Dawgen GLOBAL

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CARIBBEAN SERVICE DESK · SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN

Doing Business in Trinidad and Tobago

A practical guide to establishing, operating and growing a business in Trinidad and Tobago

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FOREWORD

Trinidad and Tobago is the Caribbean's leading energy economy and one of its most industrialised, with a business culture shaped by decades of international investment.

Investors are drawn to Trinidad and Tobago for good reason: an English-speaking, common-law jurisdiction with a deep energy base, a skilled technical workforce and, in Tobago, a distinct tourism economy. Opportunity sits alongside complexity. Registration, tax, foreign exchange and employment rules all need careful handling from the first day.

This guide sets out what you need to know in plain language: how to choose a structure, how set-up works, what taxes apply, how to employ people, and which incentives may be available. It is written for investors, entrepreneurs and groups considering Trinidad and Tobago.

We serve Trinidad and Tobago through Dawgen Global's Caribbean Service Desk, managed from Kingston, ready to help you build a well-run, compliant business.

Dr. Dawkins Brown, Ph.D., MCMI, ACFE

Executive Chairman, Dawgen Global

How to use this guide

This guide gives a practical overview of establishing and running a business in Trinidad and Tobago. It is general information, current to October 2026, and is not a substitute for advice on your circumstances. Rates and rules change; speak to us before you act.

OVERVIEW

01 Trinidad and Tobago at a glance

A twin-island republic at the southern end of the Caribbean chain, with an economy built on energy, manufacturing, financial services and, in Tobago, tourism.

CAPITAL
Port of Spain
Scarborough is the main town in Tobago

POPULATION
About 1.4 million
The large majority live in Trinidad

LANGUAGE
English
Official language of business and law

CURRENCY
TT dollar (TTD)
Managed at about TT$6.78 to US$1

LEGAL SYSTEM
English common law
Final appeal to the Privy Council, London

TIME ZONE
UTC−4
Atlantic Standard Time all year; no daylight saving

CORPORATION TAX
30%
35% for commercial banks and petrochemical companies

VALUE ADDED TAX
12.5%
Registration above TT$600,000 of supplies a year

TRADE AGREEMENTS
CARICOM, EU, UK, US
CSME; EU and UK EPAs; Caribbean Basin Initiative

Leading sectors

Oil and natural gas · Petrochemicals and LNG · Energy services · Food and beverage manufacturing · Financial services · Distribution · Tourism · Maritime and logistics · Creative industries

Gateways

Piarco International (Trinidad) and ANR Robinson International (Tobago) airports, with direct flights to North America, the UK and the region. Port of Spain and Point Lisas are the main ports; a ferry and air bridge link the islands.

Public holidays

Fourteen public holidays a year, including Emancipation Day (1 August) and Independence Day (31 August). Work on a public holiday is paid at double time. Many businesses also close for Carnival.

INVESTMENT CLIMATE

02 Why Trinidad and Tobago

An established industrial base, a skilled workforce and a familiar legal system make Trinidad and Tobago a natural base for regional business.

Strategic location

Trinidad lies just off the coast of Venezuela, at the southern edge of the hurricane belt. Businesses serve CARICOM, Latin America and Atlantic shipping routes, a short flight from Miami.

Skilled, English-speaking workforce

Decades of energy and industrial investment have built deep engineering, technical, financial and project skills. The University of the West Indies (St Augustine), the University of Trinidad and Tobago and training programmes supply new talent.

Familiar legal framework

Company, contract and property law follow English common law, and courts recognise commercial contracts and security interests in the way international investors expect. Foreign purchases of land and shares follow specific rules.

An economy in transition

Energy remains the main source of exports and government revenue, and Trinidad is one of the world's leading exporters of ammonia and methanol. Government is pursuing diversification and tax reform, and the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund provides a buffer against energy price swings. Access to foreign exchange is the most common practical concern for business.

The Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange, including its SME Market, gives growing businesses access to local equity capital.

Where the opportunities are

Sector	Examples of opportunity
Energy	Energy services, gas-based manufacturing, renewables and energy efficiency
Manufacturing	Food, beverages, packaging and building materials for CARICOM markets
Logistics	Ports, ship repair, warehousing and activity in special economic zones
Tourism	Hotels and eco-tourism in Tobago; business and event tourism in Trinidad
Services	Financial and digital services, outsourcing and agro-processing

Global TT

Global Trinidad and Tobago (Global TT), launched in April 2025, combines the former investment, export and creative industries promotion agencies and is the first point of contact for investors.

