

# PARTY ON IN 2024

Your complete carnival guide to the Caribbean

WORDS: SHARINE TAYLOR

**THIS PIC:**  
The Dominican Republic's El Diablo Cojuelos, or the Limping Devil, is a character from the country's folklore

COURTESY OF MINISTRY OF TOURISM OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The road was awash with a kaleidoscope of colours that seemed to stretch to the sky. Soca music soundtracked a revelry of bodies moving to a vibrant tempo. Some describe it as 'liberating'; others call it 'euphoric'. This is carnival – a celebration of the Caribbean's aptitude for resilience, culture and expression.

Though the histories of the carnival procession differ across the region, what ties them together are their connections to freedom, emancipation, resistance and satire. In Trinidad, the masquerade balls of the late eighteenth century (hosted by the French planter class just before Lent) informed carnival roots. Enslaved Africans were excluded, but decided to stage their own celebrations, mocking the elite. There was singing, dancing and burning of sugarcane to coincide with the harvest.

The oppressing class were not fond of these celebrations and frequently tried to quell them as they grew in popularity. After the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, the celebrations began to take on new meaning. Many uprisings and riots later, carnival became the ultimate way for people to 'talk back' to colonial order.

Similarly in Barbados, Crop Over festival had its roots in agricultural

production. During British colonial occupation in the 1780s, the island was the world's top sugar producer and celebrations were held to mark the end of a successful harvest. Enslaved Africans were forbidden to engage in their own festivities, but that didn't stop them from having their own secret gatherings of music, dancing and singing.

Throughout much of the Caribbean, carnival was an act of syncretism that combined pre-colonial African celebration traditions and colonial European influence to create something unique. Pretty Mas, the parade where revellers dress up with feathered backpacks and bejewelled costumes and march through the streets, is most people's impression of carnival. But when you look at the traditional characters that emerged from the celebration, like Trinidad's Moko Jumbie, Barbados's Mother Sally or Grenada's Jab Jab, we see the cultural memory of the region's ancestors living on.

If you want to participate in the festivities, you can register with a band, select your costume and *play ah mas*. If you're not yet ready to take on the parade, fear not. Many carnivals have areas for you to attend as a spectator, so you can still enjoy the vibes. ▶

**THIS PIC:**

The Los Taimáscaros is an integral character paying homage to the Taíno and can be seen in the Dominican Republic's Puerto Plata carnival

**DOMINICA**

12-13 FEBRUARY 2024

INSTAGRAM @DOMINICA.FESTIVALS

Mas Dominik is widely known for the traditional elements that have been preserved in its contemporary procession. Held in Dominica's capital, Roseau, the carnival season starts months in advance with national pageants and monarch competitions. But the J'ouvert and T-shirt Mas on Carnival Monday and costume parade on Tuesday, which take place right before Ash Wednesday, are highly anticipated events. During the road marches, revellers can expect to hear the energetic sounds of bouyon music and see traditional mas characters like Sensay, Bwa Bwa (similar to Trinidad's Moko Jumbie) and more. Popular fetes include Viva la Carnival and SunRise.

**GUYANA**

FEBRUARY &amp; SEPTEMBER 2024

CRICKETCARNIVAL592.COM

EXPLOREGUYANA.ORG/EVENT/MASHRAMANI-2

Not to be confused with Mashramani, or Mash (Guyana's celebration of their republic status), Cricket Carnival, established in 2022, is staged during the country's hosting of the Hero Caribbean Premier League. Celebrated each September, the month is filled with concerts, live music and cricket matches, and is capped with a costumed procession. If you're interested in attending Mashramani, the celebration is held earlier in the year, during February, in Georgetown, and is infused with national cultural events, pageants and competitions. It's common to hear calypso, pan, soca, steelpan and chutney – particularly during the road march.

**HAITI**

MID-FEBRUARY 2024

VISITHAITI.COM/FESTIVALS-EVENTS/CARNIVAL-HAITI-GUIDE

Right before Lent, multiple kanavals are held throughout Haiti and two of the well-known ones take place in Cap-Haitien and Port au Prince. Haiti's celebrations are deeply tied to honouring ancestral culture and history. Many feature traditional characters, including Lansèt Kòd, the Zel Matirins, Loas and zombies. While Pretty Mas and fetes are not part of the contemporary event, it is largely understood as a celebration that makes room for socio-cultural commentary and satire through music and costumes. Expect to hear a lot of music native to the country, like kompa, rasin, zouk and raboday.

