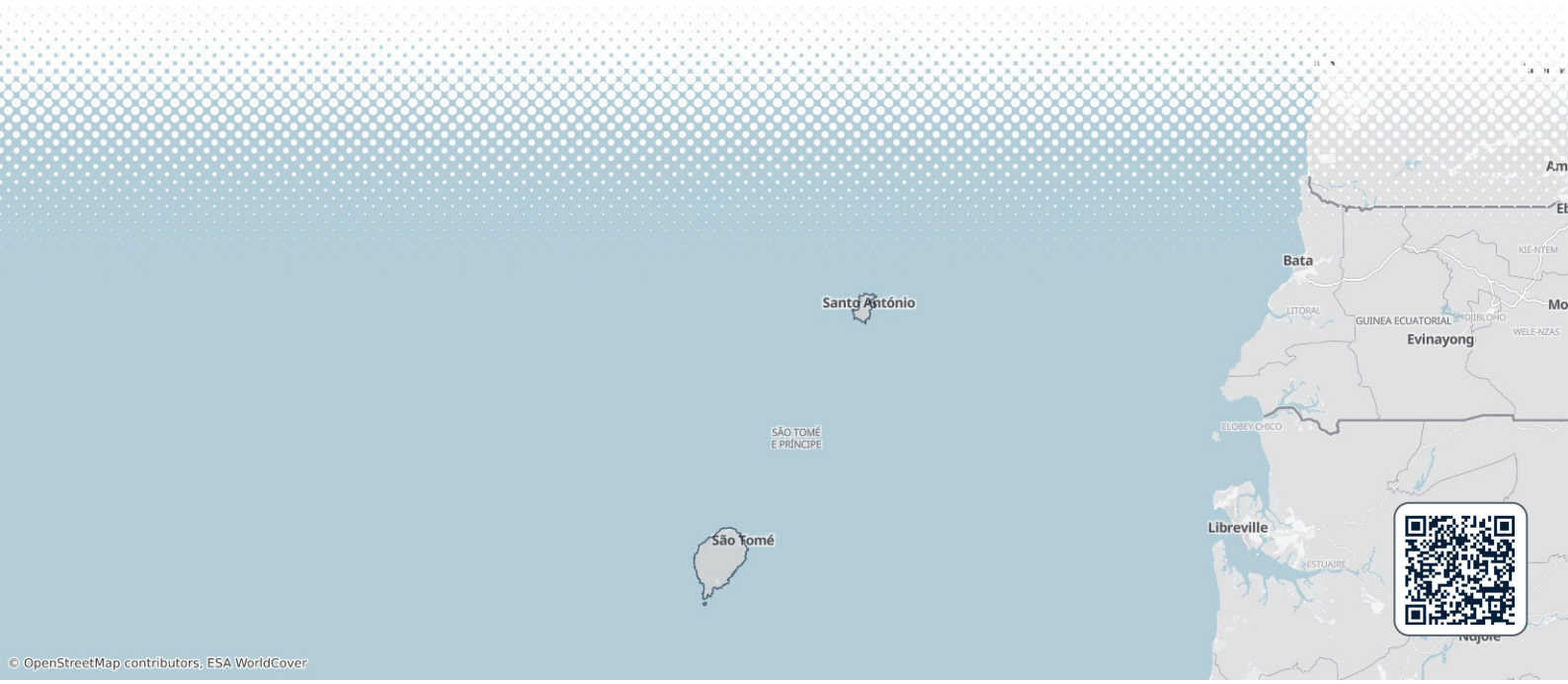


São Tomé and Príncipe

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

São Tomé and Príncipe is Africa's second-smallest country: two volcanic islands and a few islets in the Gulf of Guinea, about 250 km off the coast of Gabon. The islands were uninhabited until Portuguese sailors arrived in the 15th century. They grew sugar, then coffee and cocoa, on large plantations called *roças*, worked by enslaved and later contract labourers. The country became independent in 1975 and is today a small, peaceful democracy.

