

## **Carnivals as a Strategy for Attracting Tourists in the Greater Caribbean Region**



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Throughout history, the Greater Caribbean has stood out due to its great cultural diversity that has allowed it to be identified as an important tourist destination. Today, part of its major attraction focuses on the Carnivals that have created tremendous importance in the region, inspiring various cultural and economic activities involving small and medium enterprises including informal street vendors, which has given rise to an increase in the number of tourists during these activities which takes place in the Region all year long, producing a powerful impact in the region.

Many persons from across the world are drawn to this Region as a result of its cultural wealth. This wealth is evidenced in its Carnival which is indeed an integral part of the cultural identity of the Caribbean people. Carnivals have undoubtedly succeeded in forging synergy or a bond between the tourists hailing from different countries around the world and the locals who enjoy a unique and singular activity that reflects the culture and history of the Caribbean.

For many countries, like Colombia, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados, to name a few, Carnival has become one of the main attractions and the primary reason for visiting the destination. With this understanding, it is necessary to explore in depth the potentialities and trans-sectoral links produced by Carnivals and other events of this nature, so as to make the most of this activity's contribution to the national economy, while ensuring that visitors enjoy and experience this type of activity in its highest form.

A study prepared in 2015 by the Canadian tourism consulting firm Resonance Consultancy highlights five tourist destinations, namely: Turks and Caicos Islands, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and Martinique as countries that offer good entertainment activities and events like those involved in Carnivals.

Without a doubt, the tourism trend in the Caribbean will continue to rise, according to the magazine *Por Conocer*, which states that most of the tourists expected in 2016 are from the United States, Canada, Spain, France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy, in pursuit of the best destinations in

the Caribbean. One of the main motivations behind this is to take a trip where they can experience cultural expressions, admiring the colours and sounds associated with the Carnivals of the Region.

Therefore, conscious of the importance of preserving the cultural and historical heritage of Carnivals and their link to the tourism industry, the ACS promoted the First Meeting of Caribbean Carnivals in Barranquilla in 2013, which highlighted the historical origins of Carnivals in the Caribbean societies, emphasising the role of these festivities as an expression or celebration of freedom, social protest and cultural reaffirmation, as well as artistic expression and tourist attraction.

Based on this meeting, the ACS officially revisited the initiative of creating the “Caribbean Carnival Network” on July 6, 2015, in Santiago de Cuba. This is one of the most recent projects on the ACS agenda, which will promote an exchange in the area of cooperation and share successful stories and best practices related to the development of the cultural history of carnivals. The signatory countries involved in the creation of the Carnival Network include: Cuba, Bahamas, Colombia, Grenada, Guatemala, Martinique, Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago and the Dominican Republic. These countries established a Plan of Action that will strengthen the Carnivals in the Greater Caribbean together with other projects, with the main objective being the organisation of seminars, conferences, book fairs and exchanges to promote cooperation and friendship among Member States in the cultural domain.

Additionally, as a follow-up to these initiatives, the Fundación Carnaval de Barranquilla (Barranquilla Carnival Foundation) has proposed to host the First Meeting on Caribbean Culture that will be held in Barranquilla in May 2017. This initiative will allow ACS Countries to exhibit and present the different artistic representations of their culture, such as dance, music, art and literature. They will certainly serve as a key element for strengthening sustainable and cultural tourism in the Greater Caribbean Region.

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