



## Trinidad & Tobago 2015 Crime and Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Riots/Civil Unrest; Maritime; Earthquakes; Floods; Landslides and mudslides; Theft; Assault; Fraud; Murder; Drug Trafficking; Hotels; Burglary; Rape/Sexual Violence; Kidnapping

Western Hemisphere > Trinidad and Tobago; Western Hemisphere > Trinidad and Tobago > Port of Spain

6/12/2015

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The government faces numerous challenges in its effort to reduce crime, including an overburdened legal system, bureaucratic resistance to change, unemployment in marginal areas, disenfranchised youth, and the negative influence of gangs, drugs, and weapons.

Crime Rating: Critical

### Crime Threats

Crime is the principal threat to visitors. Most crimes are crimes of opportunity. American citizens have been victims of pickpocketing, assault, theft/robbery, fraud, and murder. Visitors to local hotels have reported the theft of items from their rooms. While not common during daylight hours, robberies and petty theft have been reported. There is no evidence to indicate that foreigners, specifically expatriates, are targeted in particular, but crimes – robbery,

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break-ins/burglary, vehicular break-ins, home invasions, and assaults (including sexual assaults) – do occur in areas frequented by tourists and in which the expatriate community lives. The use of incapacitating drugs is not uncommon in thefts and other crimes.

Crime in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) continues to be a serious concern, although T&T Police Service (TTPS) 2014 crime statistics show a decrease in overall serious criminal activity. Violent crime remains a major concern. The majority of violent crimes (homicides, kidnappings, assaults, sexual assaults) are gang/drug-related or domestic. A significant and growing portion of this violence is attributed to the influence of gangs, illegal narcotics, and firearms. Not all crimes are reported. There are also instances in which crimes are reported, but not documented. Most reported crimes occur within the metropolitan areas of Port of Spain and San Fernando. Approximately 23 percent of reported crimes result in an arrest.

According to several sources, including the 2012 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Caribbean Human Development Report, and the Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2013 report titled "Gangs Are The New Law In Urban Trinidad & Tobago," approximately 100 criminal gangs have been identified in T&T. These gangs, and other organizations, have been linked to crimes related to weapons smuggling, fraud, and other organized criminal activities.

In August 2014, Acting Police Commissioner Stephen Williams noted that despite the seizure of over 380 firearms, "the highest number of firearms taken off the street in any comparable period in the history of the TTPS, 75 percent of the murders to date were committed by firearm [compared to an average of 70 percent]." The five percent increase highlights the growing 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:

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403 murders in 2014

407 murders in 2013

379 murders in 2012

352 murders in 2011

473 murders in 2010 out of a population of approximately 1.3 million people.

The detection rate for murder was 6.1 percent for 2014. The murder rate for T&T is approximately 35.3 per 100,000 inhabitants according to the 2014 United Nations and World Health Organization Global Status Report on Violence Prevention, reflecting the tenth highest murder rate in the world. The murder rate continues to be driven primarily by gang- and drug-related activities, which are concentrated in a few urban areas (primarily though not limited to, East Port of Spain), with limited spill-over into the wider community.

In addition, reported instances of crimes related to sexual assault and domestic violence increased from 551 in 2013 to 825 in 2014.

In Tobago, murder, home invasion, petty theft, and swindling continue to affect tourists, including theft of large sums of cash and passports stolen from hotels rooms. In the past, several violent home invasions targeted well-to-do homes and villas sometimes rented to tourists. In November 2014, an elderly German couple who resided in Tobago were murdered in the Bacolet Beach area. Murders in Tobago increased from four in 2013 to eight in 2014.

In late 2011, the government implemented a State of Emergency (SoE) to deal with what they deemed specific and emerging threats. Along with the SoE, a curfew in particular areas of the

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country was imposed. During the SoE, the murder rate was greatly reduced, contributing to lower numbers of murders for 2011 as compared to 2010.

## Areas of Concern

Avoid Beetham Gardens, Cocorite, Laventille, and Sea Lots. Avoid all isolated areas and public beaches after dark.

## Transportation-Safety Situation

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road travel is generally safe, but there continue to be a relatively high number of traffic fatalities from speeding and drunk driving. Road fatalities decreased in 2014 to 143, down from 151 in 2013 and 189 in 2012. The risk of serious vehicular traffic accidents, including accidents causing death, is moderate to high, particularly at night.

Law enforcement uses breathalyzers and DUI road checks in an effort to reduce the number of drunk driving-related fatalities. It is illegal to talk on a cell phone while driving. Traffic Wardens help to monitor and enforce traffic safety; however, they have no power of arrest and will request the assistance of the TTPS if an arrestable offense occurs.

