



Trinidad & Tobago 2019 Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Port of Spain.

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Trinidad and Tobago at Level 2, indicating travelers should exercise increased caution. Do not travel to Laventille, Beetham, Sea Lots, Cocorite, and the interior of Queen's Park Savannah in Port of Spain due to crime.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Embassy in Port of Spain does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The American Citizen Services unit (ACS) cannot recommend a particular individual or establishment and assumes no responsibility for the quality of services provided.

Review OSAC's [Trinidad and Tobago-specific page](#) for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

Crime Threats

There is serious risk from crime in Port of Spain. The government of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) faces numerous challenges in its effort to reduce crime, including an overburdened legal system, bureaucratic resistance to change, unemployment in marginal areas, disenfranchised youth, the negative influence of gangs, drugs, weapons, and an economic recession.

Crime is the principal threat to visitors; most crimes are crimes of opportunity. U.S. citizens have been victims of pickpocketing, assault, theft/robbery, fraud, and murder. Guests at hotels have reported the theft of items from their rooms. While not common, robberies and petty theft can occur during daylight hours. There is no evidence to indicate that criminals target foreigners in general or expatriates in particular, but robberies, break-ins/burglaries, vehicular break-ins, home invasions, and assaults, including sexual assaults, do occur in areas tourists frequent and in expatriate communities. Do not physically resist any robbery attempt. Statistics show that victims who resist are more likely to be injured or killed by their attackers.

T&T Police Service (TTPS) 2018 crime statistics show a 2.5% increase in overall serious criminal activity compared to 2017. Violent crime remains a major concern for local security services and the general population.

Despite the seizure of 988 firearms in 2018, 80% of murders involved firearms, highlighting the problem of imported, and often illegal, weapons and firearms smuggling. Drug trafficking and gang-related activities continue to fuel the demand for illegal weapons.

According to TTPS statistics, there were 517 murders nationwide in 2018, after 495 in 2017, 462 in 2016, 420 in 2015, and 403 in 2014, in a population of approximately 1.4 million people. The 2018 numbers represent an increase of 4.4%. The detection rate for murder was 16.6% for 2018, a decrease from 17.9% in 2017. Gang and drug-related activities continue to drive the murder rate.

Since 2016, murders have been more widespread; previously, most concentrated in a few urban areas. In 2018, the Northern Division, which includes Arima and Tunapuna, reported the highest number of murders, at 118. The Central Division, which includes Chaguanas and Enterprise, reported 81 murders. The Southern and Port of Spain Divisions reported 68 and 66 murders, respectively.

Reported instances of crimes related to sexual assault and domestic violence increased to 757 in 2018 from 531 in 2017; 491 were reported in 2016.

In Trinidad, the majority of violent crime (e.g. homicides, kidnappings, assaults, robberies, sexual assaults) is gang/drug-related or domestic in nature. A significant, growing portion involves the influence of gangs, illegal narcotics, and firearms. Most reported crimes occurred within the metropolitan areas of Port of Spain and San Fernando; however, the areas of Arima and Central Trinidad contributed heavily to the 2018 crime statistics. There were 13,444 reported serious crimes in 2018, 331 more than in 2017.

Approximately one-third of crimes result in arrest

Notable violent incidents in Trinidad in 2018 include:

- In January, gunmen ambushed a car in the Morvant district. The car caught on fire and burned a 15-year-old boy and the driver to death. Two other boys travelling in the car at the time managed to escape with injuries.
- In March, police found the bodies of four persons, two of whom were teenaged girls, at an apartment in La Brea, south Trinidad. All four had been bludgeoned to death, with one of the girls' throat slit. The incident reportedly stemmed from a love affair gone sour. Police subsequently charged a man who was previously in a relationship with an adult female victim with the crimes. The fourth victim was a 69-year-old male.
- In July, gunmen opened fire on a group at the Boardwalk in Chaguaramas, a popular beach facility, shooting six people and killing three, including an eight-year-old boy.
- In November, police discovered the bodies of a pregnant 19-year-old woman and her common-law husband in a vehicle in the Wallerfield, Arima district, after residents heard gunshots.
- In December, there was a home invasion of a Canadian diplomat's home in an affluent neighborhood in Port of Spain. The suspects tied up the occupant, ransacked the house, and fled with jewelry and other valuables, including a vehicle.

