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THE ECONOMICS OF BACCHANAL: THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO CARNIVAL

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The Trinidad and Tobago carnival is one of the largest and most well known festivals in the Americas along with the famous Rio Carnival in Brazil and the Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Trinidad and Tobago also boasts of having one of the festivals with the highest level of local participation. It is estimated that over ten percent of the population is directly involved in terms of playing mas and performing on Carnival Tuesday. The capital city of Port of Spain is the main center of carnival celebrations but the carnival is also to be found in 40 towns and villages.

Global Diaspora

Trinidad and Tobago's carnival has generated many offspring and inspired the structure of several carnivals throughout the Caribbean region (e.g. Jamaica, Barbados, St. Vincent and St. Lucia). The carnival has also been exported outside the region and is to be found in over 70 Diasporic Caribbean Carnivals, making it the world's most globalized festival. The globalization of the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival is directly related to the spread and expansion of a Caribbean diaspora in the North Atlantic countries - almost every major city in the United States, Canada and England has a Caribbean-style carnival that is, in large part, modeled after the one found in Trinidad.

These carnivals have grown rapidly since the early 1990s and are now the largest street festivals and generators of economic activity in their respective locations (see Table). The 'Notting Hill' carnival attracts over two million people over two days and generates over £93 million in visitor and audience expenditures. Similarly, the 'Labour Day' carnival in New York earns US\$300 million while the 'Caribana' festival in Toronto generates CND\$200 million.

Carnivals	Estimated Attendance	Expenditures
Toronto – Caribana	1 million	CND\$ 200 million
New York – Labour Day	3.5 million	US\$ 300 million
London – Notting Hill	2 million	STG £93 million

Festival Tourism

Trinidad and Tobago has three distinct tourist seasons (Carnival, July/August vacation period and Christmas). The carnival season, which runs from the beginning of January until Ash Wednesday, generates the largest inflow of visitors. For example, February is the month with the largest number of arrivals, including the highest number of hotel, private and guesthouse visits.

The largest number of visitors comes from the United States. They account for around 50% of the total number of visitor arrivals during the Carnival period most of whom are from diasporic Caribbean communities in states like New York and Florida. The UK, Canada, the Caribbean and the Rest of Europe are the next largest sources of carnival visitors. Foreign nationals, many of whom are from the diasporic Caribbean community, account for over 70 per cent of arrivals and are a rising share of carnival visitors.

Over the last decade carnival arrivals have grown from 27,000 (1997) to around 42,000 (2006). Carnival arrivals have outpaced the growth in annual visitor arrivals. For example, tourist arrivals in the month of February consistently account for over 12.0% of total annual arrivals.

With regards to visitor expenditure, it is estimated that for the same period – 1997 to 2006 – carnival visitor expenditure has tripled from US\$10 million in 1997 to approximately \$30 million since 2004. This impressive growth, which is the envy of many a festival organizer around the world, is driven by the expansion of cultural, diasporic and regional tourism. Carnival tourism also generates travel to Tobago as well as impacts on yacht, sports and eco-tourism.

Cultural Economy

The cultural industries in Trinidad and Tobago are intertwined with the festival. The carnival is traditionally associated with calypso, steelpan and masquerade but even genres of music like parang and chutney now pivot around the carnival. On account of the carnival these artforms have developed export markets.

The Diasporic Caribbean Carnivals are an important feature of the cultural industries because they account for a large percentage of the year-round work for musical artists. Overseas music performances are the main source of earnings for most recording artists, music bands and steel pan players. In many ways sound recordings and music videos operate as promotional tools for the performance-based activity.

Diasporic carnivals also provide an avenue of employment for designers. The major mas bands produce costumes for bands in diasporic Caribbean carnivals like Miami, New York, London, and Toronto as well as regional carnivals like Crop Over and Jamaica Carnival. These exports involve a mix of high-end designer skills along with technical expertise in sewing, wire-bending, fabricating and so on.

The Carnival indirectly creates thousands of jobs in a host of ancillary industries. Telecoms (e.g. cell phone rentals), ground transportation, auto rentals, catering, tour operations, book publishing, advertising, handicraft sales and the clothing industry are just some of the sectors that attribute an upsurge in business to the carnival season. In fact, for some people, employment in those fields is seasonal and is created almost entirely because of carnival and lasts for the duration of the festival, thus demonstrating the undeniable impact of the carnival economy on people's lives. From this standpoint, the Carnival is one of the key pillars of the Trinidad and Tobago economy and deserves to be managed as such.