

PANORAMA



TOBAGO

The diminutive Caribbean island is an undiscovered treasure trove of unique natural and cultural attractions



Chief Secretary Farley Chavez Augustine's goal is for Tobago to be the planet's greatest little island



A new international airport will open in 2025, bringing more direct flights from the U.S.



An attractive location for investors, Tobago has huge potential in tourism and many other sectors



Year-round authentic cultural experiences are capped by the vibrant Tobago Carnival in October



The Tobago Carnival in October is a bucket-list event



Much of the island is covered in the Western Hemisphere's oldest protected rainforest

Introducing the greatest little island on the planet

Part of the southernmost nation in the Caribbean region, Tobago is a tropical paradise that is relatively undiscovered by tourists and investors when compared to Trinidad, its larger sister island.

It covers just 116 square miles and is inhabited by around 69,000 people. "We're a small territory in every sense of the word, but we have big hearts, big creative minds, and a bold, audacious spirit," proclaims Farley Chavez Augustine, chief secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), the island's governing body that has substantial devolved autonomy from Trinidad and Tobago's national authorities.



Farley Chavez Augustine
Chief Secretary, Tobago House of Assembly

Augustine's administration has been in office for three years, during which time it has implemented an ambitious plan to foster smart and sustainable economic and social development that reflects the islanders' audacious spirit. "We're creating the greatest little island on the planet, that's our ethos. We're doing that in tandem with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals," Augustine explains. Steps toward achieving this target include providing free high-quality education to all residents from nursery to secondary-school level, as well as subsidized tertiary studies. "We also have more health centers per capita and square mile than anywhere else, and community centers exist in almost every village," he adds.

Currently, Tobago is investing in transport infrastructure that will support economic growth and substantially improve accessibility for visitors and investors. Most notably, a new international airport will open in the first half of 2025. This will have three times the capacity of its previous facility, allowing it to handle a maximum 3 million people a year, plus three A330 and two 747 planes at any one time.

Augustine says: "We're now working with airlines to increase direct flights. We want to get a lot of international flights landing in Tobago. In North

America, for example, we have direct flights out of New York already, we're adding Toronto and we want to add Miami soon. We're also putting in infrastructure that will allow for better connectivity to and from the airport."

A destination unlike others

Tourism is a central element of the island's economy, contributing 13 percent of a gross domestic product that amounted to about \$246 million in 2023, 1 percent up on the figure for 2022. Understandably attracted by the island's lush rainforests, blue seas, sandy beaches and rich heritage, tourists arrive at either the airport that is 7 miles from the capital, Scarborough, or at one of two cruise ports. "If you dock at Charlotteville, it's breathtaking. You're landing in an untouched, unspoiled place with clean, clear waters and some of the best beaches in the Caribbean. You can also dock at Scarborough, an equally beautiful location and a very walkable city," he states.

"When you land, you'll realize it's a destination unlike any other. You may not find massive all-inclusive resorts, but you certainly will find small boutique hotels, eco-tourism establishments and home-stay apartment rentals. You can experience the simple joys of things like our Harvest Festivals, where a community will open its doors to strangers and you can enjoy a meal, drinks, fun and chat. That's in essence who we are."

THA is well aware that Tobago's natural competitive advantage for economic development lies in tourism, thanks to its wealth of green, blue and orange assets. Indeed, the authority has invested heavily in developing the island's talented artists, dramatists, songwriters, dancers and filmmakers. The successful results of that investment are best explored through a year-round calendar of vibrant cultural events, including the unmissable Tobago Carnival in October, or at Shaw Park Cultural Complex, which is the largest performing arts space in the Caribbean.

Currently a hidden Caribbean gem, a new airport is about to open tropical Tobago up for tourists, investors and digital nomads

Given the upcoming influx of visitors that are expected to start arriving at the new airport, tourism is an area with huge potential for international investors and the island's diaspora. "We're pushing for hotel development. The only caveat is we want developments that are green. One of my administration's core principles is that we're insistent on doing our part in ensuring we keep the island as environmentally sound as possible," Augustine declares.

