

July 2015



# Trinidad and Tobago

Security Overview and Travel Assessment



armadaglobal

INVESTIGATIONS • INTELLIGENCE • SECURITY

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## **Executive Summary**

Trinidad and Tobago, located in the southern Caribbean, is recognized worldwide for having spectacular beaches and, as such, the country thrives on tourism. Despite this, the country is also known for its high crime rate and is ranked among the top ten countries with the most murders. Much of the crime is centralized in the capital city of Port of Spain and occurs between known gangs rather than against tourists. The U.S. Department of State does not have any current travel warnings issued, but does list crime as a critical concern and the principal threat to visitors.

Much of the crime in Trinidad and Tobago can be attributed to the drug trade and gang violence. The island of Trinidad is recognized a major transit hub for drugs as they make their way from South America and the Caribbean to the United States. While violence associated with these issues does occur on the smaller island of Tobago, they represent a much more significant concern for visitors while on Trinidad. Visitors are strongly advised to avoid travel away from tourist areas as the risk for becoming a victim of these crimes greatly increases, even outside of the urban centers.

In addition to the safety issues, Trinidad and Tobago does have some health concerns. Dengue fever has spread throughout both of the islands and health officials have recently recognized a Chikungunya outbreak in the country. Additionally, water-borne illnesses do exist and while water quality throughout much of the country is acceptable, visitors are advised to drink bottled water whenever possible. Lastly, while Yellow Fever is almost non-existent on the island of Tobago, visitors are still advised to receive a vaccine prior to travel.

Additionally, the island country's geography makes it prone to a variety of natural hazards, particularly earthquakes and hurricanes. Trinidad and Tobago regularly experiences earthquakes that can range from light tremors to quakes with high levels of damage. Visitors should be aware that the majority of these earthquakes are tremors and should expect to feel them; however, all earthquakes should be treated as potentially life-threatening and visitors should follow earthquake response procedures in every instance. Lastly, while Trinidad and Tobago is situated below the Atlantic hurricane belt, storms have affected the islands in the past, bringing damaging winds and flooding. Visitors should be particularly cautious during the Atlantic hurricane season (June-November) and always monitor local weather alerts.

## **Arrival**

Those travelling to Trinidad and Tobago will arrive via Piarco International Airport (POS). Piarco International Airport is located approximately 27 kilometers southeast of Port of Spain. As the largest and busiest international airport in the West Indies, Piarco services 19 airlines that travel to 27 locations worldwide. Over the past 14 years, the airport has updated its security and air traffic systems and has also opened a new passenger terminal. The airport now has many amenities, such as shops, fast-food restaurants, and free Wi-Fi services; it also has a 24-hour customer relations desk available to assist passengers.

There is a variety of transportation to and from the city center available at POS. Ten rental car agencies, including Alamo's Car Rental and Avis Car Rental, are located within the airport and can easily be used to travel to the bed and breakfast. Private taxis, which are also available at the airport, have an "H" noted on the license plate to ensure passengers can trust that the taxi is registered with the government. They are often unmarked and unmetered; therefore, it is important to negotiate your fare before embarking. Because of the high number of motor vehicle accidents, having an experienced Trinidadian drive the group to the bed and breakfast is the best option. However, the minibus-style taxis, often locally called "Maxi-Taxis," should not be used as they are more prone to traffic accidents due to unsafe driving and tourists have been victims of violent robberies and assaults while using them in the past.

While the airport is located in the Port of Spain Metro area, POS is removed from most the violence and crimes that occur frequently in the city. However, criminal activity does occasionally affect those traveling to and from the airport. The Beetham Highway is one route that is of particular concern for visitors, particularly in the Laventille area. In September 2013, demonstrators barricaded the primary travel routes between the airport and Port of Spain to protest police abuses. This highway is also a hotspot for robberies; criminals will place debris on the roadway to force vehicles to stop and will then rob passengers of their valuables, often beating them, whether compliant or not. While Armada recommends travelers avoid this route, if driving on Beetham Highway, drivers should always drive with windows up and doors locked and should never stop on the roadway unless police are present. Lastly, gangs have been known to follow tourists from the airport to their accommodations in the city; they usually either rob them while in transit to the city or break into their hotel rooms/houses afterwards. Travelers should be alert to any vehicles or individuals following them and if they believe they are being followed, should alert police and not go straight to their accommodations.

## **Travel**

### *Vehicle Safety*

Trinidad and Tobago has approximately 35,000 motor vehicle accidents per year, about 200 of which result in deaths. The majority of accidents are caused by excessive speed. Alcohol is the second leading cause of accidents. With pedestrians involved in more than 40 percent of all motor vehicle accidents, it is important to be cautious when crossing roadways, especially at night.

