

Take Monday Off: TRINIDAD

An extra-long weekend packed with beaches, beats and Indian-Chinese-African-French-Caribbean fare

BY SARAH STODOLA

DAY TWO: SATURDAY

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE resort may be de rigueur in the Caribbean, but someone forgot to tell Trinidad. The larger of the two islands of Trinidad and Tobago is a mere seven miles from the coast of Venezuela. Its living, breathing local culture takes its cues from the myriad foreign influences—Indian, African, French, British, even Chinese and Lebanese—that have mingled over the centuries. In Port of Spain, the capital perched on the Gulf of Paria, that means listening to a steel band, dancing to calypso, “liming” (hanging out and relaxing, in Trinidadian English), watching cricket or eating delectable roti wraps. A measure of self-sufficiency is necessary; travelers don’t get coddled in Trinidad. But that means the island’s abundant natural wonders, including stunning beaches, are blissfully devoid of the usual tourist trappings. Or, in fact, any tourist trappings at all.

DAY ONE: FRIDAY

10:30 p.m.

Arrive in Port of Spain and take a taxi from the airport to the **Carlton Savannah** hotel, with 157 modern rooms (and a delightful pool) at the foot of the appropriately named Cascade suburb (from \$169 per night; 2-4 Coblentz Ave., thecarltonsavannah.com). Get a good night’s rest in preparation for tomorrow’s activities.

8:30 a.m.

Hire a driver for the day from Kalloo’s (\$150 for 10 hours, 868-622-9073) to avoid the sanity-testing experience that is driving in Port of Spain. Head downtown to the **Femmes du Chalet**, commonly referred to as the Breakfast Shed (*International Waterfront Center*). This women’s collective is run by descendants of those who founded it in 1936. Order a hearty Trini breakfast of cooked vegetables, meat or eggs, and a fresh juice. Enjoy it at a picnic table overlooking the Gulf of Paria.

10 a.m.

It’s about a 15-minute drive to **Y Gallery** (26 Taylor St., www.yartgallery.com) in Port of Spain’s trendy Woodbrook neighborhood. Check out the impressive selection of locally produced art.



Please turn to page D2



10:45 a.m.

Continue on (about 30 minutes) to the town of Chaguaramas for a visit to the quirky **Chaguaramas Military History and Aerospace Museum** (*Western Main Rd., Chaguaramas, 868-634-4391*). Its exhibits span the 15th century through the present, and even non-army buffs will find them engaging, especially the recreated World War II bunker. The museum is hard to miss—just look for the out-of-commission airliner out front.

12:15 p.m.

Since the museum isn't air-conditioned, you're probably in need of refreshment. The open-air **Lighthouse Restaurant** (*Point Gourde Road, Chaguaramas, 868-634-4384*) at the CrewsInn Hotel & Yachting Centre is in the marina five minutes down the road. Ogle some of the Caribbean's most extravagant yachts over a drink and snack. The cucumber salad is particularly tasty.

1 p.m.

On the way back to the city, you can't miss the sign for kayak rentals on Williams Bay. Snag one (*about \$7 an hour*) and paddle out to the palm-covered **Carrera Island**, the most inviting prison you're likely to ever see—a seeming paradise a couple thousand feet off the mainland, still housing inmates.

2:30 p.m.

Return to Port of Spain for a taste of roti, **Trinidad's** national comfort food—a delicious meat, veggie or potato filling wrapped in a soft flatbread. Nowhere does it taste better than at **Hosein's Roti Shop**, a hole in the wall in Port of Spain's commercial district (*corner of Independence Square and Henry*

Street, 868-627-3036). Eat your roti on a bench out on the square. You'll see all walks of Trini life here.

3:30 p.m.

Meander up Charlotte Street, taking in the exotic fruit, vegetable and spice stalls, then turn into **Woodford Square**, a charming park with a bandstand and the occasional political speech, a la London's Speakers' Corner. On the south side of the square stands Holy Trinity Cathedral, built in the early 19th century; it boasts a stone labyrinth in the garden. Continue up Frederick to the **National Museum and Art Gallery** (*117 Frederick St., 868-623-5941*). The ground floor covers many aspects of the country's history, including colonialism and the rise of major industries. The second floor houses art by local artists and pieces from the permanent collection.