While tourism will remain vital to the island's economy, THA's efforts toward diversification are opening up many other sectors for investments. One illustration is agribusiness. Currently generating around 2 percent of GDP, the government wants to raise this to 5 percent within three years.

“There’s a strong sense of community. You come to Tobago and, within a week, everyone will know your name and look out for you.”

Farley Chavez Augustine, Chief Secretary Tobago House of Assembly

"We have a plethora of wonderful and cheap organically grown agro-processed goods that the U.S. could tap into. Examples include gluten-free flours made from products such as dasheen, cassava and superfoods like breadfruit," he reveals.

Among other areas with potential that the chief secretary highlights are innovative digital technologies. As it strives to become a smart island, Tobago is particularly interested in exploring how technologies such as artificial intelligence can improve its systems for education, security, medical diagnostics and tourism. However, Augustine says: "We don't want to replace the human touch with a digital one. It's about integrating the latest technologies into our outputs, while not losing the warm touch that makes Tobago special."

The island provides plenty of incentives to incoming investors, including a skilled and highly literate workforce, trade agreements that open up a market of nearly 1 billion customers and, as a result of the country's hydrocarbon resources, very low energy costs. In addition, "If your investment lies within a designated area, such as Cove Eco-Industrial Park, you get tax rebates. You also benefit from doing business with a government that is the largest landowner on the island. Our strategic location outside of the hurricane belt with close proximity to South and Central American territories is critical too, as is our focus on sustainability," he details.

A further draw for businesses setting up in Tobago is the incredible work-life balance it presents. "It's safe and there's a strong sense of community. You come to Tobago and, within a week, everyone will know your name and look out for you," Augustine reveals.

Quality of life has also put the island on the radar of digital nomads, who are taking advantage of the fact that travelers from most parts of the world require no visa and can stay for up to 90 days without restrictions. "We have excellent internet connectivity all over the island, even if you are staying in a rural log cabin or a remote sandy bay, and we're preparing to launch a second independent submarine cable. Working here, the biggest distraction might be birds chirping, as Tobago counts among the places most populated by birds," he comments. "Another excellent thing about coming to Tobago is you have two islands for the price of one, because flights and ferries to Trinidad are cheap and quick if you want to experience the bustle of a big city while you are here."

Whether you are a tourist, investor or new resident, Tobago will introduce you to a way of life that has been lost elsewhere. Augustine explains: "Tobago reminds you that simple things are important, that human connectivity is important. If you want to get regrounded with nature, with people and with yourself, this is the place. We warmly welcome you to the greatest island on the planet, where Tobago is beyond ordinary."

A government dedicated to meeting Tobago's needs

The Tobago House of Assembly has devolved powers in key areas like infrastructure, health, education, entrepreneurship and tourism

Although part of the unitary state of Trinidad and Tobago, Tobago has had significant devolved powers since 1980, with its self-governance being overseen by the Tobago House of Assembly (THA).

Dr. Faith B. Yisrael is Deputy Chief Secretary of the assembly, as well as being Tobago's Secretary for Health, Wellness and Social Protection, a division that has been allocated a budget of \$129.5 million for 2025. In the following interview, she provides an introduction to the island's governance and describes some of her division's recent activities.



Dr. Faith B. Yisrael
Deputy Chief Secretary and Secretary for Health, Wellness and Social Protection

son is to secure a larger share of the national budget. Trinidad and Tobago is rich in oil and gas resources that are strategically located within Tobago's waters. We are negotiating a new formula to determine an allocation of these resources that better reflects our island's needs today, as the current method was established over 24 years ago and is outdated.

Tobago contains two public hospitals, plus 22 health and outreach centers. Has your division been investing to advance healthcare services for both residents and international visitors in 2024?

We've been upgrading our facilities, particularly our ambulance fleet this year. We faced challenges with older ambulances, so initially we leased vehicles from a private company. We have since procured new ambulances and have received four so far. We've ordered at least eight more, but shipping takes time.

I'm also pleased to report that Roxborough Hospital has been retrofitted to ensure it serves its purpose. It's now fully operational and will provide 24-hour service. We recently conducted our first helicopter landing on its helipad, confirming our safety measures. Additionally, we're investing in diagnostic tools, including a new computed tomography machine, because effective diagnosis is crucial for proper treatment.