Many people in Trinidad and Tobago use maxi-taxis (also called "gypsy taxis") to travel the city. Maxi-taxis are similar to a standard bus system, except maxi-taxis are large vans. They usually operate on fixed fares with fixed routes. Each bus line is designated by a colored stripe and travels a designated route between locations in Port of Spain. While maxi-taxis are easy to find and can be an inexpensive mode of transportation, maxi-taxis are often randomly stopping in the road, and the passengers are robbed of valuables. In some instances, there have been reports in

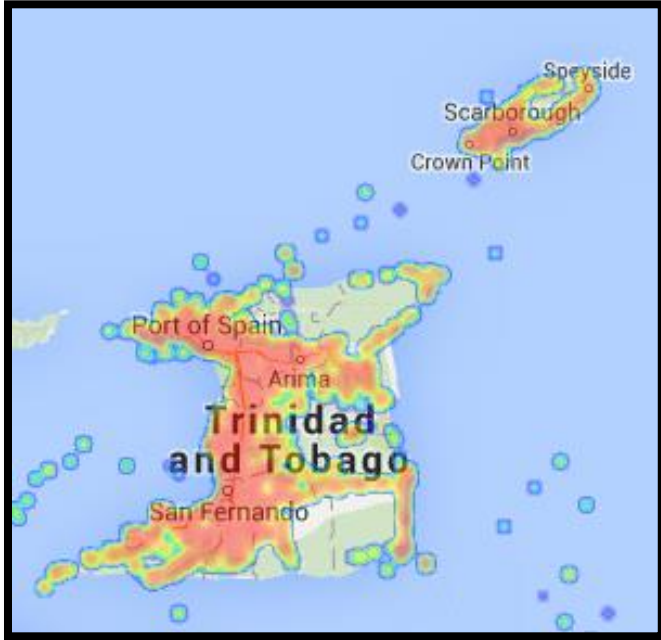
which the drivers planned robberies to occur. This, in addition to unreliable drivers and poor vehicle conditions, make maxi-taxis an unsafe mode of transportation. Armada recommends ground transportation only by trusted providers.

### *Walking*

Travelling on foot in urban areas is generally safe during the daytime; however, it is not recommended to travel by foot in the evening or at night unless in a well-trafficked area. Tourists should avoid wearing jewelry or expensive clothing, carrying cameras or bags, and other behaviors that may identify them as a non-local. Additionally, it is illegal in Trinidad and Tobago to wear any type of camouflage clothing; this includes shirts, pants, scarves, purses, and backpacks. Visitors should also pay close attention to vehicle traffic while walking due to dangerous driving behaviors, such as running stoplights and not yielding to pedestrians.

Additionally, those travelling on foot should ensure they apply sunscreen every two hours, as long exposure to the sun's UV rays is harmful. This is a particular issue when walking near water, which increases UV exposure. Travelers should monitor their location's UV index level by checking local weather sources or, if travelling with a smartphone, download a weather app that provides this information (the iPhone Weather app displays this at the bottom of the page). According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), any UV index above three requires the consistent application of sunscreen. If you are unable to access UV index information, follow the "Shadow Rule:" if your shadow is taller than you are, the UV index is likely to be lower; if your shadow is shorter than you are, the UV index is likely to be at harmful level.

### *Cellular Service*



*Map 2: Cellular reception in Trinidad and Tobago*

Cellular reception is strong throughout much of Trinidad and Tobago. Travelers staying in urban centers while on the islands should not have trouble maintaining a cellular signal; however, it should be noted that strong storms can often knock out cellular service towers and disrupt cellular communication lines. The only areas of concern for cellular service are the eastern portion of Trinidad and the northeastern portion of Tobago. Visitors to these areas should ensure their destination has reliable landline phone service or carry a satellite-based cell phone.