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Place articles in the trunk before arriving at your destination. Do not stop your car if you are flagged down along the road; hitchhikers are usually swindlers and can be threatening.

### Public Transportation Conditions

The use of maxi-taxis and “gypsy taxis” are not recommended because of the often poor condition of the vehicles and the unreliability of drivers. It has been reported that individuals have been robbed while traveling in these taxis, sometimes with the collusion of the drivers.

### Aviation/Airport Conditions

Criminals are known to follow travelers from the airport to their destination.

### Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The locally-based, radical Muslim organization Jamaat al- Muslimeen (JAM) was responsible for a violent, unsuccessful coup attempt in July 1990. Since then, JAM and its leaders have focused on Islamic education and a number of business ventures and have been linked publicly to serious crimes, including murder. In September 2010, the government launched a

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formal inquiry with the establishment of a five member Commission of Enquiry into the 1990 coup attempt. Throughout their tenure, the commission interviewed individuals and held more than a dozen public hearings in an attempt understand what led to the coup attempt. On March 13, 2014, the final report of the Commission of Enquiry was presented to the President and a day later to Parliament. In her address before Parliament, the Prime Minister stated "The findings of the Commission of Enquiry will be to ensure that history will not repeat itself, and to see what can be done to ensure that if such an event arises again, it can be better contained for the benefit of you the Trinidad and Tobago people."

Political Violence Rating: Low

#### Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There are no known indigenous terrorist groups in T&T. In September 2014, the government signed the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) anti-terrorist resolution, indicating its commitment to fighting terrorism. Traffickers continue to exploit T&T's relatively porous borders to move drugs and weapons, and it is possible that organizations could use similar routes for terrorist-related activities. Radical elements are thought to occasionally make contact with individuals and groups with possible terrorist ties around the world, and given the crime rate and some weaknesses in border control, there remains a continued concern that T&T could be utilized as a transit point for potential terrorists or terrorist organizations.

In March 2014, 17 Trinidadians were detained by Venezuelan authorities for terrorist-related activities. The women and children were released after one week while eight men remained in custody. Three men (all Imams who denied affiliation with the larger group and claimed to only be seeking visas at the Saudi Arabian Embassy for a Hajj pilgrimage) were subsequently

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released and returned to Trinidad. The remaining five were charged in November 2014 with terrorism and alleged to have received training from Venezuelan police officers who were charged with treason and criminal conspiracy.

Terrorism Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

Trinidad experiences periodic demonstrations by labor unions over salary negotiations, tax structures, and other issues involving public resources or government operations. The disruption of utility services as a result of industrial action group protests and non-violent demonstrations by labor organizations remains a concern. Some political demonstrations have become violent, including occasional clashes with the police. Throughout August 2014, protests often involving supporters and opponents of the 2014 Constitutional Amendment Bill, which introduced several constitutional changes including a run-off provision in the electoral process, were staged near Parliament. The largest demonstration included approximately 1,500 individuals who held placards outside Parliament. At another demonstration, protestors reacted angrily when police in riot gear tried to relocate them. In some instances, police removed non-compliant protestors.

In June 2014, residents in Desperlie Crescent, in Laventille, clashed with police and soldiers from the Inter-Agency Task Force over the police shooting death of a 19-year old local resident, eventually blocking the community's entrance road. In November 2014, demonstrators from Cocorite cut off the primary route into Port of Spain from the west in objection to the closing of an eastbound highway return lane they identified as critical to their ability to receive timely assistance from emergency services and public transport. In

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September 2013, demonstrators closed the primary route from Port of Spain to Piarco International Airport to protest police abuses.

## Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

T&T has been rated “extremely vulnerable” for seismic activity. The 2011 University of West Indies (UWI) Seismic Research Center Annual Report indicated that seismic activity remains elevated in the Paria Peninsula (extends eastward off Venezuela toward Trinidad). In 1955, an earthquake occurred north of Trinidad that UWI deemed would have been catastrophic if it occurred in the same location under the islands’ current topography. The same report indicated that in 2011 there were four earthquakes, which were considered “moderate” – measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale –near T&T. In October 2013, there was a 6.4 earthquake off the coast of Venezuela with no reports of damage.

The islands are considered below the hurricane belt, though some storms have occurred nearby.

Inadequate infrastructure and drainage as well as heavy rains occasionally cause flooding in certain urban areas, resulting in landslides that can block remote roads.

