



TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

A CELEBRATION OF

FESTIVALS





FESTivals

INTRODUCTION

Here every creed and race find an equal place...

In Trinidad & Tobago, our responsibility to nurture the cooperation of many races and religions living in close proximity is based on respect: respect for each other as individuals and tolerance for the differences among our groups that give rise to our wonderful diversity.

In this selection, we have represented, as far as possible, all major ethnic and religious groups. The focus, naturally, is on those festivals that are celebratory, and that welcome participation from local and international communities. Not all festivals are marked by public holidays. All the religious groups observe feast and fast days throughout the year; but it was necessary to select one or two representative festivals.

For the Muslims, Eid-ul-Fitr became a public holiday to allow the devout to observe their day of prayer unencumbered by the demands of work or business. It is not, however, a day of public feast or fete. After the rise of the new moon that marks the end of Ramadan, Eid is the holy day for the breaking of the fast, it is devoted to alms-giving and meditation for Muslims. Neither the call to prayer at mosque nor the simplicity of the meals that are offered in a spirit of peace and tranquillity, are conducive to a "party atmosphere." Nevertheless, as a gesture of goodwill,

Moslem families frequently invite close friends of other religions to share their meal.

Many other festivals are observed in "niche" communities. In Siparia, for instance, the black Madonna or Soparee Mai is an icon of the Roman Catholic as well as the Hindu residents of the community. Her effigy is brought out into a procession in Siparia at the end of May.

Though the hill village of Paramin above the Maraval valley hosts one of the largest Parang fetes, their French ancestors left them the tradition of Les Rois - the feast of the Three Kings (January 6) - and French patois carols retained only in the memories of the older heads.

Because so many of the religious holidays are based on lunar calendars, you may find that Hindu Divali and Moslem Eid-ul-Fitr coincide in a given year. In the past, Eid-ul-Fitr - the breaking of the fast at the end of the holy month of Ramadan - has coincided with Carnival. And in the middle of uncontained bacchanalia, it is indeed strange to see devout veiled Muslims moving quietly to their mosques.

Corpus Christi is the oldest holiday in Trinidad, and is observed by Roman Catholics with a procession led by the Archbishop through a route in Port-of-Spain. One of the newest religious

holidays, Spiritual Baptist Liberation day, is also observed with a procession and congregation of the faithful. Liberation day marks the repeal of the legislation passed by the colonial British government banning their observances.

The old English custom of "boxing" gifts for the poor has been retained in Boxing Day, the day after Christmas.

Secular holidays have also given rise to their own activities, now becoming steadfast traditions. On Indian Arrival day, observances may include re-enactments of the arrival of the Fatel Rozack, the ship that brought the first Indian indentured workers to Trinidad. For Labour Day, trade unions stage a march to Fyzabad, the oil town where trade unionism in Trinidad was born. Emancipation day, the first day of August, commemorates the abolition of slavery; and has become a significant occasion for the celebration of our African heritage. Independence marks the day - August 31, 1962 - from which the British government allowed Trinidad & Tobago to be self-governing; and it is the day in which the country celebrates the achievements of its citizens with the conferring of national awards. The country's adoption of a Republican constitution 14 years after independence is observed on Republic Day, September 24th.

OUR FESTIVALS



TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

CARNIVAL



CARNIVAL

THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH
FEBRUARY / MARCH



The Carnival is not just one festival, but a series sandwiched in between Christmas and Ash Wednesday. And because Ash Wednesday is fixed 40 days before the moveable feast of Easter, the season may be long or short -generally six to ten weeks - in which to pack the play-offs of

the premier Pan (steelband), Calypso and Mas' competitions in the world.

Trinidad & Tobago created these unique art forms out of the confluence of cultures - European, African, Indian, Asian - assembled here in the centuries since Columbus. The songs of the slaves and their oral news network are now pithy calypsos of social commentary and fast-paced rhythmic soca, the music and poetry of the festival.

The masked balls of the European masters have exploded onto the streets, with costume and mime - look for devils, demons, midnight robbers, bats and moko jumbies - and dancing parties, thousands strong, revelling in liberatingly loud music and licence to cavort in the heart of Port of Spain's business district! It is this transformation wrought by costume and music that has been called simply Mas', and used to refer to children, adults, individually or in bands, costumed for street or stage parades.

It was also out of attempts to suppress the drum that the steelband eventually

emerged. Now simply called pan, it is the only musical instrument invented in the last century.

The season's schedule starts with the opening of the calypso tents. Calypsonians in T&T will present the songs that will move from Trinidad to all the other carnivals for the year. This is where the hits are made. This is where musicians from other islands and territories come for approval. Listen for the panyard practices late into the night as Panorama, the steelband competitions, draw near. And visit the mas camps where the costumes for the big bands are already being distributed.