Nearly all murders are on Trinidad. There were nine murders in Tobago in 2018, 13 in 2017, and four in 2016. Crimes affecting foreigners in Tobago include murder, home invasion, petty theft, swindling, fraud, and theft from hotel rooms. Several violent home invasions targeted wealthy homes and villas frequented by tourists.

According to the 2012 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Caribbean Human Development Report and the 2013 Council on Hemispheric Affairs report entitled "Gangs Are the New Law in Urban Trinidad & Tobago," approximately 100 criminal gangs operate in T&T. These gangs, as well as other organizations, are involved in organized criminal activities including weapons smuggling and fraud.

Jamaat al-Muslimeen is a Muslim religious organization focusing on Islamic education and a number of business ventures. Its members and leadership have figured into serious crimes, including murder and narcotics trafficking.

There have been incidents of piracy in the waters between T&T and Venezuela, in which pirates boarded vessels and assaulted, robbed, and in some cases, murdered the occupants. While the majority of incidents involve local fishermen, a small community of private boat owners who stay in Trinidad during the hurricane season have also been affected. Sailors should report any incidents to the T&T Coast Guard and local police. Check with the Coast Guard and yacht facility managers for current information.

Use caution with U.S. credit cards, as most do not offer the same levels of protection as many international credit cards that require a PIN for transactions. If using a credit card, ensure that the credit card stays in sight. Do not withdraw large amounts of cash from banks or ATMs. Instead of withdrawing a large sum of money, consider cashing a check or conducting an electronic transfer. For more information, review OSAC's report, [The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud](#).

Cybersecurity Issues

The use of computers by the local population is moderate, as is the level of sophistication.

Other Areas of Concern

It is illegal to carry ammunition when arriving, departing, or transiting through Trinidad and Tobago. Authorities have detained, charged, and fined individuals found with as little as one bullet, a previously discharged bullet casing, or spent ammunition used in items such as jewelry or keyrings on their person or in their luggage at the airport. You may not import any camouflage-pattern material without approval from the Ministry of National Security. You may not wear camouflage clothing in public unless you are in the country on official military business.

T&T law prohibits the use of obscene language to the annoyance of other persons on the street. Using obscene language in public may result in an arrest if a police officer is in proximity.

U.S. government personnel and their families may not travel to the following areas (yellow shaded areas on map): Laventille, Sea Lots, Cocorite, Beetham, the interior of Savannah Park, downtown Port of Spain (after dark), Ft. George (after dark), and all beaches (after dark):



Transportation-Safety Situation

For more information, review OSAC's report, [Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights](#).

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Trinidad has modern four-lane highways and one controlled-access highway; however, road quality decreases quickly on secondary roads. Rural roads are narrow and often have deep drainage ditches. These are in poor repair and are frequently congested. Avoid nighttime travel other than on major highways. Roadside assistance exists, but is limited and may be subject to lengthy delays. Carry water and a charged cellular telephone.

Vehicles drive on the left side of the road. Local law requires the driver and all passengers to wear seat belts and motorcyclists to wear helmets.

You may not use cellular telephones while driving, unless with a hands-free device. Drivers caught talking on a cellular telephone are subject to fines. Be alert for the use of hand signals by other drivers to indicate turning, slowing, or stopping; these do not necessarily correspond to hand signals used in other countries. Drivers are generally courteous, but can be flexible with the rules of the road.

Road travel is generally safe; however, there continues to be a relatively high number of traffic fatalities from speeding and drunk driving. Road fatalities increased to 118 in 2018, up from 117 in 2017.

Do not stop if a stranger flags your vehicle down along the road; hitchhikers are usually swindlers and can be threatening.

The Beetham Highway, a main thoroughfare for Port of Spain, is dangerous in the event of broken-down vehicles. On the Beetham stretch, there are regular incidents of persons running out into the road or throwing debris (e.g. bricks, chairs, trash) at cars to cause accidents and force cars to stop. Once the accident occurs or vehicle stops, a group of accomplices then descends upon the accident victims, robbing them of valuables, and often assaulting them violently, even if they are compliant. If this type of situation occurs and the vehicle is still operable, continue to a safer area before seeking help.

