Tour Code
TT2

ADVENTURESABROAD

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO AND THE GUIANAS

Caribbean, Rainforest & Faded Empires

17 days

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Day 1 Arrive Port of Spain

Welcome to Trinidad -- South American in geology, African and Indian in culture, Caribbean in name only. Port of Spain announces itself with colour and noise: gingerbread Victorian houses alongside modern towers, the great green expanse of Queen's Park Savannah at the city's heart, and the "Magnificent Seven" colonial mansions ranged along its northern edge, each built in a different architectural style by rival 19th century merchants competing to outdo one another in civic grandeur.

This evening we settle in and meet our fellow travellers.

Overnight in Port of Spain (safely outside the downtown core).

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Port of Spain City Tour - Maracas Bay - Caroni Wetlands

We begin with a morning exploration of Port of Spain — the Red House parliament, Woodford Square, the Botanical Gardens, and the commanding views from Lady Young Lookout across the city to the Gulf of Paria and the Venezuelan coast beyond. The Magnificent Seven, seen properly from the Savannah, make plain just how seriously Trinidad's colonial elite took the business of self-presentation: seven mansions, seven architectural languages, one very competitive street.

The road north over the Northern Range brings us to Maracas Bay — a long arc of pale sand backed by densely forested hills, and the finest of Trinidad's north coast beaches. This is our lunch stop: fresh bake and shark, the local staple, eaten at wooden stalls just back from the surf. The drive itself is half the pleasure, winding through mountain rainforest with glimpses of the Caribbean coast below.

The afternoon belongs to the Caroni Bird Sanctuary, a 104 sq km mangrove swamp on Trinidad's northwest coast. We board flat-bottomed boats and drift through the waterways as evening approaches — waiting for the moment when hundreds of scarlet ibis return to their roosting trees in an explosion of brilliant red against the green mangrove. It is, by any measure, one of the great wildlife spectacles in the Caribbean. The timing today is exactly right.

Overnight in Port of Spain

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Asa Wright Nature Centre

The Arima Valley in Trinidad's Northern Range is one of the finest birdwatching destinations in the tropics, and the Asa Wright Nature Centre — a former coffee and cocoa plantation converted in 1967 into a conservation and study area — is its centrepiece. Trinidad has recorded over 470 bird species, more than the whole of Canada, and Asa Wright distils that extraordinary abundance into a single day.

Our guided walk along the Discovery Trail takes us into the forest interior, where the canopy closes overhead and the calls of trogons, motmots and woodcreepers announce themselves before the birds come into view. The real magic, however, is the famous verandah — a broad, shaded platform overlooking the estate's gardens where hummingbirds, honeycreepers, tanagers and blue-crowned motmots work the feeders just below. It is a setting that has drawn naturalists from around the world for more than half a century, and the reasons are immediately apparent.

For those travelling onward to the Guianas, this is a fine calibration of the eye — an introduction to the neotropical world that will deepen considerably as the journey continues.

Overnight in Port of Spain

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Pitch Lake - Flight to Tobago

We head south this morning through Central Trinidad — a landscape of rice fields, coconut estates and Hindu prayer flags, a world far removed from the colonial Anglican Caribbean — to La Brea and one of the stranger experiences this journey offers. Pitch Lake is the world's largest natural asphalt deposit: roughly 40 hectares of warm, slightly yielding surface underlain by a vast reservoir of natural bitumen that has supplied road-paving material globally for well over a century. Walking carefully across it, watching sulphur pools bubble at your feet with geological forces made visible and walkable, is an experience with few parallels. Sir Walter Raleigh is said to have used the pitch to caulk his ships here in 1595. The lake has been slowly replenishing itself ever since.

This afternoon we fly to Tobago — smaller, quieter, and fiercely proud of its distinct identity within the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Where Trinidad is urban, cosmopolitan and continental in feel, Tobago is unhurried and insular in the best sense: forested hills, sheltered coves, and a pace of life that seems to operate on different time entirely. We settle in this evening on the island's southern coast, with tomorrow's explorations ahead..

Overnight in Tobago

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Tobago Island Tour

Fort King George, high above Scarborough, offers our introduction to Tobago's layered colonial history — a well-preserved 18th century British fortification whose small museum traces the island's long-contested past. The fort changed hands repeatedly between the British and French before Britain gained permanent control in 1814; from its ramparts, the views across the coastline in both directions are commanding in every sense. Scarborough itself, just below, is a compact and lively capital whose market and steep streets reward a morning's exploration.

