

Grenada's Culture and Traditional Dress

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Abstract

Grenada is a Caribbean island that is located in the continent of South America. Grenada, also known as the 'Spice Isle' has a population of 105,897. It is divided into seven parishes – St. George's being the capital. The country's main cultural traditions were handed down by African ancestors, however other ethnic groups such as Indians and Europeans also made contributions. Due to the large presence of Africans, their traditions were the most influential and present-day traditional dress and cultural practices reflect their elements.

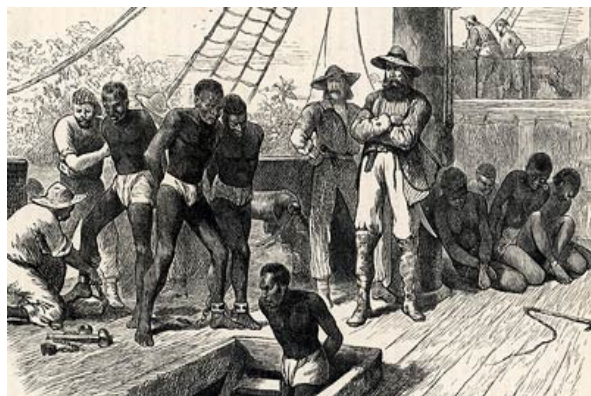
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1. Grenada's traditional culture and women's traditional wear

1.1 History of Grenada

Christopher Columbus discovered Grenada in 1498, at which time native Carib Indians inhabited the island. The Spaniards soon moved on to larger territories in order to focus on more profitable ventures. The French settled in Grenada on 17th March 1649. Due to the continuous uproar and conflict with the natives, they were unable to govern the country for a long period. However, later in the 18th century, the French finally colonized Grenada. By 1700, Grenada had a population of 257 whites, 53 coloureds and 525 slaves. The British captured Grenada from the French during the Seven Year's War 4th March 1762 and the United Kingdom gained full control of Grenada in 1776. From this point, African slaves were imported to work on cotton, sugar and tobacco plantations. The largest numbers of slaves were imported from Nigeria followed by Ghana and then Senegal (Nigeria – 34%; Ghana – 19%; Senegal – 4.9%). (Fig. 1-1)

Freedom of slaves came into effect through the Emancipation act that was passed in 1833. According to Wikipedia, the Emancipation Act also known as the Slavery Abolition Act ended slavery in the British Empire on August 1, 1834.



(Fig.1-1 Slavery Period)

As a result, Emancipation Day is commemorated every year in territories where slaves once resided. In Grenada, a public holiday is set-aside on the first Monday of August. This joyous day is celebrated with much importance to the citizens of Grenada because it is on this day that total independence was granted. Emancipation Day is celebrated very colorfully and in a grand manner. People throng the streets in huge numbers as spectators and performers depicting the devils and the social commentaries of previous years. They are accompanied by dance and sounds of steel bands and DJ's music of the latest songs of the year. (Fig. 1-2)



(Fig. 1-2 Traditional Carnival Celebration)

1.2 Grenada's Traditional Dress

The traditional clothing of Grenadian is predominantly as a result of the various ethnicities and reflects the ratio of each group present. African, Carib, French and English influences can be noted in each aspect of clothing. It can be described as a blend of elaborate formal European masquerade balls and the African and Caribbean native traditions combined to create an intoxicating mix of color, patterns and textures. The emancipated African slaves developed a statement making sense of fashion to help draw attention to their independent status.

A unique heritage African tradition became the foundation of a distinctive Grenadian style. The garment took the form of a long colorful dress often featuring bright plaid patterns and was worn on special occasions. This particular style ensemble consists of a floor length skirt in a bright color or pattern known as the 'jupe' (Creole word for skirt), layered over a flattering white cotton chemise or broderie anglaise blouse.

The neck, sleeves and hem of the chemise are often trimmed in lace or singular bands of colored ribbons for additional details. A handkerchief of white was originally wrapped around the woman's head or styled into more colorful versions, such as madras or batik.