The fine for driving under the influence is \$12,000 TT (approx. US\$1,900) for a first conviction. Traffic wardens help monitor and enforce traffic safety; however, they have no powers of arrest, and often request the assistance of the TTPS. Unannounced road checks are not uncommon and may occur at any time.

The speed limit on major highways is 100 kilometers per hour. For more information on self-driving, review OSAC's report, [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#).

Public Transportation Conditions

Traditional, non-shared, marked taxis do not exist in T&T. Uber is active, but may not be available outside of Port of Spain. Use caution with ridesharing. Ensure you are in a safe area when using a phone to order an Uber or report an incident. For more information on ride sharing, review OSAC's Annual Briefing report, [Safety and Security in the Share Economy](#).

Private taxis are available at the airports and major hotels, but they are unmetered and unmarked. You can hire them to travel door-to-door, but agree on a fare in advance. Private taxis and route taxis have plate numbers beginning with the letter "H." Use only private taxis for transportation around Port of Spain, and only private taxis or full-sized inter-city buses for travel between cities. Ensure your taxi is not a route taxi before getting in, because route taxis will pick up additional passengers. Crimes (e.g. rapes, assaults, robberies, thefts) have taken place in taxis. Taxis have also caused serious traffic accidents swerving across several lanes to pick up or discharge passengers. Avoid small buses and vans (as referred to as Maxi Taxis) for the same reasons.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the government's Civil Aviation Authority as compliant with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of T&T's air carrier operations. Find further information on the FAA's safety assessment page.

The Piarco International Airport (POS) is a hub for Caribbean flights. Airport services may be slow or not up to Western standards, but there are no concerns for safety or scams. T&T police and Airport Authority Officers appear throughout the airport; private security is located in the parking lot areas to assist in an emergency.

The Piarco Airport Taxi Cooperative Society provides service to/from the airport. Taxis are located outside the arrival area; drivers wear a white shirt, black/blue trousers, and sport a yellow photo identification pass. You must have local currency for taxi fare; negotiated fares in advance with the taxi driver.

Piarco Airport Taxi Cooperative Society: 868-669-1689
Dispatcher Contact Number: 868-669-0282

Criminals have followed travelers from the airport to their destination.

Terrorism Threat

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is moderate risk from terrorism in Port of Spain. There are several known indigenous extremist/terrorist ISIS affiliated groups operating in T&T. To date, these groups' activities have been largely aspirational. T&T authorities monitor these groups' activities carefully. Local newspapers cite government sources that report T&T nationals have traveled to Iraq and Syria to fight for ISIS. Due to recent defeats in Syria and Iraq, many fighters have died or been captured due to the fluid situation on the ground by anti-ISIS forces. Muslims make up about 5-8% of the population and comprise those with African and Indian heritage. Fighters appear to have come from both the Afro-Trini and Indo-Trini Muslim communities; many appear to have had prior affiliations with criminal gangs.

In July 2018, T&T took steps to address foreign terrorist fighters by passing an Antiterrorism law. The new law takes into account international and domestic commitments in combatting terrorism and the specific nature of the terrorist threat to T&T. The Ministry of National Security identifies and closely monitors the travel and activity of persons of interest. The new Minister of National Security continues to discuss national security in the areas of crime and counterterrorism with stakeholders and Parliament. In 2017, the Minister of National Security announced a Counterterrorism Strategy for T&T, and broadened law enforcement and intelligence functions. Notable terror-related incidents include:

- In 2017, the U.S. government designated Trinidadian ISIS fighter Shane Crawford, also known by his nom de guerre Abu Sa'ad al-Trinidadadi, as a terrorist.
- In 2015, the T&T High Court declared Trinidadian national Kareem Ibrahim a terrorist, allowing the state to proceed with freezing his local assets in accordance with the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2005. The judgment was the first under the law and played an important role in setting legal precedent on terrorism rulings. Ibrahim died in 2016.
- In 2015, an ISIS propaganda video featured several young men claiming to be Trinidadian nationals fighting in Syria. Since 2014, sporadic videos have surfaced on social media allegedly featuring Trinidadian nationals declaring their support for ISIS.
- In 2015, Saudi Arabia accused a Trinidadian studying there of being a terrorist; he spent 16 months in a Saudi prison before being released and returned to T&T in 2016.

