

What is Grand Ball?

Grand Ball is celebrated annually during the Christmas Season. The all-night festive gathering of social clubs features classical European, American, and Belizean music and dances, along with tasty dishes. This gala event emerged over a century ago and survives in Dangriga Town and surrounding communities in the Stann Creek District.



Image courtesy Jason Guerrero



Grand Ball in Dangriga

Oral accounts note that Grand Ball originated in Belize Town during the early 1900s, and by 1914, it was adopted in Stann Creek Town, now Dangriga. The first social club dating to that year was the *Young Men Sporting Association (YMSA)*. Thereafter, the *Old Citizens Sporting Association*, *Old Age Memorandum Group*, *Occasional Group*, *Progressive Group*, *Enterprise Group* and others were formed. Grand Balls were hosted at the Riverside Club, Carib Development Society Hall, Eden Rose Club, Kennedy Club, and more recently at Mar's Place. The tradition later expanded to Georgetown and Hopkins. Today, only the Old Citizens Sporting Association and YMSA sponsor Grand Ball in Dangriga on 24th and 31st December, respectively. The Georgetown Association hosts their Grand Ball on the 26th December while the Hopkins Association celebrates on 29th December.

Grand Ball Night



Grand Ball night opens with a Grand March by dancers into the ballroom where spectators await them. A male and female manager of the association ensure Grand Ball customs and etiquette are adhered to by all. They also coordinate the night's music and dances. After an opening program, the dancing begins and includes a variety of dance styles. Interspersed by short rest intervals, Grand Ball dancing goes well into dawn.

Attire

At Grand Ball, dancers and association members dress in proper, uniformed attire. Women wear long dresses with enough room for dance swirls. Men wear a tuxedo or a buttoned-down shirt, with a pair of formal trousers; a bow or neck tie compliments the suit.

Music and Dance

Instrumental music featuring the harmonica, guitar and other percussion instruments brings Grand Ball alive. Dances performed during the night include the *Lancers*, *Spanish*, *English* and *Combination Quadrilles*, *Polka*, *Waltz*, *Bolero*, *Paul Jones*, *Mazurka*, *Foxtrot*, *Chotisse*, and *Punta*, among others.