5:30 p.m.

Take a drive through the logic-defying streets of the **Laventille** neighborhood, with its colorful, precariously perched houses. They are run-down yet oddly appealing. It can be an iffy area, so keep to the car.

6 p.m.

Stop at the hotel to freshen up, then walk up St. Ann's Avenue. Turn left on Nook Avenue, which more than earns its name, to the cool, sophisticated **Chaud Creole** (*6 Nook Ave., 868-621-2002*). Its upscale, Creole-based menu incorporates African, Indian, French and Chinese influences. The corn soup is a must.

9 p.m.

Soak up Trinidad's vibrant music tradition starting with a steelpan band, which can

include up to 120 musicians. (The instrument was invented in Trinidad in the early 1900s.) At the **Silver Stars Panyard** (*56 Tragarete Rd.*), order a Carib beer and, on the right night, settle in to hear some of the best.

10:30 p.m.

The musical genre of choice among the young is soca, a variation on calypso. **Stumbilin** (*42 Ariapita Ave., 868-223-5017*), a friendly club on hopping Ariapita Avenue, hosts DJs nightly. Even if you're not moved to take part in the rear-end-focused dance that usually accompanies soca, you'll probably be tempted to join in the sipping of Angostura rum. For live soca and other Trini music, including calypso, head down Ariapita to the **De Nu Pub** (*Ariapita Avenue and French Street, 868-627-4042*).

8:30 a.m.

Check out of the hotel, rent your own car at Kalloo's and head out of the city on the North Coast Road for a stunning hour-and-change drive to the fishing village of **Blanchisseuse**.

10 a.m.

After checking into the tiny **Second Spring Bed & Breakfast** (*from \$75 per night, Lamp Post 191, Paria Main Road, second-springtnt.com*), located right on the rugged coast in Lower Blanchisseuse, journey five minutes down the road to **Cocos Hut** (*65 1/5 Mile Marker, Paria Main Road, lagunamar.com*) in the Laguna Mar Beach/Nature Resort in Upper Blanchisseuse to pick up a picnic lunch. Put your order in for dinner tonight at the restaurant (the local catch is highly recommended).



10:30 a.m.

Strike out walking east along the 19-mile stretch of untouched coastline. Stop at

any coves or streams that seem appealing, but your ultimate destination is **Paria Bay**, a remote swath of beach devoid of human presence. The jungle creeps right up onto the soft sand, waves crash into the outlying rocks. A 15-minute hike into the jungle brings you to Paria Falls and its swimming hole, just in time for your picnic lunch and a dip.

5 p.m.

Wash up back at your room, then take a 10-minute walk to **L'Anse Martin Beach**, better known as Surfer's Beach. At dusk, locals emerge for some liming. Rum and a game of cricket are likely to appear as the sun sets.

7 p.m.

Return to Cocos Hut for dinner. The owner, Fred, is there nearly every night and will share his knowledge of the country's culture and industry over dinner and, if you are so inclined, some Carib beers.

DAY FOUR: MONDAY

8 a.m.

Eat Second Spring's hearty breakfast (bread, pastries, eggs and fruit) on your terrace, then take a cup of coffee down to one of the two decks jutting dramatically from the cliffs.

10:30 a.m.

Bobb's Artistic Creations (*Paria Main Road in the Upper Village*), a 10-minute drive away, is known for its

carved walking sticks, wall hangings and other local crafts. Do a little shopping, then start the drive back to Port of Spain.

12 p.m.

Forty-five minutes outside the capital, **Maracas Bay** is the weekend escape of choice for urbanites. Its biggest attraction isn't the gorgeous shoreline but the "bake and shark" sandwiches—hunks of fried shark meat (some allege that it's catfish) tucked between two pieces of fried bread—sold in stalls across the street. Locals refer to **Richard's Bake & Shark** as the ruler among kings. After piling on the fixings, take your sandwich down to the palm-tree-dotted beach. On the remaining drive, make sure to take in the views and stop by the roadside stalls for coconut candies, fresh juices and trinkets.

