Stylish Music Festival with Caribbean Charm

In just a couple short months St. Maarten/St-Martin will be inundated with visitors, looking to dine and party around our tropical paradise. Are you thinking this article is about the Regatta? Not this time- our island is host to another massive annual event: the SXM Music Festival.

St. Maarten is notorious for being the wildest island in the Caribbean, rivaling Las Vegas for its party-like atmosphere, delectable food and numerous casinos. For our readers that live on island- this isn’t news to you, and you know why visitors flock to our island during the winter months.

But, what if we told you that these very reasons are also why one of the most extravagant music festivals calls St. Maarten/St-Martin home? The SXM Music Festival is bringing another rendition of its five-day musical experience to our island March 13 to 17 this year. This powerhouse event is known for internationally acclaimed celebrity DJ’s playing desirable dance music.

The festival notes five main reasons that it chose St-Martin as its home: direct flights, stunning tropical vibe, wild social atmosphere, two islands in one and the gastronomic adventure in the culinary capital of the Caribbean. While thousands of visitors will be arriving on island to listen to their favorite performance artists and DJ’s, the festival is open to island residents. Think of the money saved- no flight and no hotel necessary!

You Won! Did You Really?

Some friendly and deeply suntanned kids on a scooter approach you and start a conversation about your holidays. Puzzled, you engage in chit-chat.

Celebrate Valentine's Day Island Style

Celebrate Valentine’s Day this year in St. Maarten/St-Martin the way most people dream of: in our warm, gorgeous turquoise waters.

By Leslie Hickerson

Full Article on Page 3

Continued on Page 13

$50 OFF ANY JEWELRY PURCHASE OF $500 OR MORE. SPECIAL ON DIAMOND STUDS: 0.50CT FOR $399 (WHILE SUPPLIES LAST).
Letter From the Editor
January 25, 2019

Hello to our readers! Thank you for choosing our publication for your information on where to dine, shop, party, do activities and stay while on island.

This issue draws us closer to Valentine’s Day, now just a mere couple of weeks away. Our suggestions of what to do on that special day might be just what you are looking for- so be sure to read the article on page 3.

I’m also proud to share some thoughtful pieces on timeshares and rental cars, topics that are continually on the forefront for a vacation destination island.

As always, all our previous issues are available on the ST-MAARTEN.COM website. If you enjoyed our publication and would like to continue to read from home, wherever that may be, please use the QR code to the right to access our digital publication.

Enjoy the end of this month and have a terrific week!

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.

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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Publisher: Jan Thoelke
Email: j.thoelke@st-maarten.com

Editor: Hilary Grant
Email: h.grant@st-maarten.com

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Celebrate Valentine's Day Island Style

Continued from Page 1

If you are celebrating Valentine’s Day this year in St. Maarten/St-Martin why not do it on or in the ocean? After all, living on a Caribbean island means we get to celebrate holidays in ways most people only dream of!

St. Maarten’s variety of water activities is amazing, and couples can enjoy all of them. If you are looking for something more this Valentine’s than giving flowers or going out to dinner, why not partake in some of the ocean based activities the island has to offer? Even if you were in snow-covered Canada- you could bring home roses and chocolates. This year take advantage of being on this beautiful island by doing something you can’t do anywhere else.

Go Diving/Snorkeling:
Couples that dive together, stay together. Ok so that isn’t actually the saying but learning a new skill together can be a great way to connect with your partner and share a common hobby. Scuba diving on St. Maarten is beautiful and one of the best ways to experience all that the island has to offer above and below the water.

Sunset Cruise:
Enjoy the start to your evening by joining a Champagne Sunset Cruise around the Dutch side of the island. Aquamania, Coconut Reef and several other tour operators offer an evening cruise that begins as the sun goes down. Once on board you take a gentle sail/cruise around the island to get the best view of the setting sun while sipping on champagne. Book in advance, as space is limited! Once you are back to the dock you will be ready to head out for a romantic dinner on island.

