



# thecornerstone

## Introduction

IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THAT CHRISTIANS PREPARE TO COMMEMORATE CHRIST'S BIRTH WITH THE HOPE THAT ADVENT BRINGS, WE ENDEAVOUR, IN THIS CHRISTMAS ISSUE OF THE RGM CORNERSTONE, TO GET YOU IN A CHEERFUL MOOD BY REMINDING YOU ABOUT SOME OF THE CELEBRATORY CUSTOMS OF THE SEASON – FROM GIFT GIVING TO MAKING MOUTH-WATERING MEALS.

We begin though, by reminding you to consider the less fortunate at this special time of year. RGM has built a relationship with some outstanding children's charities over the past few years that have become close to our heart – and we're privileged to be able to tell you a bit about the incredible work they do, in the hope that you too, will give of your time or resources to help make a difference – either to them or to other deserving causes.

We take a look at – or rather, a listen to – the music that makes Christmas in Trinidad and Tobago unique. You may think you know all there is to know about Parang until you read this article! And while you're enjoying the rhythmic sounds of the cuatro and chac-chac, you might just be tempted to take a bite out of a few

delicious Christmas dishes that are synonymous with the season.

The gift-giving tradition associated with Christmas has, to some extent, commercialized the holiday: the Christmas period has become a key sales period for retailers, thanks to the widespread tradition of gift-giving, which is why we've compiled a list of handy tips to keep you safe while shopping for the special people on your list.

We hope that this edition of The RGM Cornerstone is one that you will enjoy...here's wishing you and yours all the very best for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

## 'Tis the Season!

WHEN CHRISTMAS IS APPROACHING, MANY OF US TEND TO FOCUS ON THE FESTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS CELEBRATORY SEASON (PARANG PARTIES, HAM AND HOPS LIMES AND OF COURSE THE CHRISTMAS DAY SPREAD WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS) AND NOT SO MUCH ON WHY WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS IN THE FIRST PLACE.

The anniversary of the birth of Christ is a reminder to us all that humility is stronger than power and that it is better to give than to receive.

In this spirit of giving, RGM has, over the past three years, remembered those who may need a helping hand, donating \$15,000 annually to deserving charities in the name of our clients. They say Christmas is for children, which is perhaps why

RGM has been drawn to children's charities at this time of year. We've made contributions to organisations like The Cyril Ross Nursery, a St. Vincent de Paul project that cares for about 35 abandoned or orphaned HIV+ children in-house and offers medical assistance and management for an additional 30 children who live with their parents or guardians in different areas of Trinidad and Tobago. The money goes towards providing for the children's medical, emotional, spiritual and

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developmental needs. In the same vein, we've also supported Wendy Fitzwilliam's Hibiscus Foundation, a non-profit that blossomed out of her work at the Cyril Ross Nursery. The foundation secures financial and other resources for the care of HIV+ children, since the cost of medical treatment alone is astonishingly high. The work of the Hibiscus Foundation also extends to pediatric AIDS cases at the nation's hospitals.

The Lady Hochoy Home has been catering to the needs of mentally challenged and differently-abled children for 50 years

now. It's a well respected and efficiently run operation that provides a safe environment for youngsters with more demanding needs to achieve their full potential. It's heartening to see the commitment with which the dedicated staff of these organisations go about their important and life-changing work; we hope that our help makes a small difference. 2011 will be the fourth year that we will make our usual donation to these three charities in our ongoing effort to make the children smile a little brighter and have happy Christmas memories to enjoy.

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## How The Grinch Didn't Steal Christmas

### PERSONAL SAFETY TIPS TO KEEP THE SEASON MERRY!

YOU KNOW THE SCENARIO: IT'S HUSTLE AND BUSTLE TIME. FEEL-GOOD MUSIC IS PLAYING THROUGH THE MALL'S SOUND SYSTEM, THE DECORATIONS ARE PRETTY, THE LIGHTS ARE TWINKLING, PERFECT STRANGERS ARE SMILING PLEASANTLY AT ONE ANOTHER AS THE CROWDS SQUEEZE IN TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF SANTA.