Most of the land is steep rainforest, with waterfalls, volcanic peaks and quiet beaches. Tourism is small-scale, and much of it happens in old *roças* turned into guesthouses. Life follows the local motto **leve-leve**, "take it easy": things happen slowly, and patience is part of the trip. The islands suit hikers, birdwatchers, beach lovers and travellers who want somewhere far from the crowds.

Money & payments

The dobra has a fixed exchange rate to the euro, so its value against the euro does not change.

Currency

CURRENCY	1 STN	1 STN
STN	**0.0409 EUR**	**0.0451 USD**
	1 EUR = 24.463 STN	1 USD = 22.197 STN

Cash preferred

- **Euros**: euro notes are accepted in many hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and taxis. Bring clean, undamaged notes; small notes are more useful.
- **Cash first**: **cards are rarely accepted**. A few upmarket hotels take cards, but plan to pay for almost everything in cash.
- **ATMs**: there are only a few, mostly in São Tomé city, and many accept only Visa cards. Do not rely on them. Bring enough euros for your whole stay, especially for Príncipe.
- **Entry fee**: every visitor pays a €20 fee on arrival, in euros, US dollars or dobras.
- **Costs**: the islands are not cheap, because most goods are imported. Local cafés are good value, while lodges and imported food cost more.

Typical costs

Rough prices in touristic areas, per person

Hotel (double room, per night) mid-range guesthouse or roça lodge, double room	1,200 – 3,500 STN €49 – €143
Dinner (mid-range restaurant) main course at a sit-down restaurant	300 – 700 STN €12 – €29
Inexpensive meal dish of the day at a local café	150 – 300 STN €6 – €12
Local beer local beer	30 – 75 STN €1 – €3
Coffee	20 – 60 STN €1 – €2
Water 1.5 l bottle	30 – 60 STN €1 – €2
Transit ticket shared taxi ride	15 – 50 STN €1 – €2

Tipping

Tipping is not required, but it is welcome. In restaurants, a tip is a kind gesture for good service, and in simple cafés you can leave the small change. Taxi drivers do not expect a tip. Guides on forest hikes, boat trips and turtle watches do expect one at the end of the day.

Restaurant about 10 % for good service	Optional
Taxi	Not customary
Tour guide at the end of a hike, boat trip or turtle watch	Expected
Hotel small tip for porters and housekeeping	Optional
Bar	Not customary

Electricity

The islands use European two-pin plugs, so most European chargers work without an adapter. Power cuts are common, so bring a power bank and a torch.

ELECTRICITY



Type C

ELECTRICITY



Type F

220 V · 50 Hz

Language

Portuguese is the official language, used in government, schools, signs and menus. Many people also speak a local creole: *Forro* is common on São Tomé, *Angolar* in the south of the island, and *Lung'Ie* on Príncipe.

English is not widely spoken outside the larger hotels and lodges. French is sometimes understood. A few words of Portuguese help a lot, especially in markets, shared taxis and villages.

Useful phrases

Hello	Olá / Bom dia oh-LAH / bohn DEE-ah
Thank you	Obrigado / Obrigada oh-bree-GAH-doo / oh-bree-GAH-dah
Please	Por favor poor fah-VOR
Yes	Sim seeng
No	Não nowng
Goodbye	Adeus / Tchau ah-DEH-oos / chow
Sorry	Desculpe dees-KOOL-peh
How much?	Quanto custa? KWAHN-too KOOS-tah
Where is...?	Onde fica...? OHN-deh FEE-kah
Help	Socorro! soo-KOH-roo

Staying connected

- **SIM cards**: the two mobile networks are CST and Unitel. Buy a local SIM in São Tomé city, as shops are rare elsewhere.
- **Coverage**: mobile data works in the towns and along the main roads, but it can be slow. Signal is weak or absent in the rainforest, in the far south and in much of Príncipe.