**Security Assessment: Trinidad and Tobago**

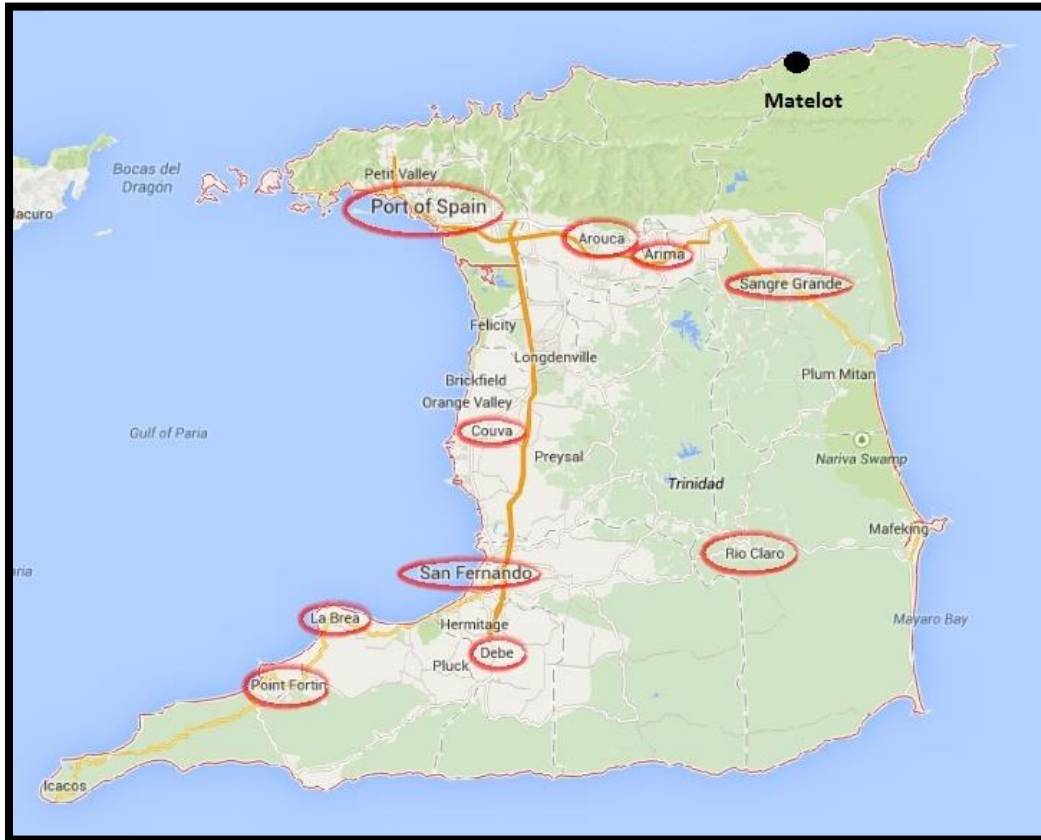
*Crime*

The islands of Trinidad and Tobago are known for the high levels of crime, mainly located in the capital city, Port of Spain. According to Armada’s research, in a one year span (September 1, 2013 to August 31, 2014), Trinidad and Tobago experienced 243 murders, 54 shootings, and 18 rapes. Additionally, five kidnappings, 13 assaults, and 18 robberies have been reported. Official crime statistics issued by the government reveal that the islands have seen an increase in the number of murders since 2011 when the number of murders was 354 and in 2013, Trinidad experienced 405 murders. In Trinidad and Tobago, the murder rate in 2013 was 31 per 100,000 inhabitants. In comparison, the city of Pittsburgh had a total of 46 murders in 2013, which averages approximately 14.6 per 100,000 inhabitants.

While the island does have a substantial amount of crime, foreigners are not targeted specifically as only 13 total crimes have been committed against foreigners in the past year according to data compiled by Armada Global. Approximately 70 percent of crimes go unreported, and of the crimes reported, the vast majority are unsolved for numerous years. While crimes against foreigners may be underreported, Armada Global believes foreigners are at no greater risk than

native  
Trinidadians.

According to data compiled by Armada Global from September 1, 2013 to August 31, 2014, crime has occurred throughout the island in cities and in the municipalities surrounding the cities. In Map 3 below, the areas