LEGAL VEHICLES

03 Choosing a business structure

Most investors use a private company under the Companies Act. Overseas companies may instead register as an external company. The right choice depends on liability, tax, financing and exit plans.

Vehicle	Key features	Typical use	Main obligations
Private company limited by shares	Separate legal entity; liability limited to shares; at least one director, a secretary and a local registered office	Most operating businesses and foreign subsidiaries	Annual return to the Companies Registry; corporation tax returns; beneficial ownership return
Public company	Can offer shares to the public; may list on the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange; stricter governance and disclosure	Larger businesses raising capital	Audited financial statements; securities law and listing rules
External company (branch)	Overseas company registered to do business locally; not a separate legal entity	Projects and market entry by foreign companies	Registration within 14 days of opening a place of business; tax on local profits; annual returns
Partnership	Firm registered under business names law; partners may be personally liable	Professional practices and family businesses	Registration; partners taxed on their share of profits
Sole trader	Individual trading in their own name or a registered business name; unlimited liability	Small owner-managed businesses	Business name registration; personal income tax
Non-profit company	No share capital; incorporated for charitable or social purposes	Charities, associations and non-profits	Annual return; non-profit organisation registration where relevant

Foreign ownership

Foreign investors may own 100% of a private company after notifying the Minister of Finance under the Foreign Investment Act, but need a licence for more than 30% of a public company. Banking, insurance, securities, gaming and telecoms also need a regulator's licence.

Beneficial ownership

Companies must keep a register of their beneficial owners, the individuals who ultimately own or control them, and file a beneficial ownership return with the Companies Registry. Failure to comply carries heavy fines.

GETTING STARTED

04 Setting up: step by step

Company registration in Trinidad and Tobago is online. A straightforward company can be incorporated in a few working days once documents are ready; bank accounts and licences usually take longer.

1 **Plan the structure and name** — WEEK 1

Choose the vehicle, shareholding and directors, and reserve the name with the Companies Registry (Registrar General's Department).

2 **Incorporate online** — WEEK 1–2

File articles of incorporation, a declaration of compliance and notices of directors, secretary and registered office through the Companies Registry Online System. Each officer needs a registry account.

3 **Register for tax and national insurance** — WEEK 2–4

Obtain a Board of Inland Revenue (BIR) file number, register as an employer with the BIR and the National Insurance Board, and register for VAT if supplies will exceed TT$600,000 a year.

4 **Open a bank account** — WEEK 2–6

Banks apply full know-your-customer checks on the company, directors and owners. Raise foreign currency needs early.

5 **Meet foreign investment rules** — BEFORE ACQUIRING

Notify the Minister of Finance under the Foreign Investment Act, or obtain a licence, where foreign investors acquire shares or land above the set limits.

6 **Obtain licences and permits** — VARIES

Apply for sector licences, planning and building approvals, environmental clearance from the Environmental Management Authority where required, approvals in Tobago, and work permits.

7 **Set up accounting and compliance** — BEFORE TRADING

Put in place bookkeeping, payroll, IFRS reporting, a filing calendar and, where your sector requires it, registration with the Financial Intelligence Unit.

Documents you will usually need

Certified passport and proof of address for each director, shareholder and beneficial owner; registered office details; and, for an external company, certified constitutional documents, details of local officers and a certificate of good standing from its home registry.

TAXATION

05 Tax at a glance

Trinidad and Tobago taxes resident companies on worldwide income and non-residents on local-source income. The headline rates are below, administered by the Board of Inland Revenue.

Business taxes	
Corporation tax	30%; 35% for commercial banks and petrochemical companies; upstream petroleum taxed under a separate regime
Business levy	0.6% of gross sales, payable where it exceeds corporation tax; not due in the first 36 months
Green Fund Levy	0.3% of gross sales; not deductible or creditable
VAT	12.5% standard rate; zero rate for exports and some basic items; registration above TT$600,000 in 12 months
Special economic zones	15% corporation tax for qualifying zone enterprises
Asset levy	0.25% of assets of commercial banks and insurers
Stamp duty	Charged on property transfers by value band, up to 7% for commercial property

Individuals	
Personal allowance	TT$90,000 a year
Income tax rates	25% on chargeable income up to TT$1 million; 30% above

Withholding tax (non-residents)	Rate*
Distributions	8% (3% to parent)
Interest	15%
Royalties and management charges	15%

*Domestic rates. Trinidad and Tobago has tax treaties with Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, the US, Venezuela and CARICOM members, which may reduce these rates.

