Cool Off in the Pool at the First Ever Discovery Day

By Leslie Hickerson

Introduce your family to an important life skill and have tons of fun at the Carib Swim Team’s first ever Discovery Day, hosted at their location in Cole Bay.

On Saturday, June 8 from 12:30PM – 2:00PM, families are invited to come to the Carib Swim Team Pool to participate in several activities. Those that attend will be introduced to the programs the Swim Team has to offer while partaking in fun events like games, relay races and free pool time all supervised by the staff of swim instructors.

Since 1993, the Carib Swim Team has been promoting water safety for children and adults on the island. With every sort of class, from Baby Buddy classes to Adult Swim Mastery, the crew at Carib Swim Team (CST) is well equipped to handle any level of swimmer. The courses are based on age and current ability, to move on students must perform certain skills and be promoted by their instructor.

“Besides the normal programs, we also offer a summer camp together with TriSport for kids who are seven years and older. During the month of July, we do intensive learning for swim lessons. Also, Peter Prinsen started his own physical therapy clinic located at the pool, so he will have an open house,” says Instructor Eline Broere.

While this event will have plenty for younger students there will also be information given out for adults looking to learn to swim or work with...
Letter From the Editor
May 30, 2019

Thanks for choosing the ST-MAARTEN.COM Weekly Edition as your source for where to dine, shop, party and participate in island activities.

After having been gone for what feels like a decade, I am ecstatic to be back home on gorgeous St. Maarten/St-Martin. Stories of my travels to come in following issues, but one thing I can share is that there is no place like our island. This has renewed my optimism that others can and will appreciate SXM as much as I do.

This weekend marks the official start of hurricane season. I was always taught to be ready for any circumstance, and that somehow my vigilance would ward off anything from happening (whether it is a natural disaster or studying for an exam). So, on the off-chance that the old wives’ tale is right, gather your supplies early. Let’s be prepared!

If you enjoyed reading our publication, please use the QR code to the right to find the digital archive on ST-MAARTEN.COM.

Hilary Grant, JIA GG
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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Guyana Celebrates on St. Maarten

Continued from Page 1

The only South American country with English as its official language celebrated 53 years of independence – and the party was on in St. Maarten. You would never assume that Guyana has a population of only 780,000; considering the size of the expatriate community on our island. The Guyanese community has a substantial impact on our local business scene. For starters, there would not be as many Hyundai cars on the roads without them.

The local celebrations started on Saturday with a parade in Philipsburg. There was a festival village installed with Guyanese specialty food, drinks, and music which drew a huge crowd. With a mellow and relaxed atmosphere as well as great conversations to be had, this was a fabulous party to attend.

Such events are the lifeblood of cosmopolitan St. Maarten and we feel that visitors to our island should not be shy to participate in similar experiences. There is so much to be learned about the diverse Caribbean cultures, and here on St. Maarten spending some time with the various expatriate communities will open a wealth of insights to the curious traveler. Attending the Guyanese Independence Day celebrations reminded us why St. Maarten continues to be called ‘The Friendly Island.’

If you would like to enjoy some authentic Guyanese food, visit Back Street 19E in Philipsburg. There is a charming courtyard eatery, called Dereck’s Catering & Local Restaurant. This is the place that Guyanese would recommend to you for enjoying the exceptional cuisine from their South American country.
Caribbean Palms: "Let's Make St. Maarten Green Again!"

Selling cooling appliances to the Arctic population is often used as an example of extraordinary salesmanship. But isn't selling palm trees to the Caribbean a similar achievement?

To find out, we meet Dennis van Limburg, the personable Dutchman who heads Caribbean Palms in Cole Bay. His operation occupies a piece of land on Union Road; close to Port de Plaisance. A vast inventory and variety of palm trees in many sizes are on display, complemented by garden accessories and a selection of herbal plants.

Dennis arrived on Sint Maarten at the age of eighteen, just thirteen years ago. He developed professional skills in several jobs around the island, focusing on marketing. It was Hurricane Irma which triggered the start of his own company, Caribbean Palms.

"The resorts were damaged and not only the buildings. Their landscaping was destroyed, gone. I knew that there would be an instant demand for trees during the rebuilding phase.

My family in Europe is in the palm business for over thirty years now. There is a plantation in Spain and a major outlet in Holland. We got together and shipped the first container to St. Maarten. It was an experiment which worked out fantastically."

Now selling his twentieth container load, Dennis realizes that he found his true professional calling through his company; almost as if the nursing and planting of palm trees are part of his family's DNA. "There is a massive amount of experience available through our European operation.