Or the Christmas choir. Or the fabulous pair of red shoes that have been ridiculously marked down. And then it happens. Your wallet is gone or an important package is missing. It happens in an instant, there's often no recourse and suddenly, a dark cloud hangs over your Christmas parade. Here's how to up the personal protection ante during this festive time when the devious Grinches are out in their numbers...

1. **Dress down.** Going holiday shopping? Try not to wear fancy jewellery and accessories. These make you stand out and increase the likelihood of being targeted for theft.
2. **Look around.** You really need to be aware of your environment. Avoid texting or talking on your cell phone in crowded areas, particularly if you have the latest Blackberry model. You may unwittingly reveal personal details or plans during your conversation, and everyone knows that when you're talking on a cell, your attention to your immediate surroundings goes out the window.
3. **Keep close.** Shopping with friends or family? Make sure everyone in your group stays close and within sight. The more alert eyes there are, the better. If you don't feel that you can properly supervise your children while shopping, it's better to leave them at home with a friend or family member.
4. **Put it on plastic.** It's a good idea to walk with minimal cash

or none at all. Put everything you buy on your credit card or use a debit card to pay for purchases. If you have to visit an ATM, try to do it during the daytime in a well-populated area.

5. **Go towards the light.** Park in a well-lit area if you know you're going to be leaving your shopping location after dark. Try not to park next to panel vans or vehicles with dark tint on the windows. If you're taking public transportation, wait in a well-lit and busy area. Regardless of your means of travel, you should be observant as to whether or not you're being followed. If you're concerned that you are, head for the nearest police station or call for help (hands-free) from your cell phone.
6. **Put the junk in the trunk.** If your shopping list is mega-long (hardly likely in this economic climate, but still) and you'll be going to different locations to shop, make sure that any purchases are discreetly stowed away in the trunk.
7. **Check the car details.** In all the confusion of getting presents into the car, you may forget an important detail like locking your doors. Even as you approach your car, you should notice whether there is anyone lurking nearby. If you're unsure or nervous, ask security to escort you. If you feel comfortable enough to continue on your own, unlock only the doors you need, get your packages – and yourself – into the car quickly and lock your doors immediately. Do not



linger in your parking spot to count money or make calls. Always ensure that your car has enough gas to get you to and from your destination and that everything is working properly – including the tyres.

**8. Watch out for the fakes.** It's the season for giving, but there are a few con artists out there who are poised to take

advantage of your generosity. Before you make a donation, you might want to ensure that it's an authentic cause. You can usually tell what's above-board and what's not by looking for proper logos and company stamps or asking the store or mall whether they have granted their permission for a particular organisation to be soliciting your goodwill.

## Christmas Food Favourites

AS ANYONE WHO HAS CELEBRATED CHRISTMAS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO KNOWS, A CENTRAL PART OF WHAT MAKES THE SEASON SPECIAL IS THE FOOD!

Many dishes that are a traditional feature of the festivities are not prepared at any other time of year, which makes having them at Christmas time all the more meaningful. Here's a sampling of the many unique meals that go into the recipe for a Trini Christmas!

### Black Cake

The season just doesn't taste the same without Black Cake! Nobody makes it exactly the same way, but in all its variations, there is no doubt that Black Cake (or Fruit Cake, as it is sometimes called) is a Christmas institution. Fruit like raisins and prunes are liberally soaked in alcohol like rum and cherry brandy, which helps to not just make the cake moist, but also practically everlasting! Ask any couple whose wedding cake was Black Cake – chances are that 20 years later, they still have remnants of the original cake in the freezer and it'll be as good as new once thawed out!

### Pastelles

There's no disputing that this Christmas staple is a lot of work, but the results are certainly worth it. Pastelles, which boast Spanish origins (they are called "hallaca" in Venezuela) were originally a meat-based dish, but nowadays, you can order them with a variety of well-seasoned fillings, including chicken, fish and "vegetarian", which usually means that the cornmeal shell is stuffed with beans or peas. But the filling is the easy part – which is probably why the pastelle-making business is so lucrative! The real work involves the cornmeal, which needs to be combined with water, salt, and butter to make a smooth dough. Critical to the process are a pastelle press and cleaned, steamed, well-oiled banana or fig leaves: the balls of cornmeal dough are dipped in oil and placed between two fig leaves on the press to be flattened – after which, you add the filling and fold and tie the pastelle. Then you need to steam the wrapped package – which looks like a really neat Christmas present – in water for about 20 minutes.

