



The Hummingbird



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It's Carnival!



Masqueraders on the stage at Queen's Park Savannah, Port of Spain.

ONCE again there is a special vibe in the air across the Caribbean, as countries gear-up for pre-Lenten carnival celebrations. Aruba, Haiti, Cuba, Curacao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Martinique, Puerto Rico and – chief among them – Trinidad and Tobago will be looking to put on impressive spectacles of colour, dance and music.

This year, Carnival falls in mid-February, so the season is shorter than previous years – which means that there will be a lot to pack-in.

In Aruba, events began on 1 January and include a calypso and road march competition, the Tivoli Lighting Parade, and a few large street parades.

Although carnival celebrations bear many similarities across the region, each island has its own cultural interpretation that make each a truly unique experience.

In Haiti, "Kanaval" is celebrated with music, bands and parades of large floats throughout the streets of Port Au Prince. The floats typically have sound systems set up on trucks to play music for the crowds. Food stands selling barbecued treats and rum are a popular part of these celebrations.

If you visit Cuba at carnival

time, expect to participate in dance parties around the city, and see colourful costumes.

Curacao carnival is one of the oldest in the Caribbean (starting since the 19th century in private clubs as masquerade parties), and features fantastic parades, floats, costumes and characters.

Carnival is unquestionably the most festive season in Dominica, even more so than Christmas.

The whole month of February is dedicated to celebrating carnival in the Dominican Republic, although some towns celebrate it during March, and even August. The festival usually climaxes around 27 February, which coincides with the island's Independence Day.

From the beginning of January in Guadeloupe you can see groups of people rehearsing in the streets, singing, dancing, and preparing for the main festivities.

Guyana's Mashramani, often abbreviated to "Mash", is an annual festival that celebrates Guyana becoming a Republic in 1970. The festival, usually held on 23 February – Guyanese Republic Day – includes a parade, music and games.

During the four-day holiday of carnival festivities in Martinique, activity on the island nearly comes to a standstill. The parades and parties start on Big Sunday (Dimanche Gras) and finish on Ash Wednesday when the carnival effigy, the "Vaval" King, is burned.

In Puerto Rico, one of the traditions of carnival is the appearance of the "vejigantes", which is a colourful costume traditionally representing the devil or, simply, evil. Vejigantes carry blown cow bladders with which they make sounds and hit people throughout the processions.

Undoubtedly the largest in the region, Trinidad and Tobago carnival is an annual event held on the Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday.

The "mas" tradition started in the late 18th century with French plantation owners organizing masquerades and balls before beginning the Lenten fast. Indentured labourers and slaves, who could not take part in Carnival, formed their own parallel celebration.

This was called "Canboulay", from the French "cannes brulées", meaning burnt cane. This festivity is re-enacted up to today, with a traditional costume parade through downtown Port of Spain, and culminating in a popular stick-fighting competition.

The Panorama and Dimance Gras competitions are also popular during Carnival, which is the most significant event on the islands' cultural and tourism calendar.

Traditionally, the festival was associated with calypso music; however, in recent decades Soca music has replaced calypso as the more popular genre. Costumes, stick-fighting, j'ouvert, and limbo competitions are also important components of the festival.

This world-class festival with vibrant music, colourful costumes, and general merriment plays out until the stroke of midnight on the morning of Ash Wednesday.

ECLAC in the Caribbean

Knowledge networks

REPRESENTATIVES from Caribbean governments are set to review how e-government systems operate in the region at an Expert Group Meeting to be hosted on 24 February by ECLAC, Port of Spain.

Entitled "Regional approaches to e-government application development in the Caribbean", the meeting will focus on an ECLAC study of e-government systems implemented in five Caribbean countries, namely Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

The meeting is expected to recommend ways in which the governments of the region can harmonise their efforts to acquire and implement e-government systems.

E-government systems can improve the efficiency of governments and help citizens to more easily perform activities, such as applying for permits or filing taxes. Though implementing these systems can be difficult and expensive, the meeting will seek to determine how countries can benefit from working together on these projects.

It is believed that mutual cooperation in these efforts could reduce costs, improve application quality, eliminate redundancy, and enable the standardisation of systems across the region.

There are obvious political and technical obstacles to this approach. Experts at this meeting will discuss how these may be overcome, so that the people of the Caribbean may benefit.



Fort de France, Martinique

The Regional Roundup**OAS to observe elections in Saint Kitts and Nevis**

THE Organization of American States will be observing the general elections in Saint Kitts and Nevis later this month.

OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza and St Kitts and Nevis' Permanent Representative to the OAS, Jacintha Lorna Henry-Martin, have signed an electoral observation mission agreement.

The chief of mission will be Ambassador Frank Almaguer.

"Electoral observations for us are very important and I can assure you, Madame Ambassador that

we will have a mission up to the requirements of your country and of your democracy," Insulza told Henry-Martin.

Saint Kitts and Nevis will be choosing its next government on February 16.

"I believe that this will constitute another rung on the ladder of successes we've had in the execution of elections that prove that we want to remain among the ranks of those that honour and respect what democracy represents, not only for our nation, but for our peoples," Henry-Martin said.

Antigua and Barbuda government aims to lower cost of living

THE high cost of living in Antigua and Barbuda is a growing concern for all residents and now the government is moving to do something about it.

It was recently reported that the government has commissioned a study to look into all the factors that affect prices in the country and to examine how to make the cost of living more affordable.

The Ministry of Trade is working through the National

Authorising Office (NAO) to secure the services of an expert from the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Head of the NAO, Ambassador Dr. Clarence Henry, indicated that the study would include consultation with key stakeholders as well as policy makers. At the end of the exercise, a report will be presented to Cabinet with recommendations for considerations.

The newest member of the OECS

THE French Caribbean just got a whole lot closer to the rest of the region.

In a recent ceremony in Fort-de-France, the French Caribbean island of Martinique officially joined the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) as an associate member, the first-ever French territory to do so.

OECS Director General Dr. Didacus Jule noted that in October 2014, there was unanimous and historic approval by the Regional Council for Martinique's associate membership.

Since then, Martinique has been actively involved in meetings

with the OECS health authority on Ebola and Chikungunya, in compliance with international health regulations, and has also been offering access to the most advanced medical technology for cancer detection, the cytotron.

Martinique was the host territory for the 60th meeting of the OECS Authority earlier this month.

Jules stated he was optimistic that the ascension will further the interests of Martinique as well as that of the other OECS states, and that the deepening of collaboration will also find expression in the broadening of business and special interests.

The OECS membership now stands at 10 countries.

ECLAC in the Caribbean

Launch of Social Panorama 2014 report

DESPITE the progress made over the past decade, structural poverty is still a feature of Latin America and Caribbean societies.

This is one of the findings reported in the Social Panorama of Latin America 2014, a flagship publication of ECLAC, which was launched at headquarters in Santiago, Chile on 26 January.

This annual study took a look at the multidimensional measurement of poverty in five main areas, including, housing, basic services, education, employment and social protection, and standard of living (identified as monetary income and the possession of durable goods).

The results indicate that during the period 2005 to 2012, there was a decrease in multidimensional poverty, which was similar to the rate of poverty measured by income alone.

Other areas focussed on in the report include the recent evolution of poverty and extreme poverty, income

distribution and social spending in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Social Panorama examined three main areas, which were youth and development, gender inequality in the labour market, and urban residential segregation.

With the region's economy slowing since 2010, the data for 2013 showed that the income poverty rate did not change since 2011, and there were no significant differences in the poverty and indigence rates compared to 2012 figures.

With regards to income distribution, the results showed a decrease in polarization with an increase of the middle income group. The study shows that the middle class had more confidence in their children's future economic well-being, than those who considered themselves to be a lower class.

The study also reflected significant progress in the educational coverage of the region's youth. However, they still suffered higher unemployment rates and had less social protection than adults. In

addition, they were among the main victims of murder, with seven of the world's 14 most violent countries being in the Latin American region.

While most of the countries in Latin America have seen participation gaps between women and men narrow over the past decade, there was still need for improvement in women's participation in the paid labour market.

In the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean the gaps were smaller, but there is still a long way to go to achieve greater equality. A similar pattern is evident with respect to the number of hours worked, occupational segregation and the higher proportion of women in the low-productivity sector.

And with respect to socio-economic residential segregation in the larger Latin American cities, the report confirmed that there was a downward trend in the last 15 years, although it continued to be greater among the wealthiest groups than among the most disadvantaged.

Digital currencies in the Caribbean

Sneak previews

Addressing the rights of older persons

FOR the second time in recent months, ECLAC will host a meeting on digital currencies in the Caribbean. This second EGM is scheduled for 12 March, and will again include representatives from regional Central Banks and other government agencies, as well as representatives from the digital currency industry.