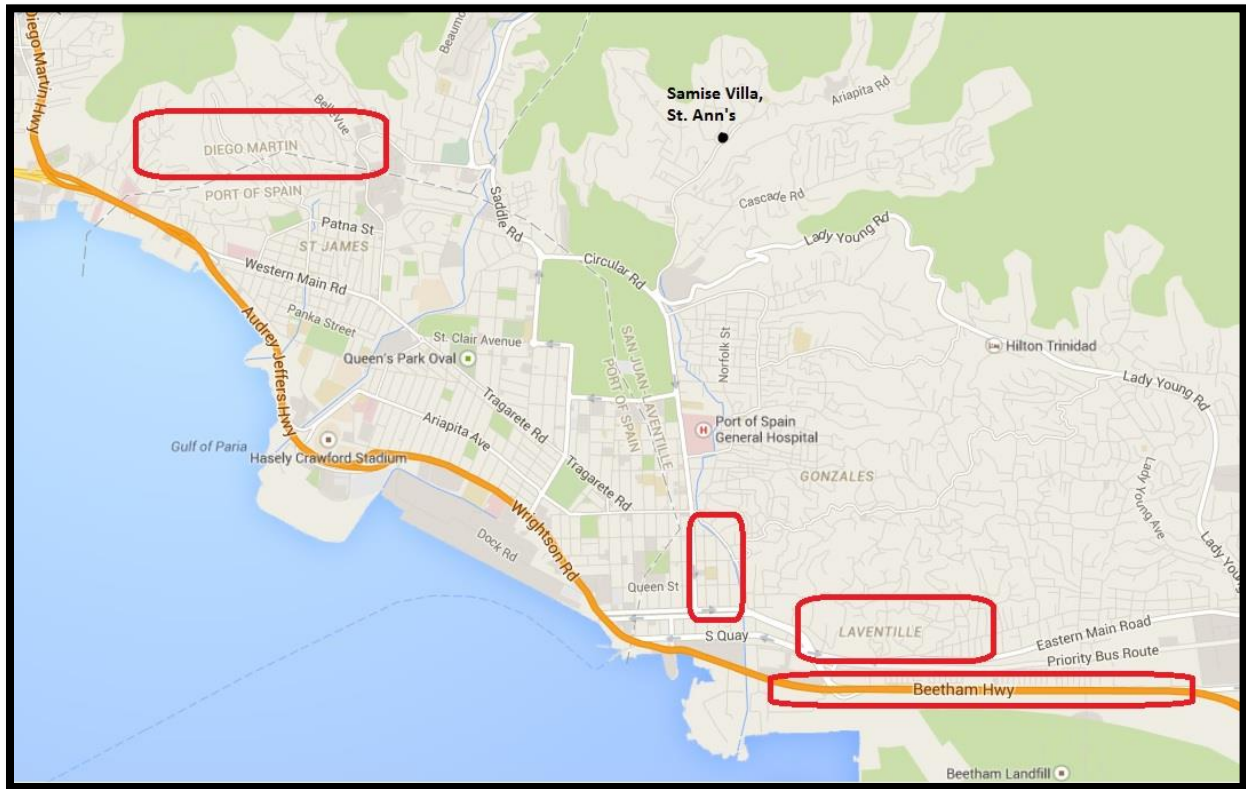


Map 3: Violence in Trinidad and Tobago

circled in red are cities in Trinidad where violence has occurred within the past year. The vast majority of murders, robberies and rapes have happened in and around these cities with very few outliers. For example, one murder occurred in June 2014 in New Grant, which is located halfway between San Fernando and Rio Claro. As depicted in Map 3, crime and violence saturates the southern portion of Trinidad, while Matelot is far-removed from crime on the northern shore. Nearly 50 percent of the crimes committed between September 1, 2013 and August 31, 2014 occurred in the capital city of Port of Spain.

In Port of Spain, the areas with the most crime include Laventille, Nelson Street, Beetham Highway and Diego Martin. Map 4 below depicts the most dangerous areas of Port of Spain and the areas which should be avoided, especially after dark. The number of murders in Laventille in the past year surpassed 30, with Diego Martin having the second highest rate of 20 murders. Bars, restaurants and nightclubs are often places where high levels of crimes are reported, and there have been reports of random drive-by shootings occurring at popular bars and nightclubs in

the city. As such, Armada recommends avoiding these locations in Port of Spain, particularly in the evening.



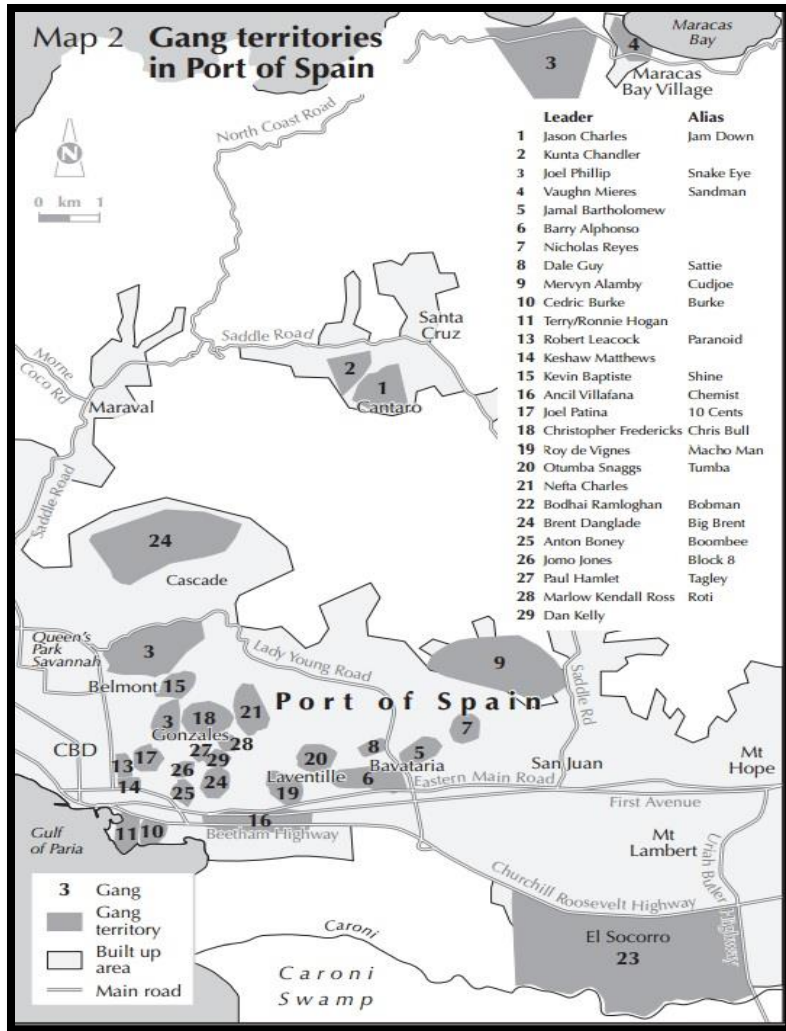
**Map 4: Dangerous areas of Port of Spain**