Freeze them and voila! All you need to do is re-heat when you're ready to eat!

### Garlic Pork

This is a Portuguese dish (its Portuguese name is "carne vinhada'alhos"), which is traditionally served, for the first time each season, on Christmas morning. It is a dish with a long history – the manner of preparation alone harkens back to a time when refrigerators were not common; it was actually a rather ingenious way of curing and preserving meat. The recipe calls for a lot of thyme and vinegar (real aficionados use a combination of cider and white vinegar), in which cubed pieces of pork are left to marinate, preferably in an earthenware jar. This provides the perfect environment in which the vinegar can begin to cure the meat; it helps to place the jar in a cool, dark area of the kitchen, ideally two weeks before the first sampling. To cook, just warm up a pot on high heat, using a touch of oil. Put in the pork, then reduce the heat. It usually springs its own water, which you have to intermittently pour out. In some Portuguese families, it is traditional to have the first mouthful of garlic pork with a shot of gin, which reputedly enhances the flavour of the dish.

### Christmas Ham

Christmas just wouldn't be the same without the smell of ham baking in the oven! Some people glaze their ham with a honey-mustard mix, others prefer to add chow-chow only when it's ready for eating. There are many approaches to cooking a Christmas ham, including covering it with banana leaves and adding cloves before baking, but whichever way it's done, there are few Trininis who would turn down a good ham and hops!

This Christmas, may you be surrounded by the deliciously diverse aromas of your favourite dishes, as well as lots of family and friends to share them with!



# Parang, Parang!

IT'S THE MUSIC THAT MAKES THE SOUNDTRACK OF CHRISTMAS SPECIAL: A MUSICAL GENRE WITH A WONDERFUL HISTORY THAT IS STRONGLY LINKED TO TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO.

- Parang was supposedly brought to our islands by Venezuelan migrants who were predominantly of Afro-Amerindian heritage, vibes that are strongly reflected in the rhythm and energy of the local version of the genre.
- The term “parang” comes from the Spanish word “parranda”, meaning a celebration, or party. Traditional Spanish “parrandas”, which took on a Carnival-like atmosphere, date back as far as the 18th century.
- “Parranda de aguinaldo” is a musical style that is predominant in certain coastal areas of Venezuela in which the “tambora”, or drum, takes precedence.
- Further up the Caribbean archipelago, in Puerto Rico, “parrandas” are musical festivities that are also centered around the Christmas season.
- In the Venezuelan sense of the term, “parrandas” began with a group of musicians who would perform at auspicious events like baptisms or birthdays – but the version that was brought to Trinidad was “parranda navideña”, referring to songs that were sung at Christmas.
- Locally, Christmas merrymaking and parang have become almost synonymous, with parang musicians and singers, commonly called “paranderos”, traditionally going from house to house entertaining people. This practice was especially common within rural communities such as Arima, Santa Cruz, Lopinot, Paramin and St. Joseph – historically agricultural towns where the Spanish influence was strong. Of course, at each house they would be welcomed inside and given food and drink.
- The official Parang Season runs from the beginning of October to January 6th, which is the Catholic Feast of the Epiphany, known in the Spanish-speaking region as “Día de los Reyes”, or the day on which the Three Kings arrived from the East bearing gifts for the newborn Christ. This day marks the end of the Christmas calendar. During this time, parang groups from all over the country perform in shopping centres and play in competitions organised by the National Parang Association of Trinidad and Tobago.

## Space options in the new year

RGM is thrilled that our lease space is in such high demand and we're pleased to tell you that there's a possibility of spots becoming available in Albion Plaza and Prince's Court come 2012.

**For further information, please contact our Properties Manager, Anya Stuart, at 625.6505 x 24.**

**Merry Christmas – and here's to exciting new possibilities in the New Year!**