

Trinidad Notes 3: Trinidad is FUN !!

Because Trinidad is a mix of 1st World, Developing Nation, and 3rd World, and because Trinis really like to party and be festive, the quantity and variety of things to do during a prolonged stay on the island is amazing. I am just going to provide a commented list of our non-boat activities enjoyed between mid-June and early December. And just think, this list doesn't even include Christmas and Carnival, which are total blowouts all on their own!

Before I get to the list, I want to write a paragraph about Jesse James. Jesse is a taxi driver. Saying this is about like saying a lion is an animal with 4 legs and a tail – it doesn't begin to capture the reality. Jesse is a gracious, smart and really funny guy who has an unusually well-developed sense of what interests and surprises visiting NAEs (North Americans and Europeans). Over the past decade he has developed a multi-van business assisting the Chaguaramas yachties with all their travel needs and also introducing them to island culture while meeting their real and/or perceived needs for security. He offers visitors insight into another country and another culture—a service that is just about unique in the Caribbean. Moreover he is happy to help visitors to become independent adventurers, generous in sharing advice and cautions. The government should make him Minister of Tourism and give him his own Mercedes Benz – but that would mean he couldn't personally go on island adventures with us and that would be a great loss. See my blog “A Walk on the Wild Side and A Walk on the Mild Side” to get some of the flavor of a day spent with Jesse. Better yet, check out his website: www.jessejamesmembersonly.com.

Enjoying the natural beauty of Trinidad:

Hikes: Avocat Falls

Rincon Falls

Tucker Valley hikes organized by Will-O-the-Wisp (Edith Falls, Macuripe Beach, creek bushwhacking)

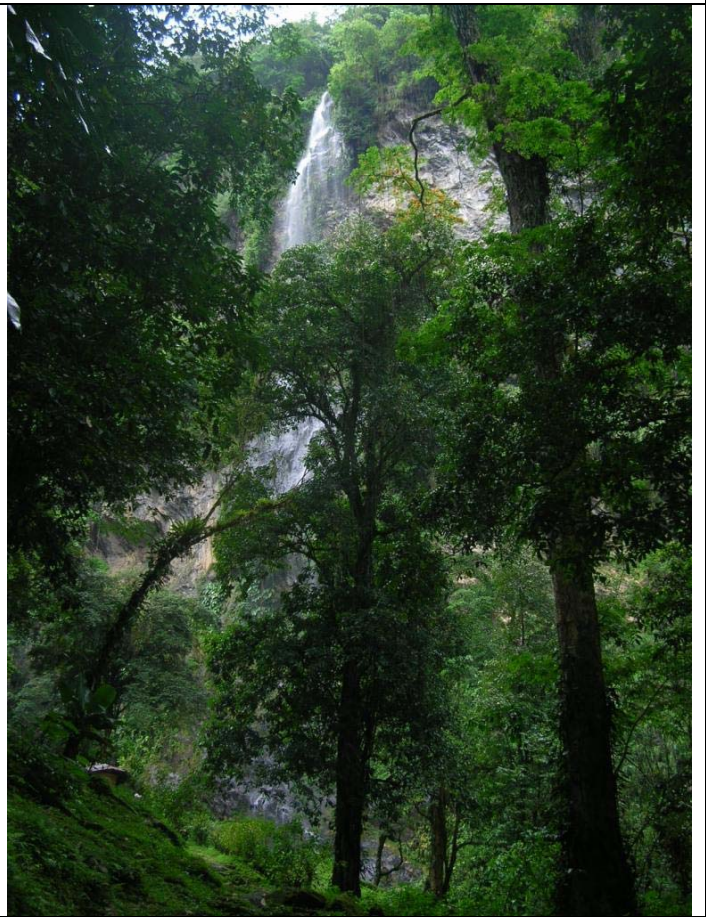
Maracas Falls

Beach Days: multiple days body-surfing at Maracas and Cuevas Beaches. Pick your day carefully: surf ranges from non-existent to serious, depending on the swell

Turtle Trip with Jesse: watching leatherback turtles come ashore to lay eggs and as a bonus if you time it right, watching hatchlings emerge and struggle down to the surf and the great unknown. I personally guided with a small flashlight 4 hatchlings down to the surf, feeling a definite parental interest in each one. It took about 10 minutes per hatchling—you can't carry them, they need to imprint on the beach. Had none of us been there, the glow of the surf would have guided them. Trinis have become very proud of their turtle beaches and now guard them carefully.

Quiet anchorages: 3-4 days each at Scotland Bay and Chacachacare, formerly US military lands reverted to Trinidad and left undeveloped. Howler monkeys abound at Scotland Bay. Water clean enough to swim in – not true at Chaguaramas.

Birding: excellent birding all around Chaguaramas (which is a national park) and a day spent at internationally known Asa Wright Bird Sanctuary.



