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Ripe for the Picking: Thousands Turn Out for Mango Melee 2022 After Two Years of Covid-induced Lockdowns

Entertainment / **Published On July 11, 2022 05:09 AM /**

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The age 13 and older group gear up for the Mango Eating Competition on Sunday, July 10, 2022 at the St. George Botanical Garden on St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The 26th Annual Mango Melee held Sunday attracted thousands of Virgin Islanders and visitors alike to the St. George Botanical Garden, demonstrating that people's appetite to participate in activities after two years of Covid-induced lockdowns is ripe — pun intended — for the picking.

It was one of the best attended Mango Melees, with large crowds seen at the various locations in the Garden where events were occurring. It was also the first in-person event since 2019 following disruptions by the global pandemic that upended life in 2020 and 2021. Now, with lockdowns a

thing of the past and the V.I. government declaring the territory as being in a state of Covid endemicity, Virgin Islanders — pent up for two years — are appearing at events once taken for granted in large numbers.

Vendors selling delicious cuisines and local businesses offering their products for sale had customers lining up. The highlight of the event was the Mango Eating Competition, where individuals challenged each other to see who can eat all of the mangoes provided to them first. There were two categories: 12 and younger and 13 and up. The winner for the 13 and up division was Yasmine Tuitt, while Josiah Baptiste won the 12 and younger category.

The first-place prize for the 13 and older competition included a half-day sail with Big Beards to Buck Island along with \$50 for lunch; two nights at the Tamarind Reef Resort & Spa; and a \$50 gift card donated by Sam's Gas Station. The second-place winner received a case of Mutiny Vodka.

A \$75 gift certificate from Undercover Books was the prize for the 13 and under competition, which only include a prize for the first-place winner.

For many, it was their first time at Mango Melee. Joyce John-Baptiste didn't want to miss this year's event. "Freedom! I am enjoying myself," she exclaimed. "This is my first time and I am here with my daughter and granddaughter."

Amid the tasty delights, there were fun and thrilling activities for children. Winifred Loving, president of the Children's Museum, watched as children explored the different activities that were present. "The Children's Museum of St. Croix was formed in 2017 to provide free services to all of the children on St. Croix. You can count on us every year at Ag Fair [Agricultural and Food Fair] and Mango Melee. We have four dinosaur activities as well as a slime activity today. We want students to learn science, technology, art, engineering and mathematics through our efforts," she said.

Miguel Cruz, a small business owner specializing in fitness and Acai bowls, was all smiles as customers approached his table. "It has been a great day. Ride into Fitness has been in business for 7 years. We are a small family business and we enjoy giving back to the community. This is our first year at Mango Melee and we will be back next year," he said.

Sue Lakos, one of the founding members of the Mango Melee event, was as active yesterday as when the St. George Botanical Garden committee that she was a member of first created the event. Ms. Lakos, who came up with the name Mango Melee, could be seen working throughout day, making sure that the sprawling activity went off without a hitch.

Asked how does it feel to be back after the two-year hiatus, Ms. Lakos was blunt: "Exhausting."