Given the crime rate and weaknesses in border control, there remains a continued concern that potential terrorists or terrorist organizations could use T&T as a transit point.

The call for self-radicalization, whether disseminated on extremist forums or via social media, continues to be a global concern. It is difficult to determine what message will inspire a violent extremist.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Civil Unrest

There is minimal risk of civil unrest in Port of Spain. The cycle has started for T&T's 2020 general elections; visitors should avoid political rallies.

Trinidad experiences periodic labor unions demonstrations over salary negotiations, tax structures, and other issues involving public resources or government operations. The disruption of utility services due to industrial action group protests and non-violent demonstrations by labor organizations remain a concern.

Occasional demonstrations are often large, and usually take place in or near the Parliament building downtown, or outside the Prime Minister's Offices in St. Clair. The police must approve demonstrations in advance, and typically provide appropriate coverage. Foreigners should avoid demonstrations.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

T&T is extremely vulnerable for seismic activity. Venezuela's Paria Peninsula, which extends eastward toward Trinidad, is especially so. Scientific research and past events suggest that the possibility exists of an event of sizeable magnitude can occur within proximity to T&T. Both islands have avoided major recent calamity, but increased population and urban development have increased the potential for catastrophe. A 6.9-magnitude quake in 2018 was the largest in fifty years.

The country is located below the Atlantic hurricane belt, though some storms have occurred nearby. Inadequate infrastructure and drainage, as well as heavy rains, cause flooding in certain urban areas, resulting in landslides that can block or erode remote roads.

General information about natural disaster preparedness is available from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Economic Concerns

The U.S. Trade Representative removed T&T from its Special 301 Report Watch List in 2016. Significant problems exist with the protection or enforcement of intellectual property rights (IP) and market access for persons relying on intellectual property protection. T&T's law enforcement leaves the content owner – who in many cases is not in the country – as likely the only one who could uncover wrongdoing. Private companies are hesitant to pursue IP claims in T&T because of the small market size and reputation for having a slow legal system. Those that have pursued claims generally receive limited engagement by law enforcement. T&T Police Service's (TTPS) statistics indicate that they have not detected an intellectual property crime in several years. Companies have noted that Customs Officers are hesitant to search containers, even with significant evidence that counterfeit products are present. A U.S. company reported counterfeit products to T&T officials, but the allegedly infringing products disappeared from shelves just hours before an inspection, suggesting collusion between law enforcement and the seller of the counterfeit goods.

Personal Identity Concerns

Trinidad and Tobago law criminalizes same sex-sexual activity, with penalties of up to 25 years in prison. Authorities rarely enforce this provision, except in conjunction with serious offenses such as rape. Immigration law also bars the entry of homosexuals, but this is also rarely enforced.

Most sidewalks are impassible for wheelchairs, due to the deep gutters that run alongside most roads. Many sidewalks are also narrow and uneven. Cars parked on sidewalks, uncovered manholes, and other obstacles may force persons with mobility issues onto the main roadways in what can be very dangerous traffic conditions.

Drug-related Crimes

Trinidad is a major transshipment point for illicit drugs; drug-related incidents are a significant contributor to crime.

Kidnapping Threat

According to TTPS crime statistics, there were 102 kidnappings in 2017, 102 in 2016, and 106 in 2015. There were six kidnappings for ransom in 2017, four of which were solved.

Police Response

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Detained or arrested U.S. citizens should notify the U.S. Embassy in Port of Spain immediately by [email](#) or by telephone at 868-622-6371. U.S. citizens may also wish to contact their family and an attorney. During the initial interview, the police may defer a request to make contact with family, but local law provides for both consular notification and an attorney upon request.

Harassment is uncommon with foreigners; however, U.S. citizens should report any incident to the U.S. Embassy.