3 p.m. Back in town, ask the Carlton Savannah to hold your luggage, then go to the **Georges X food cart** near the corner of Carlos Street and Ariapita Avenue, a 10-minute drive away, for "doubles." This is the classic street food of **Trinidad**, made of curried chickpeas and a fried bread called bara. Be prepared for a long line, and ask for no pepper if you'd like to preserve your taste buds.

4:30 p.m.

Return the car, then walk north to **Queen's Park Savannah**, Port of Spain's main park and the only true open space in the city. What seems like the entire population of the town comes out as evening approaches. You can walk the circumference in

about 45 minutes; stop on the western edge for a fresh coconut water. You'll pass the Magnificent Seven, a series of mansions, each more ostentatious than the last, built in the early 20th century by plantation owners with competing egos. Also look out for the botanical gardens and the new National Academy for the Performing Arts.

6:30 p.m.

Head down the eastern edge of the park to **Apsara** (*13 Queen's Park East, 868-623-7659*) for a refined northern Indian dinner. The menu showcases a number of treats that will be unfamiliar if you have only experienced Indian food at restaurants in the U.S. The dishes here are thicker, creamier and likely to be served over an open flame. The cholle paneer, made with chickpeas and cheese in tomato-based sauce, is excellent.

8:30 p.m.

If time allows, grab a cab to **Smokey & Bunty** (*97 Western Main Rd.*) in St. James for a farewell drink. This corner bar has long been a center of alternative culture in Port of Spain. Take another taxi to the airport for the red-eye back home.



▲ A musician at Maracas Bay



▲ Second Spring Bed & Breakfast

▼ SUNSET TRIP // Soak up the view at the Carlton Savannah hotel



▼ SCENERY FIX // Enjoy a winding drive along Maracas Bay





▲ **ISLAND BEATS** // Listen to local steelpan players



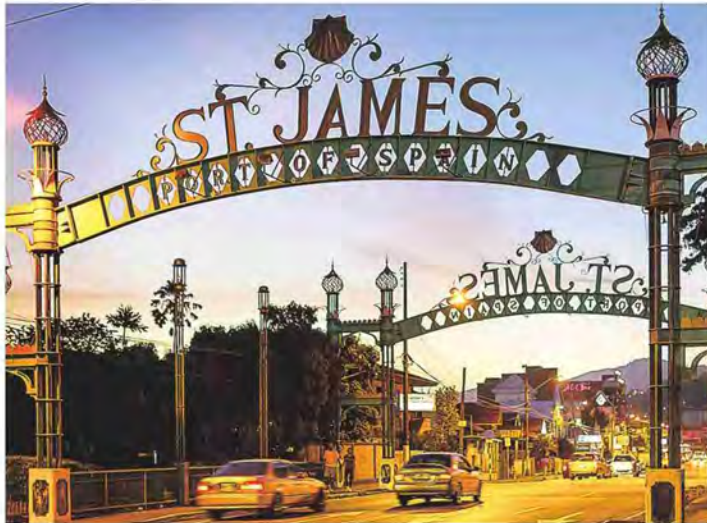
▲ **PARK STOP** // Catch an impromptu political speech in Woodford Square

▼ **CITY STROLL** // Cruise around Queen's Park Savannah, taking in the National Academy for the Performing Arts





▲ AUTHENTIC EATS // Dig into a 'bake and shark' sandwich in Maracas Bay



▲ CORNER COCKTAIL // Grab a drink in the lively St. James area



Morris Moreno for The Wall Street Journal (8)

▲ RUSTIC RAMBLE // Visit Blanchisseuse, a charming fishing village



HILL COUNTRY Above, clockwise: A view over Port of Spain; the National Museum and Art Gallery; preparing an order at Hosein's Roti Shop. Right: Lighthouse Restaurant at the CrewsInn Hotel & Yachting Centre. Below: A beach at Maracas Bay.



CASTLE AND CATCH Above, from left: One of the Magnificent Seven, mansions built in Port of Spain in the early 20th century; Chinese spicy grouper with black beans at Chaud Creole restaurant.

Maps (above) for The Wall Street Journal (NY). Map illustration by Vidhya Rajagathan for The Wall Street Journal.