

June 24th

St. John's Day



Information

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One of the most unique festivities of Aruba is the celebration of St. John's Day on June 24th, the traditional day to bury the rooster (Dia di Dera Gay).

In the past this celebration was known as an agricultural rounding off of one harvest and starting with a new one. At the end of the harvest season the fields were cleaned and the remains of the harvest were burned to thank the "God of fire" for the bountiful harvest and using the opportunity to ask for more in the coming year. So bonfires were lit on the last day of the harvest year, while they celebrated the new harvest season with festivities. You could not part with the old without celebration and purification.

For more than two centuries St. John's day has been celebrated in Aruba. Ever since agriculture became part of the Aruban daily life cultural expressions were evident and St. John's day is a part thereof. In the past after the harvesting of the yearly yield, be good or bad year, around the end of May or early July, the trunks and roots of the sorghum, maize or other crops are removed from the soil. These were collected to burn on the 23rd, the eve of St. John's day. On the 24th, St. John's day (Dia di Dera Gay), games were played. Some were of purely athletic prowess like running and jumping.

All these games took place before four, in the afternoon; while the "burial of the rooster (deramento di gay)" would take place before the sunset.

In a clearing with a sandy soil a hole would be dug. A young rooster (live) would be placed in the hole and covered by a calabash (gourd) so that the top of the calabash would be on the same level with the surrounding area. A blindfolded gentleman would be turned around by a lady while dancing on the tune of the Dera Gay song, so that he would lose all sense of direction. With a stick in his hands, while doing a shuffling dance, he would try to feel his way to the buried rooster. He only has three chances to strike his target. After the third useless try he is relieved. Another dancer would take his place. The rooster would be the price. These activities still take place in different places all over the island, with games and competitions. Instead of a live rooster a calabash is used. The predominant colors being used during these festivities are yellow, red and black.

Nowadays we celebrate the St. John's Day and Dera Gay more as a cultural event, while some people still celebrate the traditional St. John's Day. This is the reason that on this day you may still see some fires around the island and experience the smoke and its smell as a result.