Crime Victim Assistance

The local emergency line is **999**. Crime victims should contact the local police and the U.S. Embassy ACS Office (1-868-622-6371). If your passport is stolen, the Embassy can help with obtaining a replacement. For violent crimes, ACS can help find medical care, contact family or friends, and assist in sending money, if needed. Although the investigation and prosecution of a crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you understand the local criminal justice process and find an attorney.

Report suspicious activity to the TTPS by phoning 999 so they can dispatch or redirect appropriate patrol units to the location of need.

Foreign crime victims can expect treatment and assistance with the same level of cooperation and fairness as that given to a local citizen.

Police/Security Agencies

The TTPS falls under the Ministry of National Security, with more than 6,500 police officers and Special Reserve Police. The TTPS is organized into nine Divisions and 18 Branches, Squads, and Units: Community Police, Police Complaints, Special Branch, Guard and Emergency Branch, Criminal Investigation Division and Criminal Records Office, Organized Crime, Narcotics and Firearms Bureau, Homicide, Fraud Squad, Court and Process, Police Band, Mounted and Canine Branch, Police Training College, E-999, Traffic and Highway Patrol Branch, Transport and Telecom, Criminal Gangs Intelligence Unit (CGIU), and the Cybercrime Unit.

In recent years, in response to citizen concerns, the government has bought additional police cruisers, constructed and renovated police stations, recruited new officers, and made efforts to improve police customer service. Several units of the TTPS use dashboard cameras, which support the TTPS goal to continue to earn the trust of members of the public through honesty, transparency, and accountability. Some units use body cameras, but the practice is not widespread.

Medical Emergencies

Medical care is significantly below U.S. standards for treatment of serious injuries and illness, with limited access to supplies and medications. Adequate private medical care available in Port of Spain is not up to the standards of industrialized countries; it is substandard in the rest of the country. Patients requiring blood transfusions must arrange for others to donate at least the same amount on their behalf. Physicians and nurses have gone on strike, straining public and private medical services.

Ambulance service is often extremely limited in response time due to low availability and high demand. Ambulances provide basic life support services, with some moving toward advanced life support capabilities.

SCI EMS: (868) 694 2404 (private service)

GMRTT: 811 for major trauma only (public service)

A recompression chamber is located in Roxborough, Tobago. Before diving, check if the chamber is operational.

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

For medical assistance, refer to the Embassy's [Medical Assistance page](#).

Available Air Ambulance Services

International SOS (ISOS) Assistance Inc.

3600 Horizon Blvd., Suite 300 Trevoise, PA 19053

Email: phlopsmed@internationalsos.com

Philadelphia Assistance Center: +1-800-523-6586 or +1-215-942-8226; Fax: +1-215-354-2338

REVA

Operates fixed-wing fleet/aircrews based in South Florida, Puerto Rico, Phoenix, AZ, and San Diego, CA. Offers international service via network of affiliated aeromedical providers.

1745 NW 51st Pl, Hanger 73, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309

Email: operations@flyreva.com

Web: operations@flyreva.com

24-hour response center number: +1-800-752-4195; +1-954-730-9300

Insurance Guidance

Adequate evacuation insurance coverage (medevac) for all travelers should be a high priority. Highly specialized cases or complex emergencies may require evacuation to Miami. While care at some private facilities is better than at most public health facilities, facilities may expect patients to prove their ability to pay before they give assistance, even in emergencies.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Trinidad and Tobago](#).

OSAC Country Council Information

The Port-of-Spain Country Council launched in 2017. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC's [Western Hemisphere](#) team with any questions.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Port of Spain, 15 Queens Park West, Port of Spain, Trinidad

Business hours: Monday-Friday, 0730 – 1630.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Switchboard: +868 622-6371

Security Office: +868 822-5927

Marine Guard (24 Hours): +868 822-5999/5912

Website: <http://tt.usembassy.gov>

Embassy Guidance

If you plan to reside in or visit T&T, enroll with the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#). This program provides participants with up-to-date important safety and security announcements. It can also assist friends and family with contact information in an emergency.

Additional Resource: [Trinidad & Tobago](#) Country Information Sheet