Safety & emergencies

São Tomé and Príncipe is one of the calmer countries in Africa, and crime rates are low. No part of the country is under an official travel warning. The US advises increased caution because of **very limited medical care**, not crime.

- **Theft**: burglaries, pickpocketing and occasional armed robberies do happen. Do not carry large amounts of cash, and leave valuables in your room when you go to the beach.
- **Taxis**: many taxis and motorbike taxis are in poor condition and unsafe. Avoid motorbike taxis, and use drivers recommended by your hotel.
- **Beaches and remote areas**: avoid walking alone on empty beaches and in remote areas, especially after dark.
- **Roads**: many roads are narrow, damaged and unlit. Animals walk on the roads at night, and heavy rain can cause landslides. Avoid driving outside the city after dark.
- **Hiking**: forest trails are steep, muddy and poorly marked. Hire a local guide for the Obô forest and the peaks.

Emergency numbers

POLICE	AMBULANCE	FIRE BRIGADE
113	222 22 22	112

Health

- **Medical care**: facilities are **very limited**, and the main hospital is in São Tomé city. There are no proper trauma or ambulance services. Serious cases need evacuation to Europe or another African country, so buy travel insurance that covers medical evacuation.
- **Malaria**: malaria is present on both islands. Talk to a travel doctor about tablets, and use insect repellent and a mosquito net.
- **Yellow fever**: all visitors should bring proof of yellow fever vaccination. It can be checked on arrival.
- **Vaccinations**: check other recommended vaccines about 8 weeks before you travel.
- **Water**: **tap water is not safe to drink**. Drink bottled or filtered water.
- **Medicines**: pharmacies in São Tomé city have limited stock. Bring enough of your regular medicines for the whole trip, and a basic first-aid kit.

Visas & entry

Citizens of the EU, the UK, the US, Canada, Brazil, Portugal and many other countries can visit without a visa for **a maximum of 15 days**. Travellers who hold a valid Schengen or US visa can also enter visa-free for up to 15 days. To stay longer than 15 days, you need a visa.

- **eVisa**: travellers who need a visa, or who want to stay longer, apply online through the official eVisa portal. A reply usually comes within 7 working days, and the fee is paid at the border. At the border, eVisa travellers must also show proof of funds of about €100 per day of their stay.
- **Entry fee**: all visitors pay €20 on arrival.
- **Passport**: it should be valid for at least 6 months after your arrival date.
- **Yellow fever**: carry your vaccination certificate.

> Visa and entry requirements change frequently. Verify current requirements with the official immigration authority or your country's embassy before travel.

Etiquette

- **Pace**: *leve-leve* ("take it easy") is the national attitude. Service is slow and plans change. Stay relaxed and friendly; showing impatience does not help.
- **Greetings**: greet people with *bom dia* (good morning) or *boa tarde* (good afternoon) before you ask a question. A handshake is normal.
- **Dress**: swimwear is fine on the beach, but cover up in towns, villages and churches.
- **Photos**: ask before you photograph people, especially in the *roças*, where many families live in the old plantation buildings. Some may ask for a small payment.
- **Children**: children often ask visitors for sweets or pens. Giving gifts to a school or a local project is better than handing things out in the street.
- **Bargaining**: prices in shops are fixed. Light bargaining is fine for crafts and for private tours.

Holidays & opening hours

On public holidays, government offices, banks and many shops close. Flights to Príncipe fill up around holidays and in the high season, so book early.

Shops usually open on weekdays from about 8:00 to 12:00 and again from about 14:00 or 15:00 to 18:00. On Saturday, many open only in the morning, and most close on Sunday. Markets start early and are busiest in the morning.

Public holidays

Jan 1	New Year's Day
Feb 3	Martyrs' Day
May 1	Labour Day
Jul 12	Independence Day
Sep 6	Armed Forces Day
Sep 30	Agricultural Reform Day
Dec 21	São Tomé Day
Dec 25	Christmas Day

Getting around

The two islands are about 150 km apart, and each has its own character. Plan at least a few days on each.