Our trees all have independently verified health certificates."

It's an important detail because, in the past, unchecked palm trees have been imported to St. Maarten for public projects. This was done without any particular expertise, and these plants turned out to be disease-ridden, not only dying but also infecting locally grown trees.

Continued on Page 15
A One-Man Band: Isaac Tochtli

He shows up at the island's busy dining and nightlife spots and starts playing: suddenly without any announcement, the harmonies of traditional Latin songs float through the air, guitar music accompanied by the soft sound of a pan flute and competent singing. Even to the untrained ear, it becomes instantly apparent that this is the performance of a superbly talented musician.

Isaac Tochtli hails from Mexico, and arrived on St. Maarten in November 2018, and at the time of this writing, plans to stay a few more months. He travels alone and has toured Europe, from the Scandinavian countries to the Mediterranean, where he felt most comfortable on the island of Corsica. After this positive experience, he had the idea to try out another French island for the winter months, and this is how he ended up in the Caribbean on St. Maarten/St-Martin.

Asked about where his scheduled gigs are, in hopes to see him perform more frequently, Isaac hesitates: "I'm as busy as I want to be and could have firm appearances, but I'm not up to it right now emotionally."

One doesn't want to press for more information after such a private remark, but Isaac continues to explain his situation. "You see, I need to recover from a traumatic event in my life; I just escaped a cult after living most of my life in a brainwashed state."

An eyebrow raised inquisitively is enough for him to elaborate.

"I was a Jehovah's Witness. I was lucky to wake up and get away from it. But, the bad part is that I can't see my sons anymore; they cut me off from my family." Isaac feels that he needs some time to heal and explains that he frequently battles with a depressed state of mind - clearly not a favorable condition for a stage entertainer.

This is why Isaac Tochtli prefers on most days to take his instruments, walk into one of our island's towns, and to start playing wherever he can find a crowd. We were lucky to watch his performance at a rare scheduled event, right at the central plaza in Orient Village. The restaurants surrounding the stage were busy to the last table, the hum of animated conversations covered the occasional joyful shouts of children running around.

Isaac started playing his full repertoire of various Latin songs, not only the good old Mexican or Peruvian (remember the pan flute) classics, but also Colombian and Cuban hits. The music was just loud enough to be enjoyed for focused listening, but far from a volume which would have hindered dinner conversations. This soft approach to evening entertainment fills a void among our island's musicians, who usually overpower the dining environment.

A search for 'Isaac Tochtli' on YouTube will list several videos, among them a professional seventy-minute documentary. The show aired on TV stations worldwide.
Electric Versus Combustion: VOLTS is Mobility on a Budget

Electric vehicles enjoy broad support from governments worldwide as they are perceived and promoted as the magic solution to many environmental ills. The truth is that some ecological challenges might just be exchanged for others, equally damaging ones. As long as electricity is produced by burning fossil fuels, be it coal or oil, not much is green about electric transports. And St. Maarten/St.-Martin, with dependence on diesel generators to power the island, is in an especially vulnerable position.

The most severe market obstacle for electric cars or bikes is the relatively short range they allow between battery charges. And this range cannot just be extended by installing more batteries, because of weight considerations. Batteries to power a car for 310 miles (500km) are as heavy as a campervan, and we are not even talking about the astronomical cost for the storage units. Technology makes advances in leaps and bounds, but the miracle concept to increase energy density for storing electricity has not been found yet.

Now to the good news: our island is ideally suited for the range typical electric vehicles provide. Nobody here commutes over 62 miles (100km) per day, and overnight charging will deliver a fueled-up machine for the next morning. Driving an electric car or a bike is a blast! Instant power release, better acceleration at no noise compared to combustion-engine transports will convert most skeptics fast. Add to this that there is almost no maintenance to worry about, and electric cars and bikes look attractive... if the price would come down a bit more.

Enter Volts as a solution, owned and operated by longtime SXM resident Stephan Possemiers. Years ago, he started the painful process of investing in electric scooters and importing them to our island from the company headquarters in his native Belgium. Occasionally, he found a technical gem from a manufacturer committed to quality, but more often, he had to write off his investment as junk.

“It took three years to find the right products, but now I have a line-up of fantastic scooters,” says Stephan. “Nowadays, Volts as a brand stands for cutting edge and high-quality electric bikes.”

Especially popular is the Harley Scooter, even though the name might be a stretch if it’s referencing Harley Davidson motorbikes. Similarities begin and end with fat tires and a certain style of handle-bar and headlight.