### *Gang Violence*

Gang violence is rarely reported in Trinidad and Tobago, but Port of Spain is known for having more than 100 gangs. As such, many of the crimes committed are suspected to be a result of gang disputes. Laventille, an area in the Southeast portion of Port of Spain, is known to have the highest level of gang activity. Most crimes are believed to be retaliation for other crimes or because of a real or perceived connection with another gang (i.e. loyalty). As displayed in the figure below, gang activity is widespread throughout Port of Spain, but the area of St. Ann is free from any known gang territory. Drug trafficking is also a source of income for gangs as ganja (marijuana), cocaine and fabricated drugs are smuggled throughout the city causing disputes

**Map 5: Gang territories in Port of Spain**





between gangs. Firearms, in addition to cutlasses (machetes), are used for the vast majority of murders and assaults and have been used to intimidate victims of robberies, rapes and kidnappings.

There have been instances in Port of Spain in which innocent bystanders have been caught in the crossfire between gangs causing harm to those individuals. If accidentally caught in gang-related activity, it is best to leave the area as soon as possible and return to a hotel or a safe site such as a police station, hospital or school.

### *LGBTQ Issues*

Trinidad and Tobago is considered a relatively safe destination for LGBTQ travelers. There is a large LGBTQ community presence in the

country, focusing on the capital, Port of Spain. Many LGBTQ visitors travel freely in Trinidad and Tobago without any problems; however, LGBTQ visitors may experience legal challenges not experienced by non-LGBTQ persons. Trinidad and Tobago criminalizes same-sex relations, termed “buggery” or “serious indecency,” with penalties up to eighty-five years in jail depending on the age of the offender. Additionally, Trinidad and Tobago law forbids the immigration of LGBTQ non-residents into the country. The government of Trinidad and Tobago, however, has very rarely enforced these laws, particularly the laws against LGBTQ immigration. Despite this, many locals maintain anti-LGBTQ sentiments and often make vocal condemnations of LGBTQ persons. Therefore, LGBTQ visitors are advised to maintain awareness of those around them while travelling in Trinidad and Tobago and avoid persons who may begin a confrontation.

### Possible Excursions

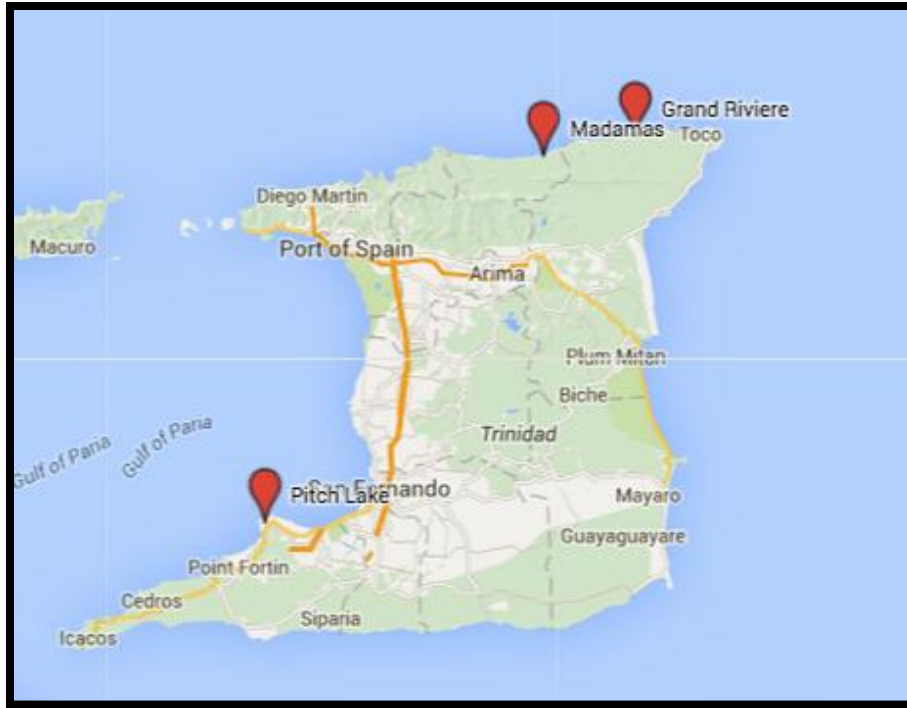
#### *Matelot*



***Map 6: Matelot***

Matelot, located on the northern shore of Trinidad, is a very remote location that has not been subjected to the crime issues associated with Port of Spain. The Matelot community has not had a murder since 2004 and rarely has any major, reportable crime. Most crimes that occur within Matelot are very minor and only involve residents of the community. Police Commissioner Stephen Williams reported in August 2014 that Matelot was a “crime-free” area in the country, and the police force aspires to have more cities similar to Matelot where crime and murder do not occur frequently. While crime is not prevalent in Matelot, visitors should keep valuables in a secure place and keep extra copies of passports/photo identification in case a robbery should occur. Although a robbery is not probable, it is still possible.

