Planning for the Future with the Past in Mind: St. Maarten's Carnival Celebrates 50 Years

By Lazette Browne

One can only imagine that having Carnival as a year-round event made up of a series of events, requires a lot of hard work and effort to pull off. The festival has changed from a few days in its early years, to now over three weeks in duration. Along the way, it has morphed into a festival focused on the combination of music, food and culture.

The organizers, from inception, have always been faced with the challenges of financing such an undertaking, as well as making the festival appealing to as large a cross section of locals, regional and international attendees as possible. Branding, sponsor interests and attendee must-haves need to be accounted for and successfully integrated into the event. As hard as anyone might try, it is impossible, however, to please everyone. Sometimes compromises need to be made or the decision to proceed just must be taken.

I had the pleasure of speaking with the current St. Maarten Carnival Development Foundation Director, Mr. Alston Lourens, who gave me some insight on what goes into organizing Carnival and how he thinks the changes of the last handful of years have elevated the festival— not just for locals but also for our regional and international island visitors.

“We have been spoken about in the industry and the Caribbean as the best kept secret,” he tells me proudly. “This happened because we started to bring in the top stars of the Caribbean.”

Mullet Bay Beach by Day and Night

By Leslie Hickerson

On the west coast of St. Maarten sits a long stretch of pristine sand with clear blue waters just next door to the famous Maho Beach.

Participate in a 12 Metre Regatta

The fastest, most elegant racing yachts compete in the America's Cup. What happens to these thoroughbreds once they completed their campaigns?
Letter From the Editor
March 29, 2019

Thank you for reading St-Maarten.com’s Weekly Edition! We are thrilled you chose us and hope to keep you apprised of island happenings in the activities, food and party scenes.

Our goal is to showcase the island through a local’s perspective, and we are confident that you will get to know St. Maarten/St-Martin better with every issue.

With the island heating up, both literally and figuratively, it seems that spring has arrived. Festivities for the Dutch side’s 50th anniversary of Carnival have begun and we look forward to covering the parties and pageantry of this cultural and historic event.

If you enjoyed our publication and would like to continue to read from home, please use the QR code to the right to access our digital publication on our website.

Wishing you a great rest of March, and safe travels if you are leaving the island this weekend.

Hilary Grant
Editor

Online Portal

For in-depth information about our island, consult ST-MAARTEN.COM - the official online portal. Please use the convenient QR codes with any smart phone to access individual pages directly.

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What does the number on each advertisement stand for?
Please refer to the map on Pages 10/11. Regions of the island are marked with a number which corresponds to the number you see on ads.

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Entire Island
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Racing Yachts on Pasture

The fastest, most elegant racing yachts compete in the America’s Cup. Sleek high tech machines, which are developed and maintained by budgets in the hundreds of millions of dollars, are fighting for the highest honor in the sailing regatta world. These boats are called '12 Metres' after the technical formula for their design, with their actual 'length overall' being about 66 feet.

What happens to these thoroughbreds once they completed their campaigns? The surprising answer: They go to Sint Maarten to start a second life as the region’s most exhilarating public water excursion! Yes, you too are invited to sail on legendary boats such as the America's Cup winner, Stars & Stripes, in a close race against their original nemesis.

Cruise lines named the 12 Metre Regatta as a top Caribbean excursion, and it’s easy to see why: This is an activity suitable for the novice sailor, even children as young as nine years are allowed to come along. At the same time, any true sailing aficionado and even experienced sailors with a circumnavigation under their belt, will yearn to get a feel for the most efficient sailing machines ever conceived.

Guests have the choice just to relax and to enjoy the ride; or to become an active part of the crew, trimming the sails, grinding the winches and doing their best to beat the competition in this true race.

Partaking in a 12 Metre Regatta should be on the bucket list of anyone with a love for the sea. Individuals can book a place, but the activity is also available to larger groups as special events. The docks of the 12 Metre Regatta are close to the cruise ship port in Point Blanche and behind Chesterfields Restaurant in Philipsburg.
St. Maarten's Carnival Celebrates

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"Two years ago, we had a Jouvert Jump Up and performance by four out of the top six Soca artists. This year, we have Machel Montano and he is the last key. Once he comes and has a good time that will open up doors. We have the best venue and a great vibe.”

For those who are not familiar with the term ‘Jump Up’, it is a procession of revelers dancing behind large flatbed trucks, traditionally with a band playing Soca, on a long and specific route. Soca music was created on another Caribbean island, Trinidad, and was adopted throughout most of the islands as their sound of choice. Most of the music played during Carnival is Soca music.