According to a 2023 United Nations report, the latest available data suggests 4.3 percent of the population in Trinidad and Tobago is, or is vulnerable to be-

coming, multidimensionally poor. How is your division supporting poverty eradication, economic inclusivity and entrepreneurship in Tobago?

The Department of Social Protection is currently undergoing restructuring to better meet the needs of the population. We're reworking our processing methods and have initiated a digitization project, identifying a company to pilot online processing of grants and applications by the end of this year. This will allow individuals to apply for rental assistance or food support online without needing to visit our office. For example, they can simply upload a picture of their ID. I'm excited about this initiative, as it will help us reach more clients.

Additionally, our Realization for Economic Achievement program provides seed grants to help applicants start or grow their businesses. The application process is straightforward and the grant does not need to be repaid. We can also assist with purchasing essential equipment, such as stoves and refrigerators for catering businesses, for example.

Moreover, we offer small businesses training throughout the year, requiring recipients to attend sessions on financial management, business modeling and marketing to ensure their success.

As a prominent female politician in Tobago, are you concerned about empowering upcoming generations of women?

While we often seek solutions from others, each of us holds an innate potential that just needs to be revealed and nurtured. As a young woman, I hope to inspire others to recognize that they, too, have the power to achieve their goals. This brings me immense joy, especially when young girls realize they can pursue their dreams.

Unlike the traditional triangle model, which allows space for only one at the top, true fulfillment and happiness come when everyone brings their unique contributions — there's room for everyone to shine.

In 2023, Tobago was named as the third most desirable island in the world at the travel awards of the U.K.'s largest tourism magazine, Wanderlust. What would you say to those considering Tobago for a Caribbean vacation?

I'm continually amazed by the island's natural beauty. We remain untapped and untouched, making us the perfect getaway. Our offerings include one of the oldest rainforest reserves, stunning beaches, elegant waterfalls and the warmest people. Once you arrive, we take care of you.

“The Tobago House of Assembly is the local government responsible for managing daily life on our beautiful island and we celebrated 44 years of significant growth in 2024.”

Dr. Faith B. Yisrael, Deputy Chief Secretary and Secretary for Health, Wellness and Social Protection

Our cultural traditions are special; here, you can visit a village on a random Sunday, walk into any home and be welcomed with hospitality. It's a truly memorable experience and it's an honor that the world recognizes our unique charm.

TOBAGO IS OPEN FOR INVESTMENT!

GREATEST LITTLE ISLAND ON THE PLANET

www.investtobago.com

Progress is the priority

Tobago is focused on attracting sustainable investments

Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy Petal-Ann Roberts is on a mission. "Tobago needs advanced development, and progress is my top priority. It's essential that we keep pace with global development, while preserving what makes Tobago unique," she asserts.



Petal-Ann Roberts
Secretary of Finance,
Trade and the
Economy

The experienced chartered accountant is responsible for the disbursal of funds received by Tobago from the country's central government, which allocated the island about \$382 million in its 2025 budget. "This fiscal year, we're focusing on strategic selectivity, directing our resources to high-impact areas that benefit the Tobago economy," Roberts reveals.

"Another key focus is encouraging entrepreneurship, which is central to my division's mission. We support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises through a business development unit that provides both financial and technical assistance." That help includes a grant scheme and a loan program for targeted economic sectors. "These initiatives are crucial to stimulating growth and supporting Tobago's small businesses," she states.

Making it easy to invest

The Tobago House of Assembly is also fostering economic development by attracting more foreign direct investment to the island. For instance, there are some major tourism projects on the horizon. As an illustration, a \$74 million Marriott-branded hotel and real estate development, and a 500-room resort initiative that will be managed by a subsidiary of Hyatt Hotels Corporation, are both awaiting environmental approval before works can start.

In addition, the state-owned Magdalena Grand Beach and Golf Resort will soon be put up for sale or lease. This enviable property includes luxury suites and villas, an 18-hole championship golf course and 2.5 miles of coastline. The country is also planning to invite proposals for a new 5-star



Tobago is home to a myriad of natural and cultural treasures

resort on its Buccoo Estate and for developing a yachting marina in Lowlands.