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

FEBRUARY &amp; EARLY MARCH 2024

GODOMINICANREPUBLIC.COM/THINGS-TO-DO/

ENTERTAINMENT-AND-EVENTS

The Dominican Republic is host to many canavals

across the island during February and March. Among the most popular are the ones held in Santo Domingo, Santiago and Puerto Plata. In the capital, Santo Domingo, the Canaval Parade is held the weekend before National Independence Day (27 February). In Santiago, the celebrations are staged each weekend in February, and in Puerto Plata, the celebrations are held every Sunday in February and end on the second Sunday in March.

It's important to recognise that though many carnivals are rooted in similar histories, they often differ from country to country, even if they're in the same region. One of the major differences between the canavals held in the Dominican Republic and elsewhere is that Pretty Mas is not a central tenet. There's a larger emphasis on showcasing traditional characters, like the Diablo Cojuelo, the Lechones (Santiago) and the Taimáscaros (Puerto Plata). Because of this, there are not many fetes or J'ouverts to attend, but with each staging, you'll see the Dominican Republic's full and diverse ancestral culture on display.

**SINT MAARTEN & SAINT MARTIN**

2-14 FEBRUARY, 18 APRIL, 5 MAY 2024

INSTAGRAM @SXMCARNIVAL AND @CARNIVALDESTMARTIN

On the French side of the island (Saint Martin), Carnaval de Saint-Martin is held right before Lent, as is done in Dominica. Though some events are held in the French Quarter, Grand Case and Sandy-Ground, most events take place in Marigot. In addition to J'ouvert, the Grande Parade and the Mardi Gras Parade, highly recommended events to attend are Jazz & Wine, D-Drum Off, Barventure and one of the Touch the Road: Drum Parade stagings.

On the Dutch side of the island (Sint Maarten), carnival is held each year in Philipsburg. The season starts in March and wraps up in early May, but the calendar is packed with a variety of fetes and concerts, in addition to carnival staples like the road march and J'ouvert. Many of the events take place in Carnival Festival Village, which is located in Orient Bay. Events that are really popular include the Soaking Wet Breakfast Fete and UV Neon Glow Fete.

**JAMAICA**

EARLY APRIL 2024

INSTAGRAM @CARNIVALINJAMAICA

FACEBOOK: OCHORIOSCARNIVAL

After visiting and playing a gig in Trinidad for Carnival during 1974, Jamaica's Byron Lee of the soca, ska and calypso band Byron Lee and the Dragonaires staged Jamaica's first carnival. Carnival in Jamaica is held in the nation's capital, Kingston, and is a unique fusion of Trinidad and Jamaica's culture. If you love soca as much as you love dancehall – both of which dominate the ►►

sounds in fetes – you're in for a great time. Among the numerous fetes that take place, headline events include Sunrise Breakfast Party, Bacchanal Jamaica J'ouvert, I Love Soca fetes, Frenchman Party events, Soca Camp, Xodus' Tailgate and Yard Mas Carnival & Xaymaca International's Beach Fete.

If you're unable to get to the south coast, Carnival gets a St Ann's treatment with Ocho Rios Carnival. The festivity was first staged in 2011 courtesy of All Island Carnival's goal to bring carnival to different parishes in Jamaica. In its 13th year, it gets better as each iteration goes by. Though the fetes differ from year to year, the road march day is what revellers most look forward to.

**BAHAMAS CARNIVAL**  
MID-MAY 2024

CARNIVALBAHAMAS.COM

If you attend Carnival in the Bahamas, you're in for an explosion of music and culture. Not to be confused with Junkanoo, a separate and culturally rich celebration of ancestral Bahamian culture, carnival goers can expect a line-up of concerts, incredible costumes and bacchanal throughout Nassau. Must-attend events include the Dutty Crew J'ouvert, Hard Fete, Insomnia, Amnesia and Encore.

