



## OUR LIVING HERITAGE



### ● About this Brochure:

This brochure presents information about nine cultural festivals and celebrations rooted within communities across Belize. Together, these comprise Belize's Intangible Cultural Heritage. These forms of intangible cultural heritage help us express who we are, and share our backgrounds and cultural identities with others.

The information provided was collected in collaboration with cultural stakeholders, activists, and practitioners from across Belize who carried out audio-visual documentation and interviews to gather information about the history, associated cultural elements and challenges faced in safeguarding these celebrations.

Note: This brochure does not represent all the cultural celebrations of Belize, but rather those which have been inventoried thus far. NICH through ISCR will continue its work to document the remaining cultural celebrations as part of the development of a national inventory of Belize's Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Do you know of any other cultural celebrations that should be included in our inventory? Would you like more information about this and other cultural celebrations in Belize?

If so, please contact us at:  
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### SPECIAL THANKS TO THE COMMUNITIES OF:

- |                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Caledonia             | Orange Walk Town        |
| Libertad              | Benque Viejo Del Carmen |
| Chan Chen             | Hopkins                 |
| Patchakan             | Dangriga                |
| San Jose Nuevo Palmar | Gales Point Manatee     |
| San Ignacio Town      | Maya Center             |
| San Pedro Town        | Punta Gorda             |
| Yo Creek              | San Joaquín             |
| Belize City           |                         |



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,  
YOUTH, SPORTS AND CULTURE



national institute of culture and history



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# BELIZE CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS



# Belize's Cultural Celebrations

## ● LAS POSADAS

Las Posadas is a religious commemoration of the Blessed Mary's and Joseph's travails on their journey to Bethlehem. The celebration begins on the 15th or 16th December and concludes on Christmas Eve. On each of the nine nights, a young couple carries the statues representing Mary and Joseph as they visit different houses asking for posadas or "lodging". A procession of rezadoras (prayer ladies), and cantadoras (ladies singing hymns) accompanies them. At each home, one group outside sings asking for shelter, and those inside refuse them. Traditionally, the posada is offered at the third home. The host family receives the statues and after reciting the prayers, offer treats such as maja blanca (a rice porridge), conservas, horchata, to all those accompanying the posada. On 24th December, pastorcitos (shepherds) offer gifts to the baby Jesus in the manger, thus completing the nativity scene.



## ● CARNAVAL

Carnaval is a pre-lenten festivity once widely practiced in northern Belize; the tradition has survived in Caledonia, Corozal and San Pedro Ambergris Caye. Carnaval commences with the enmascarados, the masked dancers who go throughout the village signaling the start of Carnaval. The three days of Carnaval directly precedes Ash Wednesday and on these days, Carnaval dancers are invited to houses to perform various comparsas (dances) such as el torito, el papalotito, la culebra and la cinta among others. On Tuesday evening, La Reina del Carnaval is crowned and a parade throughout the village streets follows. Recently, el baile de la cabeza del cochino (Hog-Head Dance) has been integrated in the event. The comparsas are performed a final time and Juan Carnaval's testamento, (last will) is read. The burning of Juan Carnaval's effigy symbolically ends the revelry as the Lenten season is ushered in on Ash Wednesday.



## ● CHRISTMAS BRAM

Christmas Bram is a festive celebration held on the 25th and 26th December in Gales Point Manatee. The celebration originated within Kriol communities when mahogany cutters returned to their families at Christmas after long periods away at camp. The celebration commences on Christmas afternoon led by the local band and villagers who parade and dance through the streets. Brukdong songs illustrate the African heritage and tells of recent happenings in the village. Instruments include the accordions, banjos, mouth organs (harmonica), grater-and-fork, pint-bottle-pan-table, and the gombay drum, among others. Dancers and musicians are provided with local wines made of blackberry, ginger, serosi, rum popo and sometimes "like" cake and ham. In the night, participants perform the Sambai, a fertility dance where dancers gather in a circle around a fire. The festivity recommences on Boxing Day.