Wedding/Vow Renewal at Sea:
Looking to avoid the stuffy church wedding? The perfect way for ocean lovers to exchange their vows is aboard a catamaran at sea. Couples can organize small wedding parties to come aboard for a day sail and be married at sea by the captain. You simply can’t beat a wedding held in crystal blue waters with mountains of St. Maarten behind you.

Hunt for the exclusive Lover’s Beach:
This small patch of paradise is situated between Galibay and Friar’s Bay and the name is well deserved. This tiny beach has just enough room for two people to lay comfortably in the sand and is surrounded by tall rocks that provide privacy. Difficult to find, this beach is often deserted and can only be seen easily from a boat in the ocean; making it the picture-perfect spot to steal away a few hours with someone special.

If you aren’t ready to take the plunge you can start out by snorkeling around the island. Take the ferry to Pinel and explore the island’s south west cove. Swim slowly and look for fish and stingrays hiding in the rocks. Then enjoy some lunch and rose at a table in the water at Yellow Beach Restaurant, or relax in the shade at Karibuni.
Germs: Rental Cars that Aren’t Hygienic

Sometimes ignorance is bliss, and it is better not to think observations through. Such is the case if we notice rental cars full of happy vacationers returning from a day on one of our hot tropical beaches. Males especially don’t seem to have a problem driving shirtless, rubbing their sweaty backs on cloth car seats, which soak up this mixture of body fluids and sunscreen chemicals. Better to not think much more about it...too late. Your mind is already likely on rails into a direction where there are no happy conclusions possible. Because now you start wondering about the hygiene of rental car seats and if or how often the rental car operators are shampooing the upholstery.

If the average rental car seat is not cleaned between renters, simple math tells us that this is the equivalent of staying in a hotel bed, where the sheets were not changed for up to one-hundred guests. It is evident that the shirtless drivers don’t seem to be sensitive to this issue, but what about others, about people like you who read these words? And is there a difference in how the rental companies are handling this hygienic issue?

We talked to several rental car providers and learned that seat cleaning is handled very differently. It turns out that the leading professional equipment of German manufacturer Kaercher is not available as a 115-volt model for the US market, which in this case is also affecting the Dutch side of St. Maarten. These expensive machines thoroughly deep-clean the cloth material with hot liquids and chemicals so that no germs or substances foreign to the chair can survive. The top car rental brands of French Guadeloupe and Martinique use such machines.

There are 115-volt substitutes for the expensive Kaercher units available, and some of the local providers use them; sometimes only after a seat is visibly filthy, sometimes on a monthly schedule. There are workers of world-renowned brands who inform us that they have never seen a chair being shampooed or deep-cleaned. Ever.

And then there are companies which clean seats every week; it is these organizations who also inform that they try to change most of their fleet to leather or vinyl seats for the sake of hygiene if the market accepts the additional expense.

Small local rental car providers handle cleaning very differently; some are very conscious about it and make every effort to keep cars in tip-top shape, even sanitize them, others don’t care at all. It is all pretty much up to the personal standards of the owner. It turns out that cars which are frequently rented to cruise ship passengers have the highest level of pollution; these cars are only used for a few hours per renter, almost always include a trip to a beach, where the passengers continue their island tour now with wet bathing suits and sandy feet.

Competitive rental car rates have reached a point where the companies have hardly any wiggle room to provide additional services. If - as a renter - you go for the absolute lowest rate, please don’t expect that all your sensitivities can be addressed. But if you pay a few dollars per day above the minimum rate, you could also ask for acceptable cleanliness.

