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## REVIEWS

### Trinidad Hilton

**Jana M. Jones, NBC 17 Travel Expert**



#### By Dwight Brown

Dwight, an executive at a major media company located in New York, is also a passionate travel writer who specializes in the Caribbean Islands and Brazil, writing about upscale hotels, resorts, dining venues, sports and cultural tours. He is a frequent contributor to NBC 17 Travel - Great Getaways.

To discover all of Trinidad's treasures, you need a good host. The host with the most on this Caribbean island is undoubtedly the **Hilton Trinidad and Conference Center**. Set on 25 acres and surrounded by lush gardens, with palm trees, hibiscus and bougainvillea, it features a dazzling view of the Gulf of Paria, the city of Port of Spain and Queens Park Savannah. This Hilton is known as a superb business hotel, although I couldn't have guessed that while I was there -- the hotel featured the local Ms. World swimsuit competition. Business hotel, yes. Party lodge, that too!

#### Big Business at The Trinidad Hilton

As my taxi drove up the driveway, into a small circle outside the entrance, the feel of the Trinidad Hilton seemed tropical. Natural wood floors led into a cavernous lobby and hotel staff passed by saying hello. The welcome was warm in this unique, upside down hotel -- I entered the lobby, and to my surprise, all accommodations are on floors below. My walk to one of the 394 rooms, down corridors, some with glass walls



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and dramatic views of the Gulf of Paria, filled me with great anticipation. All rooms have balconies with ocean, Northern Range Mountains or Queens Park Savannah panoramas and 27 of the rooms are deluxe suites. My spacious suite was the size of a large apartment, with a satellite TV, comfy beds and a bathroom that could fit two guests easily. The decor is classic and resplendent with earth colors.

Built on what was once the site of a government house, the hotel was erected in 1962 and expanded several times up until 1993, when it was also refurbished. The Hilton is Trinidad's largest hotel. It's a hub for business travelers as it is just 17 miles from the Piarco International Airport.



There are 20 flexible conference room/banquet areas that can accommodate from 15 to 1,200 people. The Hilton's Business Centre is equipped with up-to-date computer equipment, internet access, 24-hour fax, copying, mail and postage service. Those who stay in one of the two executive floors have access to the CLUBROOM. The CLUBROOM offers continental breakfast, evening cocktails and its hosts help guests with travel reservations and assume other concierge duties. Same-day laundry/valet service, secretarial services and an airline check-in desk are just some of the amenities that make the Hilton business traveler friendly.

### Daily Activities and Dining

After a good night's sleep I sampled the American buffet breakfast at the Pool Terrace Garden Restaurant: tropical fruits, fresh breads, egg dishes to order. It's also opened at lunchtime when it features an international buffet. La Boucan Restaurant serves afternoon tea from 4:00p.m. to 6:00p.m. Monday to Friday. Dinner is served nightly 7:00p.m. to 10:30p.m. and the menu features international and West Indian cuisine. When I lounged around the pool, the waitresses brought me the local Carib beer, exotic drinks and light snacks from the poolside Gazebo Bar. Evenings, guests gather at the Carnival Bar, which has a festive atmosphere and features live music Saturday nights. Late at night, up until 6:30a.m., you can buy a cocktail at the Lobby Bar. And yes, there are guests up that late on this party-time island.

If you like people watching, the pool area is a real scene. The adult swimming pool is shaped like Trinidad and a smaller pool is shaped like Tobago. Guests lounge around in bathing suits, taking in the sun. But on one particular day the eye candy quotient went up several notches. That was the day the Hilton hosted the local bathing suit competition for the Miss

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World Contest. Participants from around the island decked out in swimwear and Carnival attire paraded their beauty around the pool, to the delight of guests and locals who rooted for their favorite contestant. A teenage pop group sang. The Daiquiris and Margaritas flowed. The sun shined on the ladies. And in the end, when they all stood in a row, I could see that Trinidad's standard of beauty ranges from short to tall, tan to black skin and to people of Asian, East Indian, Amerindian and African heritage. The potpourri of loveliness makes Trinidad quite alluring.

I hit balls with the head pro on one of the two chevron tennis courts and there's flood lighting for evening play. For those who like to paddle smaller balls, there is Table Tennis. I found just enough equipment in the Fitness Center to do my basic workout and if I was so inclined, Tai-Bo, Tai-Chi and Yoga classes were offered. Golfers can arrange a game at the nearby Moka Golf Course, at the St. Andrews Golf Club, through the concierge.

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**E-Mail Jana**

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