



IRICK

I Remember Intangible Cultural Heritage

ICH DOMAIN 1
ORAL TRADITIONS
AND EXPRESSIONS,
INCLUDING LANGUAGE
AS A VEHICLE OF ICH



unesco

Sint Maarten
National Commission



DEPARTMENT OF
CULTURE
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, CULTURE, YOUTH & SPORTS
ST. MAARTEN

ICH Domain 1: Oral Traditions and Expressions, Including Language as a Vehicle of ICH

IRICH

IRICH stands for, *I Remember Intangible Cultural Heritage*. A project created by the Sint Maarten National Commission for UNESCO and developed by The Department of Culture of the Government of Sint Maarten. The objective is to educate the community about Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), and create a home for the culture of the Sint Maarten people to access, use and share.

IRICH acts as a vehicle for the distribution of the ICH. This resource is a database of information regarding various aspects of the culture of Sint Maarten, is free, and intended for educational purposes.

Oral Traditions and Expressions

The first Domain, *Oral Traditions and Expressions, Including Language as a Vehicle of ICH*, outlines the way St. Martiners communicate verbally. This segment of the database encompasses these customs by listing each with clarification, and indicating if the tradition is thriving, declining, or surviving.

Oral tradition served as a primary means of communication; available for forming and maintaining societies and their institutions. Moreover, oral tradition remains the dominant mode of communication in the 21st century, despite increasing rates of literacy. The expressions used in society are also sayings and verbal cues that are distinctive to people.

Far more than “just talking,” oral tradition and expressions refer to dynamic and highly diverse oral-aural mediums for evolving, storing, and transmitting knowledge, art, and ideas.

When viewing the database, each segment is further broken down into categories of “*Thriving*,” “*Surviving*,” and “*Declining*,” based on if the culture is still relevant and used today; whether the element is known, but not used as much; and finally, if there is little to no daily practice.



“The cultural heritage of a nation or region is not solely composed of monuments and museum collections, but also of living intangible expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants...” – UNESCO

1.1 S'Maatin English

The creolized English dialect used by most communities on the island. Slight variations exist in grammar and pronunciations.

Thriving

1.2 Gibberish

A code language created, spoken, and meant to be understood only by the persons in the conversation.

Declining

1.3 Singing of the National Song

“Oh Sweet St. Martin’s Land” (often also referred to as the St. Martin Song) is the most popular “national” song of St. Maarten and is performed during official ceremonies and events. This is standard and it is also taught in schools.

Thriving

1.4 Christmas Caroling

An annual practice during the Christmas holiday season. Usually church choirs and other groups gather and go from house to house or business to business serenading.

Declining

1.5 Singing of Spiritual Songs and Hymns

Spiritual and religious songs are usually sung



Singing of the National Song

in churches and parochial schools. In school, this is done during the morning devotions.

Thriving

1.6 Use of proverbs and other sayings to express oneself, make a point, or teach a lesson

Popular and traditional proverbs and sayings are widely used throughout different communities. Many are shared throughout the Caribbean region while others are unique to St. Maarten.

Surviving

1.7 Oral history/ account

A field of study and a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events.

Declining

1.7.1 Diamond Estate 26 (Run/Escape)

The historical event that occurred on May 28, 1848, when 26 of the enslaved people from Diamond Plantation in Cole Bay ran into the hills and into the North, a possession of France, which had declared the abolition of Slavery on May 27, 1848.

Surviving



Diamond Estate 26 (Run/Escape)



Oral history/ account

1.8 Storytelling

The telling of stories is used as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation, and instilling values.

Declining

1.8.1 Jumbie Stories

These are stories about ghosts, spirits, or demons. For example, it is said that Jumbies can chase a person but cannot follow over water. It is also believed that upon coming home late at night, a person must turn around and enter the home backwards to prevent a Jumbie from following him or her inside.



Jumbie Stories

Declining

1.8.2 Nansi Stories

Stories that are not true and intended to deceive others. The phrase “Oh, stop your Nansi stories” means to stop making up or inventing things. The name Nansi derives from the Anansi character in popular West-African folklore. *Declining*

1.9 Telling of Urban Legends/Myths/ Folktales/Superstitions

Telling a story of an urban legend, myth, folktale, or superstition for entertainment purposes or to explain random events. It is based on hearsay and circulated as true.

