Article published on February 17th 2012 | Travel

The carnivals held in the Caribbean are said to be the greatest shows on earth, attracting thousands of revellers and a sea of mesmerising dancers and colour. The music is electric and people dance and enjoy themselves for days. Carnival is a massive Caribbean blow-out and it is well worth attending if you happen to be on island at the time, or even worth making a special trip for. It is one of great Caribbean experiences.

The history of Carnival

The â€˜carne valeâ€™, literally means a â€˜farewell to meatâ€™, was traditionally a blow-out before the L fast. It is Catholic by origin, but the religious roots have gone now and instead, in true West Indian form, carnival is a huge festival, or party.

Many carnivals are still staged at the start of Lent, culminating on Mardi Gras or on Mercedi des Cendres (Ash Wednesday), but some are held to celebrate the end of the cane-cutting season, Crop Over in Barbados, or the zafra in Cuba. Others are staged at convenient moments in the calendar, for example Easter in Jamaica. There are so many festivals you will find it hard to choose.

Trinidad Carnival is the largest in the Caribbean islands and it sees thousands upon thousands of revellers in the streets of Port of Spain. It builds up for a month or more, with calypso tents and steel band competitions, before culminating in Jouvert on the Monday morning and then the street parades on Monday and Tuesday.

A key part of the festivals is the music. Soca is the driving rhythm behind the street parades in the British Caribbean carnivals (in the Latin islands it is salsa and in the French Caribbean zouk). Behind the scenes in the south-eastern Caribbean you will also hear calypso, songs of love, life and everything West Indian.

The best thing about Caribbean carnivals, those in the British islands at least, is that you can join in. The â€˜bandsâ€™ and the groups of revellers in the street parades offer costumes for sale. Make sure yo turn up ahead of time to buy one, and you can join the festival. Dance your heart out and experience the true Caribbean carnival. It is definitely a unique experience and one not to be missed out on if youâ€™re visiting the Caribbean.

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Article Keywords:

Holidays Caribbean

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