- **Between the islands**: small planes fly between São Tomé International Airport and Príncipe Airport most days, in well under an hour. STP Airways and Afrijet run the route. Book directly with the airline and early, as seats are few. The baggage limit is usually 15 kg. Boats between the islands are irregular and slow, and they are not a practical option for visitors.
- **By shared taxi**: yellow shared taxis and minibuses link São Tomé city with the towns along the coast. They leave when full and take cash only. Many taxis and motorbike taxis are in poor condition and not safe, so choose a well-kept vehicle or ask your hotel to book a driver.
- **By taxi or driver**: most visitors hire a car with a driver or join guided tours. It is the easiest way to reach the south of São Tomé, the *roças* and the trailheads.
- **On Príncipe**: public transport is very limited. Lodges arrange transfers and boat trips, and a driver is the usual way to get around.

Driving

Many visitors hire a car with a driver instead of driving themselves. Rental cars are available in São Tomé city.

- **Licence**: carry your national licence and an International Driving Permit.
- **Road conditions**: the main coastal roads on São Tomé are mostly paved, but they are narrow, with potholes and sharp bends. Inland roads to the *roças* and trailheads are rough, and a 4x4 helps, especially in the rainy season.
- **Hazards**: watch for people, dogs, goats and chickens on the road. Roads are unlit. Heavy rain can cause landslides.
- **Night driving**: avoid it outside São Tomé city.
- **Fuel**: stations are few and mostly in and near São Tomé city. Fill up before you head south or inland, and pay in cash.
- **Electric vehicles**: there is no public charging network.

PETROL
Gasolina

DIESEL
Gasóleo

Drive on the right

No motorway vignette needed

There are no road tolls in São Tomé and Príncipe.

Food & drink

Food on the islands mixes Portuguese and Central African cooking, with fresh fish, tropical fruit and starchy staples such as breadfruit, banana and taro. The best-known dish is *calulu*, a slow-cooked stew of smoked fish or chicken with many local herbs and palm oil. Grilled fish with fried banana or breadfruit is the everyday meal in beach cafés. Lunch is the main meal, and simple local restaurants often serve a dish of the day.

The islands were once among the world's largest cocoa producers, and their cocoa and coffee are still excellent. Try local chocolate and a cup of coffee from the highland plantations. Other drinks include *vinho de palma*, a fresh palm wine sold in villages, and the local beer, Rosema. Fresh fruit is everywhere, including jackfruit, papaya, mango and pineapple.

What to eat & drink

DINNER

Grilled fish · peixe grelhado
Fresh fish grilled over charcoal and served with fried banana, breadfruit or rice.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Fried banana · banana frita
Slices of cooking banana fried until golden, sold as a snack or side.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Chocolate
Chocolate made from the islands' own fine cocoa.

DRINKS

Palm wine · vinho de palma
Fresh, lightly fermented sap of the oil palm, sold in villages.

Coffee · café
Arabica and robusta coffee grown on the highland plantations of São Tomé.

SIGNATURE DISHES

Calulu · calulu
The national dish: smoked fish or chicken slow-cooked with many local herbs, vegetables and palm oil, served with rice or cornmeal.

Breadfruit · fruta-pão
A starchy tree fruit served boiled, roasted or fried as a side dish.

