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V.I. Madras: A Fabric Symbolic of the V.I. People, Environment, History, Fashion, Festival and Art

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The new Virgin Islands Madras has made Virgin Islands history a bit richer as artists and fashion designers utilize it now in their craft.

The official V.I. Madras was commissioned to be made by locally raised textile designer Debbie Sun through a 2016 grant awarded by the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts. The official Madras fabric was established by Act No. 8424 (Bill No. 33-0226). This Act amended the Virgin Islands Code Title 1, Chapter 7 to establish the official Madras of the Virgin Islands of the United States. V.I.C.A. unveiled the fabric on Saturday, June 5th at the Frederick Dorsch Cultural Center in Frederiksted.

The colors chosen for the V.I. Madras pattern represent the following:



VIRGINIA
MA



Turquoise

Waters



Royal Blue

Deep Sea Harbor



Pink

Conch Shell



Flo



Additionally, there are four stripes on the pattern that represent each of the major U.S. Virgin Islands and the fourth line symbolizes their unity. In answer to a non-Virgin Islander's query of what it means to be a Virgin Islander, "We wanted the Madras to be that symbol to represent who we are as a people through the fabric," Debbie Sun said.

"We look forward to seeing how designers, seamstresses, and artists will use the fabric creatively. We are grateful to cultural bearers like Mr. Bradley Christian who had the foresight to bring together so many talented individuals that were able to create another piece of V.I. history," said V.I.C.A. Executive Director Tasida Kelch in a written statement.

Various fashion designers, seamstresses, and artists on St. Croix have already begun using the fabric. Outside of fashion, Designs by Regal and Creative Crucian launched a '[My Madras Competition](#)' for residents of the territory who are 16 and under to create their own madras pattern. The winner will receive custom wrapping sheets of their design.

The territory can expect to see a variety of these designs and more worn during Festival 2021-2022. "We will definitely be highlighting the Virgin Islands Madras in our décor, especially for our pageants, our calypso shows, and any opportunity that we have to utilize the Virgin Islands Madras," said assistant director of the Division of Festivals for St. Croix Shamari Haynes. For the rundown on the schedule of events, click [here](#).

According to [Modern Madras](#)' website, Madras has been authenticated differently in most Caribbean cultures and throughout West Africa. In West Africa, it is sometimes called Injiri and George. In Jamaica, Madras is referred to as Bandana or Madras Bandana. Caribbean islands like Antigua, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts/ Nevis and Guadeloupe have their own national Madras fabric. Ms. Sun shared that their patterns often correlate to the colors in their flags. It is unknown as to whether any of those islands created their own fabric as the U.S.V.I. did. Nevertheless, Ms. Sun, president of the St. Croix Heritage Dancers, Bradley Christian and president of the Christiansted Community Alliance, Mary Dema chose to design an original fabric symbolic of the people, history, and environment of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Debbie Sun engaged in discussions over what Madras is, its history in the U.S.V.I. and its history in the Caribbean with fellow project partners. Mr. Christian shared in an interview with VIC that the wearing of Madras as traditional attire dates back to the 1700s. To this day, quadrille dancers still adorn themselves in various patterns of madras while dancing to the calls of the territory's native music, Quelbe.

As Madras is made through weaving, Ms. Sun even went as far as visiting a weaving factory in England for research purposes to understand the mechanics of how Madras is made. Madras originates in Chennai, India also known as Madras city. The official V.I. Madras, however, was manufactured in Trinidad, according to Kendell Henry, the special projects coordinator for V.I.C.A. on St. Croix.

On St. Thomas, the V.I. Madras can be purchased at The Fabric Store, L&C Milliner, and Fabric in Motion. On St. Croix, it can be found at Clara's Special Occasions, Ebbe's Fabric Store, and Divi Divi Fabric.