Digital currencies are a new range of electronic payment technologies that have the potential to greatly impact sectors such as banking, e-commerce, and remittances. These technologies include cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, as well as "mobile money" solutions that enable electronic transactions to be facilitated using cellular phones.

At an earlier meeting on this topic, ECLAC discovered that there is significant value in facilitating the discussion of concerns between the fledgling digital currency industry and the agencies that have a responsibility to ensure that adequate regulations are in place to protect the public interest, especially with regard to concerns including consumer protection and the prevention of money laundering.

The meeting, to be held in March, will review a draft report on digital currencies in the Caribbean, which builds on the recommendations that came out of the previous meeting in December.

It is hoped that the final report will serve as a valuable aid to governments and central banks of the region as they seek to develop effective policy responses to this emerging new technology.

THE human rights of older persons have recently been receiving increased attention from Latin American and Caribbean countries. Although there is not yet a unifying convention on the rights of older persons, they are addressed to varying degrees in a wide range of treaties, laws and agreements of differing legal status and scope.

ECLAC is planning to raise the awareness of policy makers and experts from across the Caribbean to address common issues and challenges related to the human rights of older persons, with a view to improving on this situation.

The meeting will analyse recent advances and gaps, and provide a forum for sharing best practice in respect of policies aimed at this age group. It will also seek to identify concrete recommendations to help member states to advance the rights of older persons.

Population ageing, which will have a huge impact on Caribbean countries and territories during the coming decades, makes action on behalf of older persons even more imperative. Too many older people do not have an adequate income or are in a highly precarious situation, where a single event such a health problem or a change in family circumstances can push them to near destitution.

There is an urgent need to strengthen systems of social protection and increase investment in public health and social care services.

There is also growing recognition of the need to address elder abuse: physical abuse, violence, neglect or abandonment of older persons either by family members or care workers.

The meeting will address these and other issues through a human rights-based approach.

Sweet Lime

Focus on the ECLAC Family

Hardcore training



ECLAC staff at their kayaking session.

A FEW members of ECLAC subregional headquarters staff have recently taken up the Hardcore Caribbean challenge in a bid to tap into their ultimate fitness potential, as part of a group formed by Research Assistant Nyasha Skerrette.

Hardcore Caribbean is one of the main obstacle course challenge series in the Caribbean. It comprises 20 water and land-based military-style obstacles over a 5 mile course. Obstacles are designed to level the playing field regardless of physical size: it doesn't matter if you're 250lbs of solid muscle or a petite 5 footer, hardcore Caribbean will test your physical and mental stamina to the maximum.

The preparation needed for such a challenge requires significant commitment. By working towards this goal with office-mates and friends, ECLAC staff have found a ready-made support system to encourage them along the way.

The current participation requirements for the ECLAC group formed by Nyasha include exercising at least three times, and running at least two miles, per week.

Activities are tracked and the top performers announced regularly. Each month, participants are also required to participate in a boot camp conducted by Spartan Fitness, in addition to one group activity such as hiking, kayaking, and biking, among other activities.

Hardcore Caribbean climaxes in August 2015 approaches, so we shall closely monitor how their fitness activity and stamina increases.

The Regional Roundup

What's Up ... upcoming events in the Caribbean

WHEN	WHERE	WHAT
5-7 February	Jamaica	Nexus Caribbean Youth Sum-
7 February	Cayman Islands	Taste of Cayman Food and
13-15 February	Antigua and Barbuda	Jolly Harbour Yacht Club Re-
13-15 February	The Bahamas	Invitational Wahoo Fishing
15-22 February	Barbados	Holetown Festival: This is an annual festival which includes a variety of entertainment such as gospel, classical, Tuk band and calypso music, as well as folk dancing, presented in free open-
17-21 February	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Admiral's Cup Pro-Am Golf
18 February	Cayman Islands	Agriculture Show and Fair
19-22 February	Curacao	International Swim Fashion
21 February	Antigua and Barbuda	Health and Wellness Street
21-22 February	Jamaica	Blue Mountain Music Festival: This premier music festival is held annually in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica. The two-day event offers patrons an experience where music meets food, art, craft and nature.
22 February	Saint Lucia	Independence Day
27 February—3	Anguilla	Fashion Expo
27 February	The Bahamas	Rum Cay Day Festival: This all-day festival features a church service, cultural entertainment, "rake and scrape" bands, local craft, food and drink.
26 February—7 March	Curacao	Plein Air Art Festival: Local and international artists will paint on land as well as underwater. A variety of media will be used with emphasis on oils, watercolours and pastels.