São Tomé and Príncipe – Plan Your Trip
Turn the places from this guide into a real itinerary, with smart routing, time estimates, and everything you need for a perfect trip.
3M+ downloads · **4.6 stars** · **15 years of trip planning**
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Where to explore

São Tomé island

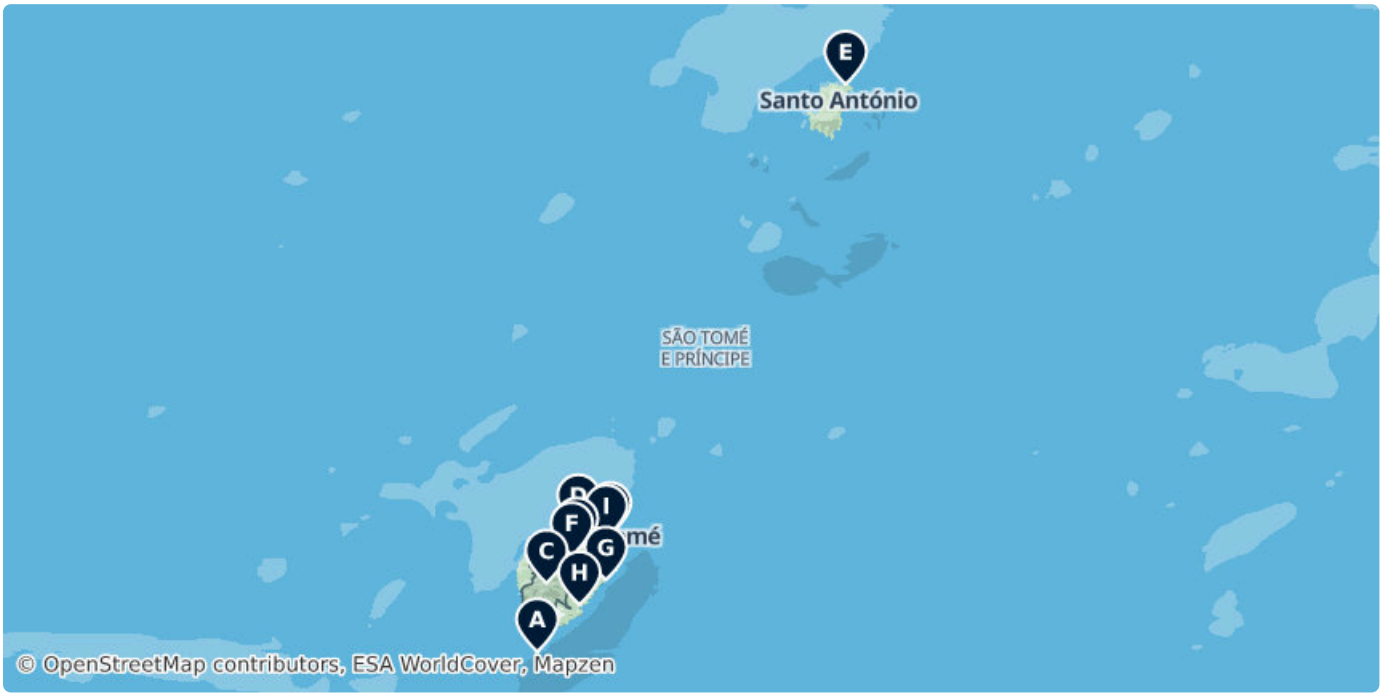
- **São Tomé city**: the capital sits on a wide bay in the north-east. See the colonial cathedral, the busy central market and São Sebastião Museum, the national museum inside a 16th-century fort. It is the base for most trips on the island.
- **The north**: Roça Agostinho Neto is one of the largest old plantations, with a grand avenue and a ruined hospital. Along the coast are the bay of Lagoa Azul and quiet beaches.
- **The highlands**: Roça Monte Café has a small coffee museum. Nearby, São Nicolau Waterfall drops through green forest.
- **The rainforest**: Parque Natural Ôbo covers much of the island's centre and south. It protects many birds and plants found nowhere else. Guided hikes lead to crater lakes and to Pico de São Tomé, the highest peak at about 2,000 m.
- **The south**: the thin rock tower of Pico Cão Grande rises straight out of the forest. On the east coast, the sea shoots up through the rocks at Boca do Inferno. At Praia Jalé, sea turtles nest on the beach, mainly from November to February, and local guides run night walks.
- **Ilhéu das Rolas**: a small island off the southern tip, reached by a short boat ride. A monument marks the equator, which crosses the island.

