

# TRAVEL



KEITH ROOKE

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY KEITH ROCKE

# TROPICAL Paradise



The Caribbean's vibrant isles of Trinidad and Tobago offer a sunny splash of serenity

Where is that?" It took a few seconds for me to formulate an adequate answer. Surprisingly, there was at least one person who did not know where Trinidad was. Now, to clarify, there is a city in Cuba named Trinidad. And that Trinidad has long been a haven for photographers hoping to capture and preserve images of colorful old homes, cars and colonial architecture. But the Trinidad referred to here is one half of the Caribbean duo of Trinidad and Tobago. These are the last two islands in the chain stretching from the Bahamas to the northern coast of Venezuela in South America.

So, what's the big deal about Trinidad and Tobago? For starters, whenever you hear the lyrics from the Bill Withers song "Just the Two of Us," he's singing about the island pair. That song was commissioned by the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Board to launch an aggressive worldwide advertising campaign. If you remember the old tropical jingle, "Drink de rum and Co-ca Co-la...working for de Yankee dollar," these words



tell of a time when U.S. presence in the Caribbean was a boon for investment and development in the region. Surely, you've heard of the limbo dance. Don't forget the energetic and melodic tunes played on the steel drums or the vibrant and colorful calypso music.

Been to the Mardi Gras in New Orleans or to the big one in Rio de Janeiro and think you've seen them all? Hold on. You missed one! There's the party of all parties held annually in Trinidad. It's called Carnival (carne vale). Yep! Two days of insane partying in the streets. Most visitors who travel to Trinidad for Carnival arrive there at least one week before the merriment begins. It's the buildup to the Monday and Tuesday festivities that remain firmly in the minds of visitors and that memory (usually) brings them back year after year.

When the party is over in Trinidad, on Ash Wednesday, the next place to be is on the sister island



TAKE A DIP IN THE MOST SPECTACULAR OF SETTINGS AT MACQUERIPE BAY, LOCATED ON THE NORTHERN COAST OF CHAGUARAMAS ON THE ISLAND OF TRINIDAD. BECAUSE OF ITS NATURAL SHELTERED DESIGN AND DEEP, CALM OCEAN WATERS, THE BAY WAS A PERFECT SUBMARINE BASE FOR THE U.S. DURING ITS OCCUPATION OF THE ISLANDS FROM 1941 TO 1972.

of Tobago (pronounced toe-bay-go). Tobago boasts many more white sand beaches with calm waters and protective bays, a more laid-back lifestyle and a natural wonder, the Buccoo Reef. The Northeastern coast of Tobago is dotted with numerous scuba dive sites. Like Trinidad, the mountain ranges in Tobago – accessible by 4-wheel drive vehicles – refreshes the mind and body and brings one back to quietness of nature. That tranquility is interrupted only by the whistles and chirps of the plentiful songbirds or the occasional flight of parrots overhead. If you're lucky, you'll be treated to the vocal stylings of the indigenous howling monkeys or "howlers" as they're more aptly called by the natives.

For the eco-enthusiast, Trinidad and Tobago ranks among the richest outposts of biodiversity in the Caribbean, with more than 450 bird species, over 108 types of mammals, 55 reptiles, 25 amphibians and 620 types of butterflies.

American Airlines, Delta and Continental Airlines fly regular scheduled flights to the islands. Accommodations, whether a hotel, motel or guest house, are plentiful, but planning a trip is well advised, particularly during the high-volume vacation season. The U.S. dollar and euros are actively transacted for goods and services. Dining runs the gamut, from a quaint brunch at a local spot to formal meals at posh restaurants, especially in Trinidad. Have a good time. Sample the island cuisine. And, by all means, get some sand between your toes. Drink fresh coconut water at least once, and ask a native where you can get a Julie Mango.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A PANORAMA OF PARADISE UNFOLDS AT TOBAGO'S TROPIKIST BEACH HOTEL & RESORT. LOVELY STAINED GLASS WINDOWS GRACE THE CHAPEL AT ST. MARY'S COLLEGE, A LANDMARK OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN TRINIDAD. PARLATUVIER BAY IS ONE OF THE MOST SCENIC SPOTS ON TOBAGO, AN ELONGATED ISLAND WITH A MOUNTAIN RANGE THAT RUNS THE LENGTH OF THE LAND. THE WARMTH OF THE CARIBBEAN ISLES IS REFLECTED IN THE FACE OF THIS YOUNG TRINIDADIAN, HAPPILY BIDING HER TIME IN THE MOUNTAINSIDE WHILE HER MOTHER WORKED NEARBY, "PUTTING ON FACES" AS A MAKEUP ARTIST FOR AN ON-LOCATION PHOTO SHOOT. COMMEMORATING THE MARTYRDOM OF HUSSAIN, THE GRANDSON OF MUHAMMAD, HOSAY IS CELEBRATED ANNUALLY WITH A COLORFUL PARADE OF TADJAHS, CRAFTED OF BAMBOO, WOOD, PAPER AND TINSEL.

