Eagle-Eye Tours

Trinidad & Tobago Itinerary

Link: Trinidad & Tobago

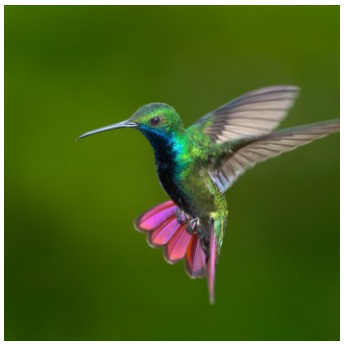
Tour Overview

Many of our guests have been introduced to South America's wonderfully diverse birdlife via our Trinidad and Tobago birding tour. This relaxed and easy-paced birding adventure visits both parts of this two-island nation: the varied rainforests and wetlands of Trinidad and the ocean-oriented paradise of Tobago. Collectively, we affectionately call the place "T & T!"

The highlights are numerous: the spectacle of Scarlet Ibis arriving at their evening roost; the quest for an ultra-rare endemic; the amazing Oilbirds; an onslaught of motmots, macaws, hummingbirds and honeycreepers; and the wonderful birding from the verandah of the Asa Wright Nature Centre. Add to this a glass-bottomed boat tour over a coral reef and you have a perennial favourite with birders and naturalists!

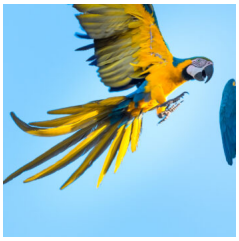
Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Trinidad



Our Trinidad & Tobago birding tour begins at Trinidad's Piarco Airport where you will be met and transferred to our lodge. Night at the Asa Wright Nature Centre.

Days 2 - 5: Asa Wright Nature Centre and area



The next four exciting days will be spent exploring the classic destinations that Trinidad has become famous for over the many years we've been birding the island. Our accommodation is set in a strategic, very scenic location above Port-of-Spain that allows for half- or full-day excursions, depending on the destination. It is also famous for feeders that provide photographic opportunities. The birding around the lodge is fantastic, with two hundred bird species possible. Hummingbirds might include Copper-rumped Hummingbird, White-chested Emerald, Blue-chinned Sapphire, White-necked Jacobin, and the awesome Ruby-topaz Hummingbird and Tufted Coquette. From the veranda one has a fine view of most of the Arima Valley, and this is an excellent spot to see such fabulous birds as Ornate Hawk-eagle, White Hawk and Channel-billed Toucan. One of the trails leading from the veranda is aptly named Bellbird Trail, after the Bearded Bellbird whose loud ringing "Bok" call is a characteristic sound of the centre. There are leks of both White-bearded and Golden-headed Manakins within easy reach of the centre, and there are usually Blue-headed and Orange-winged Parrots flying overhead, Great Antshrikes and Squirrel Cuckoos calling from the underbrush, and Black-faced Antthrushes whistling from dense ground cover. We visit a cave where Oilbirds reside. Oilbirds are relatives of nighthawks and nightjars (such as Whip-poor-wills); however, unlike their relatives they do not eat flying insects but rather have a diet of fruit, and they have adapted to nesting in caves. Further afield, one morning we will visit the Aripo Savannah, where open-country birds will be easy to see, providing a good introduction for those newer to birding. Guests can expect to see the ubiquitous Southern Lapwing, not to mention Pied-Water-Tyrant, Red-breasted Blackbird, Savannah Hawk, and Grassland Yellow-Finch. Elsewhere in palm groves and wetlands we will listen for the raucous calls of macaws. Two species are possible here: the rare Blue-and-Yellow Macaw and the smaller Red-bellied Macaw. When mixing forest and wetlands we often amass a large bird list and today will be no exception. These habitats can produce a varied set of birds with bizarre names including Rufous Crab Hawk, Pinnated Bittern, Bicolored Conebill, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Large-billed Tern, Wattled Jacana, Violaceous Euphonia and Silvered Antbird. We should be close to getting into the triple digits on our species list today. On another morning after a hearty, fruit-filled breakfast we'll embark along the most northerly extension of the Andes mountain range, in the highlands of Trinidad. Here we'll encounter some different species than lower down, and tanagers are one of our targets. This diverse guild of forest birds is one of the reasons many birders jump on a plane to visit this part of the world. We'll look for a dozen species including Turquoise, Speckled, Swallow, Bay-headed Tanagers, and the migrant Summer Tanager—familiar to some folks from home. Three large forest raptors might be spotted today: the glorious Ornate Hawk-Eagle, the more common Black Hawk-Eagle, and the striking White Hawk. Bearded Bellbird, Lilac-tailed Parrotlet, Guianian Trogon, Trinidad Motmot, and Yellow-rumped Cacique are other targets for the day. After a relaxed morning, when the coffee will flow and the garden birds entertain us, we'll head to the Waterloo area for migrant shorebirds then we set forth one of T & T's most memorable forays: a boat trip to Caroni Swamp. The star attraction here is the hundreds of Scarlet Ibis that arrive to roost in the mangroves. Other less flamboyant species such as flamingos and egrets are common here too! We'll also look for the mangrove-loving Black-crested Antshrike, Black-throated Mango, Anhinga and Tricolored Heron. This trip goes down well with a rum punch at sunset! Nights at Asa Wright Nature Centre.