VOLTS is currently using a fleet of Harley Scooters for guided tours with visitors; private rentals are not available yet. But new scooters are also for sale, starting at only €1,800. For this price, one acquires a tool for perfectly competent transportation in areas like Simpson Bay loop or the Old Town, maybe to Marigot or to get around in Philipsburg. Top speed is about 25mph (45 km/h). With an optional second battery, the scooter will have a range of about 50 miles (or 80 kilometers).

For transport to all corners of the island, a full-size scooter resembling the classic look might be better suited. Volts has several in their list.

Stephan foresees a bright future for electric mobility on the island: “As soon as individual households start producing their own power with solar panels, my bikes can’t be beaten for cost efficiency and convenience. But we are ahead of the game already because we also have the fun factor on our side!”

Go online to VOLTS.BE to find more information - if you speak Dutch. Otherwise, contact Stephan Possemiers at +1 721 554-3462 or shoot him an email: volsbe@gmail.com.

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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 19
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The St. Maarten Vegans Organization: Living the Vegan Life
By Sarina Alexander

Continued from Page 1

For the Vegan Ladies (see photograph on the left), their presence at the market is essentially to raise awareness on how “tasty” vegan food can be. Though I can’t truly vouch for it, as I wasn’t offered to try any, but perhaps they taste as good as the pictures I took.

In case you want to try to whip up some vegan dishes of your own, the Vegan Ladies put together a book composed of all the recipes they personally tried during their monthly gatherings for the past year. All profits from the $10 books sold, go to supporting the Animal Defenders organization, which feeds stray cats and dogs on Sint Maarten, helping with animal adoption, providing medical attention and overall through advocating for better treatment of animals on the island.

St. Maarten Vegans Organization was created four years ago when they launched their first vegan festival to bring together like-minded people. Though they were not expecting a huge crowd for their first event, they managed to attract about 100 people. For their third edition last year, over 250 participants came to enjoy vegan food, vegan products, cooking demos and several talks around veganism.

So, in case you’re still wondering what veganism is, Marianne proposed the following definition: “veganism is the act of eliminating animal products and animal harm in one’s lifestyle. That goes as far as not purchasing leather, nor products that were tested on animals, or where animals were hurt in the process of creating a product for yourself.”

The main difference with vegetarian and vegans would be that vegetarians still consume fish, honey, eggs and dairy; whereas if we base ourselves on the definition given by Marianne; that’s a big no-no for vegans.

So, twice a year they put together this marketplace at the Joga Center, creating a space for artists residing on the island and vegan-conscious people to come together to purchase, sell and exchange ideas and ideologies.

Or, if you prefer, add them on Facebook to stay updated: @StMaartenVegans

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The main difference with vegetarian and vegans would be that vegetarians still consume fish, honey, eggs and dairy; whereas if we base ourselves on the definition given by Marianne; that’s a big no-no for vegans.

Now, if like me you’ve tried countless times to eliminate meat from your diet in vain because you’re constantly on the go and get easily tempted by home-cooked oxtail, smoked turkey in red beans and stewed chicken: Marianne gave some great tips of places you can get delicious bites from such as the Trinidadian food truck on Pond Fill that sells chickpea doubles, lentil spinach patties can be found at Jamaican restaurants and vegan patties and cupcakes can be found at Cake House.

If you’d rather make your own delicacies, you can get your fresh fruits and vegetables at different local farmers or vendors such as:
- SXM fisheries (Facebook: @sxm.fisheries) and Jus en Folie in Bellevue offers fresh vegetable baskets with locally grown vegetables or imported from Dominica
- Denicio Wyatt or ECO St Maarten Agricultural Research and Development Foundation or Spaceless Gardens in St Peters
- Sunny Food on Monday from 4:00PM to Tuesday 9:00AM, “that’s when they have the fresh stuff”

Otherwise, newly opened restaurants and a lot of well-established restaurants on the island now have vegan-friendly menus.

If you’re interested in meeting the Vegan Ladies or discovering more about St Maarten Vegans, you can pay them a visit at their upcoming events:

November 2nd – pop up dinner by Vegan Ladies
November 16th – Vegan Festival
August – Meet and Greet
Chefs are the unsung heroes of the food world because they operate behind the scenes. Although their work is a crucial aspect of any restaurant, we customers don’t usually get to meet them.

Chefs rely on the waiting staff – their earthly representatives – to make sure we are well looked after and put us in the frame of mind to enjoy the food. Together they make a team that makes the catering world go round.

