



12 MUST-HAVE FOODS FROM TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Trinidad and Tobago is known worldwide for its distinct, unique foods that beautifully exemplify the twin isles' mash-up of cultures. Our rich history of European colonization and West African, East Indian, Chinese and Portuguese labour lend for a little bit of everything from everywhere. Our best meals come from roadside vendors, beach bars and casual Creole restaurants scattered all over the islands.

In light of Independence Day, we're celebrating our national pride by highlighting our best traditional dishes. Send this list to your friends aboard or post it online and boast because you're Trinibagonian and proud. Here are 12 foods you must add to your food bucket list.

1. Doubles

Because it's cheap, fast and readily-available on every corner at all times of the day, doubles is a fan favourite. It's a greasy, hand-held open-faced sandwich made of thin disks of fried dough called "bara" that's filled with with curried channa (chickpeas) and topped with tamarind sauce and mango chutney. Be extremely cautious when asking for pepper. Levels of heat range from slight to medium to heavy — but "slight" can still be dangerous, as vendors have heavy hands. Grab a red or apple soft drink to complete the experience.

2. Pelau

A one-pot wonder, pelau's origins came from East Indian indentured labourers who were used to preparing "pulao". Burning the meat in sugar gives it a signature smoky, sweet flavour, similar to the beginnings of a great stew influenced by African food traditions. This rice can be simmered with meat, pigeon

peas, pumpkin and of course, creamy coconut milk. It's served with coleslaw to cool off the heat from the pepper that burst in the pot.

3. Souse

"To souse" means to pickle something — and here in Trinidad, that something is pig trotters, chicken feet or cow tongue. Meat trimmings are soaked and seasoned in lime, onions, cucumbers and peppers; reminiscent of ceviche. But don't freak out when you see toes sticking out at you! ("chuckles")

4. Chow

There's so much fruit on the island, so this snack is only natural. Chow is a fruit salad of sorts in which half-ripe fruits are soaked in lime juice, hot pepper, salt, garlic and chadon beni, a cousin of cilantro. You'll find chow with mango, plums, pineapple, cucumber, pommecythere, chennet, pommerac and literally anything that's in season.

5. Shark and Bake

Made famous at Maracas Beach, this sandwich consists of a light, fluffy fried bread that's most commonly stuffed with fried shark or fish. (*Sharks are in danger of being overfished in Trinidad though, so saltfish or shrimp make great alternatives.*) You can have it however you like — topped with pineapples, shredded mango, tomatoes, lettuce, cole slaw and cucumbers, doused in dressings like ketchup, Thousand Island, garlic, chadon beni, tamarind and more! There's a long-going debate over whether it's called "shark and bake" or "bake and shark" but regardless, everyone agrees that it's darn delicious.



6. Corn Soup

This is a hearty split pea-based soup featuring corn on the cob, chunks of vegetables, ground provisions, dumplings and whatever the chef feels to throw in the pot. If you're lucky enough, you might find salted pigtail or beef somewhere in there. Considered a pick-me-up after a night of feting or dancing at a club, vendors are found on the roadside wherever there's a crowd. And during Carnival, pots bubble in every panyard to the pleasure of those who love the sweet sound of steel pan.

7. Roti

Dhalpuri is a messy, nutty, spicy roti in which dhal is boiled with curry and saffron and then seasoned with geera. It's folded in a way that wraps the curried fillings — from meats, potato, pumpkin, bodi and more — like a baby in a blanket. *Buss-up-shut*, also known as *paratha*, is *dhalpuri*'s alternative that got its name from its resemblance to a torn up shirt. But it's an amazingly tender flatbread that's designed for your hands to perfectly sop up sauce.

8. Fried Street Foods

Because we created a limited list and we love all Indian delicacies, we decided to group them into one category. Let's start with the thing that's most addictive thing: *pholourie*. Once you start eating these fried balls of seasoned dough dunked in tamarind sauce, you won't be able to stop. *Aloo pies* are very similar to samosas, except they're elongated and filled with smashed potato, onions, garlic, cumin and other spices. *Saheena* is another fan favourite in which a long roll of bhaji (Trinidad's answer to spinach) is dipped into a split peas batter and



then flash-fried.

9. Callaloo

This is a concoction of dasheen leaves (bhaji), okra, onions, coconut milk, pumpkin, pimento peppers, scotch bonnet peppers, and thyme that simmers into a soft soup. It's a Sunday lunch favourite that's enjoyed alone in a mug or over a bed of rice.

10. Macaroni Pie

Although this pie is made up of macaroni, copious amounts of cheese, eggs, evaporated milk and seasonings, it's NOT anything like America's mac-and-cheese. Served in cubes from BBQ joints and other casual Creole food outlets, when paired with stewed beef and gravy it will blow your mind.

11. Curry Crab & Dumplings

Tobago's signature dish that consists of blue crabs stewed in a fragrant curry is served over dense boiled dumplings. You won't get a knife and fork with this one, so be prepared to crack the shells and use your teeth to suck out the meat. Put aside a few hours to clean up a plate and be sure to digest before hitting the waves. (This dish can easily sink you down.)

12. Choka

This refers to the method of preparation where vegetables (juicy, ripened tomatoes, garlic and eggplant — what we call "baigan") are roasted over an open flame and mashed with aromatics like onion and garlic. Oil is then heated and poured over the vegetables, a method known as "chuckkaying". It's regularly enjoyed with sada roti, a plain flatbread. Imagine a roasted salsa or babaganoush on crack.