Príncipe

- **The island**: Príncipe is smaller, greener and quieter, and the whole island is a **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve**. It has forest-covered peaks, empty beaches such as Praia Banana, and rich birdlife.
- **Santo António**: the island's quiet capital, a small town of pastel colonial houses.
- **Roça Sundy**: an old plantation where the British astronomer *Arthur Eddington* watched the solar eclipse of 29 May 1919. His measurements helped to confirm *Albert Einstein*'s theory of general relativity.

São Tomé e Príncipe Essentials

Explore the diverse heritage of São Tomé e Príncipe, from the 16th-century São Sebastião fortress to the massive colonial cocoa plantations known as roças. This selection highlights the archipelago's volcanic landscape, featuring the dense rainforests of Obô Natural Park and the dramatic blowholes of Boca do Inferno. Key cultural sites include the historic Monte Café coffee museum and the Equator monument on Ilhéu das Rolas, where visitors can stand at the center of the world.





A Monumento a Gago Coutinho e Sacadura Cabral - Linha do Equador

Located on Ilhéu das Rolas, this monument marks the exact crossing of the Equator. It commemorates Portuguese aviators Gago Coutinho and Sacadura Cabral, who conducted vital geodesic studies on the island.

São Tomé & Príncipe (-0.00069, 6.52207)



B São Sebastião Museum

São Sebastião Museum is a museum, housed in a 16th-century fortress in the city of São Tomé, São Tomé and Príncipe.

(Unnamed Road), São Tomé, São Tomé & Príncipe (0.34597, 6.73940)



C Parque Natural Obô de São Tomé

The Obô Natural Park of São Tomé is a natural park of São Tomé and Príncipe, covering 195 km2 of the island of São Tomé.

São Tomé & Príncipe (0.20377, 6.54918)



D Roça Agostinho Neto (Roça de Cinco mil)

The island's largest colonial plantation, formerly called Roça Rio do Ouro. It is distinguished by its massive neoclassical hospital and extensive cocoa-processing infrastructure.

(Unnamed Road), Rio Do Ouro, São Tomé & Príncipe (0.36866, 6.64497)

E Praia Banana

A secluded, crescent-shaped beach on Príncipe Island characterized by clear water and overhanging palm trees. It is one of the most photographed coastal spots in the archipelago.

Roça Paciência, Belo Monte, Pagué, São Tomé and Príncipe (1.69045, 7.44175)



F São Nicolau Waterfall

A tall waterfall located in the humid highlands near Monte Café. The site is accessible by road and surrounded by dense tropical ferns and moss-covered cliffs.

Nova Moça, Monte Café, Mé-Zóchi, São Tomé and Príncipe (0.28603, 6.62531)

turismo.gov.st/en/downtown-sao-tome

G Boca do Inferno

A natural volcanic rock formation where the tide forces seawater through narrow channels, creating high-pressure sprays and a distinctive roaring sound.

(0.21331, 6.72633)



H Roça São João

A restored plantation house in São João dos Angolares. It operates as a cultural hub and restaurant specializing in traditional Santomean gastronomy and local art.

(Unnamed Road), São João dos Angolares, São Tomé & Príncipe (0.13907, 6.64767)



I Mercado Novo

The main market in São Tomé city, offering a wide array of local produce, medicinal herbs, fresh fish, and traditional basketry.

(Unnamed Road), São Tomé, São Tomé & Príncipe (0.33800, 6.72802)

J Coffe Museum

Housed in the historic Roça Monte Café, this museum explores the island's coffee production history and the processing of Arabica and Robusta beans.