Recent changes

The 2025/26 budget raised NIS contributions, introduced the asset levy and a landlord business surcharge, and exempted approved pension income. The 2026/27 budget, presented on 12 October 2026, proposes from 1 January 2027 a cap on loss relief at 75% of chargeable profits and withholding tax on distributions of 10% (5% to parents), and from 1 March 2027 VAT on digital services from non-residents.

PEOPLE

06 Employing people

Employment law is protective, and disputes can reach the Industrial Court. Employers must register with the BIR and NIS, pay contributions monthly and observe minimum standards.

Minimum standards

- **Minimum wage:** TT$20.50 an hour, in force since 1 January 2024
- **Hours:** 8-hour day and 40-hour week; overtime at time and a half, and double time on off-days and public holidays
- **Vacation and sick leave:** set by contract and collective agreements; put them in writing
- **Maternity:** 14 weeks' leave after 12 months' service; one month on full pay and two on half pay
- **Retrenchment:** 45 days' notice to the Minister, workers and union when five or more workers are made redundant
- **Severance:** after one year, 2 weeks' basic pay per year of service, rising to 3 weeks from the fifth year

Statutory payroll contributions

Contribution	Employee	Employer
Income tax (PAYE)	25% / 30%	—
NIS (16.2% in total)	One third	Two thirds
Health surcharge	TT$8.25 a week	—

NIS is paid by earnings class up to TT$13,600 a month and is due to rise to 19.2% in January 2027. Health surcharge is TT$4.80 a week on monthly pay of TT$470 or less. All are paid by the 15th of the following month.

Bringing in foreign staff

Work permits

Foreign nationals need a work permit, applied for by the employer online through TTBizLink. Employers usually show that the post was advertised locally.

CARICOM skilled nationals

Qualified nationals of participating CARICOM states in approved categories, such as graduates, nurses, teachers and artisans, may work under a CARICOM Skills Certificate.

Short visits

A work permit is not needed for visits of 30 days or less in a 12-month period. Other exemptions apply under the immigration rules.

HR essentials from day one

Give every employee written terms of employment, keep accurate time, pay and leave records, register each employee with the BIR and NIS, and adopt a staff handbook covering conduct, grievances, data protection and health and safety. Most disputes we see start with missing paperwork, not bad intentions.

MONEY AND ASSETS

07 Banking, currency and property

Banking and finance

Trinidad and Tobago has a well-developed financial sector of banks, insurers, credit unions and securities firms, regulated by the Central Bank and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

- **No exchange controls:** profits and capital may be repatriated, but banks allocate foreign currency, which can be scarce
- **Managed currency:** the TT dollar has traded at about TT$6.7 to TT$6.8 to US$1 for years
- **Plan ahead:** agree supplier terms and banking lines early
- **US dollar accounts** are widely available
- **Compliance:** expect thorough anti-money laundering checks

Financial reporting

Companies prepare financial statements under International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), or IFRS for SMEs where eligible.

Land and property

Foreign investors may hold one acre for residential use and five acres for business without a licence; larger holdings, and land in Tobago, need a licence under the Foreign Investment Act. Reforms from 2027 are proposed.

Typical costs on a property purchase	
Stamp duty	By value band; 2% to 7% for commercial property, with relief for first-time home buyers
Registration	Fees to record the deed or title
Legal fees	Agreed with the attorneys for each party
Property tax	Residential collection suspended; check the position for commercial property

Before you build

Development needs planning permission from the Town and Country Planning Division and building approval from the regional corporation (or the relevant Tobago authority). Many projects also need a Certificate of Environmental Clearance from the Environmental Management Authority.

GROWTH LEVERS

08 Incentives, trade and customs

Trinidad and Tobago combines a new special economic zone regime with targeted tax allowances and preferential access to regional and international markets.

