



UPSCALE

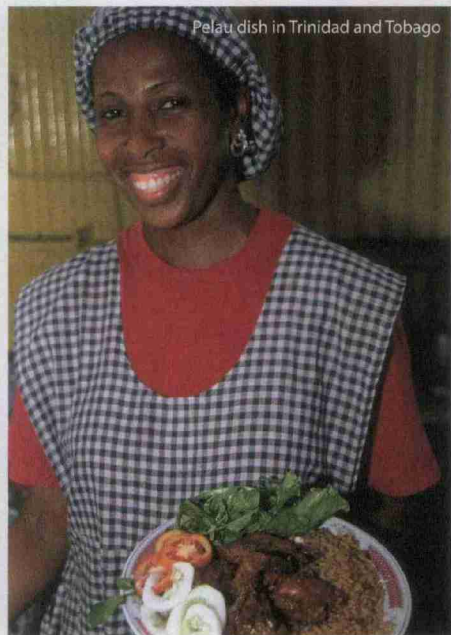
EXCURSIONS



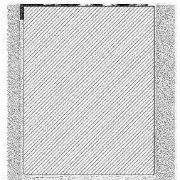
**Stir It Up** by Kym Allison Backer

HEAD TO THE CARIBBEAN FOR FUN IN THE SUN.

There's no better way to beat the winter blues than a quick trip to a nearby island getaway. So whether you're ready to get adventurous on a solo excursion, get romantic with your significant other or put in serious hang time with your foodie bffs, here are three picks guaranteed to deliver a spicy good time.



SOCA QUEEN: KYM BACKER; PELAU: TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TOURISM AUTHORITY







Trinidad and Tobago Emancipation Day

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Flight time (East Coast): 4 ½ hrs

It's a steamy morning in downtown Port of Spain, but the crowd, impeccably clad in intricate outfits based on African dress, isn't complaining. Today is Emancipation Day, and with banners held high, celebrants young and old are stepping high with their pride in their heritage on display. Me? I've long since retired to the shade with a fruit-flavored, condensed-milk-soaked sno cone in hand. I accepted days ago that I would be spending a great deal of time sampling the delicacies of the twin islands' African- and Indian-based culinary scene, and I'm not letting a minute go to waste. Days later, I've run the gamut, feasting on everything from shark and bake (slight pepper!) on Trinidad's Maracas Beach to candlelit Creole dishes from lovely Kariwak Village in Tobago.



Bake and shark near Maracas Beach



Trinidad and Tobago roti

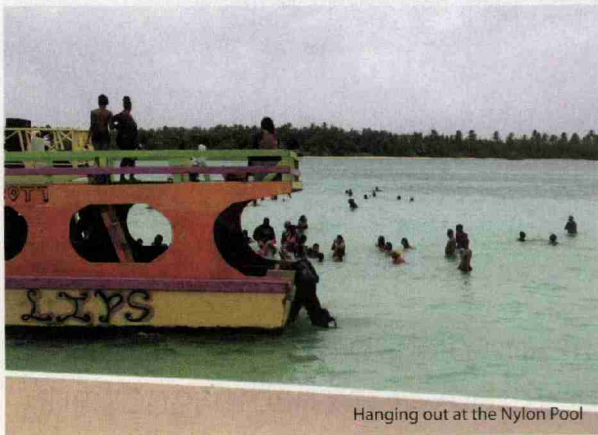
**GO:** The legendary T&T carnival is more like a joyous, music-filled season than an event, but to play mas with one of the popular bands or just line the streets to drink in the colorful floats and dancing masses, head down the week of Ash Wednesday (the beginning of Lent). Emancipation Day, held annually on August 1, is another major event that commemorates the 1834 end of slavery.

**WITH:** Calling all foodies! Head down with your nearest and dearest and prepare to indulge in local treats ranging from such Creole dishes as pelau and callaloo to the popular East Indian-based curry and roti to pholourie, small bites made with split peas and flour and usually served with a spicy mango or tamarind chutney.

**STAY:** In Trinidad, downtown's Hyatt Regency (Trinidad.hyatt.com) boasts an extensive menu that integrates local and international tastes, all served with a glorious backdrop of colorful sea. For a central location near Queens Park Savannah, Kapok (kapokhotel.com) offers reasonable rates and a buzzing bar with top-shelf liquor. For budget rates, try the Holiday Inn Express, located just minutes from the airport with a complimentary guest shuttle. In Tobago, Bacolet Beach Club offers large, well-appointed rooms just steps away from the sandy beach.

**PLAY:** Trinidad's Maracas Beach is a must—located close to the city and always a wonderful people-watching spot, Maracas poses a daily dilemma: which of the several bake and shark huts should you patronize today? Richard's? Anna's? And with a cool, fresh water coconut to wash it down? It's a crucial part of the visit, and you can cross the road to veg out on the sandy shore before taking a dip. For just \$50 TT, you can take a two-and-a-half-hour ferry over to beautiful Tobago.

**DON'T MISS:** Lidj Yasu Omowole Emancipation Village, Trinidad. Get ready for a cultural immersion in this mystical village that invites guests to celebrate the sights, sounds and tastes of African heritage. In Tobago, hop a tour boat to No Man's Land, much less ominous than it sounds. Here, the breathtaking blues and wading depths of the Nylon Pool are best enjoyed to the beat of calypso and reggae coming from the boats.



Hanging out at the Nylon Pool

EMANCIPATION DAY, ROTI: TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TOURISM AUTHORITY; NYLON POOL, MARACAS BEACH: KIM BACKER