Quinta da Graça, Monte Café, Mé-Zóchi, São Tomé and Príncipe (0.29975, 6.64027)

Editor's Choice

This selection highlights the diverse geography and colonial heritage of São Tomé e Príncipe. It features the dramatic 663-meter volcanic plug of Pico Cão Grande and the neoclassical architecture of Roça Agostinho Neto, once a major cocoa plantation. Natural sites include the Malanza mangroves, the volcanic blowhole at Boca do Inferno, and the endemic orchids of the Bom Sucesso Botanical Garden. The list also covers the secluded beaches and viewpoints of Príncipe Island, such as Praia Banana and Terreiro Velho.





A Pico Cão Grande

The Pico Cão Grande is a landmark needle-shaped volcanic plug peak in São Tomé and Príncipe, in the Caué District of São Tomé Island in...

São Tomé & Príncipe (0.11819, 6.56636)



B Roça Agostinho Neto (Roça de Cinco mil)

Formerly Roça Rio do Ouro, this is one of the nation's largest colonial cocoa plantations. It is noted for its grand neoclassical hospital building and the remains of the railway infrastructure once used for transporting crops.

(Unnamed Road), Rio Do Ouro, São Tomé & Príncipe (0.36866, 6.64497)



C São Nicolau Waterfall

A high-altitude waterfall located in the lush mountains near Monte Café. The falls drop down a vertical rock face and are easily accessible from the roadside in the island's interior.

Nova Moça, Monte Café, Mé-Zóchi, São Tomé and Príncipe
(0.28603, 6.62531)

turismo.gov.st/en/downtown-sao-tome

D Boca do Inferno

A natural rock formation and blowhole on the coast where seawater is forced through a narrow channel, creating high-pressure sprays. It is surrounded by dark basaltic rock and tropical vegetation.

(0.21331, 6.72633)



E Miradouro Terreiro Velho

A viewpoint on Príncipe Island offering panoramic views of the Gulf of Guinea and the Terreiro Velho plantation. The surrounding estate is world-renowned for its high-quality cocoa and chocolate production.

(Unnamed Road), São Tomé & Príncipe (1.61419, 7.42707)

F Praia Banana

A crescent-shaped beach on Príncipe Island known for its clear turquoise waters and dense palm groves. It is a signature example of the archipelago's pristine and secluded coastline.

(1.68960, 7.44290)

G Lagoa Azul

A shallow bay on the northern coast of São Tomé characterized by its bright blue water and surrounding baobab trees. It is a primary site for snorkeling and observing local birdlife.

(0.40679, 6.61094)

H Mangrove Boat Tour

A guided excursion through the Malanza mangroves, the largest wetland ecosystem on São Tomé. Tours typically use traditional wooden canoes to navigate narrow channels through the dense aquatic forest.

(0.04480, 6.53223)

I Botanical Garden

Located at Bom Sucesso, this garden serves as the gateway to Ôbo National Park. It preserves over 1,000 plant species, including a significant collection of rare endemic orchids and tropical flora.

(0.28905, 6.61216)