Key incentive regimes

Regime	What it offers
Special Economic Zones	15% corporation tax for qualifying enterprises, plus customs duty and VAT relief, administered by the TT Special Economic Zones Authority
Tourism Development Act	Tax holidays of up to seven years and other relief for approved tourism projects in either island
Capital and other allowances	90% initial allowance on manufacturing plant; enhanced deductions for training and technology, within caps
TTSE SME Market	Corporation tax at 0% for five years after listing and half the rate for the next five
Exporters	Manufacturers' export sales are exempt from the business levy

Eligibility and conditions apply to each regime. We can assess which incentives fit your project and prepare the applications.

Market access

- **CARICOM Single Market and Economy:** duty-free trade in qualifying goods across member states, with a Common External Tariff on imports
- **CARIFORUM–EU and CARIFORUM–UK Economic Partnership Agreements:** preferential access to Europe
- **Caribbean Basin Initiative:** duty-free access to the United States for many products
- **CARICOM trade agreements** with Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela

Customs

The Customs and Excise Division handles imports and exports electronically, with permits processed through TTBizLink. Importers need a BIR file number and registration with Customs. Duty is charged at tariff rates, with VAT on imports at 12.5%.

COMPLIANCE

09 Regulators and compliance calendar

Who regulates what

Body	Role
Registrar General's Department	Company and business registration, annual returns, beneficial ownership
Board of Inland Revenue	Corporation tax, levies, VAT, PAYE, withholding tax
Customs and Excise Division	Imports, exports and duties
Central Bank	Banks, insurance, pensions and foreign exchange
Securities and Exchange Commission	Securities and capital markets
Financial Intelligence Unit	Anti-money laundering supervision and reporting
National Insurance Board	NIS registration and contributions
Ministry of Labour	Labour standards and retrenchment notices
EMA and Town and Country Planning	Environmental clearance and planning approvals
Tobago House of Assembly	Local administration and many approvals in Tobago

Key filing dates

When	What
15th of each month	PAYE, health surcharge and NIS contributions for the previous month
Within 30 days of payment	Withholding tax on payments to non-residents
25th day after each two-month period	VAT return and payment
31 March, 30 June, 30 September, 31 December	Quarterly instalments of corporation tax, business levy and Green Fund Levy
30 April	Corporation tax return and final payment for the previous year
Each year	Annual return to the Companies Registry

Dates shown are for a company with a December year-end. Late filing and payment attract penalties and interest, which build quickly.

Anti-money laundering

Financial institutions and listed businesses, including real estate agents, attorneys, accountants and motor vehicle dealers in certain activities, must meet obligations under the Proceeds of Crime Act and report to the Financial Intelligence Unit.

ACTION PLAN

10 Your first 90 days: checklist

Use this checklist to track the essential steps from decision to first trading day.

Days 1–30: establish

- [ ] Agree business plan, structure and ownership
- [ ] Search and reserve the company name
- [ ] Gather KYC documents for officers and owners
- [ ] Open registry accounts for officers
- [ ] Incorporate online with the Companies Registry
- [ ] Prepare the beneficial ownership register
- [ ] Make any Foreign Investment Act notice
- [ ] Apply to open business bank accounts

Days 31–60: register and license

- [ ] Obtain a BIR number; register with NIS
- [ ] Register for VAT if above TT$600,000
- [ ] Apply for sector licences
- [ ] Apply for work permits for foreign staff
- [ ] Assess SEZ or other incentives
- [ ] Lease premises and confirm planning approvals
- [ ] Arrange insurance and foreign currency lines

Days 61–90: operate

- [ ] Set up the accounting system and chart of accounts
- [ ] Set up payroll and statutory deductions
- [ ] Issue written employment contracts
- [ ] Build the tax and filing calendar
- [ ] Put AML and data protection policies in place
- [ ] Agree year-end and audit arrangements

Ongoing

- [ ] Monthly payroll and bimonthly VAT filings
- [ ] Quarterly tax and levy instalments
- [ ] Annual tax return and financial statements
- [ ] Annual return to the Companies Registry
- [ ] Renew licences and permits on time

YOUR PARTNER

11 How Dawgen Global helps

From first conversation to first audit, one Dawgen Global team supports you through our Caribbean Service Desk, managed from Kingston.