Roberts says: "Tobago is open for business, especially in tourism, health, education and agriculture, with tourism being our top sector. We're diversifying beyond the traditional sun, sea and sand model to include health and sports tourism, for example, offering more reasons to visit Tobago." According to Tobago's Foreign Direct Investment Unit, other sectors ripe for investment include infrastructure, renewable energy, creative industries, digital technologies, agribusiness and manufacturing.

Entities choosing to invest in the island benefit from attractive financial incentives that are overseen by the country's government. "While we would like to offer further incentives like tax breaks, our legislative framework limits us, as those decisions are controlled by the central government," she notes.

However, what Tobago's administration can and does do is make it easy to invest. "We've set up a department to assist investors with statutory approvals and provide a one-stop shop for information," Roberts states.

"Additionally, we're exploring options such as using land as equity for investors, and we've established a Department of Environment, Climate Change and Energy to ensure that all infrastructure and development projects align with our commitment to keeping Tobago clean, green, safe and serene. This strategic placement helps integrate environmental considerations into all major decisions."

When asked to give an overriding message to the international investment community about Tobago, Roberts replies: "I want our diaspora and potential investors, especially in places like Miami, to know that we're focused on digitization, health, tourism and sustainable development. I welcome all who are interested in our growth."



International investor confidence in Tobago's position as a premium tourism destination is growing

Full of potential for investors | The island offers opportunities and a great business climate

The island's private sector backs the government's belief that Tobago is full of potential for investors. "In comparison to other Caribbean islands, Tobago is a less crowded market," says Curtis Williams, chair of the Tobago Division of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce.



Curtis Williams
Chair, Trinidad and
Tobago Chamber
of Industry and
Commerce
Tobago Division

"When you come in to do business, it's very easy to move from one step to the next and, as the business environment continues to improve and new projects are being developed, Tobago offers exciting perspectives for investors."

As a leading advocate for sustainable business growth and development on the island, the chamber has helped to promote its conducive business climate. Its mission is to lobby authorities for policies that benefit the business community, as well as to provide networking opportunities and other services to its members that support the development of their enterprises.

For example, it has recently opened a business advisory services unit that offers guidance, mentorship and advisory resources to both startups and established companies. "We also aim to position Tobago as a business hub while ensuring that the island's unique natural environment and cultural identity are respected. That's critical for us here," he adds.

More than just a tourism destination

The chamber views the government's upcoming divestment of the vast Magdalena Grand Beach and Golf Resort, alongside the proposed development of substantial internationally branded tourism projects, as positive steps toward the sector's revitalization. "This reflects growing investors' confidence in Tobago's tourism potential and will attract more private investment and ex-

pertise, enhancing the island's competitiveness as a premium tourism destination," Williams states.

"However, the chamber emphasizes the need for careful planning, ensuring that projects align with Tobago's sustainable tourism strategy and environmental goals. With proper management and investment, Tobago can attract a higher volume of visitors by expanding eco-friendly and culturally enriched experiences."

As Williams is keen to stress, "Tobago has numerous opportunities for investment beyond tourism, particularly in areas such as agriculture and renewable energy. The chamber is also supporting local entrepreneurs in various other sectors, including manufacturing, technology and the green economy."

He is optimistic about the island's economic future, not least because of the imminent completion of its airport's expansion project. "There will be more airlift coming in and more guests, which will create a need for more high-end room stock, agricultural products and other goods, logistics and tourism services, attractions and cultural activities, because these hotels will need cultural activities. It's a whole trickle-down effect and I'm looking forward to that," he enthuses.

Williams would encourage potential investors to take a look at what the island offers. "Tobago is more than just a beautiful vacation destination. It's a vibrant island with rich cultural heritage, on top of representing a business opportunity and being home to forward-thinking entrepreneurs," he says. "The chamber is committed to fostering an environment that welcomes both local and international enterprises, ensuring that business grows in a manner that benefits all stakeholders, while preserving the island's nature. Our goal is to keep Tobago's unique warmth and natural friendliness intact."