We talked in depth about how important it was to retain the old traditions of Carnival but at the same time incorporate modern elements. Mr. Lourens was emphatic that when it comes to keeping the historical elements of Carnival that, “we keep almost everything because our past is very important to who we are today. Carnival is a tradition and we have to carry on that tradition as much as possible.”

“Keeping with tradition, however, should not mean that we do not try to improve on things,” he further states. “I am a history person- so culture is very important to me. Adding cultural elements (food competitions, a culture night, a cultural parade and even a living King Momo) over the past three years is my attempt to add more of our culture.”

King Momo is the embodiment of the spirit of Carnival. St. Maarten used to only burn an effigy of King Momo at the closing of Carnival. They have never had a living one, presiding over Carnival as they do in other countries, until now.

He acknowledged that there will always be those persons who are wary of change and won’t agree with or like the transformations made. When asked how the SCDF handles the introduction of new elements or modifications to existing he responded, “Our public doesn’t take things easy. It’s best to just do it. My board and I measure all the possible impacts- both good and bad, and make decisions based on how the changes will positively enhance the Carnival experience for everyone.” One of the biggest changes, and the one that has drawn the most criticism, is the modernization of the Carnival Village and increases in booth fees.

There are those in the community who feel that the tradition of booth holders building their own booths is an important one that has been lost; as watching the booths and the village be constructed was an essential part of that ‘Carnival is coming feeling’.

There are also complaints that by raising the booth fees the SCDF has limited the participation of individual booth holders and instead opened the doors to commercial entities.

“The SCDF is under pressure to make things accessible for as much as the public as possible,” Lourens explained. “We have always had money problems. While they think of themselves as our ‘biggest’ sponsor, government really does not provide a sufficient budget to sustain Carnival. We are therefore dependent on sponsors like TELM, LLT and Motor World and of course, the booth fees to make things happen. Yes, back in the day it was the responsibility of the booth holders to build their own booths and the fee was only something like $50 to $100 dollars. Nowadays booth fees are $800 to $900 dollars but the booths are turnkey. This provides the supplemental income that SCDF uses to operate. Without proper funding, we will always be stung in how far we can go.”

Lourens also pointed out that the addition of the commercial booth holders is not a bad thing as he believes that this has diversified the offerings of the village. He says, “The village used to have 80 something chicken and Johnny cake booths. Now it has a larger mix which reflects the diverse culture of St. Maarten.”

Aside from changing how the Village looks and expanding its culinary offerings, Mr. Lourens explained how he is an advocate of having more young people be involved in Carnival. From artists to chefs to photographers; he believes that it is only

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50 Years: Planning for the Future

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fair that these young people be given a chance to make their mark. He also is very proud that under his leadership the number of events catering to local musical talent has increased.

In order to drum up interest, in the local populace, early on, organizers invited bands from other islands to play. This is still an element of Carnival as there are at least five nights of international concerts on the Carnival schedule. “Raising the participation local participation of musicians definitely is part of my attempt to add more of our culture to the music side of things. Jouvert being blocked, the Band Clash and the Soca Rumble are all things that I was involved in changing.”

Mr. Lourens made it clear that before his term as SCDF is done that he would like to have set Carnival on the path to self-sufficiency. “In the future, it needs to be sustainable. It should not have to rely on government or on the business sector to operate. It needs to be professional, it needs to be able to operate 24/7, 365 days a year with an office and people being paid to do what needs to be done. This is how the festival will grow. It would be great for us to get management of the Village which would help strengthen our operations, especially the development part of SCDF. The development part is very important and for that we need money. If we already don’t have enough money to just run the festival, we don’t have money to put into development.”

To commemorate 50 years of Carnival, the SCDF has released a coloring book, an album and commemorative coffee table book. Alston hopes that these endeavors may become a standard part of Carnival, opening up new avenues for revenue generation.

Ultimately, he wants the general public to realize that the only way for Carnival to continue to thrive is for the community as a whole to be involved. He is appreciative of corporate sponsors but stated, “we need the schools involved, we need the community involved. Everything changes as life changes,” he reminds me.

“At SCDF we are looking at 50 years as a turning point and are looking at year 51 as new beginning. We do not want to be operating the same way next year and onwards.”
Is There a Difference Between Precious and Semi-Precious Gemstones?

By Hilary Grant, GIA Graduate Gemologist

There is a common misconception surrounding these two terms related to gemstone purchases. In fact, the Gemological Institute of America and their graduates (like myself) stay away from these terminologies as they commonly confuse price, rarity and characteristics.