We circle the island northward through the spectacular coastal scenery of the windward coast, arriving at Charlotteville — a tranquil fishing village tucked into Man O' War Bay on Tobago's northern tip, its colourful pirogues pulled up on the beach, the forested hills dropping straight to the water. The road south along the northeast coast brings us to Speyside and lunch at Jemma's Tree House Restaurant, perched in the branches of a large saman tree above the Caribbean — by any reasonable standard, one of the more memorable places to eat lunch in the southern Caribbean.

The return route passes through the Tobago Forest Reserve, the oldest protected rainforest in the western hemisphere, its canopy closing overhead as the coast drops away below.

Overnight in Tobago

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Tobago - Fly to Georgetown

Today we transfer to the Tobago Airport and fly to Georgetown, capital of Guyana and one of South America's lesser-known destinations (via Port of Spain).

Named after King George III, Georgetown lies on the Atlantic coast at the Demerara River estuary. The city is protected by a sea wall and elaborate drainage system designed by the Dutch. Called the "garden city" for its wide tree-lined avenues, Georgetown preserves a piece of colonial past in a modern world. Built mostly of wood, the city is an architectural wonder with many buildings dating to the 18th and 19th centuries.

Overnight in Georgetown.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Georgetown - Fly to Kaieteur Falls - Riverside Resort

Long before the British named this country and the Dutch engineered its coastline, a Patamona chief named Kaie paddled to the edge of the world to save his people. The legend holds that he canoed over the precipice willingly — an offering to Makonaima, the Great Spirit — to turn aside the Caribishi who threatened to destroy his tribe. What he went over was 224 metres/741 ft of free-falling water, the highest single-drop waterfall on earth.

We fly into Guyana's interior this morning — roughly an hour and a half by light aircraft — and our pilot circles Kaieteur before landing, giving passengers on both sides a view of the Potaro River as it gathers, narrows, and then simply disappears over the sandstone plateau into the gorge below. On the ground, a trail winds through tropical vegetation to a series of viewpoints where the scale of the thing becomes real in a way the aerial view doesn't quite prepare you for.

After our time at the falls we fly onward to a landing strip at the edge of the Essequibo — one of the great rivers of South America, wide enough in places to lose sight of the far bank — where a boat takes us downstream to our jungle resort for the night. The river is bronze in the late afternoon light, the forest unbroken on both sides. The empire-built coast already feels very far away.

NOTE: For our time here and later at Kabalebo in Suriname, please pack a smaller collapsible overnight bag due to light aircraft weight restrictions. Your larger baggage will be securely stored.

Overnight at our jungle resort.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Riverside Resort - Sloth Island - Georgetown Touring

This morning we travel by motorboat to Sloth Island, a wildlife sanctuary mid-river, for wildlife spotting before continuing to Fort Zeelandia to visit the fort and museum. The Dutch built forts the way they built cities: systematically, with an eye on the water, and with the intention of staying. They didn't stay, but the forts remain.

Back in Georgetown by afternoon, we spend several hours with the city on foot. The Dutch legacy is most legible at the waterfront, where the seawall and canal system that keeps Georgetown above the Atlantic reveal themselves as a feat of hydraulic engineering that the tropics have been quietly contesting ever since. The Stabroek Market's iron clock tower presides over the waterfront chaos; the Parliament building and the colonial-era Red House anchor the civic centre. St George's Cathedral needs no introduction after last night, but seen in daylight its scale is newly astonishing — all that ambition, expressed in wood.

We visit the Walter Roth Museum of Anthropology, where Guyana's indigenous peoples — the Patamona, the Arawak, the Wapishana among others — are given context beyond the colonial narrative that tends to dominate the rest of the city. We finish at the National Park, whose waterways are home to West Indian manatees — slow, vast, improbably gentle creatures that surface without drama and submerge the same way, leaving barely a ripple.

Overnight in Georgetown.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Georgetown, Guyana - Fly to Paramaribo, Suriname

Paramaribo stops you in your tracks before you've worked out why. The streets are Dutch — the proportions, the brick, the relationship between building and canal — but the faces, the food, the sound of the city are Caribbean. Suriname absorbed the Dutch colonial project and then filled it with everyone else: enslaved Africans, indentured labourers from India and Java, Sephardic Jews fleeing the Inquisition via Brazil, Maroons who escaped the plantations and built their own nations in the interior. The result is a city that shouldn't cohere and somehow does.