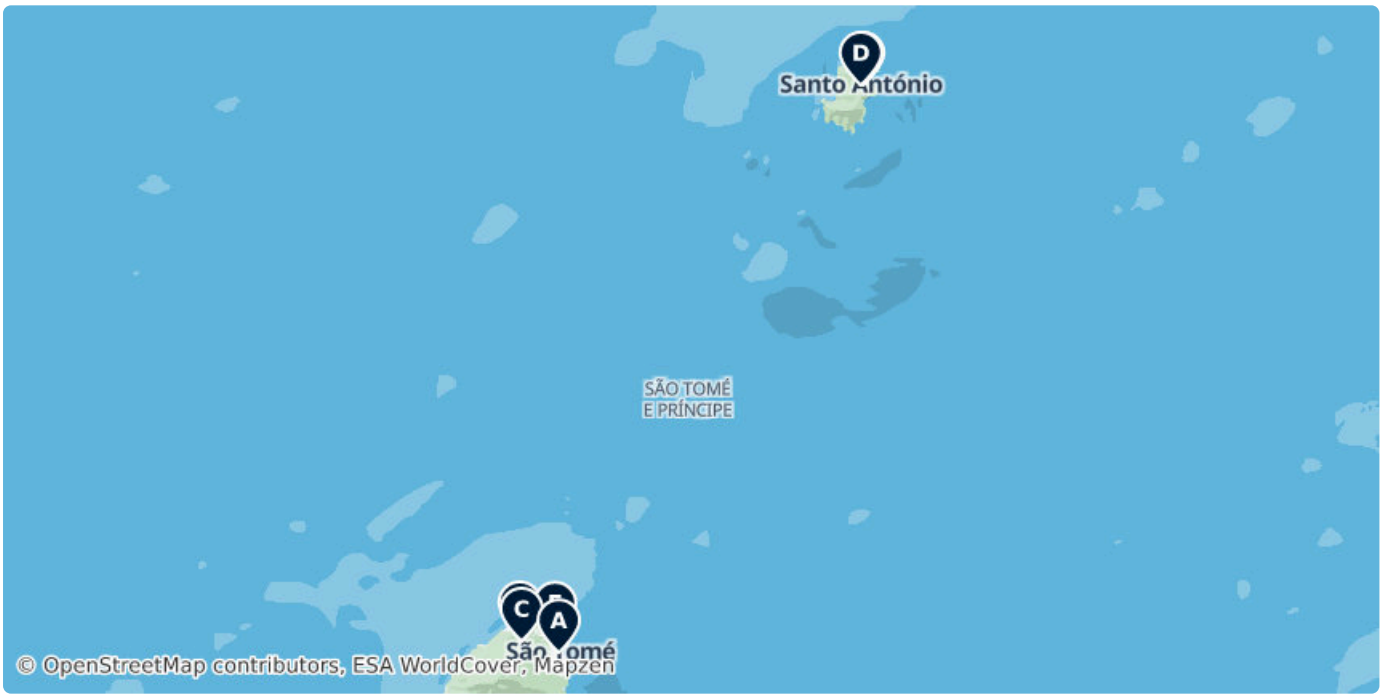
J Ilhéu de Santana

A steep, rocky volcanic islet located off the eastern coast of São Tomé. It serves as a prominent nesting site for various seabirds and is a landmark visible from the town of Santana.

(0.24138, 6.75937)

Historic Churches

Explore the religious architecture of São Tomé e Príncipe through this collection of historic cathedrals, colonial-era chapels, and modern places of worship. The list features iconic landmarks like the pink-hued Igreja da Nossa Senhora da Conceição and the chapel at Roça Agostinho Neto, the island's largest former cocoa plantation. These sites represent the evolution of faith from Portuguese colonial influence to diverse contemporary denominations across both São Tomé and Príncipe islands.



A Igreja Conceição

A distinctively bright pink colonial-era church located in the center of São Tomé city.

(Unnamed Road), São Tomé, São Tomé & Príncipe
(0.33945, 6.72713)

B Igreja de Nossa Senhora de Guadalupe

A historic Catholic church serving the town of Guadalupe in the northern part of São Tomé island.

(Unnamed Road), Guadalupe, São Tomé & Príncipe
(0.38050, 6.63810)

C Capela na Roça Agostinho Neto

A colonial chapel situated within the grounds of Roça Agostinho Neto, the largest historic plantation complex in the country.

(Unnamed Road), Rio Do Ouro, São Tomé & Príncipe (0.36584, 6.64196)

D Igreja Católica

Catholic place of worship located in Santo António, the primary settlement on Príncipe island.

Avenida Martíres da Liberdade, Santo Antóino, São Tomé & Príncipe (1.63921, 7.41954)

E Igreja Nova Apostolic

New Apostolic place of worship situated in the town of Santo António on Príncipe island.

(Unnamed Road), São Tomé & Príncipe (1.63928, 7.42464)

F Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia

Seventh-day Adventist place of worship located in the São Tomé district.

(0.37949, 6.71883)

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