In closing let's talk about a policy of our web portal, ST-MAARTEN.COM: Before publishing an article, which addresses a service challenge, we ascertain that the companies which we promote through our web portal are not part of the problem. So, rest assured that rental car providers listed and recommended on ST-MAARTEN.COM are offering reasonably clean vehicles.
Some friendly and deeply suntanned kids on a scooter approach you and start a conversation about your holidays. Puzzled about their interest in you, but also charmed by their charisma, you engage in a little chit-chat. While the young man fumbles around on his scooter a few meters away, the girl pulls out a piece of cardstock and hands it to you: "I just have one left, why don't you see if you get lucky," she says with a charming French accent. You immediately pull back, because you don't want to buy a lottery ticket.

"No", she laughs, "It's for free...".

You are holding now a card with several options to scratch of a graphic under which - presumably - a prize might be hidden. Okay, you go for it and dirty your fingernail with the ink. And there it is! It must be your lucky day. An icon is revealed with a hotel bed visible!

The girl screams: "Jacque, come, you need to see this! They have won, they won the big prize." She jumps up and down, and Jacque runs over. He seems to be equally impressed. "First time I see this..." he says breathless and with the gravity of just having witnessed a metaphysical event. You still don't know what you have won. "An almost free vacation," explains the girl. She turns the winning card around and shows you an address.

"This is so great! You just have to go to this resort and show them the card. They will talk to you for a while to explain what they do and after you get your free stay. I'm so happy I have met you and could do this for you!" she gushes and hugs you.

So lucky, such nice people, so much emotion, this island really is the greatest in the world.

Or might this all be too good to be true?

Let's start back with the birth of modern St. Maarten. The dramatic economic development began in the Nineteen-Eighties and was mostly supported by a booming timeshare industry. These were the years when fractional ownership of a vacation property was still firmly connected to a specific unit and week of the year. Many timeshare-owners were so thrilled with their vacation property that they purchased addit-

---

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You Won! Did You Really?

Tional weeks; an indication that the original concept had a healthy market with happy clients.

Today, actual apartment units are not offered anymore; now it is membership programs which are sold. Several reputable organizations run point systems, which give access to a vast worldwide network of properties.

Timeshare and the related vacation ownership concepts have frequently come under scrutiny. Often, the product itself is excellent. It is the marketing methods which cause concern.

The girl in our opening paragraph and her boyfriend Jacque are OPCs - Off Premise Consultants to one or several resorts selling vacation club membership. Their job is to approach couples which are newcomers to the island and to convince them to attend a 90-minute presentation at one of the resorts participating in this marketing scheme.

If they are successful and the couple shows up to participate in the presentation, they receive up to $120. There will also be a managing company which has them under contract, and this company will get another $100. The OPC are trained to look out for the right target group because the resorts know precisely to whom they want to sell.

Making friends with strangers is legal, and nobody intends to block this. But offering scratch cards is prohibited by local law on the Dutch side. Because no matter where you scratch: each window is a winner. The little song and dance show of our OPC is, frankly, just a disgusting example of deceit and unfortunately all too common. Timeshare and vacation ownership marketing is completely illegal on the French side.

By presenting the scratch card at the sales desk of the resort, the salesperson knows right away that you are gullible and that there is a good chance you will accept an overpriced offer from him or her.

And what is the Grand Prize? The only thing you have won after wasting precious ninety minutes of vacation time is a somewhat subsidized (but not free) two or three-day stay at another resort of the brand, probably in Orlando. There you will be punished with another mandatory hard sales pitch.

Still, taking a tour - as it is referred to in timeshare-sales lingo - mustn't be a bad thing. There are a lot of good resales on the market and post-Ima renovated resorts also have new inventory. There are incentives for attending a tour which are so valuable in themselves that they justify the time investment.

In the past, we at ST-MAARTEN.COM, have run our own incentive program. The rewards for attending a presentation were anything from a free car rental for one complete week to sumptuous dinners, jewelry or excursions. We do consider bringing this program back during the coming months but felt that it should be introduced with some straight talk about the industry beforehand.
How to Play Blackjack: A Beginner's Guide

By Leslie Hickerson

After the sun has set on our beautiful beaches, St. Maarten has an amazing variety of nightlife available for you to enjoy. After dinner and drinks heading into the casino is a great way to end the night. Some people go and park in front of a slot machine for the evening, but if you are looking for the best odds in the casino, this is not the way to go.