**ST VINCENT & THE GRENADINES**  
LATE JUNE TO EARLY JULY 2024

VINCYNAS.VC

St Vincent & the Grenadines Carnival, affectionately known as Vincy Mas, is an energetic carnival scored by Vincentian soca (and sometimes Grenadian soca). Held in its capital Kingstown, the road march boasts a long route, so be sure to stay hydrated and pace yourself. Vincy Mas also includes a judging portion, so be ready to show out when crossing the stage. Similar to other carnivals in the region, the carnival season has a series of national events, like monarchs and pageants, but it also has a t-shirt mas, J'ouvert march and costumed road march. Popular events include Brunch & Soca, AM Jamboree, H2O Soca, Melting Pot and Wet Republic.

**ST LUCIA**  
EARLY TO MID-JULY 2024

CARNIVALSAINTLUCIA.COM

There are multiple carnivals that take place across St Lucia, but the most popular stagings are in Rose Islet and Castrilles. The road march is known to be long and hilly and the sun beams brightly (don't forget to wear your sunscreen!), but if you're a fan of power soca, then pacing yourself alongside Dennery Segment – a subgenre of soca – will ensure you have a good time. With a host of national monarch and pageant events, revellers should also add fetes like Indulgence, the Mess

Ferte, Blocko, Brazen, Escape, Colour Me Red, Saka Fete and Euphoria to their list of go-to events.

**ANTIGUA**  
LATE JULY TO EARLY AUGUST 2024

VISITANTIGUABARBUDA.COM/ANTIGUAS-CARNIVAL

Antigua Carnival is a true immersion into Antiguan culture. For a few weeks, St John's is host to a plethora of cultural events and competitions. T-Shirt Mas is held the weekend before Monday Mas and the Tuesday costumed road march where there's a judging portion. On the road, you'll see traditional characters like John Bull and hear plenty of Antiguan soca, but you'll also hear Riddimbox – an infectious percussive beat played with live instruments – and iron bands: a group of musicians who have repurposed pieces of metal to create instruments. Popular events include Breakfast Fete, Melting Pot, Dru's Day, Marshall Monday and Ripple.

**BARBADOS**  
JULY TO EARLY AUGUST 2024

VISITBARBADOS.ORG/GRAND-KADOOMENT

There's no greater feeling than being blanketed in the sounds of bashment soca as you parade down the streets of Bridgetown. Barbados's Crop Over festival is a true display of Bajan ingenuity: the country's cuisine, music and culture are all on display and for masqueraders to enjoy. Where other countries celebrate J'ouvert, Barbados has its Foreday Morning Jump that starts at midnight on the day of the Grand Kadooment Parade and goes right until daybreak where revellers march and are equipped with paint (so wear something you don't mind either throwing away or getting dirty). Must-go events include Bliss, Dis is Rick, Fyah D'Wuk, Brek Fus and Caesar's Army: AM Bush.

**BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS**  
LATE JULY TO MID-AUGUST 2024

BVITOURISM.COM

Each year Tortola and the other islands that form the British Virgin Islands celebrate their Emancipation Festival: a festivity to honour the 1834 emancipation of then-enslaved Africans. A massive display of culture, it touts live music concerts showcasing music from across the region, a food fair and soca monarchs. Among the most highly anticipated event is the Emancipation Rise and Shine Tramp: a wet fete and J'ouvert that sees a route laced throughout the island's capital.

**CUBA**  
LATE JULY AND EACH WEEKEND  
IN AUGUST 2024

GOCUBA.CA/EASTERN/SANTIAGO-DE-CUBA

Salsa music and drums are part of the heavenly soundscape that scores the carnivals in Cuba.



**FAR RIGHT:**  
Fashion model,  
Winnie Harlow,  
playing J'ouvert

**RIGHT:**  
Soca musicians  
Kes the Band  
giving fans a lively  
performance

**BELOW LEFT:**  
Revellers having a  
good time during  
Crop Over

**BELOW RIGHT:**  
The Honourable  
Edmund Bartlett,  
Jamaica's Minister  
of Tourism,  
poses with two  
masqueraders

COURTESY OF JAMAICA TOURIST BOARD



COURTESY OF JAMAICA TOURIST BOARD



COURTESY OF BARBADOS TOURISM AND MARKETING INC



COURTESY OF JAMAICA TOURIST BOARD

Similar to the roots of other carnivals in the region, the festivities can be traced back to then-enslaved Africans who used their time when they were not engaged in labour to have private parties that involved masquerading with feathers and masks. In its contemporary iteration, expect to see floats and choreographed dancing, which are later judged and awards distributed. What is known in other countries as ‘bands’ and ‘sections,’ in Cuba, there are *comparsas*: a troupe of costumed dancers and its corresponding musicians. Kiddie Carnival is also an integral component of the celebration, making it a festivity that is enjoyed across generations. While Havana Carnival is celebrated in late July, Santiago de Cuba Carnival, which is arguably one of the larger and most popular of the carnivals, is held in late July to commemorate the 26 July Revolution Day holiday.