Take Tanzanite as an example; it comes from only one mine in the world and can have a high price per carat. So, would you call it precious or semi-precious? If we had to choose between the two, Tanzanite would fall into the semi-precious gem category and here is why.

Diamonds, Sapphires, Rubies and Emeralds traditionally carry the highest price per carat of all the gems due to their astonishing color and tremendous rarity. Any gemstone that is not one of these fabulous four is actually a semi-precious jewel. This term did not mean there was less value in the twinklely mineral, just that they are typically more abundant.

It is also important to note that these terms do not come from thousands of years ago. The mid-1800s are responsible for the distinction between precious and semi-precious gems. Other gemstones used to have the same ‘precious’ terminology, like Opal and Amethyst, but that was quickly changed to semi-precious after large deposits of these glittering treasures were unearthed in the early 1800s.

Nowadays you can find numerous rare semi-precious gems like Alexandrite, Tsavorite and Tanzanite; which rival Rubies and Sapphires in price. It is fair to say that these terms that we try to fit these sparkling gems into are out of date and meaningless.

The US Federal Trade Commission has toyed with the ideal several times of banning the use of precious and semi-precious expressions relating to jewelry altogether as a way to combat customer confusion. Additionally, GIA is joined by the American Gem Trade Association by listing in their Code of Ethics, “Members should avoid the use of the term ‘semi-precious’ in describing gemstones.”
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The Unique St. Maarten/St-Martin Crossword Puzzle

Find out if you are a truly knowledgeable about our region and its culture, history and geography

ACROSS
2 Bay named after which fruit?
4 After which town is this casino named?
9 Popular game at the Jump Up Casino
10 French upscale supermarket
12 Bay is home real estate development and beach bar
15 Island off the Eastern coast of St-Martin
16 Lagoon island names after Peanuts character
18 Tree with pod-like fruits
20 Card game at Hollywood Casino
21 Pre-owned luxury watch for sale at Oro Diamante
22 Airport code for Grand Case Airport
23 Bay named after which stinging plant?

DOWN
1 Town at Great Bay
3 Juicy stone fruit
5 Sea snail
6 Not dusk beach
7 Beach at the end of the airport runway
8 Another name for Mahi Mahi
11 Bay named like cartoon family
13 Bother some seaweed
14 Aquatic reptile
17 What emotion is expressed at this bay?
19 Bay named like a bad hair cut

Careful! This week's crossword puzzle has a couple trick questions. You will notice that all questions are rooted in the Caribbean hemisphere and might take a bit of research to answer if you haven't spent much time here. It also means: the answers are valid for St. Maarten/St-Martin and the neighboring islands. For example, if we ask for an island directly to the North of our location, it can only be Anguilla.

If we are using compound words in the answer, they do NOT have spaces!

If you try to solve the puzzle as a visitor to our island and you get stuck: don't be shy! Approach a local and ask. You might find they struggle to answer as well. Or strike up an interesting conversation and learn a bit about our very unique region.

Mistakes do happen, even though our puzzle is produced right here on the island. If you detect an error, drop us a line at SXM@EMAIL.COM.

Puzzle Solution on page 18
Find Shopping, Activities and Services Here

1. **The Art Box**
   - **Address:** 14 Papaye, Philipsburg
   - **Contact:** +1 721 544 2412
   - **Website:** www.ArtboxStMaarten.com

2. **Ric’s Pest Control**
   - **Call:** 0690 88 69 80
   - **Website:** www.mosquitocontrolstmaarten.com

3. **NoCo Art Studio**
   - **Contact:** +1 721 533 0868
   - **Website:** nocostudio.com

4. **INcredible Fitness & More**
   - **Address:** Rhine Road 146, Cupecoy
   - **Contact:** +1 721 554 4606

5. **Topper’s Rhum Distillery Tours**
   - **Contact:** +1 721 520 0008
   - **Website:** www.toppersrhumtours.com

6. **Centre Commercial de Mont Vernon**
   - **Contact:** +1 721 590 27 2794
   - **Website:** www.montvernon.com

7. **Eye Land Optique**
   - **Address:** Promenade Mall
   - **Contact:** +590 590 36 64 65
   - **Email:** eyelandoptic.sxm@gmail.com

8. **Jo Junie Tours**
   - **Website:** www.jojunietours.com
   - **Contact:** +1 721 527 4496