The ultimate all-inclusive tourism experience

Thanks to Tobago's wealth of attractions, its tourism sector is poised to capitalize on the island's expanded airport capacity

With a strong recovery from the pandemic, Tobago's tourism sector saw an impressive 14 percent increase in visitors in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period in 2023.

Many are attracted by the Caribbean idyll's beaches, dive sites, rainforests and wildlife, but there is a lot more to discover, as Secretary of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation Tashia Burris explains.



Tashia Burris
Secretary of Tourism,
Culture, Antiquities
and Transportation

Could you describe the island?

Tobago is unique, unspoiled, untouched and undiscovered, and has something for every type of traveler. It's your destination if you want a great balance of sun, sand and sea, as well as breathtaking landscapes, nature-based and eco-tourism activities. Tobago allows visitors to have an all-inclusive experience, not in the traditional sense within the confines of a hotel or resort, but because the entire island is the ultimate all-inclusive experience. We offer a bit of everything, including the opportunity for visitors to immerse themselves in our culture, food, music, arts and festivals that allow you to revel in paradise, as well as the warm, hospitable and charming personality of our people.

If you're looking for high-end luxury, a budget-friendly vacation, sustainable community immersion or a getaway where nobody can find you, Tobago offers that and much more. You can stay in an all-inclusive resort, an exclusive villa, a guesthouse, an Airbnb property or camp on our Little Tobago Island.

At the moment, tourists can fly to Tobago via Trinidad, or on direct flights from various regional airports, New York via Caribbean Airlines (CAL), London with British Airways and Germany through Condor. However, a major expansion of the island's ANR Robinson International Airport will be completed in 2025. How will this impact Tobago's economy?

The investment in the new airport is the equivalent of \$148 million and it will have a capacity of up to 3 million passengers per year. We're focusing on attracting new direct airlift. We will be looking to CAL for additional connections to key markets, Miami being one of them. We've started conversa-

tions with CAL and it is amenable. The new airport presents an opportunity for carriers from Europe to see Tobago as a destination that's accessible and has the facilities to service their needs too. For other markets, particularly the U.S., it gives us a competitive edge due to its capacity to accommodate 747s and A330s. The airport also brings opportunities in areas such as aviation services, cargo handling, the private aircraft sector and aviation education, positioning Tobago as a center for aviation-based activities in the Southern Caribbean.

Given that it will be much easier for tourists to visit, international investors are expressing interest in entering the market, with one example being Marriott. How open are you to foreign investment?

What's important is to support our new airport's success by ramping up our tourism sector's products and services, from accommodation to restaurants, bars, retail services, experiences and tours. Certainly, when a brand like Marriott sees the value in our destination, we must pay attention,

What's important is to support our new airport's success by ramping up our tourism sector's products and services."

Tashia Burris
Secretary of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities
and Transportation

although as with any development, consultation is required. While Tobago wasn't necessarily seen as a destination for large-scale or branded hotels traditionally, we see an opportunity to capitalize on a more balanced offering.

The state has also announced its divestment of Magdalena Grand Beach and Gold Resort, the island's largest hotel. With the uptick in our tourism numbers, the hope is that an entity with the means and experience can come in and operate it to a high standard. The Tobago House of Assembly's way of assisting is to build capacity for local stake-



Tobago's calm and crystal-clear blue waters offer a perfect environment for water sports

holders and tourism workers, so that when large investors come in, our people and industry are ready.

Tobago was visited by 103,838 cruise passengers in the 2023-2024 season. Do you have additional capacity in this area?

Our welcoming of over 100,000 cruise visitors represented a 56 percent increase compared to the previous season. We have the capacity to see even more in the future. Tobago's cultural uniqueness, rich culinary offerings and landscapes provide a pull factor, giving cruise passengers a taste of what our island has to offer. This administration is always looking for more ways to collaborate, support and ensure that stakeholders are well equipped to welcome cruise arrivals.

Tobago is diversifying into emerging areas such as community tourism, with visitors being able to enjoy immersive stays in small villages like Castara. What is your policy for diversification?