Where and when:

The vast influx of visitors and returning residents is usually concentrated in the week before the Carnival. Fetes, pan, calypso and mas' events are planned in towns and villages all over the two islands, but mainly in and around Port of Spain. Most visitors stay until the weekend after Carnival, taking in Tobago, sea baths and post-Carnival shows.

PHAGWA



PHAGWA

A CELEBRATION OF GOOD OVER EVIL
DETERMINED BY THE LUNAR CALENDAR



Also known as Holi, Phagwa celebrates Prahlada, a child-prince who was persecuted by his emperor father for refusing to worship him as God. He ordered his sister Holika, to destroy the prince by fire; but he was miraculously saved while Holika perished.

Phagwa season begins with the planting of a castor oil plant symbolizing Holika. In the following five to six weeks, the community puts rubbish around the tree. During this time, villagers gather at different homes to sing chowataal or folksongs. Singers accompany themselves on jhaals - small brass cymbals - and are led by drummers. Above the loud rhythms, strong voices must rise in ever-increasing speed to chant complex tongue twisters in Bhojpuri, a dialect of North India.

The re-enactment of Prahlada's escape is held on the eve of Phagwa - full moon night. The large pyre is set fire

after a ceremony. As the fire subsides, participants throw ashes on each other. At dawn, neighbours vie to be the first to douse abeer - magenta coloured water - on each other, then take to the streets singing, dancing and holding mock battles. Every one is liable to be sprayed with large syringe-like instruments called pichakaarees.

Where and When:

Venues include Children's Phagwa at Tunapuna Hindu School. Adult chowtaal bands compete at Aranguez, Tunapuna, Carlsen Field and other venues. A competition hosted by the Kendra at Divali Nagar, provides stinging bilingual social commentaries called pichakaarees. You will also view Makhan Chor, a contest in which groups of youths form human pyramids to reach a pot of dahee - curds - at the top of a tall tower. It is advisable to walk with a towel, and cover car seats with plastic.



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BUCCOO GOAT RACE FESTIVAL

TOBAGO'S GRAND EASTER RACE MEETING
APRIL



If the run-up to the austere Roman Catholic Lenten season is Carnival in Trinidad, then it is appropriate that the celebratory end of self-denial takes place in Tobago, where Trinidadians flock on the longest weekend of the year (Good Friday, Glorious Saturday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday) for sun, sea-bathing, and the odd and enjoyable goat and crab races.

There may be no corbeaux (black vultures) on Tobago, but there are plenty of blue backed crabs. And here you're allowed to play with your food before you eat it. In some races, the crabs are encouraged to run on a straight course - have you ever seen a crab run? Otherwise, all the crab competitors are placed in the centre of a large circle drawn in the sand, and the first one to get out of the circle is declared the winner.

Owners run around, scream, cajole and entice the side-stepping crustaceans, but in the end, it's the owner that takes the

prize, and all competitors go into the pot. Curried crab and dumpling is just as delicious whether your crab has raced and won, or not.

Wacky companion event to the crab races are the goat races. These take considerably more preparation since goats are usually trained for months before on whatever beach or pasture might be nearby. Their jockeys run either beside or behind, holding on to or being dragged by their steeds. Spectators place their bets, and are allowed to scream their lungs out for Betty, Neddy, Goatee...

So England has Astor, we have Buccoo. The races take place in the sun, so bars, buffets and ice cream vendors do a thriving trade.

Where and when:

Easter sports take place at community grounds over the Easter weekend. Main venue for the Goat and Crab Races is Buccoo on Easter Tuesday.

RAPSOFEST



RAPSOFEST

THE POWER OF THE ORAL TRADITIONS
APRIL / MAY



Rapso is "the power of the word in the rhythm of the word". It is a unique style of street poetry that emerged in Trinidad & Tobago during the period of the 1970s, that came to be known as the Black Power era.

It is a natural progression in Trinidad from the traditions of the African Griot that flowed through the Chantwell to Calypso,

Pierrot Grenade and Midnight Robber. Lancelot Layne created the first Rapso recordings with his conscious lyrics, Blow Away and Get off the Radio, in the early 1970s. Cheryl Byron was the first to take Rapso to the Calypso tent, in 1976, and is recognised as the "mother of Rapso."

The conscious effort to popularise Rapso as a community festival began with the first Rapsofest in 1991. It takes place during April and May. Month long of workshops address the need to orient young people to the art form which is "world music and poetry" according to Brother Resistance, indefatigable advocate of Rapso. Workshops take place throughout Trinidad & Tobago and have the support of the National Library system, with schools and community centres as venues. These sessions culminate in the first of four performance events in May.

Breaking New Ground allows the recent initiates of Rapso to present new works to the public. Children's Story Time introduces the art in a familiar form, to children by children. Women of the Oral Tradition in

tribute to Cheryl Byron, features strong voices like Sista Ava, Samantha Pierre, Shakilah and Eintou Pearl Springer.