**GRENADA**  
1-13 AUGUST 2024  
SPICEMASGRENADA.COM

Spicemas is an unforgettable experience that offers a little bit of everything for everyone! Held in the nation’s capital, St George’s, it’s an energetic display of Grenadian culture. If you’re into live music, catch the local artists participating and competing for the Groovy and Power Soca Monarch crowns or watch the Panorama competition: a beautiful symphony of sounds by the

country’s steelpan bands. While there’s a road march portion, Grenada is known for its J’ouvert celebration: an ancestral tradition that starts at 5am on Carnival Monday and involves people who play Jab (one of the country’s traditional mas characters) covering themselves in black paint, old engine oil, or vegetable oil and charcoal and marching through town. Headline events are Pure White, Fleet, SAVVI Fete, Monday Day Mas and Monday Night T-Shirt Mas.

**ST KITTS & NEVIS**  
LATE NOVEMBER 2024 TO EARLY  
JANUARY 2025  
SKNCARNIVAL.COM

There’s nothing sweeter than St Kitts & Nevis’s carnival, more commonly referred to as Sugar Mas! Created as a way to inject the Christmas festivities with more ways to celebrate culture, there are fetes, live performances from local and regional artists, pan competitions, pageants, opportunities to learn more about folklore, soca monarchs and more. Every year, Basseterre holds J’ouvert on Boxing Day, and then hosts its Pretty Mas parade on New Year’s Day and Last Lap the day after. With the sounds of Kittician soca and Sugar Bands scoring the procession, it’s a great time to learn more about St Kitts’ history and culture. Must-attend events are Top off Brunch, Soca Seas Cruise, Cooler Fete and Inception.

**RIGHT:**  
J’ouvert morning belongs to the Jab, a traditional character, during Grenada’s Spicemas

**BELOW LEFT:**  
Stilt artists dancing during carnival in Cuba

**BELOW RIGHT:**  
A musician playing the trumpet during Cuba’s carnival



COURTESY OF QUERINE SALANDY/QUE MEDIA FOR INDUSTRY 360

THE WORLD OF MAS

Discover key terms to make your time on the road a memorable one!

**JOINING THE BAND**

When someone decides to participate in carnival, they usually have to play with a band, which is made up of a variety of band sections. Each band section has a different costume, and each costume is determined by the band’s theme. Some carnivals have a judging portion, otherwise known as ‘crossing the stage’, where revellers are judged for how they present the costumes, how the costume interpreted the theme, as well as the costume’s design.

**ALL THAT SOCA**

The genre of music most commonly heard during carnivals in the Caribbean is soca, but there are also subgenres within soca. The most common kinds of soca in Trinidad are groovy soca (with a slower bpm) and power soca, which is more energetic, often has instructions laced in its lyrics and has a faster bpm. Other genres of soca include St Lucia’s dennerie segment, Barbados’s bashment soca and Dominica’s bouyon soca.

**THE RIDDIM OF MAS**

During some road marches in the Caribbean, you’ll often hear percussive music that is not accompanied by lyrics (although may have chants). In Grenada, this is known as Jab Jab. Chants are led by a captain, referred to as Capital. In Antigua, you’ll hear Riddimbox and in Dominica, you’ll hear Lapo Kabrit.

**FETES**

Parties associated with carnival are often referred to as fetes. While many

countries have their own local fetes, many promoters stage their events in different countries so everyone can experience their festivities.

**J’OUVERT**

Many carnivals include a J’ouvert, a celebration that is usually held from midnight to sunrise. It consists of a road march and involves paint, powder, chocolate, water or mud (and sometimes all five). Revellers are accompanied by music as they dance in the streets of their host city.



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