Declining



Storytelling

1.9.1 Gudder's Head

There are two versions of this story. In the first one, Gudder was an enslaved man who was having a relationship with a White woman. When the relationship came to light, he was sentenced to hang until death. Then his head was chopped off and placed on a stake close to the current Prince Bernard Bridge on the A.T. Illidge Road to discourage other slaves. It is a mystery what became of the head. In the second story, Gudder is the son of an enslaved woman and a slave owner, who also had a son with his wife. Gudder was talented, and his

jealous half-brother killed him.
Declining

1.9.2 Chupacabra/ Soucouyant

Soucouyant is a shape-shifting, evil female demon. By day, she is described as an old woman who has made a pact with the devil. At night, she sheds her skin. However, in order to do that, she searches the graveyards for dead people's livers from which to make an oil that would allow her to strip her skin. To protect the skin, she hides it in a hollowed-out tree trunk. Like a ball of fire, she then flies around at night seeking her victims. She could enter a home through a keyhole and, like a vampire, suck people's blood while they sleep, leaving blue marks on their arms, legs, necks, and soft parts. In the morning, the victims either are dead or have turned into soucouyants themselves. To catch a soucouyant, one has to place rice in heaps around the house or at crossroads. The soucouyant will then be forced to gather the grains one by one before dawn, so she can be caught in the act. To destroy her, one has to either sprinkle salt on her or sprinkle coarse salt or pepper in the tree trunk where her skin is hidden. This way she will not be able to re-enter her skin, and she will die.

Declining

1.9.3 Lajabless

Lajabless (from French: La Diablesse) is a devil woman. She is described as a pretty woman, although her face is always hidden



Lajabless



One Titty Loke/One-Tété Lohkay

under her wide-brimmed hat. She has a beautiful figure and wears a long, black dress that covers the fact that she has one good foot and the other a cow's hoof. She walks with one foot on the road and her cow's hoof in the grass at the side of the road. She hangs out on lonely dark roads waiting for men to stop and offer assistance. She then leads her victims deep into the forest or bush. Once in the bush, she disappears, and the man, who is then confused, lost, and scared, runs around the forest until he falls into a ravine or river or gets eaten by wild dogs and dies. However, men can protect themselves from her by removing all their clothes, turning them inside out, and putting them back on.

Declining

1.9.4 One Titty Loke/One-Tété Lohkay

Lohkay was a young woman, or perhaps a girl, enslaved on a plantation on the island. She rebelled and ran away but was hunted down by the slave owner, recaptured, and brought back to the plantation. As punishment and a warning to other slaves, the slave owner ordered that one of Lohkay's breasts be cut off. She was told that if she ever disobeyed again, her other breast would also be cut off. However, after being nursed back to health, the brave youngster escaped again and lived in the hills, occasionally coming down to visit her people and to raid the plantations in Cul-de-Sac. According to the story, as the other slaves headed out to the fields in the early morning, they could see the smoke from

Lohkay's camp in the hills. Lohkay is admired because she managed to escape Slavery and live freely.

Thriving

1.9.5 The Partition Tale

Folklore tells a tale of how the island was divided into the territories of Saint Martin and Sint Maarten. According to the tale, in 1648 the European inhabitants were told to choose two walkers, one by the French-dominated community and the other by the Dutch-dominated community, who were put back to back on one extreme part of the island. They were made to walk in opposite directions along the coastal line and were not allowed to run. The point where they would eventually meet was the other extreme of the island, and the line between those two points chosen as the border, dividing the island. Supposedly, the Frenchman walked more than his Dutch counterpart, and they got their respective parts, 54 km² and 32 km². The French inhabitants' explanation for this discrepancy is that, prior to the race, the Frenchman chose wine as his stimulant while the Dutchman chose Jenever (Dutch Gin). The Dutch inhabitants instead accused the French walker of running.

Thriving

Total Number of Major Elements and Sub-Elements: 16



Nansi Stories



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"Remembering and Preserving St. Maarten's Culture"

St. Maarten endorsed the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) on May 21, 2014.

The Sint Maarten National Commission (NATCOM) for UNESCO, and the Department of Culture, with other selected representatives in the community, participated in ICH trainings throughout the Dutch Caribbean and Suriname. Numerous consultations were held with:

- Knowledge Bearers •
- Cultural Practitioners •
- Heritage Experts •
- Culture-Creative Professionals •

The national inventory list, as defined by the UNESCO ICH convention, is used as a resource tool for teachers, students, and anyone seeking accurate history and cultural customs of St. Maarten.

The five sectors, called domains, are broken down into the following topics:

- (1) Oral Traditions and Expressions;
- (2) Performing Arts;
- (3) Social Practices, Rituals and Festive Events;
- (4) Knowledge and Practices Concerning Nature and the Universe; and
- (5) Traditional Craftsmanship.

Download the database, broken down into the 5 Domains, and more, online at www.irich.sx.



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