The big climax, Rapso Night Concert, brings artistes from all over the Caribbean: Adissa from Barbados; Ras Mo from Dominica; Ras I from St Lucia; Muta Baruka from Jamaica; Papa Loko from Haiti. In T&T, Brother Resistance and Karega Mandela with the Network Riddum Band have long carried the torch for Rapso, and are happy to have such good company as 3 Canal, Ataklan, Kindred, Blak Lyrics, Ozzie Magic, Andre Tanker, SuperBlue, Black Stalin and David Rudder.

Where and when:

The amphitheatre of the National Library in Port of Spain and Little Carib theatre are main venues. All workshops and seminars take place in April; performances in May. For more information, visit websites, www.visittt.com, www.rapsofest.com, www.brotherresistance.com or contact Brother Resistance (telephone 868-620-2966; 868-622-4161)

TOBAGO INTERNATIONAL GOSPEL FESTIVAL



TOBAGO INTERNATIONAL GOSPEL FESTIVAL

A CELEBRATION OF GOD'S GLORY THROUGH SONG
JUNE



Spirituality is alive and well, and living in Tobago. It's not just the many churches - Methodist, Moravian, Pentecostal, Spiritual Baptist, Anglican and Catholic in almost every village - but that the very heart of Tobago is holy.

Vacation and recreation take on deeper meaning under sublime skies and with the sea or forest on virtually every doorstep. Meditation and holistic retreat are natural added benefits.

No wonder then that the intrepid John Arnold of the Signal Hill Folk Choir and the Tourism Department of the Tobago House of Assembly would have thought to produce the International Tobago Gospel Fest as an annual event.

It started in 2003 with a one day concert, and went to two days in June 2004. The latter featured the internationally

acclaimed Ron Kenoly, and coincided with the visit of South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu who was the special guest and patron of the 2004 event.

While the Tobago audiences flock to the opportunity to hear and join in singing praises to raise their spirituality, Tobago Gospel Fest also caters to international gospel fans. BWIA is cooperating by offering packages that include airfare, accommodation and tickets to the shows. Take a break to refresh spirit, soul and body in June. Tobago Gospel Fest is the healing that the world needs.

Where and when:

Let the Tobago Gospel Fest centre body and soul. Contact TIDCO, or BWIA or the Tobago House of Assembly - Tourism Department for more information.

GANGA DHARAA



GANGA DHAARAA

A TRIBUTE TO THE 'MOTHER' OF CIVILISATION
LATE JUNE



Colourful flags map out the route along a winding mountain road. A pristine river becomes an altar, tall trees are the walls, and the open sky is the roof of nature's mandir. Lit deeyas in prayer boats made of coconut fibre sail intermittently along the lazily flowing mountain river. And women wearing saris of yellow buttercups flutter by.

This is Ganga Dhaaraa (Dashara), the oldest river festival in the world. It is a

unique experience of man, nature and God in communion.

There are seven ghaats or locations along the banks where over 25 activities are held. Worship at a small cave is important for pilgrims. Devotees, predominantly in yellow traditional clothes, stand in the water, or on the banks or stony hillocks bearing fruits and burning incense in brass vessels.

The blasts of shankh - conch shell - bells, and voices in praise are raised, sometimes close by, and sometimes echoing in the distance.

The festival remembers an ancient cataclysmic ecological event when a severe need for fresh water threatened to destroy human civilization. The Puraanic texts record that Bhagirathi, a descendant of Emperor Sagar's children who were burnt to ashes, suffered severe hardship to bring down Ganga from the heavens to revive them. An annual award, an ecological mantra, discourse and folk songs are part of the nature festival.

Light, non-leather shoes are best for the occasion. Bring along a change of clothes and towel.

Where and when:

The trek starts in the Blanchisseuse forest around the 18-mile post, in the pre-dawn darkness. Led by the pundit, celebrants walk up-river to the designated spot. Check your daily newspaper for the date, usually a Sunday in early June; TIDCO, or the Kendra (665-4270)

TOBAGO HERITAGE FESTIVAL



TOBAGO HERITAGE FESTIVAL

A CELEBRATION OF TOBAGO'S DANCE, STORYTELLING, MUSIC & FOOD
LATE JULY



Tobago's history has taken different twists and turns from Trinidad's. It was never seen by Columbus, but instead claimed by English adventurers for their king. They had to contend with the original inhabitants who were by all accounts fierce defenders of their island, and who had cultivated and smoked tobacco, the plant for which the island was named.

The island changed hands several times among European powers including the Dutch, Courlanders (a Baltic principality) and the French. A fertile salubrious island, Tobago was "the jewel of the Caribbean" and home to an elite planter class that depended on African slaves who acquired land after the abolition of slavery in 1834.

