

What is Yurumein?

Yurumein commemorates the arrival of the Garinagu to Belize. This annual Garifuna Settlement Day celebration is held on 19 November. Yurumein features the re-enactment of the ancestral Garinagu's journey from St. Vincent to Roatan, Honduras and Belize. This day includes a procession filled with traditional music and dance, a Mass of Thanksgiving and concludes with general merriment. Though previously observed only in the Stann Creek and Toledo Districts, Yurumein is now widely celebrated across several communities where Garinagu reside in Belize.



Garinagu Arrival to Belize

After Paramount Chief Joseph Chatoyer was assassinated on 14 March 1795, over 4300 Garinagu were imprisoned on the island of Balliceaux in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Some 2248 survivors were exiled to Roatan, from where they later migrated to the mainland of Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Belize. Archival accounts date the Garinagu presence in Belize to as early as 1802. Oral history says that in 1823, Alejo Beni finally convinced British authorities to allow Garinagu families to settle south of the Sibun River. Another large group arrived in Belize in 1832. Today, the communities of Dangriga, Barranco, Punta Gorda, Seine Bight, Hopkins, Georgetown, and Dangriga trace their origins to arrival of the ancestors.

History of Garifuna Settlement Day

The efforts of Thomas Vincent Ramos, along with Mateo Avaloy and C.S. Benguche with a few others, resulted in 19 November being observed as Carib Disembarkment Day. In 1941, the celebrations were first held in Dangriga. In 1943, the day was officially recognized by colonial authorities as a Public and Bank Holiday in the Stann Creek District following the efforts of T.V. Ramos, Domingo Ventura and Pantaleón Hernandez. In 1977, it became a national holiday and the name was officially changed to Garifuna Settlement Day.



Re-enactment, Procession, and Thanksgiving Mass

Yurumein begins in the early morning of 19 November with participants paddling dories as they re-enact the voyage towards Belize's coast. They chant songs that reflect the harsh conditions the ancestors faced as they crossed the Bay of Honduras. On disembarking, one of the leaders seeks the authorities' permission for all to settle, but they are refused twice. At the third attempt, they are allowed to land. The Garifuna nation is represented by voyagers, including an Old Man and an Old Woman, a pregnant woman, other adults and children. From the dories they take crops such as cassava, plantain, and sugar cane that were brought by the ancestors. Singing and dancing to the rhythm of the *primero*, *segunda* and *sisira*, the participants are led in procession to the church for a Mass of Thanksgiving. Garifuna Settlement Day has expanded into a month long series of activities highlighting Garifuna culture. Yurumein remains at the heart of the celebrations and has become a part of the nation's history and identity.