A foulard, or scarf, of cotton resembling French provincial dresses was originally worn over the chest to provide a degree of modesty, and is now more often constructed of a plaid or patterned material matching the skirt. White, lace-edged petticoat have become more fashionable, and the jupe is sometimes fashioned to sling over a woman's arm to reveal more of the petticoat as in the African tradition. (Fig.1-3)



(Fig.1-3 Grenada's traditional Dress)

2. Characteristics of Grenada's Traditional Culture

The traditional Caribbean cultural celebration of Carnival is very important festival in Grenada and because of its direct relation to Grenada's history it can be classified as the main feature of Grenada's traditional celebrations.

Carnival comes from the Latin *carne levare*, which means "farewell to meat" and is held annually around the beginning of August and lasts 10 days. The tradition, some believed came from the French and Romans who pigged out on meat the day before Lent and followed by a strict period of fasting. Between the 1st of the year and Lent, the French would celebrate by hosting magnificent balls.

The slaves, being left out of their owners' fun and fanfare, organized their own parties during the same time. Without elaborate dresses such as those of their owners, they put together costumes with what little they had. This is said to be the origin of "Ole Mas", symbolic of every thing evil in society.

2.1 Grenada's Carnival Celebration

Grenada's Carnival has been celebrated on the island since the occupation European colonisers occupied the island. Although smaller and lesser known than its Caribbean counterparts, Grenada's Carnival has the same magnificence that any of the best have to offer. It is believed that Trinidad's Carnival celebration was heavily influenced by Grenada due to the Catholics that resettled in Trinidad (neighbouring island) with their slaves, who celebrated as they did while in Grenada, and thus influencing the natives. (Fig. 2-1), (Fig. 2-2)



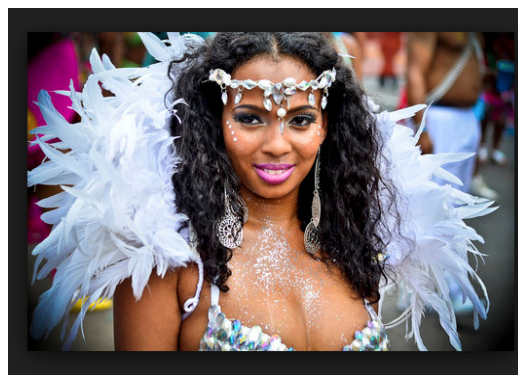
(Fig. 2-1 Masqueraders)



(Fig. 2-2 Carnival Street Parade)

The festival is held in August, one of the hottest months in the Caribbean. The feeling of emancipation brings together peoples of all statuses, celebrating to the intoxicating sound of music, dance and food into a pageantry

of colorful costumes, talent shows and parades that leaves its spectators breathless. (Fig. 2-3)



(Fig. 2-3)

Carnival Costume)

Spice Mas is a nickname given to Grenada’s carnival. Spice is a nod to the Grenada’s history of cultivating spices. Mas is the Caribbean patois shortening of the French word-meaning masquerade. Spice Mas is a celebration with the pomp and pageantry like the mother of Carnivals.

Grenada's carnival is indeed a celebration of the artistry, uniqueness, and vibrancy of the nations people. Colorful costumes, competitions and an outpouring of talent go along with the celebrations.

Festival	Description
Carnival	Unlike many other Caribbean locales, Grenada has two Carnivals. The first is on Carriacou in February, and the second is on Grenada in August. These two cultural events are known for their bright colors, costumes and general festivities, including the naming of many Carnival dignitaries.
Emancipation	Held on the first Monday in August Emancipation marked the liberation of slaves. On this day Grenada’s wear their national colors or traditional garments and march the streets. Other events includes story telling by the elders in society. These tradition folk stories are very famous around emancipation celebration.
National Dance Festival	This festival begun in 1991 to encourage children in one parish’s schools to dance, this festival has grown into a national affair. The festival lasts a week and is held twice a year. Most dance features the music of drums music and tradition adopted from the African culture. (Fig. 2-4)



(Fig. 2-4 National Dance Festival)

3. Conclusion

The mixture of Grenada's cultural elements contributes to its diversity. Each different ethnic group that had occupied Grenada in some way or the other be it in food or clothing has left ethical impressions. These elements still exists and are practiced and celebrated yearly in Grenada.

The most enjoyed celebration is Carnival. The cultural wear of Grenada has modified over the years from what it was in the past. However the significance continues to demonstrate the historical African, French and British inheritance.

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