In 1889, Tobago was joined with Trinidad as a British Crown Colony. Since then, the two islands have remained one administrative entity, acquiring independence as one nation in 1962.

Tobago remains different from Trinidad in its thriving tourism industry, and a lifestyle rooted in village life. The Tobago Heritage Festival celebrates traditions that are

largely African, and climax in a j'ouvert (pre-dawn street "jump up") and street parade on Emancipation Day (August 1), and a Great Fete early in August.

The heritage events are hosted in different villages and feature dance performances of Bele (or belair), Jig and Reel, all based on 18th and 19th century European formal dances; the Ole time Tobago Wedding with its procession of the bride and groom, wedding guests and gifts, accompanied by the music of fiddle and tamb'rin (a circular skin drum).

New generations of Tobagonians are inducted in community ways through story-telling, folk tales, superstitions and morality plays. This is theatre in the rough, mainly for Tobagonians, but everyone is welcome.

Where and when:

The events usually begin in early to mid July, and end in the Great Fete and Emancipation Day (August 1). All events are open to the public, with entrance fees. There's food to be purchased at every event.

FESTIVALS OF PAN



FESTIVALS OF PAN

THE NATIONAL INSTRUMENT ON DISPLAY
THROUGHOUT THE YEAR



Steelbands were born in communities, and the panyards are centres for music as well as community life. Competitions at Carnival have been organised to bring audiences to hear the music in the panyards. Committees in many bands are not only staging their own panyard events at different times of the year, but co-operating to play in other yards. Some of the panyard festivals that are putting pan on the map are featured here:

The TIDCO-Pan Trinbago Pan Yard Sensations takes place in June. It showcases the best of Pan in a concert format alongside other elements of the culture such as the tassa drumming,

tamboo bamboo, rapso, talkcalypso, and some of Trinidad and Tobago's best folk choirs.

Concerts have been held at Valley Harps Steel Orchestra Pan Theater (North) and at the NLCB Fonclare Steel Orchestra (South), in addition to Exodus, Neal & Massey All Stars, TCL Skiffle Bunch, Tobago Our Boys, Tropical Angel Harps, RBTT Redemption Sound Setters, La Horquette Pan Groove and Trinidad Nostalgia; and featured Brother Resistance, extempo champion Black Sage, Karega Mandela, saxophonist Jesse Ryan, Ken "Professor" Philmore, Len Boogsie Sharpe and others.

The Pan coalition in the West - Playboyz, Invaders, Phase II and Starlift - are also responsible for a series of pan concerts that take place in their panyards.

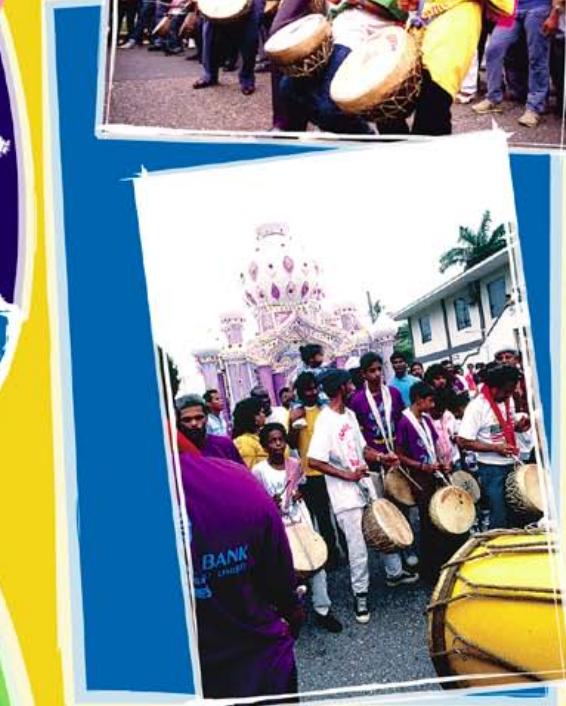
The Laventille Steelband Festival, started over five years ago, also invites pan lovers to a programme of concerts organised by the Laventille Community Committee, from the last two weeks of July through the Emancipation holiday in the first week in August.

The concert programme culminates in a street parade, on the "Eastern Parkway": from McAllister Street along the Eastern Main Road to Leon Street. There is also an educational component of the Laventille festival - a two week pan camp for nine to 17-year-olds selected from schools in Laventille. The camps cover intensive sessions in pan playing and history, music practice and theory. They are also intended to identify and generate interest in careers in Pan; and maintain Laventille's prominence as the place where the instrument was born.

In the weeks before Christmas, Excellent Stores Silver Stars on Tragarete Road hosts "Parang and Steel" - concerts of traditional Christmas music - in their panyard on Tragarete Road. The Queen's Royal College Foundation produces The Trinidad and Tobago Steelpan and Jazz Festival - Pan Royale, as a fund-raiser for the secondary school.

