



Trinidad & Tobago - Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture

Tim Ewbank

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The twin Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Tobago could hardly be more different. Trinidad is vibrant, cosmopolitan, culturally diverse, and multiethnic, with a population descended from East Indian, African, Spanish, French, Dutch, American, Chinese, Syrian, and English forebears. This potent mix finds full expression in unbridled revelry each February with the celebration of Carnival—a dazzling, open-to-all-comers, mass participation street extravaganza of steel bands, calypso, dance, and the magnificent costumed bands “playing mas” (short for masquerade). Tobago, by contrast, is much quieter, predominantly rural, and a tranquil tropical idyll.

Both islands have a history of slavery and indentured labor that, even today, engenders a determination in the people to live life as they choose rather than to order. “Trinis” are by nature friendly, outgoing, and hospitable. They are slow to anger and quick to walk away from confrontation. They have an infectious *joie de vivre* and a laid-back attitude to time—which foreigners can sometimes find frustrating.

Culture Smart! Trinidad and Tobago explores the codes and paradoxes of Trinbagonian life, describing the many and varied traditions, customs, and cultures of its diverse society. It outlines the contrasting histories of the two islands, and opens a window into people’s private lives, showing how they interact socially, and their attitudes to people who are “from foreign.” It offers practical advice from business tips to how to play mas at Carnival. It aims to make that first trip to the two islands as rewarding as possible by taking you beyond the stereotypes to the real people

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