

July 7th 2023

HAVE A SAFE AND ENJOYABLE CARNIVAL

Introduction

Vincy Mas 2023 is in full swing after being absent in 2021 because of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the eruptions of the La Soufriere volcano, with the 2022 version not featuring competition in some components. This year however, the full carnival experience is available and from all indications, it is shaping up to be a massive carnival celebration. The anticipation has been high with many who were unable to be a part of our nation's premiere cultural festival are making sure that they do not miss what is on offer this year. Already those sights and sounds that signal the presence of carnival are already on display; street bars are up in Heritage Square and Lower Bay Street, the consistent sound of calypso and soca music on radio stations, and the increased numbers of visitors on the streets on Kingstown. Already our country is abuzz with activities that let us know Carnival is in the air and we ready ourselves for 10 days of mas, pan and calypso.

Let's Welcome Our Citizens and Visitors

Already, it is very evident that this year's carnival festival, will benefit from the participation of Vincentians who reside outside of SVG as well as visitors from other countries who have been arriving in record numbers. The ease of travel to SVG, specifically from international destinations in North America and Europe, must be a welcome feature for those making the journey, and is undoubtedly contributing to what is turning out to be a good year for arrivals. It would be impossible to discuss the numbers of persons arriving without considering the impact of the construction of the Argyle International Airport and how it has improved direct air access to SVG. The very prophetic words of Comrade Ralph "build it and they would come", when he laid out his plan to construct an international airport are being fulfilled before our very eyes. Because of the AIA, Virgin Atlantic brings travelers from Europe to SVG twice per week and now also operates regional flights between Barbados, Grenada and SVG. American Airlines that previously operated twice-weekly flights between Miami and SVG, has increased those flights, where they now operate a flight to SVG daily. These flights, especially the AA flights have had a tremendous impact on the ease of

access for travelers from the USA who are happy to transit through Miami from various destinations within that source market. A visit to AIA on any day to witness the arrival of any of the international direct flights will reveal full flights, with excited passengers, some of whom have not visited SVG in decades, reveling in the joy of touching down on Vincentian soil.

Additionally, the influx of visitors has created a welcome challenge of room scarcity across SVG, many of these bookings made more than a year in advance. Vincentians who provide accommodation, whether hotels, guesthouses, or Air B&Bs, were encouraged to make the necessary investments in expanding their room stock to prepare for increase in arrivals that would result from the operationalization of the AIA. Today, those who took the advice and made the investments are happy with their decision as their investments are reaping benefits with Carnival, Christmas and Easter offering great opportunities to fill the rooms. The continued growth of our tourism sector, with more flights added by Air Canada, and with negotiations ongoing with other carriers, things will only improve year-round for hotels and guesthouses.

Whether the travelers are residents coming home and would stay in family residences, or are visitors who will occupy hotels and guesthouses, let us make them feel welcome and ensure that they have the best time taking in the sights, sounds and activities that are there to be enjoyed.

Let's Keep the Carnival Violence Free

It is important for continued growth and sustainability of our premier national festival that it is conducted in a safe environment and that residents and visitors alike are made to feel safe as they go about their business during the season. Our country is relatively safe, but recently a minority that is allowing their inclination towards a life of crime to get the better of them, is by their actions disturbing the peace that our country is known for. The negative impacts of the actions of that minority on the social and economic stability of SVG, by their criminal actions cannot be over emphasized. Each of us must play our role if we are to effectively address the challenges our country face in dealing with acts of violence that threaten the safety of all. During this time of celebration, we strongly encourage our young men especially, to leave the guns and the knives at home, or more preferred, get rid of your illegal firearms. It is likely that once you're in possession of a weapon, it will become the first resort in settling

disputes that may arise on the road or at an event, but if you don't have a weapon, you won't be able to use a weapon. The reckless actions of those who resort to violence do not only impact the individual committing the act, but also on the victim, his/her family, their home community and our country. The safer individuals feel leaving or returning to their homes at night, attending events, being on the beach or just walking through their neighborhoods, the greater will be their participation in the various events. Violence is never the answer, and any benefits from crime will be short-lived, even if perpetrators may escape initial capture and punishment, the consequences have a way of catching up on them.

It is in the best interest of all of us to ensure that Vincy Mas 2023 is safe and enjoyable for all, and we are encouraged to keep it crime and violence free. Cooperate with the authorities by reporting suspicious activities, but also individuals need to take all precautions to safeguard their person and property from possible violation by anyone who sees crime and violence as the way out. Let's make Vincy Mas 2023 a festival to remember.