At most casinos the game with the best odds is blackjack. The house (the casino) normally has less that 10% edge to win. Meaning the odds would be 60/40 to the house, by playing by a basic set of rules you can lower this to less than 1% edge.

The most basic idea behind the game is for the numbers on your cards to add up to 21, which is blackjack, and you will receive a higher pay out. If you aren’t lucky enough to get blackjack, you want to get as close as possible without going over 21 or ‘busting’. Still sounds simple, but you are playing against the dealer. If the dealer gets closer to 21 than you do you lose and they take your bet. If you win the house doubles your bet.

Now things are going to get a little complicated. The dealer is required to draw cards (hit) until they reach a minimum amount of 17. Based on this you will change your strategy each hand after you see the cards you and the dealer have been dealt.

Traditionally everyone playing receives one card face up, including the dealer, and then the players receive their second card face up while the dealer’s second card is played face down. If the dealer is over 17 they must stand. But if the dealer is under 17 they hit. If they go over 21 they bust.

The rules you use to decide whether to hit or stay are based on statistics. If the house is showing a low card (6 or under) they will have to draw a third card to reach their minimum of 17 so it is better to hope that they dealer will end up with too many cards and bust. If the dealer is showing a card 7 or higher you must try to get to 17, because there are several cards that would cause them to win.

The Basic Rules:
- If the house is showing a 6 or under when your cards total up to 12 or more you stay.
- If the house is showing a 7 or higher you hit until you reach 17 or more.

Things get much more complicated when you start to split, double down, etc. If you are learning how to play go to the tables early in the night and ask the dealer’s advice.

If you are new to the rules and playing with a large group, know that how you play affects the rest of the turn as if you draw or stay when you shouldn’t it could be that the person after you will suffer from this! When you turn pro don’t get mad at beginners who don’t yet know the rules. If you don’t like how someone is playing- just leave that
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

Please enjoy another edition of our crossword puzzle. 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.

In this edition we are using a lot of compound words to feature local bars and restaurants. These names do NOT have spaces in the answer!

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.

ACROSS
2 Restaurant with swim-up bar
4 Best in Beacon Hill
9 We find it special
11 Close to the movies
12 Restaurant named after Jamaica's second large city
14 Where is The Boon Beach Bar?
15 What machines to watch from Driftwood Boat Bar?
18 Italian, not only for gamblers
19 A restaurant/bar with Karaoke
20 At Maho Beach
21 Neighborhood of Red Piano
23 Where is Rendez-Vous Lounge?
24 Runner-up of Cocktail Competition

DOWN
1 Inside which hotel is the Ocean Lounge?
2 Second runner-up of Cocktail Competition
3 Where to find Little Mobay?
5 A colorful music instrument
6 Winner of Cocktail Competition
7 How does Topper's spell the drink they produce?
8 Not Pineapple Pete
9 For a night out in Philipsburg
10 What is Island 92?
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17 Westernmost Dutch side restaurant
22 Casino close to Isola Ristorante
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Stylish Music Festival with Caribbean Charm

Continued from Page 1

as over seventy-five DJ’s will be performing live.

This musical extravaganza is open to those eighteen and over, which coincides with the legal drinking age. The action takes place all over the island on the sandy beaches, chic nightclubs, boats and villas with stunning, original stage designs that will take your breath away.

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The Magic of Valentine's Jewelry

By Hilary Grant, GIA Graduate Gemologist

Walking into a jewelry store in the hopes of finding the perfect Valentine’s gift for that special someone can be overwhelming. Thousands of pieces in inventory, the anticipation of how something so small could have so many zeros in the price and how to make sure the sentiment is reflected in the gift can almost be too much to bear. So, I’d like to simplify things for you and ensure that this year you are armed and ready for your shopping experience.

