

Bars shut doors amid taxes hike

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MORE bars and restaurants across Trinidad and Tobago are closing their doors following the increases in alcohol and gaming taxes announced by Finance Minister Davendranath Tancoo in the 2026 national budget.

A list circulating on social media claimed that around 30 establishments have shut down due to higher fees.

The Express contacted the businesses named on the list to verify the claims.

Scotchie's Sports Bar, located on Tumpuna Road, Arima, confirmed via social media yesterday, that it had shut down, becoming one of the latest establishments affected.

The closure was attributed to a combination of rising taxes and licence fees.

'For the past eight years we have created memorable events and lifetime friendships at this location, however with the sudden 100% increase in alcohol, 400% increase in Amusement Gaming Tax from \$6,000 to \$24,000 per screen, increased liquor licence fee from \$1,800 to \$9,000 it is difficult to stay afloat at this time. We have decided to quit while we are ahead, feel out the economic climate before we proceed to damage the integrity of the brand,' it stated. According to the post, three years after Covid-19, the business was on the verge of recovery before the new tax measures were introduced.

'This vicious taxation not only crippled the restaurant and bars but also put its future in line with extinction of an entire industry - sports bar and lounge,' Scotchie's stated.

'We are in high hopes of serving you our loyal customers in the near future at another location however for now it's not goodbye but see you soon!' it stated.

DND Restaurant and Bar in Siparia confirmed its closure on social media yesterday.

Although no specific reasons were given, the restaurant thanked its customers and staff for their support.

'With heavy hearts, we have to say goodbye as we close this chapter of DND Restaurant & Bar.

We want to extend our deepest and most sincere thanks to our amazing customers, our hard-working and dedicated staff, and everyone who has supported us along this journey. Your loyalty, love, encouragement, and belief in us meant more than words can ever express. Every visit, every smile, every shared moment helped make DND what it was.'

It also thanked its team for their commitment, passion and tireless efforts.

'Although this chapter comes to an end, the memories, friendships, and experiences will always remain with us. We sincerely thank you all for standing by us and wish each and every one of you nothing but success, happiness, and blessings for the rest of the year and beyond. Thank you for being part of the DND family.'

Also confirming its closure on social media was Livie's Bar in Rio Claro.

In a brief post, the bar stated: 'We extend our sincere gratitude to our loyal customers for being an integral part of our journey. We are truly grateful. Sorry, we're closing.'

Raj Bar and Lounge in Tunapuna also closed its doors on January 11 but stated that it will be moving to a 'bigger and better venue'.

'With heavy hearts, we announce that Raj Bar & Lounge will be closing its doors on Sunday January 11, 2026, due to unforeseen circumstances. We will be relocating to a bigger and better venue. This decision was not made lightly. Over the years, Raj Bar & Lounge has been more than just a place to enjoy drinks and music- it has been a space where memories were created, friendships were formed...'

Searches on La Vida Bar and Lounge, Maraval and Charlie's Bar, San Francique showed the establishments as 'permanently closed'.

Calls to Sips Bar on Chin Chin Road, Cunupia, confirmed that the establishment closed its doors last October, according to the number listed on its social media page.

Also on the list was Mamoo's Bar in Mc Bean but owner Joanne Jairam assured that the bar will be reopening today. In a telephone interview with the Express, she said, 'We closed in December (2025) because our landlord died and we needed to close in order to reapply for the necessary licences. Everything was in his name.'

Speaking on the social media claim that the business had closed, she said, 'We know there are increases but everybody has to live.'

Wrongfully listed as well was Chillax Rest and Bar in Fyzabad.

In a telephone interview with the Express, the operator, who did not want to be named, said they were operating and were unaware of the post until customers reached out.

'I had no idea about the list. I was surprised. But we are operating,' the operator said. **BOATT**

working with Government

President of the Bar Owners Association of T&T (BOATT) Sateesh Moonasar said the Association was working with Government in light of the new taxes.

'BOATT is constantly engaging with the Government and the Ministry of Finance for the future of the bar sector in this economic climate,' he said yesterday.

He said bar closures are something that happen on a daily basis.

'There are roughly anywhere between 2,500 to 3,000 bars in T&T and bar closures is something that happens on a regular basis, not

necessarily because of income taxes and so forth, but most of the times it is be concerning capital and so forth. So each bar owner will have to keep their own claim on why they closing their establishment. But what I can tell you is that these establishments are being closed by the persons who are running the establishment now, but are being taken over by other companies,' he said.

Moonasar also highlighted that the taxes have not yet affected bars, as the licence renewal period runs from March through April.

'The Amusement Gaming Tax pertaining to bars has not hit as yet, because the increased taxes that were proposed by the present Government come into effect when your licence is renewed in April of this year. So the gaming taxes that these bars are talking about, are giving taxes that have been implemented since 2017. So I am unsure on why they are alluding to the gaming taxes, because the law-abiding bar owners should have been paying their taxes all along. So now that there's a surge in enforcement of the law, this shows that the bar owners that are now complaining are persons who were not abiding by the law all the time,' he said.

Moonasar argued that although higher alcohol prices have impacted the sector, they have not yet caused any closures.

'If there are persons taking over the bars that have been closed down shows that there is viability into the business and somebody is willing to do the business going forward,' he said.

Moonasar believes the reasons for the closures depend on the individual and what they are dealing with in their establishment.

Minister Tancoo could not be immediately reached for comment yesterday.

On January 12, Port of Spain bar, D'Bocas, announced that it will shift its business model to only serve food, citing broader economic pressures on the bar industry for the decision.

A post by D'Bocas stated then: 'After 37 incredible years in Port of Spain, we say farewell with full hearts and deep gratitude...In recent times, broader economic challenges have significantly impacted the bar industry and our overall business model. As a result, we have made the difficult but necessary decision to pivot our operations and move forward with a food-focused, franchise-style concept, positioning ourselves in prime locations throughout Trinidad.'