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Utopia Cruise and Festival Team Takes Miami Carnival By Storm; Response and Interest From Revelers 'Overwhelming'

Utopia / **Published On October 13, 2023 10:25 AM /**

Janeka Simon **October 13, 2023**

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A collage of pictures from the Utopia Carnival Cruise & Festival activities for the 2023 Miami Carnival. By. UTOPIA CARNIVAL

Last week, the team behind the Utopia Carnival Cruise & Festival (Utopia CCF) brought the excitement and hype that has been building ever since the festival's launch to Miami Carnival, where they shared some exciting news and educated revelers about the blockbuster entertainment package that is slated to begin in late April, 2024.

"It was amazing," said Utopia's Director of Operations, VIP, Security & Beverage Kevin Elliott, describing the experience in Miami. "People were so excited and so engaged," he said, describing

how people would take pictures of the tent when they walked by, with some stopping to visit the Utopia [website](#) right then and there. “The level of enthusiasm and responsiveness we received from every encounter was overwhelming,” said Director of Administration Cruselda Roberts.

Utopia’s CEO Ernice Gilbert, the founder and publisher of the Consortium, was also pleased with the response to the team’s efforts. “The exposure in partnering with Miami Carnival was something that turned out to be very important,” he said, noting that Utopia’s Marketing Ambassador Naydyeyah Acoy-Thomas took to several stages and cameras, conducting a blitzkrieg of promoting not just Utopia but the Virgin Islands overall to revelers from around the world who converged in Miami last weekend for Carnival.

“We were front and center at Panorama, J’Ouvert, and the Parade of Bands,” clarified Lyndale James, Utopia’s Director of Productions. Even industry professionals who were seeking to do business with Utopia, he observed, were also drawn in by the promise of participating in what they saw as a transformational entertainment activity. “That in itself is a big positive,” Mr. James noted.

The value proposition, noted by both Mr. Gilbert and Mr. James, is something that people in Miami were extremely excited by. The prospect of a 10- or 6-day cruise filled with high quality entertainment, plus the opportunity to enjoy St. Thomas Carnival with the addition of land-based Utopia events featuring mega stars like Spice, Morgan Heritage and Burna Boy, all for one price, was mind-blowing for some. Apart from the headliners, however, Mr. James believes the real “knockout punch” for patrons will be the cast of DJs that will be supporting each event. With regionally internationally renowned names like DJ Scratchmaster, Lord Hype, DJ Puffy and DJ Top Class already on board, the director of productions is anticipating a non-stop party atmosphere. New names are constantly being added to the lineup, Mr. James reminded. “We’ve just signed on Problem Child, I don’t think we’ve even put that out yet...hot off the press, Problem Child is going to be part of the Utopia entertainment package.”

For Kleon Gaskin, Production Manager for the USVI, the opportunity to meet several of his colleagues in person was a crucial aspect of the visit. “It was important for us to connect because [now] we do have a better understanding of the team’s players personally.”

With excitement and enthusiasm mounting, so is the pressure to ensure that all Utopia CCF events are executed to the standard that meets Mr. Gilbert’s expectations. The team seems more than up to that challenge, coming up with innovative solutions to several of the unique issues that accompany a major production of this type.

“We’ve been looking at that for a little bit and we’ve come to a decision to do mobile bars,” said Mr. Elliott, saying that this would make setting up and breakdown for Utopia’s consecutive land-based events quicker and more efficient. Security is also a huge consideration for Mr. Elliott, former owner of the acclaimed Starlight Nightclub Bar & Lounge, who is still actively involved in the entertainment event industry. “People love coming to my nightclub because they feel safe,” he said, noting that his security personnel are proactive and highly engaged in order to nip any problems in the bud. “I want to bring this same attitude and this same strength to Utopia,” Mr. Elliot vowed.

Also responsible for ensuring a top-notch experience for VIP patrons, Mr. Elliott explained that a mobile double-decker VIP lounge was being designed to create a luxury atmosphere for premium guests, and provide the best view of the events unfolding below. VIP patrons will have access to their own bathrooms and designated servers to ensure minimal distraction from enjoying the

parties. “The experience for VIP is going to be out of this world, that’s what we are shooting for,” he promised. Mr. Elliot also emphasized that a lot of time, effort and energy was being put into ensuring that these innovations would be built to last. “Not only are we going to use it for St. Thomas, but we’re going to use it in St. Croix, and wherever else we decide to go.”

Other members of the team echoed and reinforced Mr. Elliot’s stated desire to establish Utopia as a fixture on the entertainment calendar in the Virgin Islands. Mr. Gaskin reiterated the team’s long-term vision for Utopia. “It’s not a short-term thing that we’re doing,” said Mr. Gaskin. “This is longevity.” Mr. James referred to Utopia CCF as a “legacy project,” expounding on how the festival would reverberate through the territory. “We’re going to be making a big splash, putting our local bands and local entertainment on a major stage.”

Mr. Gilbert agreed, stating that the intention from the beginning was to ensure that the territory would reap the benefits from Utopia year after year. Apart from new jobs that he says will be generated, the festival will be a boon to already existing businesses in the territory. Vendors, promoters, and related businesses will benefit from the festival’s series of land-based events, Mr. Gilbert noted. St. Thomas Carnival, one of the territory’s landmark tourism events, will receive thousands of new participants without additional pressure on the island’s overburdened accommodation sector. Mr. Gilbert also believes that the landmark at-sea and on-land festival will serve as a regional beacon, elevating the Virgin Islands as a unique destination for innovative entertainment events.

That is why, Mr. Gilbert says, he decided to take such a huge leap of faith. “I think it’s a risk worth taking,” the entrepreneur said, describing the opportunity for the festival to positively impact the lives of Virgin Islanders and the economic benefit it would bring through enhancement of the territory’s tourism product. “That is why I’m putting a lot of energy, capital, and personal resources into Utopia,” he declared. “Because I believe in it.”