We've embarked on the development of several specific and pointed initiatives, which target niche markets that Tobago can excel in. For example, we're seeking to promote communities across the island that offer unique experiences. The ideology we uphold is that you arrive as a stranger but leave as family. We're supporting local service

providers, tour guides, restaurants, cottage industry owners and property owners within those communities through training, certification and strategic direction. Post COVID-19, travelers have become more responsible and focused on unique, indigenous and immersive experiences. Travelers are also keen on experiencing a destination for what it truly is. This is where Tobago scores big.

Sports tourism is another great opportunity and our recent construction of the Courland Beach Sporting Arena, which hosted the Commonwealth Youth Games beach volleyball competition in 2023, demonstrates we are committed to making Tobago a destination that can welcome international tournaments, sporting enthusiasts and off-season teams for training.

What does the future hold for tourism?

Tobago is well poised to capitalize on opportunities and is preparing to further captivate the imagination, minds and interests of visitors from far and wide. Tobago has everything it takes to become the greatest little island on the planet — from its rich natural resources and skilled people to its unique history, cultural heritage, traditions and more. It is a destination you don't want to miss out on experiencing. It's the place where memories can be made and you feel compelled to return to. It's not just a destination you visit, it's a destination you feel.

Tobago's tourism sector in numbers



14% year-on-year increase in international tourists in the 1st quarter of 2024



The new airport can handle 3 million passengers a year, 3 times more than the old one



Tobago welcomed 103,838 cruise passengers in 2023/24, 56% up on the previous year



October's unbeatable Tobago Carnival attracted 50,000 visitors in 2023



1st protected rainforest in the Western Hemisphere and top 4 globally for bird density

Tobago's unique selling point is its booming orange economy

"Tobago's orange economy has been booming, it continues to grow and we have data that says it's going to outpace the oil industry eventually. Creative products are Tobago's unique selling point," declares Jared Prima, interim CEO of the Tobago Performing Arts Company (TPAC).

"Our island's unique and rich culture is more than just performance and presentation, it's what defines us as a people. We're proud and passionate when it comes to who we are and our cultural history," he adds. Established in 2021 under the auspices of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation, TPAC is a multidisciplinary arts institution tasked with preserving and advancing that culture, as well as promoting the island's extensive dance, music, drama and film talent via activities such as education, training and forging international partnerships.

"It's about arts being the vehicle by which we showcase our wealth of culture to the world," Prima summarizes. "We want to get our people ready for when the true orange boom happens here. We want, for example, our performers to have honed their craft and how they function as businesses, as brands." A focus for the company is building up human capacities by, for instance, developing multimedia productions of works written, performed and produced by local artistic and technical talent, which address real issues facing the island's communities. "All our productions are not just infusing Tobagonian culture, they are showing how drama, dance, music and film can work in concert," he states.

As well as generating cultural products that entertain, TPAC aims to create products that educate. Prima says: "We've developed a lot of avenues for that. One we're very proud of is



Jared Prima
Interim CEO, Tobago Performing Arts Company

Kern Cowan
CEO, Tobago Festivals Commission Limited

Fource, a multidisciplinary festival we held for the first time this year." The June event included performances, workshops, master classes, debates and discussions targeted at emerging and established creatives, as well as art lovers. International talent will be welcomed at future editions. "Fource is a hub for creativity and a safe space for artists to perform. We want it to be an incubator, a platform, a showcase for creative technologies, where we can tell our stories and expose our excellence in music and dance," he states.

Another illustration is a new boot-camp competition for young soca musicians. "We bring music, production and business professionals in to teach them about sound, stagecraft, copyright, licensing and so on. It's about elevating artist development and capacity building," Prima stresses.

As an experienced movie director, he is enthusiastic about Tobago's potential in film and television. He explains: "There's so much content to create here and many unique stories that could

Numerous platforms have been established to showcase the islanders' culture and arts to the world

be converted into amazing universal content with global relevance. We have all the necessary tools." Developing Tobago's orange economy is not a one-organization endeavor and TPAC collaborates closely with others, including the Tobago Festivals Commission Limited (TFC) that is also under the Department of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation's umbrella. TFC's CEO Kern Cowan says: "We're primarily charged with overseeing festivals and events in Tobago, providing managerial support and strategic direction. His organization is kept very busy. "Tobago is a mecca of festivals in the Caribbean region, offering year-round authentic cultural experiences," he notes.