“High” Culture

With 1 million inhabitants, many of them very well-educated, Port of Spain offers quite sophisticated urban pleasures.

Concerts:

Lydian Singers at Queen’s Hall: light classical with many costumes

Adamo Singers Concert at St. Josephs, “Talking Drums”: phenomenal voices with an African theme

Opera: Song of Hiawatha by Lydian Singers at Queen’s Hall: sophisticated concert-opera performance of an opera written about 1900 by Samuel Coleridge Taylor, the first major Black English composer. Accompaniment was the original piano score blended with a muted pan orchestra that was absolutely haunting. Great evening.

Plays:

“3 Women”, presented by Players Workshop. Witty, sophisticated, and touching play about three 50-ish friends women who indirectly support each other through personal crises. Written and performed by three Trinidadan women with extensive dramatic training and accomplished careers in theater, television, and academia.

“The Penis Monologues”: also Players Workshop. Funny but a definite test of my beginner’s mastery of Trini-speak.

Film Festivals:

Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival: 2 weeks of Caribbean film

European Film Festival

Dance: Uganda National Dance Troupe, Emancipation Day Celebration. Wild mesmerizing energy

Popular Culture

Day at the Race Track – the Royal Oaks Derby.

Trinidad to Tobago Power Boat Race (and race preview at National Stadium



race track with a view, good horses and shade

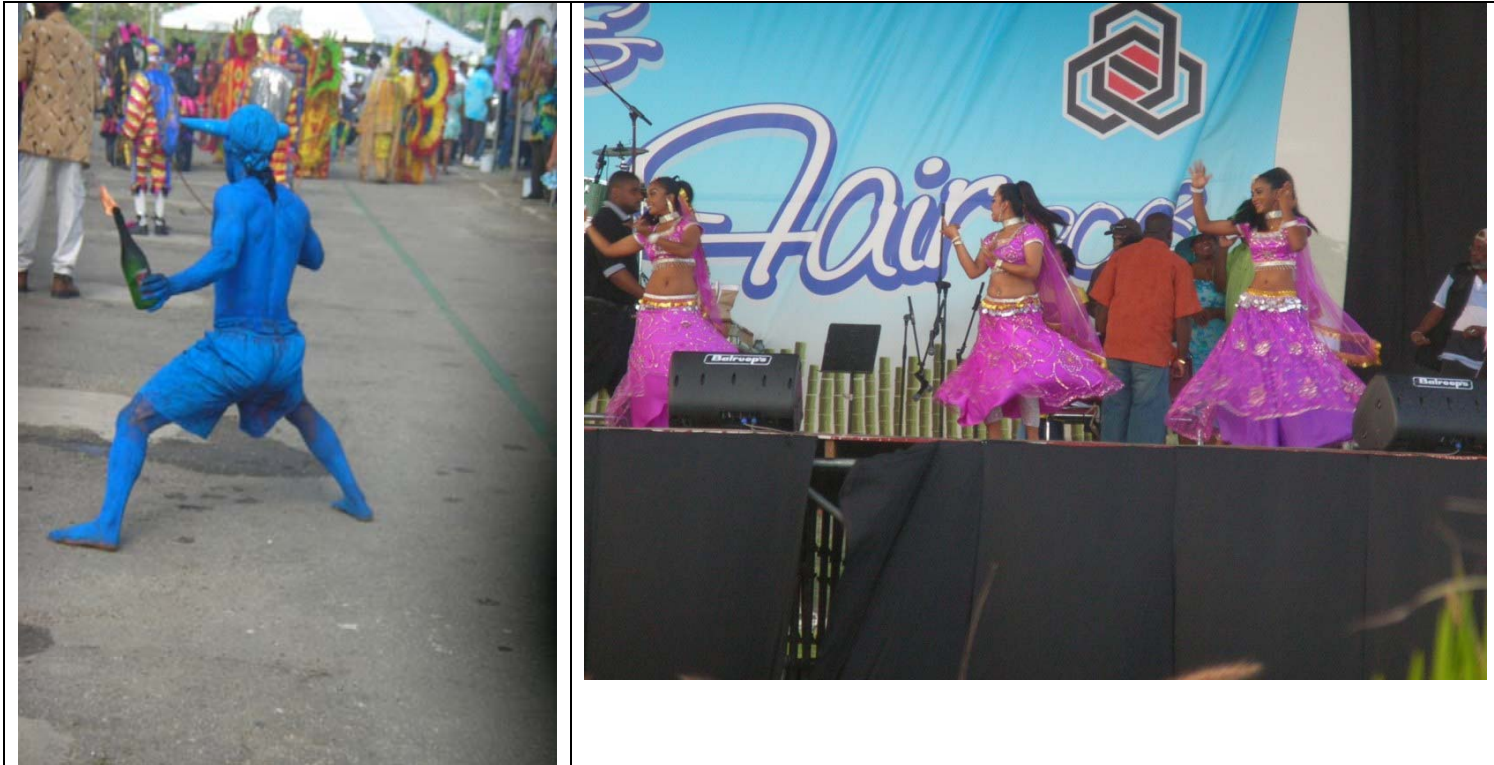


Power Boat Show
(you were expecting a picture of an engine?)