9. **Sint Rose Arcade**
   - **Website:** www.sintrosearcade.com

10. **Simpson Bay Yacht Club**
    - **Address:** Welfare Road #66, Cole Bay
    - **Contact:** +1 721 544-3653
    - **Email:** info@simonbyc.com

11. **Simpson Bay Pharmacy**
    - **Website:** www.sxmpharma.com
    - **Location:** Simpson Bay
    - **Contact:** +1 721 544-3653

12. **St. Martin Anguilla St. Barths**
    - **Website:** caribbeanmarines.com
    - **Contact:** +590 690 48 49 33

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**Activities:**
- Secluded Beaches
- Best Snorkeling Spots
- Deserted Islands

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- **Monday – Friday:** 8:00 am – 8:00 pm
- **Saturday:** 8:00 am – 1:00 pm
- **Sunday and public holidays:** 9:00 am – 7:00 pm
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1. Thirsty Barons
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   - Philipsburg, Sint Maarten
   - Call +1 721 542-3100

2. Taco Macho
   - Enjoy the best of Latin hospitality
   - Mexican - Colombian Restaurant & Bar
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   - Free parking! Call 1 721 545-5390 for reservation

3. Snoopy's
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   - www.MelangeSXM.com

5. The Boon
   - ‘Right on pristine Simpson Bay Beach!’
   - Casual Gourmet Bistro
   - Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner
   - (8 AM to 10 PM)
   - 117 Simpson Bay Road, Simpson Bay
   - Call +1 721 545-3070 for reservation

6. Bistrot Caraïbes
   - Open from 9AM for Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner
   - 81 Boulevard de Grand Case
   - For Reservations Call +590 590 200 829 or +590 590 538 144

7. Karakter
   - OPEN FROM 9AM FOR BREAKFAST, LUNCH & DINNER
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8. Orient Village Plantation
   - Restaurant Bar & Lounge
   - ‘Opening Hours’
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   - Lunch 12pm - 3pm
   - Dinner 6pm - 9.30pm
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9. Wetzel’s Pretzels
   - #65 Airport Road Simpson Bay

10. Wetzel’s Pretzels
    - Blend of French, Asian and Caribbean cuisine
    - Open for dinner: Monday thru Thursday: 6PM to 10PM
    - 10PM

11. Wetzel’s Pretzels
    - Blend of French, Asian and Caribbean cuisine
    - Open for dinner: Monday thru Thursday: 6PM to 10PM
    - 10PM

12. Wetzel’s Pretzels
    - Blend of French, Asian and Caribbean cuisine
    - Open for dinner: Monday thru Thursday: 6PM to 10PM
    - 10PM
On the west coast of St. Maarten sits a long stretch of pristine sand with clear blue waters just next door to the famous Maho Beach. This beach is nestled at the edge of the Mullet Bay Golf Course and offers the perfect day for adults and children to spend the day in the sun.

On shore, the white sand beach is surrounded by palm trees and some of the rocky coast nearest the airport becomes the perfect place to dive into the blue water. On the far side, the cliff edges are an ideal spot to take a break from the water and hike or explore.

Right nearby the free parking area are two delicious BBQ restaurants that make the perfect lunch for beach goers. Drinks, chicken, ribs and fish are all available and incredible delicious (especially after spending some time in the water). On the same end of the coast you can rent chairs and umbrellas for the day.

The ocean is often so clear here that you can see the ripples of the sand beneath the waves as you float on the surface relaxing in the sun. Where the waves break near the sandy shore you can body surf or swim past the break to float in the warm water with a drink in your hand.

Snorkeling at this location is a must-do. On either end of the beach there are rocky cliffs that start above the water’s surface and continue beneath the waves. As you swim along this area you can look into the crevices or holes for eels, lobsters or crabs. If you snorkel in the middle of the bay and you are lucky, you can sometimes find a spotted eagle ray or schools of fish cruising from one end of the bay to the other.

Focus your swimming near rocks or other protected areas for marine life to hide from predators. Pay attention to how far out you are swimming as jet skis and boats often frequent this slice of paradise. It is always best to snorkel in pairs and only use reef friendly sunscreen when entering the water. To make sure you are protected from the sun while you swim you can layer up with a UV protective rash-guard.

But what happens when the sun goes down? Every so often you can attend a beach party after sunset on Mullet Bay Beach. Most often these are Full Moon parties hosted by Maartian Rebels.