*Other Tourist Sites*



*Map 7: Popular tourist sites on Trinidad*

Popular sightseeing locations throughout the island, such as Madamas, Grand Riviere and Pitch Lake have not experienced any significant crimes over the past year. While crimes have not been reported to authorities, tourist websites have indicated that visitors have been the victims of pickpocketing and small-scale robberies. Visitors to these sites should stay in groups and carry only a small

amount of cash. It is important for sightseers to be vigilant and keep a watchful eye on the people surrounding the group. At the tourist sites, most especially Pitch Lake, native Trinidadians will be willing to give guided tours. Before accepting a tour, make sure the person is from a recognized agency, and never accept a tour from a private individual.

Boat safety can be an issue when traveling to certain sightseeing destinations, specifically Madamas Bay. During the rainy season (July-December), the water can be extremely rough and should only be traversed by professionals. While Trinidad and Tobago are not located in the hurricane belt, the water can become increasingly rough between the two islands. The north shore of Trinidad and the southwest shore of Tobago have been known areas where people have drowned. It is important to swim in shallow water, never swim alone, and be mindful of water conditions swimming.

### **Weather**

Mudslides are prominent issues in Trinidad, occurring mainly to the north of Port of Spain. From July through December, mudslides can be expected due to excessive rain during the rainy season. The last major mudslide in Matelot occurred in December 2013, which left dozens of people stranded as the only road to Matelot was inaccessible. Despite this, communication was still viable, and rescue teams were able to reach the area after a few days. If an emergency (a snake bite, for example) were to occur during a severe mudslide, such as the one in 2013, a sea rescue may be necessary, but that may not be possible as sea conditions are very rough during the rainy season.

The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management issue warnings and alerts in regard to severe weather via electronic media within 36 hours of the event, which can be found [here](#). In the event of a disaster, the American Red Cross suggests seeking shelter at home first. If that area is unsafe, then move to a friend or relative's home. If both areas are unsafe, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) will provide a safe shelter in local schools, community centers, sporting centers and some religious institutions. The closest shelters to Matelot are:

Matelot: Paria, Main Road Community Center

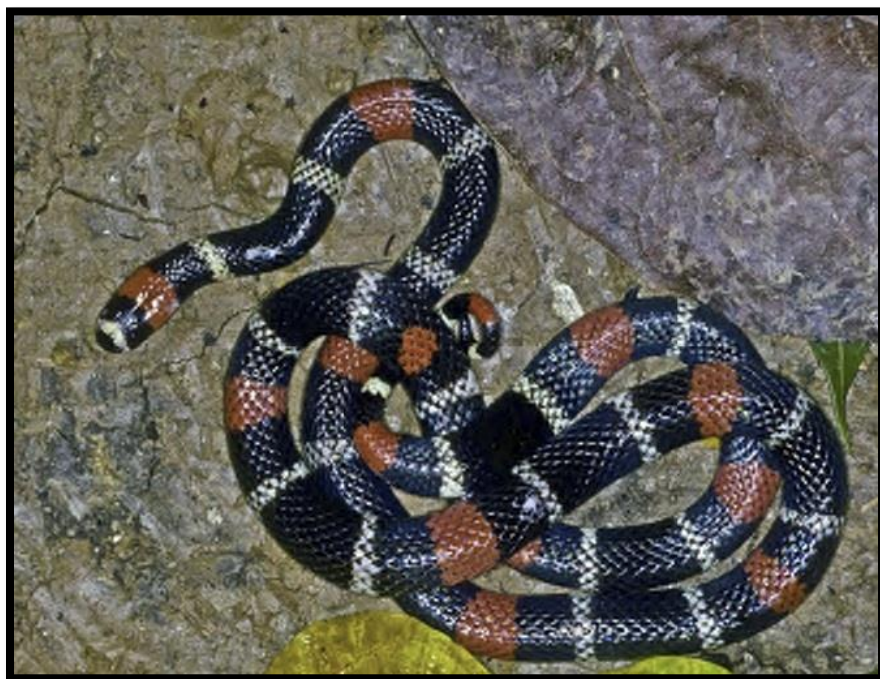
Grande Riviere: Rampanalga Road Community Center

These shelters should be able to provide blankets, bedding, water, food, relief clothing and crisis counseling. Additionally, the American Red Cross suggests having a flashlight with extra batteries, extra cash, multiple copies of personal documents (i.e. passport, photo identification), a cell phone with chargers, and a battery-powered radio to listen for important information which may be issued by NEMA.

## Health

### *Venomous Snakes*

All reptiles become more prominent in Trinidad and Tobago during the rainy season (from July-December). Two types of snakes in the country are especially dangerous and poisonous – the coral snake and the mapepire snake.