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## Drug-related Crimes

Trinidad is a major trans-shipment point for illicit drugs, and drug-related crimes are a significant contributor or crime.

## Kidnapping Threat

According to TTPS crime statistics, there were 94 kidnappings in 2014, down from 112 in 2013. There were three kidnappings for ransom in 2014 (one was solved), four in 2013, two in 2011, and four in 2010.

## Police Response

In recent years, in response to citizen concerns, the government bought additional police cruisers, constructed new police stations, renovated other police stations, recruited new officers, and made efforts to improve police customer service.

In 2013, the government implemented a limited Rapid Response Unit (RRU) for emergencies (similar to a 911 response in the U.S.). These police vehicles are equipped with GPS tracking technology and monitored by dispatchers to improve their response times to emergency calls.

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The RRUs are operational throughout T&T. Response time can be sporadic due to a limited number of resources, vehicles, and personnel.

In 2014, the government implemented a Community Comfort Patrol (CCP) Program whereby marked CCP patrol vehicles are operated by private security officers under the authority of the TTPS and serve as a visible deterrent to criminal activity in residential communities. The CCP aims to enhance relations between communities and local law enforcement personnel. CCP officers may be equipped with handcuffs, batons, and flashlights but are not authorized to carry firearms. They are not granted any extraordinary powers of arrest, but as with any citizen, they can make an arrest where they suspect someone to be in the act of committing, or having already committed, an arrestable offence (rape, robbery, burglary, arson, wounding, house breaking, larceny, etc.), which carries a penalty of five+ years. The pilot program has been expanded to cover 15 patrol sectors, excluding areas considered “hot spots” for crime where only law enforcement operate.

The Acting Police Commissioner has been outspoken about the need for police to earn the public’s trust through honesty, transparency, and accountability. He has supported the issuance and use of “body cameras” by TTPS units once departmental orders are completed and officers trained. The Police Social and Welfare Association has called the purchase and use of such technology long overdue and believes the cameras may prove useful to officers in the execution of their duties. Inter-Agency Task Force officers will likely be the first to use the new technology in early 2015.

## How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

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U.S. citizens detained or arrested by the TTPS should be offered the opportunity to contact friends or family. Take this opportunity to contact the U.S. Embassy in Port of Spain (622-6371) immediately. Harassment is not common with foreigners, but you should report the incident to U.S. government authorities if it occurs.

### Crime Victim Assistance

Foreigners who are crime victims can expect to be treated and assisted with the same level of cooperation and fairness as that given to a local citizen.

Police response may be obtained by phoning "999." Rapid Response Units (RRUs) can be reached by phoning "911."

### Medical Emergencies

In the event of a medical emergency, ambulance service can be reached in Trinidad by dialing "811."

### Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

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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

CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:  
[http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/trinidad-and-tobago?s\\_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/trinidad-and-tobago?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001).

## **Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

Situational Awareness Best Practices

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Carry your belongings in a secure manner and be alert/aware of your surroundings, especially when in crowds. Do not leave your valuables unattended on deserted beaches. Do not travel with valuables. Carry traveler's checks and major credit cards (not large amounts of cash). There are several banks in the metropolitan areas. Foreign bank cards can be used in ATMs. Money dispensed can either be in local currency or U.S. dollars, depending on the machine. Check the machine before use, as some machines do not accept foreign cards and will either reject or retain the card without warning. Retrieving the bank card can be difficult.

If possible, do not travel alone after dark, and do not walk in isolated areas at night.

## **U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information**

### Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

United States Embassy

15 Queen's Park West Port of Spain

Trinidad & Tobago

### Embassy Contact Numbers

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In the event of an emergency during business hours (7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.), the U.S. Embassy operator can assist American travelers with contacting the American Citizen Services (ACS) officers in the Consular Section. After business hours and on weekend and holidays, the U.S. Embassy Port of Spain Marine Security Guard can assist American travelers with contacting the Embassy's Duty Officer for assistance with an emergency. The Marine Security Guard is available to assist in emergency situations only. All other calls should be placed during normal Embassy business hours.

U.S. Embassy: (868) 622-6371

Emergency Only: (868) 622-6682

Marine Post One: (868) 822-5999

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

Embassy Guidance

ACS prepared a Guide for U.S. Citizens Residing in T&T with relevant contacts and services.

## **OSAC Country Council Information**

There is not an active OSAC Country Council in Port of Spain. To reach OSAC's Western Hemisphere team, please email [OSACWHA@state.gov](mailto:OSACWHA@state.gov).

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