The evidence is most startling at the centre of town, where the Neveh Shalom Synagogue and the Keizerstraat Mosque stand on the same block — not tolerating each other at a distance, but genuinely neighbouring, sharing the street the way longtime residents share a fence. Both communities have been here for centuries. The sand floors of the synagogue, a Sephardic tradition, were laid by people who arrived here having already fled one continent; the mosque serves a community whose ancestors were brought from Java under Dutch colonial labour contracts. That these two institutions ended up next to each other is one of colonial geography's more unexpected outcomes.

We explore the UNESCO-listed inner city on foot — the Presidential Palace and its stately Palm Garden, the waterfront at Independence Square, the black-and-white colonial facades that give Paramaribo its distinctive graphic quality. Fort Zeelandia has been converted into a museum; its exhibits on Surinamese history quietly acknowledge what the fort was actually built to protect, and for whom.

This evening we dine together — the last night of relative urban comfort before three days in the deep interior.

Overnight in Paramaribo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Paramaribo - Fly to Kabalebo Nature Resort

The plane(s) that takes us to Kabalebo this morning carries only a handful of passengers. There is no other way in — no road reaches this part of Suriname's interior, no river is navigable all the way from the coast. The lodge sits at the confluence of the Kabalebo and Corantijn rivers, deep in a stretch of Amazon rainforest so intact that the word "untouched" is for once not hyperbole. The name Kabalebo comes from the Carib Amerindian language: arch in the river.

After lunch we ease into the forest on its own terms. This afternoon might mean a walk along trails where our guides identify medicinal plants by touch and smell, explaining uses that predate every colonial pharmacopoeia ever written. Or we take to the water by dugout canoe — long pirogues with outboard motors that go quiet when something worth watching appears on the bank.

NOTE: For our time here, pack a smaller collapsible overnight bag due to light aircraft weight restrictions. Your larger baggage will be securely stored.

Overnight at Kabalebo Nature Resort.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Kabalebo Nature Resort

The river is our road today. We travel by boat to reach one of the area's waterfalls — Kilotri Falls when conditions permit — passing through forest that reveals itself slowly, in layers: the canopy first, then the mid-story, then the understorey where the light barely reaches and the undergrowth is a different world entirely. Our guides move through it with the ease of long familiarity.

The birds here reward patience. Scarlet macaws and blue-and-yellow macaws work the canopy in pairs — macaws, like many things in this forest, mate for life. Caracaras pick the riverbanks. Aracaris move through the middle story in loose noisy groups. The Buff-throated Saltator, if you're lucky, will sit still long enough to be properly appreciated.

A packed lunch on the river, then the afternoon at whatever pace suits you. Those who want more forest take more forest; those who prefer to sit on the lodge deck with binoculars and let the forest come to them will not be disappointed.

Optional: Those preferring a less strenuous day can enjoy shorter forest walks near the lodge and a leisurely afternoon boat ride.

Overnight at Kabalebo Nature Resort.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Kabalebo Nature Resort

By the third day the forest has settled into familiarity. The sounds that kept you alert two days ago have become familiar enough to notice their variations — which birds call at dawn, which fall silent at midday, what the river sounds like when the wind picks up upstream.

Today we follow the river in both directions. Upstream the Kabalebo narrows toward fishing territory, the current stronger, the forest closing in on both sides. Downstream the engines go quiet and the boat drifts, which is when the wildlife appears — caimans, river otters, the occasional giant river otter if fortune is with us, and always the birds: Blue-headed Parrots moving in flocks, Black Skimmers working the surface with that improbable lower mandible, the Buff-throated Saltator reconsidered in better light than yesterday.

The lodge's landscaped paths offer a quieter alternative for those who prefer to spend the morning on foot, and the river has shallow spots away from the jetty where a swim is possible under the guidance of people who know which spots are safe and which are not — a distinction worth respecting in Amazonian water.

Overnight at Kabalebo Nature Resort.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Kabalebo - Fly to Paramaribo, Suriname - Kourou, French Guiana

We leave Kabalebo the way we arrived — by light aircraft, the forest canopy unrolling beneath us until the coast reasserts itself and Paramaribo reappears below.