Reveling in paradise

The biggest event in the island's annual calendar is its carnival, which takes place over the final weekend in October, with TFC providing over \$145,000 in funding to support participants in this year's edition. The carnival has a rapidly expanding worldwide audience. "Between 2022 and 2023, visitors to the island for the Tobago Carnival increased from 20,000 to 50,000," Cowan discloses. As Prima notes: "It's a festival that brings people in to experience Tobago and revel in its events, as well as our sea, sun, sand, food, culture, crafts and people."

Other Caribbean nations also celebrate carnival, but Tobago's is different. Prima explains: "It speaks to Tobago's unique identity. People are inspired by our landscapes, flora, fauna and folklore in their costumes and performances, for instance, and ritualistic elements are important." These include Mud Mas, in which mud is used for costume, self-expression and celebration. "People find Mud Mas very freeing. Mud is on the face, the body — you're completely covered in mud!" he comments.

Other central features of the carnival include soca, calypso and numerous steel bands that take to the street. Prima says: "Tobago's steel pans were born out of the country's oil boom experience. An important part of our carnival is Rhythm, Steel and Powder, which describes how we infuse our rhythms into our pans and other percussive instruments, creating energy."

Another event that is popular with international tourists takes place during carnival in Bloody Bay village: the Blue Food Festival, which celebrates an indigenous variety of dasheen, or taro, that turns blue when cooked. Attendees are able to sample an immense array of savory, sweet and baked treats, and even wines made from the gluten-free starchy vegetable.

One unmissable summer draw is the month-long Tobago Heritage Festival that embraces the island's cultural traditions. Every night, a different village takes its turn to welcome guests and introduce them to its dances, theater, music and foods. Among the participating communities, Cowan highlights Moriah's reenactment of an 18th-century processional wedding dance. "The Ole Time



Months of planning goes into Tobago's festivals

Wedding is a whole cultural experience by itself," he insists.

The range of festivals held on the island is vast, with its calendar running the gamut from traditional goat and crab racing at Easter, to a four-day yacht regatta and carnival in February. Every Tobagonian celebration has one thing in common though. Cowan reveals: "Our food is one of our major selling points. We're talking about our curried crab and dumplings, and all the other things Tobago is known for." Among the best places to discover the diversity of the island's cuisine is at a Harvest Festival. These thanksgiving feasts occur once a month on a Sunday and are hosted by a different village each time.

"Tobago is a mecca of festivals in the Caribbean region, offering year-round authentic cultural experiences."

Kern Cowan, CEO
Tobago Festivals Commission Limited

TFC prepares rigorously for every festivity it manages. "We try to have at least a three-to six-months' window of pure planning before any execution, and we ensure each event gets the oversight it requires because we believe in brand quality," Cowan asserts. "Tobago has unique culture, heritage, dances, linguistics and other qualities that we home into as a commission, as they are the things that set us apart from anywhere else."

TFC is stepping up its efforts to promote the island's orange economy, which the CEO is convinced has huge potential to attract international tourism and investments. "In 2025, we're going to engage in early, wider-scale promotions. North America is one of the markets we're targeting," he reveals. As far as TPAC is concerned, "Our work has only just begun," Prima says. "We will continue to develop well-created, produced and curated content that showcases Tobago and can earn revenue as creative products. And we will continue to partner with local and international entities that want to assist in the development of Tobago's cultural product."



Tobago offers one-of-a kind diving, snorkelling and boating opportunities



A must-visit Caribbean destination

101 unforgettable activities, authentic experiences and thrilling adventures

Tobago has seen a steady increase in international tourist arrivals during 2024. "That's a testament to the heightened appeal of Tobago as a must-visit Caribbean destination," says Dalia Jerry, chairman of the Tobago Tourism Agency Limited (TTAL). "As the island's charm continues to captivate potential and returning visitors, we anticipate continued growth in 2025."