Where and when:
Contact TIDCO (www.visittt.com) or
Pan Trinbago (www.pantrinbago.com)
for timely information about Pan events.
When in T&T, check the daily newspapers.

HOOSAY



HOOSAY

SHIITE MUSLIM COMMEMORATION OF THE MARTYRDOM OF IMAM HUSSAIN AND IMAM HASSAN, (THE GRANDSONS OF MUHAMMAD), 640 A.D. SUBJECT TO THE ISLAMIC LUNAR CALENDAR



Hoosay commemorates the martyrdom of Hussein - the grandson of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam - which occurred on the "Day of Atonement" in the month of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

After the death of Muhammed, conflicts over succession had ensued. One grandson, Hassan, died by poison. Hussain, his brother, was attacked in Kerbala (Iraq) and killed.

The martyrdom of Hussain (Hoosay) and Hassan was observed by Shiite Muslims who brought the customs to Trinidad when they came as indentured workers from India.

The first Hoosay in Trinidad was held in 1854. When the British colonial administration put a ban on processions, a large crowd came out for Hoosay in San Fernando, in 1884. Confrontation with the police led to what is known as the "Hoosay Massacre."

The Shiites of St. James, the western suburb of Port of Spain, begin the month of Muharram with prayer and fasting as

they build tadjahs (Hussain's tomb) of wood, bamboo, and tinsel. The 7th day of Muharram is Flag Night on which the Hoosay-building families parade with flags and drums. The following night is Little Hoosay Night when tadjahs are pulled through the streets accompanied by drumming. The next night, Big Hoosay Night, the tadjahs are brought out together with two half-moons, one each for Hussain and his brother Hassan.

On the "Day of Atonement", the main procession proceeds in daytime along a route set out since St James was a plantation. The tadjahs reach Queen's Royal College at 3.30pm - the time of death - where the funeral prayer is read. Four days later, the tadjahs are dragged to the sea and destroyed.

Where and when:

Hoosay is commemorated in St. James, a suburb of Port-of-Spain that was settled by Indian indentured workers - street names include Lucknow, Mathura, Delhi, Calcutta, Cawnpore, Bengal - and Cedros, the southwest toe of Trinidad. Contact TIDCO for more detailed information.

SANTA ROSA CARIB FESTIVAL



SANTA ROSA CARIB FESTIVAL

HOMAGE TO SANTA ROSA DE LIMA
AUGUST



Santa Rosa de Lima is supposed to have appeared to a group of Carib men at a time when they were resisting conversion to Catholicism. Rosa, the priests claimed, had been born in Arima and taken by her parents to Peru where she dedicated her life to helping the poor. She was the first canonized saint of the Americas, and her manifestation in Trinidad led to the construction of a church in 1759 dedicated to Santa Rosa de Arima.

The underground spring where she was seen by the men still exists in the

residential area now known as Santa Rosa Heights. * The community of the descendants of indigenous Caribbean/Amerindian people became known as the Santa Rosa Caribs. As far as possible, they have retained traditional survival systems and practices including the cultivation of cassava, its processing methods and farming implements.

Cassava, first cultivated and processed in the Americas - over 9000 years ago it is estimated - is now grown in equatorial countries around the world, accounting for a wide range of industry and products. It is the fourth most important crop in the world.

Though they have little influence on the social or economic life of the islands, they have given us a rich legacy of place names and words. According to John Stollmeyer, Trinidad artist, Arima is their "place of beginnings," and Naparima refers to the home of an ancestral hero, Haburi the canoe and paddle maker. Cumucurapo, site of the Port of Port of Spain was built upon an Amerindian meeting place. And no Trinidadian would be foolish

enough to be in a hammock during a hurricane!

The Santa Rosa Carib Festival takes place in August - in the week leading up to Independence Day (August 31) and is intended to pay tribute to the First Peoples of the New World, and to expose their culture to the nation.

The ceremonies include the crowning of the Carib Queen, an elder matron of their community who performs the role of focusing their heritage and traditions; a church procession and performance of some of their traditional and ritual activities - smoke ceremonies and prayer; as well as the opportunity to see the preparation of, and purchase cassava bread.

Where and when:

The Santa Rosa church is a landmark in Arima which lies in the foothills of Trinidad's Northern Range. Contact TIDCO for details of the annual Santa Rosa celebrations.

(* ref: Elma Reyes was a journalist who lived in Arima and recorded the history and customs of the Santa Rosa Caribs.)



EMANCIPATION

A CELEBRATION OF FREEDOM

AUGUST 1ST



On August 1, 1838, the enslaved Africans throughout the British Empire in the Caribbean were finally freed from the bondage of chattel slavery.

In 1985, August 1, Emancipation Day, was declared a national holiday. Since 1985, Emancipation celebrations have grown into a major national festival, where tens of thousands of people participate in various activities.