But how do you get on the ladder to culinary success in this island?

I spoke to Jan van Beek, Head of Business and Hospitality at the University of St-Martin, and his colleagues, and learned that there is a system in place to give students a start in the catering business, even though it is not as highly developed as they would like.

For many students, it starts with a hospitality course at Sundial school.

“They learn to serve, learn all the rules of serving,” Mr van Beek says. “They learn the techniques, including some knowledge about wine. And in the kitchen they learn to cook, simple dishes, three course menus.”

There are certainly opportunities for what these professionals call “line staff”: from commis chefs (junior cooks who do a lot of the basic work and preparation) to kitchen porters and cleaners, and with the island still not fully recovered from Hurricane Irma, line staff positions are protected by government to ensure that the jobs go to local people.

When so many hotels and restaurants closed after the destruction, it left a lot of local people out of work, so it is vital for the island to look after its own in this respect.

The more senior positions in the industry are often filled by experienced and highly trained staff from outside.

The island is far from alone in this respect. Any small community worth its salt will give local people a chance if they have the ability – not just in catering but many industries including healthcare. But if the talent is not available among the locally-born workforce, in order to maintain high standards, the right people must be brought in.

For a young person with aspirations to wear the tall white hat, getting started is the key, and this is where the Sundial school comes in. With a restaurant-style kitchen to use, budding chefs can get a feel for the life and learn some basic skills.

From there they may progress to NIPA, the National Institute for Professional Advancement, which provides vocational training in many areas including catering. And that is where I found Renata de Weever.

Culinary Instructor Renata is a good example of a local girl making her way in the world, and now passing on her knowhow to the next generation, while working part-time as sous chef at Emilio’s. Renata’s path to her current position involved spending time in Holland from the age of 16, doing the grandly named Hospitality and Hotel Entrepreneur Management course, then coming home for a couple of months before moving to the US to get her Bachelor’s degree in Culinary Arts at a university in the US.

Such travel can be a stumbling block for anyone whose family does not have the money to fund the education.

But even then, all is not lost and it is possible to get some basic skills and then go straight into a professional kitchen to learn as you go. Some might even argue that this is the better option, not having to wait to see the classroom theory put into real action.

Renata always planned to return, to put her new qualifications to good use, and she did just that. “I came back to the island and worked for seven years at Sonesta,” she says.

But NIPA had its eye on her and at the third time of asking she agreed to take up the post.

NIPA takes the students to Level One, with Level Two hopefully coming soon – and levels Three and Four the ultimate aim. Level One is largely about professionalism, including such basic life skills as punctuality.

“Some find it a bit of a joke, not being on time,” Renata says. “But I make sure my students know: you have to be on time here because when you get a job you’re going to have to do that. And we work on basic manners, how you conduct yourself. They learn how a commercial kitchen operates. And we teach them some skills, like food preparation.”

Level Two goes a bit deeper into each subject. Renata is keen to stress that before a cook can get too creative, they must master a recipe. Once they can do it perfectly, then they can think about adding their own touches.

“That’s when you can make it yours,” she says.

So, what is it that Renata likes so much about a career as a professional chef?

“It’s a rush,” she says. “But after the rush you feel good, like ‘Hey, we did it.’ It’s stressful but it’s fun at the same time. The kitchen has its own culture. We bark down each other’s throats and there’s a lot of trash talk, which makes it fun. As much as we may yell at each other, at the end of the day we’re a team, a family.”
Adventures in Sex and Dating in St. Maarten
A Regular Column by Leslie Hickerson

"Tinder Mistakes"

The month of May might have hit the tourism industry on St. Maarten hard, but it hit the sex scene harder. With the absence of transient yachtsies and tourists, the dating pool has practically been cut in half. The result has been that people have turned back to the dating apps that they neglected all high season.

One man, Roy, organized to meet up with a Tinder match over the weekend with high hopes. His date was Jillian seemed funny, relaxed and very pretty. When Roy arrived at the bar he found her sitting with two beers ready; this was definitely a good sign. They got off to a great start: laughing, taking shots and making out together. Jillian finally announced that she wanted an early night, but she would like to see him tomorrow. While Roy would have liked to spend the night, he was happy meet up then. They went their separate ways.

In slurs, she explained that she went home but got called back out by her friend. Roy could tell this was more effort than it was worth and started to walk away, but the drunken Dutch man had other plans.

