



Inini

Status: Territory within French Guiana
Area: 30,301 sq. miles
Population: 5,024 (1946)
Currency: French Currency; 100 Centimes = 1 Franc



Historically, French Guiana has consisted of a string of settlements in a 30-to-35 mile band along the north coast of South America. The interior of the colony was largely tropical rain forests inhabited by a small population of isolated and often hostile Amerindians. The interior was accessible only by its riverways. The largest, the Maroni on its western border, was closed to navigation until 1861 because of a political dispute with the Dutch. Settlers found the area uninviting due to its inaccessibility, its harsh climate, endemic diseases, and predatory fauna, including a rich variety of dangerous snakes and man-eating fish.

Legends of a golden El Dorado in the interior of Guiana were popular as early as the 16th century. The lure of fabulous wealth drew a handful of adventurous prospectors into the interior despite the inhospitable environment. In 1855, gold was discovered. The concentration of mining along the Inini River, a tributary of the Maroni in central Guiana, led people to refer to the entire region as Inini.

For a country of less than 20,000 people, gold became an important source of revenue. But it was not an El Dorado. At its peak at the beginning of the 20th century gold production averaged about 8,000 pounds per year; that was about half a percent of world production. After World War I production began a steady decline.

Guiana's interior remained undeveloped. In 1930, there was not a single permanent administrative post in the interior of the country. The few isolated Indians were considered mysterious people. The miners disappeared as the gold mines dwindled away. The miners developed their own code of conduct, which they enforced. Importantly, the government believed that it was not getting its proper share of revenue from gold production. This long-term trend was exacerbated by the worldwide 1929 economic crisis.

To correct this situation, the territory of Inini was created by government decree in 1930. The territory was placed under the direct authority of a governor. He was assisted by an unelected administrative council. The governor of Inini reported directly to the governor of French Guiana. The experiment was a failure but the structure continued until after World War II. When French Guiana became a department of France in 1946, Inini was one of the two arrondissements (administrative division) in the former colony. Inini remained a political entity until 1969 when the two arrondissements were reorganized.

Stamps of French Guiana were overprinted "Territoire de L'Inini" for use in the territory starting in 1932. Special Inini stamps continued through the Vichy issues of WWII but did not resume after the war. Inini stamps tend to be more expensive used than unused.



An overprinted 1-cent Archer stamp of 1932. Nearly all 72 Inini stamps are overprints of stamps used in French Guiana, Scott 1.



A 40-cent orange-brown and olive gray Canoe stamp, Scott 13.



A 20-franc indigo and vermillion showing a Government Building in Cayenne, the capital of French Guiana. Cayenne was not considered to be part of Inini, Scott 40.



A 2-franc + 6-franc air-post semipostal (Scott CB2) of 1942. This and its companion, a 1.5 franc + 50-cent air semipostal, are the only stamps specifically printed for Inini, and do not feature overprints, Scott CB2.



Marshal Philippe Pétain appears on the 1-franc overprint. This stamp (Scott 44) and a 2.5-franc of similar design were issued in 1941 by the Vichy government in France but not sold in Inini. All stamps printed in 1941 or later were not sold in Inini.



A 50-cent + 1.5-franc semipostal in 1944 raised money for the Colonial Development Fund, Scott B9.