*Figure 1: Coral Snake (large variety)*

The coral snake has black, red and pale white rings that circle the body of the snake. The black rings of the coral snake are always either a single ring or a triad. If the snake has black rings in pairs, then the snake is not venomous. Despite this, it is best to assume all snakes with black, red and pale white rings are venomous. Coral snakes can range in length from one foot to three feet.

Mapepire snakes have a triangular head, tend to have short tails, and have heavy scales. Folding front fangs lay perpendicular to the roof of the snake's mouth and are only visible when a person/animal is bitten. Mapepire snakes range in length from six feet to 12 feet. The coloring of a mapepire can be deceiving as the snakes have various patterns of black and brown, not one specific pattern. It is best to rely on coloring or head shape to determine if the snake is poisonous.



*Figure 2: Mapepire Snake*

If bit, the victim should remove all bracelets, rings and anything else on the body which may be constricting. The area of the bite should be immobilized, and if bitten on the arms or legs, keep the wound below heart level. It is important to not drink any liquids or consume food after a snake bite as this may make the situation worse. The victim needs to seek emergency medical treatment immediately at a medical facility and avoid all local remedies. Many local remedies are not effective in treating snake bites and can be harmful to the victim.

### *Vaccines*

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that travelers to Trinidad and Tobago be up-to-date on all routine vaccines. Routine vaccines include diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, measles-mumps-rubella vaccine, chickenpox vaccine, yearly flu shot, and the polio vaccine. Additionally, while the United States is not a country prone to yellow fever, the CDC still recommends travelers receive the yellow fever vaccine. Since Matelot resides outside Port of Spain and is located outside of an urban area, the risk of yellow fever increases and, therefore, travelers should take precautions.

In addition to the routine vaccines, the CDC highly recommends most travelers receive vaccines for hepatitis A and typhoid. Both hepatitis A and typhoid are transmitted through food or water. These vaccines are recommended for travelers who will be residing in rural parts of Trinidad and Tobago or who tend to have more adventurous eating habits.

Hepatitis B and rabies vaccines are only recommended for some travelers. Unless specific travelers plan on coming in contact with infected bodily fluids (i.e. blood), hepatitis B is

unnecessary. In order to avoid rabies, travelers should avoid touching or coming in direct contact with animals, specifically bats since bats are known to carry rabies in Trinidad and Tobago.

### *Chikungunya*

Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) detected the transmission of chikungunya throughout the Caribbean. Additionally, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains a level 1 watch for Chikungunya for Trinidad and Tobago. Local transmission, meaning infected mosquitoes are spreading the virus to people, has been detected in numerous Caribbean islands, including Trinidad and Tobago. Chikungunya is a viral disease, meaning there is neither a vaccine to prevent the disease nor an antiviral medication to treat it. Symptoms of chikungunya begin three to seven days after the initial mosquito bite and most commonly include a fever and severe joint pain. Additional symptoms include muscle pain, headache, a rash, or joint swelling, mainly in the hands and feet. While antiviral medication is not available to treat chikungunya, treating the symptoms is possible. Fever reducers and pain relievers should be utilized to ease suffering as joint pain, joint swelling, and fever can be severe. Death from chikungunya is very rare, and most patients begin to feel better after a week, although some infected people exhibit symptoms for much longer than a week and can develop long-term joint pain.

While travelers are unable to prevent chikungunya, precautions can be taken in order to reduce the threat of this disease. Avoiding mosquitoes by wearing long pants, long-sleeved shirts, wearing insect repellent and staying indoors are the best methods to prevent chikungunya. Using insect repellent with 30 percent DEET (diethyltoluamide) is the best option to ward off mosquitoes, and reapplication is highly recommended to keep insects at bay. Once bitten by an infected mosquito, it is best to avoid mosquitoes and insect bites even further to prevent the spread of the virus.

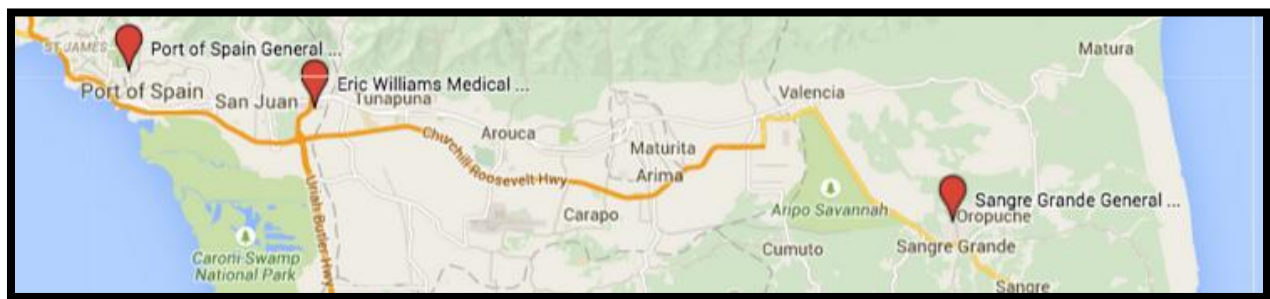
### *Dengue Fever*

The Ministry of Health in Trinidad and Tobago has declared Dengue fever a hyper-epidemic, meaning there is sustained circulation of the virus on the islands. Dengue fever spreads from person to person through infected mosquitoes, the same way chikungunya spreads. Symptoms, which appear five to six days after a person is infected, include:

1. Headaches
2. High fever
3. Backache
4. Vomiting/nausea
5. Skin rash
6. Diarrhea
7. Pain behind the ears
8. Skin rash

In order to prevent Dengue fever, it is best to avoid mosquitoes as much as possible by using bug repellent and wearing long sleeves and long pants. Reapplication of bug repellent is necessary when working in the water or sweating excessively. It is possible for Dengue fever to develop into Dengue Hemorrhagic fever, which is a very serious condition in which emergency medical attention is necessary. Symptoms of Dengue Hemorrhagic fever include abdominal pain, weakness/lethargy, bleeding under the skin, bloody vomit, stools, and gums, and low blood pressure. It is important to note that an infected person can only take Paracetamol or Acetaminophen, as prescribed by a doctor, to aid with symptoms. Taking aspirin, Motrin, ibuprofen, or Cataflam will only exacerbate the symptoms.

### *Hospitals*



**Map 8: Hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago**

#### Port of Spain General Hospital

#### Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, San Juan

#### Sangre Grande General Hospital, Sangre Grande

In a medical emergency, dial 811 for ambulance service.

Contact numbers for recommended hospitals and clinics:

Seventh Day Adventists Centre: 868-622-1191

San Fernando General Hospital: 868-652-3581

St. Clair Medical Centre: 868-628-1451

Port of Spain General Hospital: 868-623-2951

Tobago Regional Hospital: 868-639-2551

Complex, Mt. Hope: 868-645-2640

### **Security Recommendations**

In Trinidad and Tobago, all isolated areas and public beaches should be avoided after dark and valuables should not be left unattended at any location in Trinidad. Travelers should avoid carrying large amounts of cash, and carry traveler's checks and major credit cards instead. While most banks accept foreign bank credit cards, it is important to check if local ATMs accept

specific cards as some ATMs will withhold rejected cards. All travelers should be aware of their surroundings and carry belongings in a secure manner in order to avoid potential robberies. In the event of a deteriorating security situation, Armada recommends traveling to a nearby safe site to seek support. Depending on the nature of the incident, the closest police station may be the preferred location; however, during demonstrations or gang conflicts, police stations may be targets. In the event of a large-scale security concern, Amizade volunteers and personnel should relocate to a central tourist hub, such as a major hotel, where security will be much greater. Once relocated, remain in shelter and avoid unnecessary travel outside of the hotel until the situation is resolved; if necessary, contact the local police or U.S. Embassy for further instructions.

As an added security measure, Armada recommends outfitting travelers with emergency communication devices to assist in the event of an emergency. Armada provides a smartphone app for emergency communication for on-grid locations and a standalone iridium-based device for off-grid locations. As most major security events also result in cell towers going offline due to overuse, the iridium-based tracker would provide a secondary, satellite-based emergency communicator. Both options tie into a 24/7 monitoring station for emergency response coordination. Further, it is recommended that Amizade personnel obtain a security briefing prior to their travel advising of the concerns and recommendations included in this document. Finally, in the event Amizade chooses to hire a security consultant to travel with the group, Armada can provide this expertise or arrange for a local, vetted security resource to be present.

Armada Global advises all travelers to practice the following security awareness techniques:

- Be cognizant of your surroundings
- Avoid predictable patterns and change your travel routes
- Do not dress extravagantly or wear expensive jewelry
- Travel in groups
- Use only trusted transportation nodes (arranged by western hotel, for example)
- Do not hail street cabs
- Prior to your trip, register with the U.S. Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program - <https://step.state.gov/step/>
- Ensure you have proper vaccinations and have registered for travel insurance and medical evacuation coverage

### **Local Media and Emergency Contact Information**

*Local Media*

[Guardian](#)

[Daily Express](#)

[CNC3](#)



## CCN6

### *Emergency Phone Numbers*

**Police;** “999” or “911”

**Fire & Ambulance-** “990”

**Ambulance-** “811”

**Anti-Kidnapping Hotline-** “623-6793”

**Local Police:**

46 mm Andrew Street

Matelot

Phone- “670-8220”

**Divisional Eastern Police Headquarters:**

Cor. Toco and Eastern Main

Phone- “668-2505”

**U.S. Embassy**

15 Queen’s Park West

Port of Spain

Trinidad and Tobago

Hours of Operation: 7:30am – 4:30pm

U.S. Embassy Operator- “868-622-6371”

Emergency Line- “868-622-6682”

Marine Post One- “868-822-5999”