Days 6 - 7: Grand Riviere



After a transfer to the northeast part of Trinidad we'll be based in Grand Riviere, where a single species is our principal target: the critically endangered Trinidad Piping-Guan with a population hovering around 100 individuals. We'll focus on finding these canopy-dwelling birds, one of only two endemic species on T & T (the other being the Trinidad Motmot). Other species we'll look for are: Trinidad Euphonia (not endemic!), Golden-headed Manakin, Purple Honeycreeper, Magnificent Frigatebird, and various other coastline species. After all, we'll be based on the shores of the Caribbean! Nights at the Mt. Plaisir Estate Hotel in Grand Riviere.

Days 8 - 10: Tobago



We depart Grand Riviere after final morning of birding and make our way back to the airport in Port-of-Spain for a short flight to Tobago midday. Birding on Tobago is much different than on Trinidad. It is small enough that a short visit is sufficient to visit the major hotspots, much of the agricultural land is reverting back to second-growth habitat, and it's a fairly obvious Caribbean paradise. We visit the central highlands, mangrove swamps, and take a boat ride to Little Tobago Island, with the target of finding those species not found on Trinidad. These include Rufous-vented Chachalaca, Striped Owl, White-tailed Sabrewing, White-fringed Antwren, Blue-backed Manakin, Scrub Greenlet, and Black-faced Grassquit. Some species are easier to find and observe on Tobago than on Trinidad, and we have a good chance of locating Yellow-legged Thrush, Stripe-breasted Spinetail, Venezuelan Flycatcher, and Great Black-hawk, and especially Trinidad Motmot. At Little Tobago the seabirds are the main attraction and highlights include Brown and Red-footed Boobies, Magnificent Frigatebird, and the stunning Red-billed Tropicbird. A glass-bottomed boat gets us across a postcard-quality coral reef, with an option for some snorkeling en route. Many guests decide to stay on Tobago for a night or two after the tour. Nights at Blue Waters Inn.

Day 11: Return to Trinidad

We spend a final morning birding around Blue Waters Inn. We travel to the airport with some birding along the way before catching a mid-afternoon flight back to Trinidad. We gather for a final dinner at our airport hotel to reminisce about the adventures we've had on these two beautiful islands. Night near the Port of Spain airport.

Day 12: Departure

Our Trinidad & Tobago birding tour ends today. You can catch flights home at any time today from the Trinidad's Piarco Airport.

What to Expect

Overview
The Trinidad & Tobago tour is a great introduction to the birds of South America, with relatively easy birding. The daily travel schedule varies to account for weather, bird species and habitat. There will be mostly early mornings and typically one night excursion. Although we will be filling up our days with exceptional birding, there will still be the opportunity for afternoon siestas, and free time to go swimming or snorkelling while in Tobago.

Food
Breakfast will often be at the hotel, although there will be a picnic breakfast on the mornings where we go out birding very early. Lunch will either be out in the field, at a local restaurant or back at the hotel. We will usually have dinner at the hotel restaurant. During dinner we usually discuss the day's activities and review the list of birds seen and heard.

Accommodation
Accommodations will vary from basic airport hotels to comfortable birding lodges. Asa Wright Nature Centre is a well known lodge catering to birders with busy feeders that you can enjoy from the verandah and trails right on the property.

Walking
Walking is generally easy to moderate, but there are quite a few inclines (e.g. Asa Wright itself is on a hillside; the driveway at BWI is steep and bird walks there typically require a bit of a climb). Most walks are are less than 1 km and we walk at an easy pace and take rests along the way. The Oilbird Trail at Asa Wright is probably our most challenging walk. It is ~2km return, but the terrain can be muddy and there are several ups and down with stairs along the way. The trail to see the seabird colony on Little Tobago is short-medium length (~ 1 km each way), but is steep with some steps. The trail at Gilpin Trace (Tobago) has uneven surfaces and can be muddy, but does not have much elevation. There is an option to opt-out of walks if you wish. Bring appropriate footwear for muddy trails and bring water shoes or waterproof sandals (e.g., Tevas, not flip flops) for the oilbird cave.

Driving
Our longest drive is 1.5 – 2 hours in duration. Driving will be mostly highway, but there will be some mountain passes with twists and turns.

Climate
Temperatures will be mostly warm with high temperatures around 27°C (80° F), but expect the occasional rain shower. Lightweight, moisture wicking clothes are recommended, with a light waterproof jacket or sweater for coolish nights. Bring a hat – it is sunny in the Caribbean! Long pants are advisable, especially in the savanna areas where the grass can be quite sharp-edged, but shorts are comfortable to wear in most localities. Humidity is a key part of the island climate, usually high (around 70–85%), so it can feel warmer than the thermometer says.

Boat Trips
There will be two boat trips on the tour, each around 2 – 3 hours in duration. The Caroni Swamp boat tour is in calm waters of a mangrove swamp & estuary. The boat is open and mostly slow-moving as we bird the entire way. Duration is 2.5 – 3 hrs. The Little Tobago boat trip is on the ocean, and water conditions may vary from calm to choppy depending on the day. We consult with local operators to choose the best time based partly on water conditions. We do some birding from the boat, and also disembark on Little Tobago island. Total duration is around 3 hrs, but with no more than 1.5 of those hours spent on the boat.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes
• All meals & soft drinks
• Accommodation
• Ground transportation
• Return flights between Trinidad and Tobago
• 1 EET guide with 4 - 8 participants, 2 EET guides with 9 - 12 participants plus local guides
• Park entry / tour fees
• Gratuities to local drivers
• Airport Transfer

Tour Price Does Not Include
• Flights to and from Port of Spain, Trinidad
• Travel Insurance
• Items of a personal nature
• Alcoholic beverages