The Emancipation Support Committee of Trinidad & Tobago hosts a week of activities leading up to Emancipation Day including cultural performances in music, song and dance. Over the past years, leading international artistes such as the world renowned National Senegalese Ballet, Lorraine Klassen and Jabu Khanyile from South Africa have performed in the celebrations.

Other activities include an art exhibition, lectures by prominent Pan African scholars, opportunities for networking and business development through the annual International Trade and Investment Symposium.

There is a chance to purchase African artefacts, paintings and clothing in the market place, popularly called the Trans-Atlantic Exposition which attracts traders from Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria, the Caribbean region and North America.

The Kamboule (street procession) on Emancipation Day is theatre in motion, a mass procession throughout the streets of the capital Port of Spain, featuring African drums, steelband, moko jumbies and dance groups. The day ends with the Flambeau Procession later in the night, recalling the rebellion of the African Ancestors against slavery.

Within recent times, Emancipation celebrations have attracted an increasing number of foreign visitors from across the African diaspora. Trinidad & Tobago is now dubbed the Emancipation Capital of the world and the celebrations form one of the world's foremost African festivals.

Where and when:

Contact TIDCO or the Emancipation Support Committee for specific events related to Emancipation celebrations.

OSUN RIVER FESTIVAL



OSUN RIVER FESTIVAL

THE FESTIVAL OF MOTHERHOOD
AUGUST



Osun (pronounced Oshuun) is a Yoruba goddess who is widely worshipped in Yoruba land.

Ancient tradition holds that for a long time people had great trouble in finding good water until Osun helped through divination. Orisa Osun is the Orisa of fertility, wealth and riches. She is the epitome of beauty. Osun is the spirit of the river - with the transparent, cleansing, fluid and life-giving qualities of water - in the Orisa pantheon.

The Orisa emerged from the Yoruba system of belief brought from Africa, and survived the imposition of Christianity as it was practised in the 17th and 18th centuries in West Indian societies. It allowed slaves and descendants of slaves to preserve the traditions of their ancestors while accepting the tenets and observances mandated by their European rulers.

Even after Emancipation, for many decades, Orisa remained an "underground" religion regarded with suspicion by the authorities, and practised clandestinely in close-knit

communities. Ritual celebrations were marked by night-long drumming, blood sacrifices and "catching the power" as the trance-like states were called.

In 1995, the umbrella body that has organised the Orisa religion in Trinidad & Tobago was recognised by an Act of Parliament. Tribute to Osun is placed at the mouth of the river at the point where it meets the sea.

A feast of food, bread, cake, sweets, fruit and flowers, is laid out upon the sand for the tide to take it into the sea. Celebrants wear festive robes in mainly white or yellow. The significance of the festival lies in focusing attention on the importance of good water and the cleansing of the river.

Where and when:

River mouths all over Trinidad are possible venues: Manzanilla, Salybia, Grande Riviere, Blanchisseuse. Celebrants are taken to the site in excursion buses. For information, contact 868 637 1750 or 868 675 1079

TOBAGO FEST



TOBAGO FEST

TOBAGO'S VERY OWN CARNIVAL
LATE SEPTEMBER



It's late September and not a Carnival in sight until the pre-Lenten "mother of all festivals" in Trinidad the following February or March. Antigua's, Grenada's, Jamaica's, Toronto's, Notting Hill's, and even Brooklyn's Labour Day - all versions of Trinidad style Carnivals - have passed.

So, a few years ago two resourceful Tobago Mas' enthusiasts invited the National Carnival Bands Association of Trinidad and Tobago (NCBA) to assist in producing a Trini style Carnival on the sister isle within the low visitor period of late September. With the support of The Tobago House of Assembly, though it is just a few years old, already the Tobago Fest is taking off with its own Carnival season.

Queen show, fetes, calypso, chill-out, night mas, a parade of the bands and j'ouvert are packed into a longish weekend - who minds if it spills over to a workday? - in Tobago venues that are never far from the sea. For good measure, you might also bump into a Bum Boat Festival!

A unique feature of Tobago Fest is the Traditional Mas which features Fancy Sailors, Beasts and Imps, Authentic and Fancy Indians, Jab Jabs and many more who contribute to the Fest and bring alive the cultural portrayals of yesteryear.

Airline tickets and accommodation are easier to come by in the coolest Carnival on the calendar. We don't expect it to be too long before the Tobago Fest stars on as many holiday calendars as the others. In the meantime, as they say, get in on the ground floor. Enjoy the uncluttered beginnings of a festival in the making!

Where and when:

Take advantage of low season airfares and hotel rates to plan your holiday in Tobago in late September.