This group of DJs sets up a bonfire, bar and stage for them to play House Techno Love music late into the night. Those attending can come anytime as the sun begins to set to relax on the beach and listen to the music as the moon rises and the stars come out. Finding a spot to sit next to the bonfire to chat, have drinks and enjoy the tunes.

If you arrive after sunset you don’t have to know the exact location to find the party. As you exit your car you can just follow the sound of the music through the trees right to the edge of the beach. Dancing, drinking and sitting in the sand looking at the stars as the music plays is the perfect way to end a long week. As the evening goes on you can often find several people dancing in front of the speakers, enjoying the party well into the morning.

To find out where the next event is, visit the Facebook page for the Maartian Rebels.
BirdSleuth Caribbean Program Connects Kids to Science and Nature on St-Martin

Les Fruits de Mer amazes once more. This nonprofit organization whose mission is to raise awareness about nature and culture, hosts an activity geared toward conserving Caribbean birds and their habitats. This program is called BirdSleuth.

Over the last five years, almost 50,000 people across twenty-two islands have learned about our indigenous birds. They took part in BirdSleuth Caribbean, a program that uses birds to teach science and conservation. The program was hosted by BirdsCaribbean.

BirdsCaribbean is a vibrant international network of members and partners committed to conserving Caribbean birds and their habitats. The goal is to raise awareness, promote science and empower local partners to build a region where people appreciate, conserve and benefit from a thriving bird population.

“The goal of BirdSleuth Caribbean is to promote the protection of birds and nature,” explained BirdsCaribbean Executive Director Lisa Sorenson.

“It’s easy to fall in love with birds. They are beautiful and they are all around us. That makes them a perfect tool for teaching science and conservation.”

On French St-Martin, dozens of teachers have learned BirdSleuth. The program is available in English, Spanish and French. The program involves over twenty-five activities including classroom lessons, games and outdoor activities. BirdSleuth can be taught as a series of ten lessons. Many activities also work well on their own.

BirdSleuth activities have been used in many ways. They are offered in schools and museums. Fun activities like Bird Bingo and the Habitat Scavenger Hunt are popular at bird and wildlife events.

The focus on Caribbean birds connects with kids, especially on islands where most teaching tools come from far away.

Over 1,000 kids have participated in BirdSleuth Caribbean and both Environmental Protection in the Caribbean as well as the Les Fruits de Mer association, have trained teachers and led BirdSleuth with students.

These activities are offered for free to classes and groups visiting Amusement Naturalis at The Old House in French Quarter. The activities are led by local bird expert Binkie van Es and other Les Fruits de Mer association volunteers.
Fundraiser at Buccaneer Beach Bar Benefiting Furry Family Members

By Leslie Hickerson

Last weekend SXM Paws hosted a very successful fundraiser at Buccaneer Beach Bar. SXM Paws is a group that does amazing work around our island to benefit animals in need.

The organization was founded in 2015 by Corinne Mackie and Dorette de Leeuw. Since that time SXM Paws has grown to an all-encompassing group that does everything they can to help to the animals of SXM. “Our goal is pretty broad. It is taking animals out of harm’s way, rescuing strays/abandoned dogs, we try to set up spay and neuter programs, and more,” says de Leeuw.

Over the years, the group has taken on more and more in the way of caring for those that need it most, but they have even bigger plans for their future.

“Ultimately of course what we would like to do is to set up a shelter, or at least an adoption center. Where we can have an office, where we can have a presence. That way people could come in to get info. Right now, everything we do is on social media and all of the animals that are in our care, which can be up to twenty, are all in foster homes. It would be wonderful if we had a spot where tourists can see the animals and interact with them,” explains de Leeuw.

Saturday’s event included live music, a raffle of prizes donated by local businesses, a silent auction, and specials through CC1 on Tito’s Vodka. Dianna Boyd, a recent addition to the SXM Paws Board of Directors, did an amazing job planning and coordinating the fundraiser. A huge turnout of animal lovers eager to support the group, and get a chance to win some truly amazing prizes, got to mingle both with other animal enthusiasts and the pets that got to come along.

The proceeds from this event will go towards funding the adoption center they hope to open. It will also help fund those medical costs that the group continues to provide to both strays and pets of those that can’t afford to do so.

“There are a lot of good dog owners who just don’t have the resources. We provide medical care. It is an on-going struggle for financing.”

If you were unable to attend the event you can still support that amazing work that is done by the organization in several ways.