Dalia Jerry
Chairman, Tobago Tourism Agency Limited

Many tourists are drawn in by Tobago's wide sandy beaches and clear turquoise seas that are teeming with marine life and perfect for water sports. "There's been continued interest in our one-of-a-kind diving and snorkeling experiences through pristine waters and stunning ocean reefs, as well as boat tours to our famed shallow Nylon Pool and bioluminescence tours to see amazing glowing plankton, for example," Jerry confirms.

Tobago's inland natural environments are equally dazzling and lend themselves to eco-based adventures. The island offers awe-inspiring mountains, rolling hills, breathtaking waterfalls and an ancient protected rainforest. Home to diverse fauna and flora, these landscapes can be explored through activities such as hiking and cycling, or by participating in popular events like marathons and triathlons.

Furthermore, the country boasts one of the world's highest densities of birds, with around 260 species to be spotted in Tobago. Among the rewarding destinations for bird watchers is tiny forest-covered Little Tobago, also known as Bird of Paradise Island.

TTAL is committed to safeguarding these environments. For example, it has introduced globally

recognized eco-certification programs, such as Green Key for hospitality providers and Blue Flag for beaches. Visitors are welcome to join in the island's sustainability efforts by, for instance, replanting reefs, caring for endangered species in wildlife reserves or protecting the sea turtles that nest on its shores. "In 2020, Tobago was awarded UNESCO Man and the Biosphere designation for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. We're serious about being an eco-friendly destination," Jerry asserts.

A one-stop shop for tourists

As she points out, there is much more to the island than sun, sea, sand and fabulous nature: "We have those things in abundance, but what makes Tobago different is that it's almost like a one-stop shop for tourists; we offer a lot of authentic experiences that are going to wow you."

The island has a long, rich history that incorporates elements such as colonialism and the slave trade, fascinating physical reminders of which can be discovered. As can the lives and heritage of the diverse indigenous communities on Tobago. One village Jerry recommends to tourists is coastal Castara. "It's a good place to experience authentic village life. You can go to the beach in the morning and help the fishermen pull in their nets with the day's catch, for example. Thursday in Castara is bonfire night, with entertainment and cooking on the beach. That's one of the things you don't want to miss," she enthuses.

Another is the weekly Buccoo village Sunday School, a vibrant street party with steel bands and DJs. "Sunday School is alive. It's such an immer-

sive experience," she explains. "Buccoo is the location for our goat and crab races that we hold at Easter too. Visitors are fascinated by the fact we race these animals — it's a really fun activity!"

Jerry also highlights the gastronomic excellence that can be found across Tobago, with the island's cuisine melding flavors from disparate parts of the world and utilizing the bounty of locally grown and harvested ingredients. "Our enticing culinary culture particularly shines through at our Harvest Festivals, our month-long summer Heritage Festival, and our Blue Food festival and Tobago Carnival in October," she notes. "A Harvest Festival is hosted by a different community each month. You can just turn up, walk into anybody's house and they will treat you to food and drink they've cooked. You're treated like royalty, even if they've never seen you before. It's a very friendly, welcoming atmosphere, with a lot of laughing."

The number of U.S. citizens vacationing in Tobago has expanded significantly over the last two years and this upward trend is expected to continue. "Our new world-class airport facility will significantly improve accessibility to the destination while enhancing the travel experience," she explains, adding that one new flight in the pipeline

is a direct connection with Miami that could be operational by the middle of 2025.

"If you're looking for an unspoiled, untouched Caribbean getaway where the undiscovered waits around every corner, be sure to add Tobago to your travel bucket list," Jerry informs those considering taking advantage of the island's growing

"A Harvest Festival is hosted by a different community each month. You can just turn up, walk into anybody's house and they will treat you to food and drink."

Dalia Jerry, Chairman, Tobago Tourism Agency Limited

accessibility. "With 101 unforgettable activities, authentic experiences and thrilling adventures that take you beyond the ordinary, there's no shortage of things to do. Follow Visit Tobago on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, and visit our website at tobagobeyond.com to plan your trip today!"



Tobagonian communities are passionate about their distinct cultural traditions



The island's delicious cuisine highlights locally grown and harvested ingredients

Tobago

beyond ordinary...

I ♥ TOBAGO



Experience the perfect escape and explore the unspoilt, untouched, and undiscovered wonders of our island.



visittobago