## ● LA FIESTA DE SAN JOAQUIN

La Fiesta de San Joaquin is a cultural extravaganza celebrated in San Joaquin Village, Corozal in honour of the community's patron saint. The fiesta commences on August 8th with the "corrida de la antorcha" (torch marathon) from Bacalar, Quintana Roo to the village of San Joaquin, commemorating the cultural and historical ties between the two communities. The runners arrive on time to use the torch to light the veladoras for the first novenas (nine days of prayers). The fiesta culminates on August 16th with a mass, followed by a social feria with mechanical rides, traditional foods and beverages, and stalls with crafts and local products. A highlight of the feria is the opening ceremony where Miss San Joaquin is crowned, followed by cultural presentations and a dancehall where live bands are invited to entertain revelers.



## ● BENQUE FIESTA

The Benque Fiesta begins on July 6th and consists of a ten day celebration in honour of Benque Viejo del Carmen's patron saint Nuestra Señora de Monte Carmelo (Our Lady of Mount Carmel). The celebration features alboradas (early morning prayers) and ladies praying novenas, accompanied by the reverberating sounds of the marimba. This is followed by breakfast sponsored by "los dueños del día" or the patrons of the day's feast. The daily evening prayers and Mass are complemented by a lavish display of fireworks. The Benque Fiesta also includes a feria, a social event that includes the selection of Señorita Flor de la Feria, other cultural displays such as the Chatona, 3 nights of dancing to the music of popular bands and DJs, and the sale of traditional foods and beverages.

## ● LA SEMANA SANTA

La Semana Santa (Holy Week) commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through a weeklong series of Easter activities. In Benque Viejo del Carmen, the Domingo de Ramos (Palm Sunday Procession) re-enacts Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Holy Monday's Procesión del Silencio and Holy Tuesday's Procesión del Encuentro reflects on Christ's



## ● LOS FINADOS

Los Finados (also called Día de los Muertos or Hanal Pixan) is a religious commemoration of the visit of the souls of the faithful departed to their homes. 1st November honours infants and young children and is referred to as Día de los Angelitos. 2nd November is Día de los Muertos and honours adults who have died. Each night, altars or tables are arranged with the deceased's favourite foods, treats and beverages as the rising steam from the foods is believed to invoke their spirits. Families visit the graves of their deceased ones to say prayers and place flowers, wreaths, food and drinks. It concludes with the Catholic Church celebrating a special Mass and procession to the cemetery. Prayers continue for nine days. On 9th November, candles are placed along the roadside to guide the souls back to the cemetery.

teachings. Good Friday morning features the Live Passion Play as streets are transformed into the Via Dolorosa, with local actors dramatizing Christ's trial, tribulations and crucifixion. Residents also create intricately-designed sawdust tapestries on the streets as a show of gratitude for blessings received throughout the year. The late evening Procesión del Santo Entierro – Christ's



## ● OX'LAJUN BA'AKTUN

Ox'lajun Ba'aktun (13th Calendar Cycle), is a thanksgiving celebration held in Maya Center Village, Stann Creek on the 21st and 22nd December. Traditional foods such as aj tamal (Maya tamales), chu'uk waj (sweet corn tortilla biscuit), caldo, and coffee and cacao drinks are prepared. Leading up to the ceremony, the women perform various dances as the men play the marimba, drum and flute. The highlight of the celebration is a closed midnight ceremony led by a No'och Cha'bej (Maya priest) on the 21st December. The ceremony culminates with a procession to the temple led by the Ox'lajun Ba'aktun Dancers. Families gather to say their individual prayers and burn incense. On 22nd December, the Ox'lajun Ba'aktun dancers perform various public dances honouring the various gods such as Chac, Ixchel and Kinich Ahau.



## ● YURUMEIN

Yurumein (Homeland or St. Vincent) is the re-enactment of the arrival of the largest group of Garinagu to Belizean shores in 1823. This annual celebration is held on the 19th November or Garifuna Settlement Day. Efforts by Thomas Vincent Ramos and others led to the commencement of the celebrations in the Stann Creek District in 1941 and Toledo District in 1943; in 1977, it was declared a national holiday. The re-enactment demonstrates the Garinagu trials as they journeyed from St. Vincent to Roatan, Honduras then to Belizean shores. The re-enactment infuses a lively procession with drumming and singing as they bring their traditional crops and tools. Activities include the crowning of the national and local Garifuna queens, a parade, a church service and the selling of traditional foods such as hudut and bundiga.