Market entry and structuring

Choice of vehicle, group and tax structuring, feasibility studies and business plans.

Incorporation and corporate secretarial

Company formation, statutory registers, annual returns and beneficial ownership filings.

Tax advisory and compliance

Registrations, planning, VAT, payroll taxes, returns and tax audits, through our Caribbean Tax Service Desk.

Accounting and payroll outsourcing

Bookkeeping, management accounts, payroll and a Virtual CFO.

Audit and assurance

Statutory audits, reviews and special-purpose reporting for lenders and parent companies.

HR, immigration and legal support

Employment contracts, HR policies, work permits and legal process support, with our panel of attorneys.

Risk and compliance

AML programmes, data protection compliance, internal audit and governance.

Technology and cyber

Systems selection, digital transformation, cybersecurity and AI governance.

Incentive applications

SEZ and other incentive assessments, applications and compliance.

Start with a conversation

Tell us your plans for Trinidad and Tobago, and we will set out the steps, timeline and costs. Some regulated services are performed by affiliated firms; we will advise you of the arrangements when you make a request. Fees are tailored to each client's circumstances and set out in an engagement letter. Email **info@dawgen.global** or call (876) 926-5210.

Talk to the Trinidad and Tobago Caribbean Service Desk

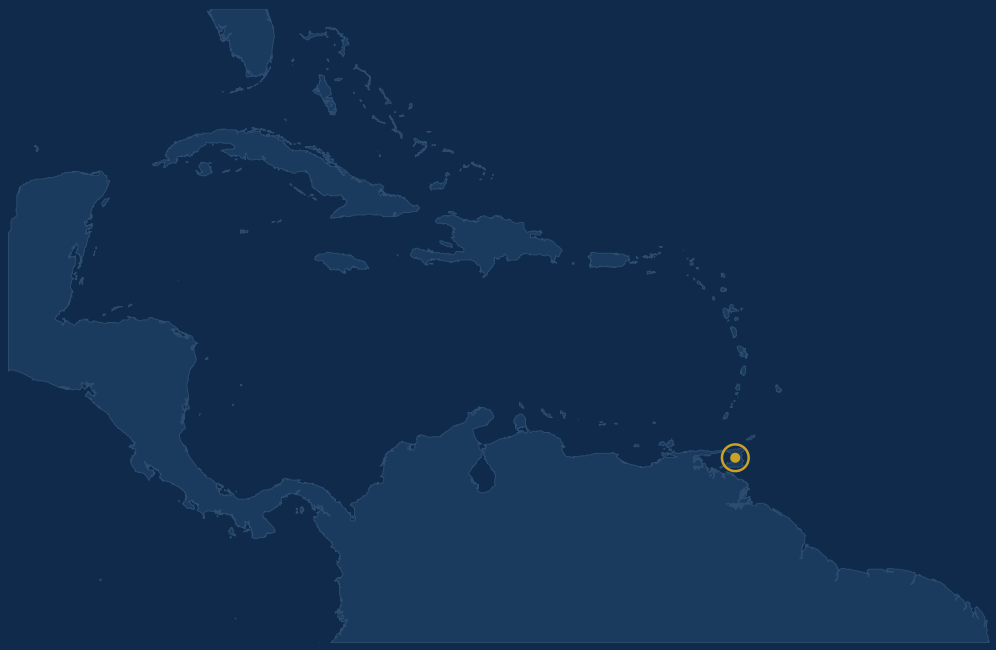
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Key official sources

- Board of Inland Revenue, Inland Revenue Division (ird.gov.tt)
- Ministry of Finance (finance.gov.tt)
- Registrar General's Department (rgd.legalaffairs.gov.tt)
- Ministry of Trade and Industry (tradeind.gov.tt)
- TTBizLink single electronic window (ttbizlink.gov.tt)
- National Insurance Board (nibtt.net)
- Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (central-bank.org.tt)
- Customs and Excise Division (customs.gov.tt)



This publication contains general information only, current to October 2026, and is not professional advice. Tax rates, thresholds and procedures change frequently, and 2026/27 budget measures depend on legislation; confirm the current position with Dawgen Global or the relevant authority before acting. Some regulated services are performed by affiliated firms; we will advise you of the arrangements when you make a request.
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