Tobago uses the Trinidad & Tobago dollar or TTD.

The exchange rates for Trinidad and Tobago dollars per US dollar are 6.2896 (2008 est.), 6.3275 (2007), 6.3107 (2006), 6.2842 (2005), and 6.299 (2004).

Education

Adult illiteracy rates are estimated at 1.8%. In 1997, the islands had 476 primary schools with 7,311 teachers and 181,030 students. As of 1995, public expenditure on education was estimated at 3.2% of GDP. There are four small, government-run technical colleges, five teachers colleges, and two polytechnic institutes. The University of the West Indies has a faculty of engineering, arts, and agriculture at its Trinidad campus.

Language

English is the country's only official language, but the main spoken language is a dialect or a Creole, which reflects the African and European heritage of the nation and is spoken by all Trinidadians regardless of ethnicity.

Religion

In Trinidad & Tobago the largest two are the Roman Catholics (26%) and Hindus (22%). The Anglicans (8%), Muslims (5%), Seventh-day Adventists (4%), Presbyterians, Jehovah's Witnesses and Methodists are amongst the other faith groups involved.

Agriculture

About 28% of the total land area is arable, most of it on Trinidad. There are two types of agricultural operations, the large estate or plantation that is managed by a specialist and employs large numbers of laborers, and the small farm cultivated by the owner and family. The small farms grow mainly for the home market. Crops include corn, rice, peas, beans, potatoes, other vegetables, and a wide variety of fruits. Lowland rice is grown almost entirely by Indian farmers.

Trade

Trinidad produces 150,000 barrels of oil and 4.2 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day. Most exploration and production is conducted offshore. It is currently the world's largest exporter of ammonia and methanol, and provides over 70 per cent of all Liquefied Natural Gas and methanol imports to the United States. Australia also plays a

big role with trade. Australia's exports to Trinidad and Tobago included non-bovine meat, cheese and curd, and milk and cream, totaling approximately \$23.8 million. Australia's imports from Trinidad and Tobago included essential oils and electrical circuits equipment valued at approximately \$5.2 million.

Food

Many dishes are popular choices for the morning meal in Trinidad and Tobago, with everything from hot breakfasts like Sada roti with bodi (cowpeas), doubles, bake (a sweet, unleavened bread) and shark, to wonderful dinners with curry chicken. Special Christmas foods include pastelles, garlic pork, boiled or baked ham, turkey, pigeon peas, fruit cake, ginger beer, ponche-de-crème and sorrel.

Landmarks

There are many sites and landmarks in Trinidad & Tobago. The National Museum and Art Gallery was established in 1892 and was originally called the Royal Victoria Institute, The City of Port of Spain Museum, and The Lopinot Museum. The Queen's Park Savannah is a very historic landmark, and is the oldest recreation ground in the West Indies. Knolly's Tunnel also located in Trinidad & Tobago, and is the Caribbean's longest tunnel.

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