Been there, done that with heart shaped jewelry? Or Rubies because they are red which symbolizes love? One of the hottest gemstones on the market now is called Morganite. This sparkler comes in a variety of shades of pink from pastel to bright with orangy tints is a variety of beryl-meaning it is cousins with Emerald and Aquamarine. Even though it is a family member, this gem is harder and no eye visible inclusions and is safe for every day wear.

Morganite was named after financier J.P. Morgan, who was undoubtedly a lover of gems. The largest Morganite ever found weighed a whopping fifty pounds, called the “Rose of Maine” in honor of its unearthing in Maine, USA. These feminine and flirty gems are often set in rose gold to enhance the rose color of Morganite. It will surely be a showstopper and an exceptional gift that she would love for Valentine’s.

Prefer diamonds? Well, they are a girl’s best friend after all.

Hearts on Fire is a world-renowned brand that celebrities and regular folk alike drool over. This brand of diamond touts to be ‘perfectly cut’ to maximize the fire or spectral colors of each diamond. And guess what? It’s all true.

Hearts On Fire uses only high-quality diamonds that meet rigorous standards allowing only 1/10 of 1% of the world’s rough diamonds to become a Hearts On Fire diamond. The way that this diamond reflects and refracts light is unreal, and it reveals the beauty from within.

A Hearts on Fire diamond will shimmer and dance in the light on her finger, ear, neck or wrist. Visit Majesty who has the exclusive on this extraordinary diamond brand.

Head over to Joe’s Jewelry on Front Street to view the Twogther jewelry collection. For centuries, Diamonds have been used to signify affection. And the cutting-edge expression of love is two Diamond jewelry.

The two diamonds can be symbolic of the perfect match between two people or represent different aspects of your special relationship, the Twogther collection perfectly expresses, “when one plus one equals us”.
Adventures in Sex and Dating in St. Maarten
A Regular Column by Leslie Hickerson

Not all our stories of Sex and Dating on St. Maarten end in heartbreak and disaster. This week’s couple is Hannah and Seth. Set up on a blind date by a mutual friend, the couple and their friends went out for a big night on the town. As we all know, liquor helps loosen people up a tad (or in this case, a whole lot). They might have started the evening with vodka tonics, but they stepped up to jaegers and car bombs early in the night. Things progressed into other (legal and illegal) substances and the night got even more fun. By 3AM the bars shut down—so it was time to go home and continue the party.

Luckily a hot tub was waiting for the group and as Hannah and Seth got in naked, the rest took their cue that it was time for some privacy and went to bed. As things happen under the influence of party time, one thing led to another. Pretty soon the couple decided it was time to christen the couch (if you know what I mean). Halfway into the deed Hannah starts to feel ill, could be that all the party substances she partook in didn’t mix well together. In her inebriated state, she gets up and leaves poor Seth with his pants around his ankles and goes to sleep… until 4PM the next day. Since she didn’t give an explanation before her untimely exit, Seth was baffled (he thought he had been doing an alright job).

Later that week the mutual friend invited them both out again and Seth asked Hannah on a real date, apparently just a taste wasn’t enough. Like we said all things don’t always end in disaster. The couple ended up happily married. Happy hot tub-ing!!
The Diamond Rap Sheet Explained

If you thought gold pricing was tricky, then buckle your seatbelts! Diamond pricing is so convoluted, but I accept the challenge of streamlining this topic as much as I can.

I should begin with the basic knowledge of the 4 C’s of diamond: Carat, Color, Clarity and Cut. Most of the emphasis when you are shopping for a diamond, including how it’s priced, is based on carat, color and clarity. But, what about cut?

The diamond industry will often refer to the “Rap Sheet” when pricing diamonds. This list is an international pricing guide. Rapaport diamond prices is the main source of prices used by dealers worldwide to establish the prices of diamonds in all major markets.