Completely misreading the situation this guy thought he needed to defend Jillian’s honor and shoved Roy in the back telling him to, “get the eff out”. Roy’s friends quickly came to support him and Jillian dragged her companion out of the bar.

While this should be the end of the story you may be surprised to hear that the next day Roy got a call from Jillian trying to finalize their plans to meet up... he did not go.

Caribbean Palms:
"Let's Make St. Maarten Green Again!"
Continued from Page 5

“We do everything by the book. No shortcuts! Our trees are expertly prepared for transport; we keep them watered through a special system while in the container.”

Dennis is especially proud of his team, as the business made the transition from selling trees to becoming a landscaping specialist as well. Whatever plants Caribbean Palms sell they are also able to maintain them. Retail sales are strong, but Dennis explains that they are building up a wholesale market and that they can furnish large commercial projects on other islands as well.

The blond and attractive lady greeting customers while Dennis is in the field is his mother Angélique, who recently moved to St. Maarten and became part of the Caribbean Palms crew. She has an exceptional eye for the details of business and makes sure that all orders are handled smoothly.

To find out more about Caribbean Palms, check out their website at Caribbean-Palms.com
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 19. Good Luck!

Easy

Get A Free Rental Car

Scan the QR code below with your smart phone. You will find a sign-up form to claim your free rental car or dinner for two.

The Belair Beach Hotel is offering a very generous promotion with this program. Please understand that certain qualification criteria apply.
The Be the Change Foundation has provided $800 in funding for Les Fruits de Mer’s Citizens of Change project. The project will highlight St-Martiners who have made a difference on the island. The stories of their work will be featured in an exhibit at Amuseum Naturalis at The Old House, as well as also online.

Les Fruits de Mer is a non-profit association based in St. Martin whose core mission is to raise awareness about nature, culture, and sport. The organization carries out this mission through publications, an education program, and special public outreach events that entertain, inspire, and inform.

As for the Amuseum Naturalis, it is a free museum of the nature, history and culture of St-Martin and the Caribbean, created by Les Fruits de Mer. It is located at the historic Old House in French Quarter on the hill above Le Galion.

“We are thrilled that Be the Change and their local donors have supported this project,” said Les Fruits de Mer President Jenn Yerkes. “Local kids need a place where they can see the faces and read the stories of the people that made St-Martin what it is. It is one of our goals for Amuseum Naturalis and something this project will do.”

The first installment of the project will feature about a dozen people. The project aims to spotlight a variety of people, including teachers, writers, artists, builders, farmers, craftsmen, cooks, parents and storytellers. During March, Les Fruits de Mer requested nominations from the public. Based on those nominations, the association decided to focus first on St-Martiners who have passed.

“As we started researching, we realized it’s already difficult to find information and images of St-Martiners from the past,” explained project leader Mark Yokoyama. “In many cases, we feel like we’re racing against the clock to find and document these exceptional lives.”

The first installment of exhibits from Citizens of Change project will debut later this year at Amuseum Naturalis. The museum welcomes further submissions of people to feature, and information and photos that can help tell their stories.

Amuseum Naturalis is open from 9am to Noon Tuesday to Saturday and admission is free. It is located at The Old House, on the hill above Galion Beach in French Quarter. More information is available at http://amuseumnaturalis.com.
Cool Off in the Pool at the First Ever Discovery Day

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For adults and children that do not know how to swim the Discovery Day is the perfect way to introduce the student to the pool and the staff of CST! Being able to swim means that you will truly be able to enjoy the benefits of living on our beautiful island, but it is also a crucial skill to ensure your safety in several everyday activities for residents.

Children especially are unaware of the dangers of going too deep or too far from shore when playing the water, but even adults can have an unlucky fall while walking down a dock or working near the ocean or lagoon.

“See, when you live on an island you are surrounded by water, it’s very important to know how to save yourself! This can be done in different matters and the younger you learn these skills the better it is. Swimming is a lifelong skill,” says Broere.

When teaching students, the course work focuses on making students comfortable in the water and then teaching them how to get to safety in an emergency situation. The unfortunate truth is that parents cannot be attentive 100% of the time, especially during summer holidays when many children have an excess of free time.

By introducing the student to good swim practices you are giving them a skill that could be the difference in a crisis. Once the students, adults or children, have mastered the basics the coursework continues to proper stokes and redefining their technique.

To attend the Discovery Day just show up at the CST pool located in Cole Bay off Union Road from 12:30PM – 2:00PM, for questions or directions you can contact them on Facebook, call at +1 721 553-7225, or email info@caribswimteam.org.
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