For those visiting the island: You can donate at any of the three veterinary clinics on the Dutch side: Animal Care Center, St. Maarten Veterinary Clinic, or Animal Hospital of SXM. Just tell the office the donation is for SXM Paws. You can also donate to a PayPal account in the United States. One amazing (and adorable) way to help the group is to volunteer as a pet escort for your flight home. Several pets get adopted by families in the US or Canada. These pets need companions on their way to their forever homes!

For residents of SXM: Adopt don’t shop!! There are several cats and dogs that are awaiting homes on the island. Don’t spend a lot of money buying an animal from a breeder when these adorable pets sit in kennels waiting for a home. If you can’t adopt the group is always looking for foster parents for animals. They are also in need of funding, volunteers at events, or food donations at all times!!

SXM Paws will be hosting their next event very soon! “We will be doing a raffle after this year’s Carnival. We are going to try to ensure that we have prizes that people off island would be able to use as well as locals that live here,” said de Leeuw.

To have a pet is to truly know unconditional love. Supporting this group is an amazing and simple way to make all the difference in the life of an animal. There is nothing better than seeing the change in an animal that knows love and care for the first time in its life.
Sudoku Puzzles

Try your skills on our Sudoku. Ranging from easy to difficult, giving you the opportunity to see if you are a puzzle master. Need help or want to see if you got it correct? Find the Sudoku solutions on Page 18. Good Luck!
Adventures in Sex and Dating in St. Maarten
A Regular Column by Leslie Hickerson

Dating on the island can be messy. Since we live in a place that is in constant holiday mode people find it hard to take life seriously.

There was a couple named Mary and Jack. They got together in high school on the island and continued to date into their twenties. From the outside the two seemed to have it together; living together, working together and having fun. Unfortunately, Jack had a big secret- for a couple of years he had been seeing Mary’s best friend, Samantha, on the side.

Samantha and Jack used to sneak around together whenever they could. The three of them would go out together and Mary would normally call it a night early to go to bed. Then Sam and Jack would hook up anywhere they could find.

Over the years, they got too casual with the running around and one night while they were having a quickie behind La Bamba, another friend caught them going at it. This girl told Sam she would have to fess up to Mary or the friend out them. So, Sam and Jack decided they would go tell Mary that he was moving out and in with Samantha.

Of course, Mary was devastated and some kind of pissed off. The two were quickly dropped by all their friends and found out they really only liked each other because they were forbidden fruit. Within 2 months of moving in Jack was found back on Mary’s doorstep begging for forgiveness. Luckily Mary ain’t that type of woman and she laughed in his face before slamming the door. Since then Jack and Samantha have both left the island and Mary has moved on to better and bigger :) things.
Why is St. Maarten Part of the 'Unhealthy Caribbean'? World Health Organization and individual nations. The index takes ten key metrics to come to its rankings: blood pressure, blood glucose, obesity, depression, happiness, alcohol use, tobacco use, exercise, healthy life expectancy and government spending on healthcare.

It came as a shock to see that six of the twenty most unhealthy countries in the world are located in the Caribbean: Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia, Haiti, Dominican Republic and Jamaica.

Except for Haiti, which faces other challenges, obesity with high blood pressure and lack of exercise are the common denominators.

While the hemisphere is gradually developing and many individuals enjoy a comfortable middle-class income, the purpose of a good life is defeated if it's a very short one. Time to look into the mirror and analyze one's lifestyle. What is the main problem in general and why do I carry my extra pounds specifically? With a guilty conscience, I ask this question to Vanessa Mallarino, an island resident who doubles as a fitness coach and successful Cross-Fit competitor:

"It's not always lack of exercise. First, look at your intake. While on vacation it's fine to have cocktails after the beach. But, you guys meet up almost every evening somewhere for happy hour. And you don't drink just one, but a few Margaritas... and two-thousand calories per day later, you wonder where the weight is coming from? Stop the booze and the weight will fall right off."

What about food?

"All the good and healthy stuff is available, so decent eating is not a problem. And we don't have to talk about the downside of fast food. Everybody knows. Only what I see with local food styles is a bit problematic. They are all high-calorie meals, a kind of cooking which developed during a time when people were working physically very hard and also walked huge distances every day. Fuel was needed. But now? In an office job? And commuting by car? Maybe a third of the portion of what was normal in the old days is justified."

Paradise can be deceiving is her message. It takes a special kind of discipline to not fall into the trap of overindulgence. And asked what the first lifestyle change should be, we are surprised that she doesn't mention exercise first. No, she zeros in on drinking alcohol. "Many people will fix a lot of their health problems if they could just stay away from booze."

Good advice. I will ponder what action to take over a Margarita later this afternoon.
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