Pan concerts: a moving and grooving group really into their thing is like a single organic pulsating organism.

Carnival Costume Launch: Costume designers rent a venue and hire gorgeous young bodies to wiggle and gyrate in eye-popping ways to display tiny bikinis covered with feathers and sequins in gorgeous colors. Fooled into thinking they can look like that, attendees plunk down hard cash to order their very own carnival costume.

Small Communities Folk Festival (a mid-summer appetizer for Carnival)

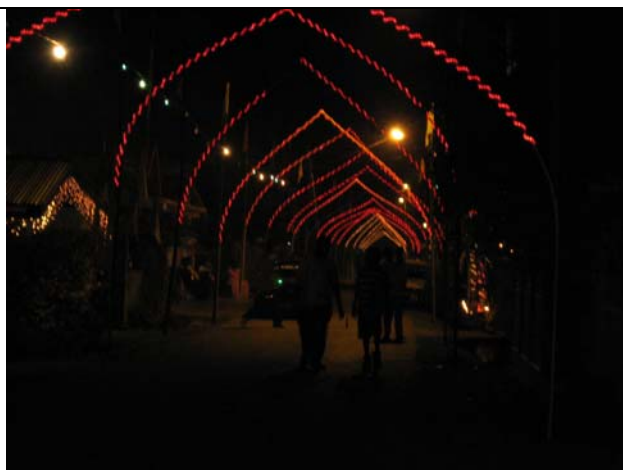


Independence Day Fireworks Display on Queen's Savannah

Orchid Show: T&T Horticultural Society

Divali: Jesse organizes several vans to take NAE yachties down to a village mid-island that is noted for its enthusiastic lighting up for Divali. (Think of over-the-top Xmas decorations, but the majority of it done with small oil lamps). We enjoyed a short show of tassa drumming and a few classical dances put on in a Hindu temple (mandir), followed by excellent traditional food prepared by Jesse's extended family. Then we joined the cheerful good-natured throngs of visitors from all over the island, strolling around the dark streets, admiring the lights and exchanging greetings with home-owners sitting in front of their houses.

Blessing of the Fleet: after Mass we joined part of the congregation of St. Peter's Church, Carenage, on the deck of a big tug that steamed out into Carenage Bay so the pastor could douse holy water on the bows of the wonderful local fishing pirogues driven with enviable skill and elan by whiskey-swilling fishermen.



Divali stroll (for another Divali picture see my blog Dear All__Nov08)



Restaurants and Night Clubs: Port of Spain showcased a variety of fairly upscale night life venues. There was a lot of jazz and music on tap. Unfortunately I cannot report on these firsthand: Generally shows didn't begin until after 10 pm and big events didn't begin until later; alas, as a friend has observed, "9 pm is cruisers' midnight." Furthermore, a dedicated taxi is advisable when going into Port of Spain at night and that was well beyond our budget.

Miscellaneous adventures

- Shopping in downtown Port of Spain: Trinidad's version of the Souk. I shopped alone and always felt perfectly safe, although one cruiser did have her purse grabbed right after she used an ATM near Woodford Square. After 2 pm on Fridays, the main shopping area in POS turns into a giant street party. Fun.
- Open House on July 4th graciously hosted at the residence of US Marines stationed at the US Embassy. Drinks, grilled burgers, and a pool full of cheerful children. The house itself: let's just say this is not hard duty.
- Saturday AM Fresh Market: Jesse collected us at 6:30 am. Must be seen once to be believed. I went biweekly for fresh fresh produce and my bootleg DVD (first run movies—now discontinued, alas). Regular trips there made me aware of the very high inflation all summer long – a first-hand appreciation of a serious problem.
- Zoo: small scale, with mostly regional fauna on display in generally acceptable habitats. Spectacular snakes.
- Military Museum: Unprepossessing exterior but quite a good display and explanation of Trinidad history, maintained with herculean effort by a Trinidadan couple.
- Island explorations by local maxiTaxi: Start early and be home by dark. Provides an inexpensive way to see the south and central parts of the island. Jesse provides similar explorations, with more explanations.

Participated in International Coastal Cleanup Day: got acquainted with several Trini families whose boy- or girl-scout youngsters were doing a good deed, as well as bunches of government workers earning brownie points with supervisors. Felt good to give back but picking up litter in Trinidad is Sisyphusian at best.

To be continued in 2010 or 2011 after we go back for Carnival. !!

All copy rights to text and images reserved.
May 9, 2009
Constance Elson