The first section of the Rap Sheet is simple: Carat weight. This is the easiest to master of all the 4 C’s. Abbreviated as “ct”, carat is a weight measurement. Every carat equals 1/5 of a gram. Each diamond is weighed to the nearest hundredth of a carat, which is called a point; so, a .10ct diamond can be called 10 points or 1/10 of a carat. 100 points equal 1 carat; which is easily equated to 100 pences totaling 1 US dollar.

The second component of the Rap Sheet is color. Color is relative to what you can’t see: the less color, the higher the price. The exception to this scale is fancy color diamonds (pinks, blues, purples, yellows). Most diamonds you’ll find in jewelry stores are colorless or near colorless.

The last main portion of the Rap Sheet is clarity. Because diamonds form under extreme heat and pressure, deep within the earth; they can contain inclusions (internal) or blemishes (external) which the diamond experts will call ‘clarity characteristics’.

What’s trapped inside the diamond usually affects the price more than the blemishes. Diamonds without any of these birthmarks from nature are rare, which will be reflected in a significant priced increase.

The Rap Sheet will give you the per carat price of the diamond. It will have sections like: .90–.99 carat, 1.00–1.49 carat, 1.50–1.99 carat and so on.

Here is how the chart works. You pick the carat weight section the diamond you are looking at falls into, and then match up the color and the clarity. This will list a per carat price. So, if it says for a .92 carat G SI2 diamond that the price is $4500 USD per carat, the price on that diamond will be $4,140.

So, what is missing from this list? Cut! This is such an oversight, or perhaps a purposeful omission. Cut is ultimately the factor that makes a diamond’s fire, sparkle and brilliance. Those are the three components that make the diamond twinkle.

The attractiveness of a diamond depends more on cut than any other C. Other aspects of a well-cut diamond are weight ratio, durability, polish and symmetry which all relate to the craftsmanship. A well-cut diamond is completely dependent on the skill of the cutter. These assessments are given one of the following grades: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair and Poor.

Good, fair and poor diamonds are diamonds that we know are going to sit in the showcase for a long time in the jewelry store. It’s not the diamond’s fault it was cut that way, but ultimately it won’t have the sparkle and shine that an Excellent or Very Good cut will have.
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Did You See the Super Blood Wolf Moon?

While you might think we are talking about a new movie that is out, we are not. This is one of the most incredible and rare astronomical events to occur.

 Overnight from Sunday, January 20 into Monday, January 21, millions of people in North and South America had a superior view of a total lunar eclipse. The new year was off to an incredible start when an uncommon reddish-orange Super Blood Wolf Moon, decorated the sky.

On Sunday January 20, the moon passed through Earth’s shadow in a total lunar eclipse during the Full Wolf Moon, which is also known as a ‘supermoon’. This phenomenon is the accumulation of several lunar happenings.

First, there was a total lunar eclipse, also known as a Blood Moon. This occurs when Earth passes between the Sun and Moon, causing the Sun’s light to bend towards the Moon. Hence, the eerie reddish shade.

Second, the Super Blood Wolf Moon took place during a supermoon. This occurs when a moon’s full phase overlaps with when it is closest to Earth.

Space.com states that these two features make the moon look 14 percent larger and 30 percent brighter than normal.

Finally, a full moon in January has been called a Wolf Moon since colonial times, with hungry packs of wolves howling during the most frigid cold nights in winter; outside of Indian villages. That is where ‘wolf moon’ originates from.

The next total lunar eclipse will occur in 2021. Don’t wish to wait that long? Other astounding events to watch out for next year include:

**February 19 and March 21**
a trio of supermoons

**May 6 and May 7**
the Eta Aquarids meteor shower on May 6 and May 7

**July 2**
a rare total solar eclipse

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Crossword Puzzle Solution

Background photo courtesy of SXM FESTIVAL.
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