From Paramaribo we transfer to the Marowijne River at Albina, where a boat crosses into French Guiana. This is one of the more quietly remarkable border crossings in the world. On the Suriname side: a former Dutch colony, independent since 1975, finding its own way. On the French side: an overseas département of the French Republic, which is to say a fully integrated part of France — and therefore of the European Union — situated on the northeastern shoulder of South America. The euro is the currency. French is the language of government. The tricolore flies. It is the 21st Century and France is still here, not as a colonial memory but as a current administrative fact, and the jungle begins immediately behind the customs post.

We continue by road to Kourou.

Overnight in Kourou.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Kourou: Ariane Space Centre & Cayenne

The road to the Centre Spatial Guyanais passes through tropical forest, and then the forest opens and there are rockets — actual rockets, on actual launch pads, under an equatorial sky. Ariane launch vehicles have placed roughly two thirds of all Western satellites into orbit from this precise patch of South American jungle. The reason is simple physics: proximity to the equator gives rockets a rotational boost that saves fuel and increases payload capacity. France looked at its map, noticed it had territory on the equator, and built a spaceport.

This morning we visit the Ariane Space Center for a guided tour. Ariane rockets, whose path over the Atlantic is tracked from Devil's Island, have put two-thirds of all Western satellites into space. This base is French Guiana's biggest source of income. Launch schedules at the Centre Spatiale Guyanaise are closely-held secrets, so our schedule may be amended on short notice. The usual visit includes a bus tour criss-crossing the facility, with stops at assembly buildings and control centres.

This afternoon we drive to Cayenne, French Guiana's capital and chief port — a city that wears its Creole culture in colour, literally, the building facades running from ochre to turquoise to a particular shade of coral that seems designed to hold the light. Avenue Général de Gaulle is the main commercial artery; Place des Palmistes and Place de Grenoble anchor the civic centre, where the Hôtel de Ville built by Jesuits in the 1890s still presides with quiet authority. The Musée Départemental frames the afternoon with context — indigenous history, colonial settlement, and the penal system whose most infamous chapter we visit tomorrow.

NOTE: As tour dates are published before rocket launch schedules are known, a launch could impact our plans if security lockdowns curtail our visit. Though unlikely, if this happens we will substitute other sightseeing.

Overnight in Kourou.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Kourou & Iles du Salut

Today we enjoy a full-day excursion to the former penal colony on the Iles du Salut (Isles of Salvation). The islands appear on the horizon as the catamaran clears the harbour — three low shapes in the Caribbean, green and improbably beautiful from a distance. This is the view that greeted arriving convicts for over a century.

The Îles du Salut — Isles of Salvation, a name whose irony was not lost on the more than 30,000 prisoners who died here — served France as a dumping ground for those it could not rehabilitate and would not execute: political prisoners, repeat offenders, the incorrigible and the inconvenient. Devil's Island itself, the smallest of the three and still inaccessible to visitors, held the most famous prisoner of all — Alfred Dreyfus, a French army officer convicted of treason on the basis of forged evidence in a case that split France along every fault line it possessed.

Île Royale is where we spend our time. The cells, guards' quarters, and administration blocks have been converted into a hotel and small museum; the history is legible in the stonework if you know where to look. Stone-cut steps climb under palms to viewpoints over turquoise water where sharks once patrolled for bodies.

We return to Kourou by catamaran (dinner on your own this evening).

Overnight in Kourou.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 16 Kourou, French Guiana - Paramaribo, Suriname

The road back to Paramaribo retraces yesterday's ground in reverse — French Guiana giving way to Suriname at the Marowijne River, the euro yielding to the Surinamese dollar, the tricolore to a different flag entirely. Though it may seem logical to fly onward from Cayenne, the lack of and high changeability of flights, and the inconvenience of the available schedules, mostly through Paris, result in this overland route.

On the Suriname River approach to Paramaribo, look to the right. Half-submerged in the water sits the rusted hull of a German cargo vessel, scuttled here during the Second World War to prevent its bauxite cargo — Suriname was then one of the world's primary bauxite sources, the raw material of aluminium, and therefore of aircraft, and therefore of enormous strategic value — from reaching Allied hands.

We cross the bridge into Paramaribo for the last time.

Overnight in Paramaribo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Departure from Paramaribo

After breakfast we say our farewells and depart Paramaribo — three countries, two colonial languages, one waterfall, and a stretch of Amazon jungle that sees very few visitors. Time well spent.

Bon voyage! Tot ziens!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast