

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Johnians Put Culture Before Worries In First Festival After Hurricane Irma

Culture / **Published On July 05, 2018 10:08 AM /**

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ST. JOHN -- [Walking the streets of St. John](#) ten months ago following the passage of Hurricane Irma in particular, the sadness this reporter felt for the small island, was palpable. During The Consortium's first visit following the storm a few days later, people were still missing, and those seen were either trying to make sense of what had happened, or trying to connect with family members from away on patchy cellphone service.

Some cried, others said they would leave immediately after losing everything. The island was so badly hit that traversing it was impossible early on, and it seemed as if the island's recovery would take years.

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Fastforwarded to present, many issues remain and there's a lot of work left to be done, but St. Johnians, with the help of the local government and private individuals and firms, are forging ahead more resiliently.

On Wednesday, during the island's 2018 Festival Parade, residents and visitors alike came out in respectable numbers to celebrate culture, placing aside at least for a moment the arduous work of rebuilding an island that had been leveled by a category five storm. And the support from sister island St. Thomas was strong, with ferry services providing hourly trips to assure that visitors wanting to participate in the festivities would have no trouble getting over.

The parade, which started after 12:00 p.m., included children and adults troupes, with the children -- steelpan players, an arts group, the Department of Education and others -- making their way through the small town of Cruz Bay in a lively and colorful celebration that was, as this year's theme suggests, "Resilient, Strong and Filled with Love and Esteem for St. John Festival 2018".



This troupe's costume included encouraging quotes such as "Keep looking up," and "Today was a good day." (Credit: Savannah Loftus)

Among performers in this year's adults parade were the popular Westin Hotel troupe from St. John, and, of course, the Traditional Dancers from St. Thomas, among other great performances.

In attendance were the territory's dignitaries: Governor Kenneth Mapp, Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter and members of their cabinet. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett was also present, as well as the gubernatorial hopefuls vying for office.

Following the parade, some visitors stayed in St. John, while others -- especially St. Thomas and St. Croix residents used to taking the ferry back and forth -- left the island to return during the nighttime for the fireworks at 9:00 p.m. and the final night of Village activities, which featured major Soca artists such as Farmer Nappy and Kes, the latter having one of the biggest Soca songs out dubbed "Hello", [with nearly 15 million views on YouTube](#).

Feature Image Credit: [Savannah Loftus](#). Visit her website [here](#).