Your bonus package will certainly include the Carnival fetes, parades and competitions. Contact TIDCO (868-675-7034 to 7) or the NCBA (868 627 8323) for more information. www.visittnt.com



RAMLEELA

HINDU DEVOTEES DRAMATISATION OF THE RAMAYAN OCTOBER / NOVEMBER



Ramleela or Ramdilla, an annual reenactment of the Tulsidas' Ramayan, is the oldest open air theatre in the Caribbean. The event is held during the Hindu observance of "Nav Raatam - nine nights of the Divine Mothers."

This 10-day serialised play recounts the journey of the divine king, Rama and his consort, Sita, on earth; and begins with a ceremonial procession of the characters which includes deities, kings, princes, sages, soldiers, monkey troops, forest

dwellers and the army of the evil ten headed king, Ravana. It is the story of Rama's willing acceptance of 14 years exile in order to uphold His father's word and eventual victory in war over the evil king.

The open-air performance area is cordoned off and ritualized as sacred "Ramdilla ground" and invested with the names of kingdoms, cities, forests, rivers, mountains and pilgrimage centres associated with the episodes and Rama's travels.

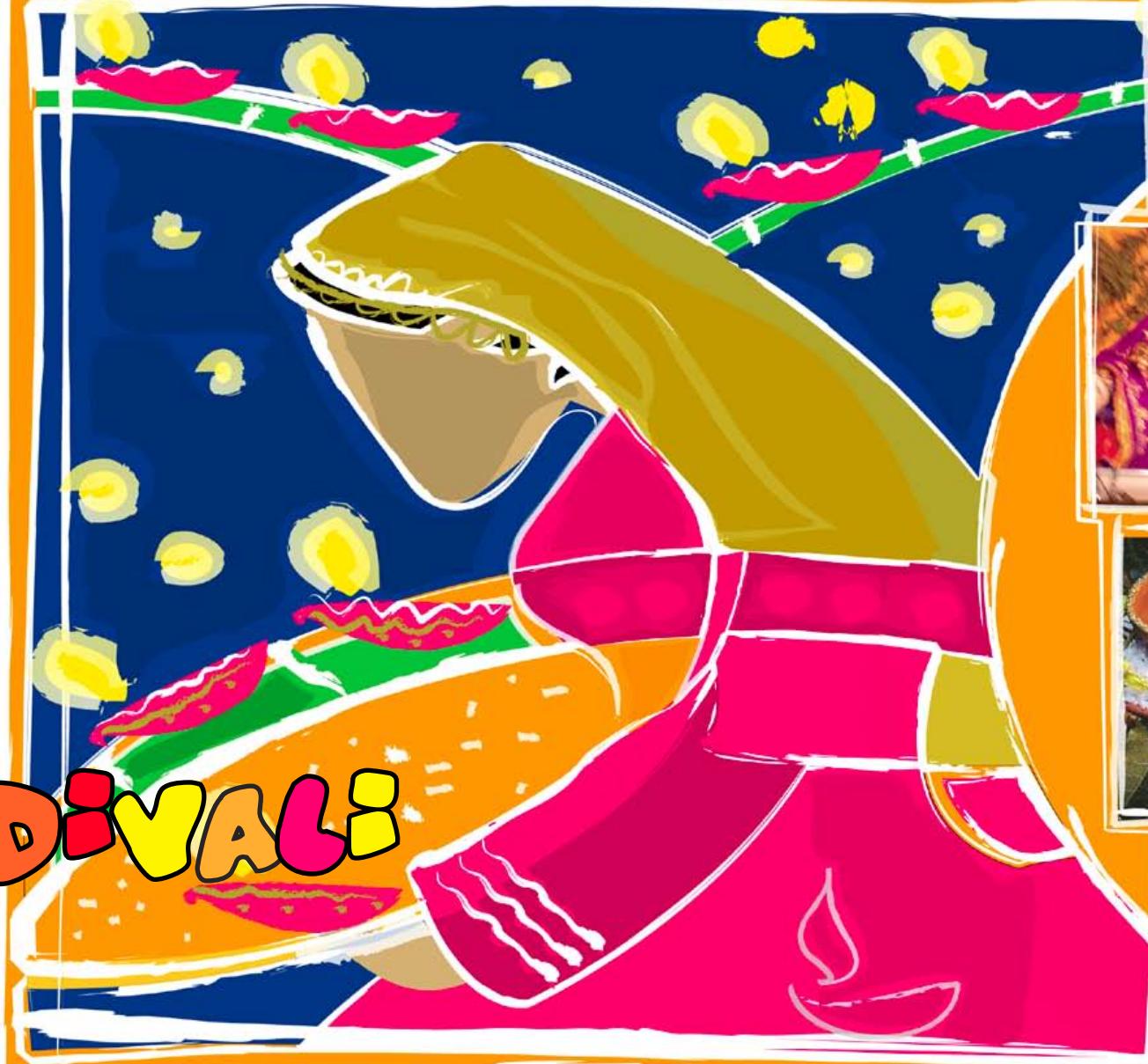
Bare-footed actors called paatras (vessels) observe ritual disciplines before they enter the ground. Ancient characters in costumes of yellow, red, blue and black dance to the strong rhythms of tassa drums as they enact the episodes which are sung in Hindi and narrated in English from a raised platform situated to the east.

The annual reenactment is ritual, faith and theatre in four languages; Awadhi, Sanskrit, English and local Trini dialect. It ends on Dashmi, the tenth day, with the burning of a gigantic effigy of Ravan. Rama's coronation and a festival of lights welcoming his return to Ayodhya marks the eventual victory of good over evil. This Festival of Lights enters contemporary time and local space as a public holiday, Divali, two weeks later on the local calendar.

Where and when:

Check newspapers for open invitations to Ramayan Yagnas - discourse, music and feast. Ramleela occurs at several venues including Hindu Schools, St. Augustine, Aranjuez Ground, and Baal (Children's) Ramdilla, Raghunanan Road, Enterprise.

DIWALI



DIVALI

HINDU FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS OCTOBER / NOVEMBER



Diwali, as the Festival of Lights, connects with Ramleela to celebrate the defeat of evil and victory of good with the return of Rama to Ayodhya and His coronation as King of Ayodhya. The story of Rama's exile is also the story of the exile of the jeeva, beings from God. The ultimate recovery of spirituality orders the joy and prayerfulness of the Festival of Lights: "Asato maa sad gamaya." (Lead me from darkness to light.)

Diwali stands in the middle of a season of five festivals in the Hindu month of Kartik. Diwali was selected as the representative holiday for the large Hindu community. Since then it has served as a means of presenting the religion and culture of descendants of Indian indentured labourers.

The vigour with which the festival is engaged has now stretched into cultural programmes during weekends extending over one month before and after Diwali. Pooja or ceremonial worship, feasts and cultural programmes which include religious, folk, film and classical music,

dances and songs are the main features. Indian sweets are distributed.

Diwali Nagar, which attracts many people from across the country hosts a yagna - a formal event two weeks before Diwali. It serves to inform through discourse in a traditional ambience of decor, Indian music and feast. This is followed one week later by a thematic exhibition on Hindu religious and cultural traditions, staged cultural programmes and a commercial section which caters mainly for shopping.

The highlight is Diwali night when deeyas - earthen lamps - are lit across the country. Each locality takes pride to create artistic designs using bamboo arches and plantain trees to hold thousands of lighted deeyas. Indian music is piped from homes and stages making it an enchanting experience.

Where to visit on Diwali night:
Felicity, Patna Village, Dow Village and Penal. A drive in the countryside around Barackpore or Caparo.

PARANG FESTIVAL



PARANG FESTIVAL

THE MUSIC OF CHRISTMAS
SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER



Although Trinidad was originally named and colonised by the Spanish - who later encouraged French planters to settle here with their households and slaves - it was not until the island was held by the British that a Christmas tradition of the Venezuelan peons engaged in the cocoa industry took root. This was the custom of house to house serenading that began with carols recounting the Anunciation, the journey to Bethlehem and birth of the Christ child; and which would usually end with more prosaic songs spreading the joy of the season. The songs were sung in Spanish. The singers were called paranderos. And the musical form became known as Parang, the sound of Christmas in Trinidad & Tobago. Instruments included cuatro (a small four-stringed guitar), violin, chac-chacs (maracas), a curious one-string box bass, and, of course, the voices.

While the custom of house to house visits continues mostly in close-knit rural communities; Parang has grown into a national folk form with events for groups of paranderos organised by the Parang

Association. Not only parang groups, but calypsonians too, record songs in the Parang tradition - in Spanish or with Spanish phrases or choruses and according to the lilting lyrical tempo of the songs telling of Christ's birth.

The official Parang season starts on September 25. There is a gradual build up that heightens the anticipation of Christmas which is the most commercial and popular festival of the year, celebrated by all citizens, whatever their religious background.

Where and when:

Parang groups are invited to perform in malls and public places, as well as private functions and parties, as the Christmas season progresses. The National Parang Association of Trinidad & Tobago organises an annual competition which moves through venues in different parts of the country. Contact TIDCO, the Association or check the daily newspapers for up-to-date information.



FESTivals

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- The Tobago House of Assembly, Department of Tourism

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- The National Council of Indian Culture

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- Ravi-Ji and the Hindu Prachar Kendra

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- The Queen's Royal College Foundation

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www.panroyale.org

- Ile Orisa Osun/Obatala, Babalawo

Olatunji Somorin, Petit Valley

- The Emancipation Support Committee

868-628-5008

www.emancipationtt.org

- The National Parang Association of Trinidad and Tobago

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- Brother Resistance and the Rapso Movement

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