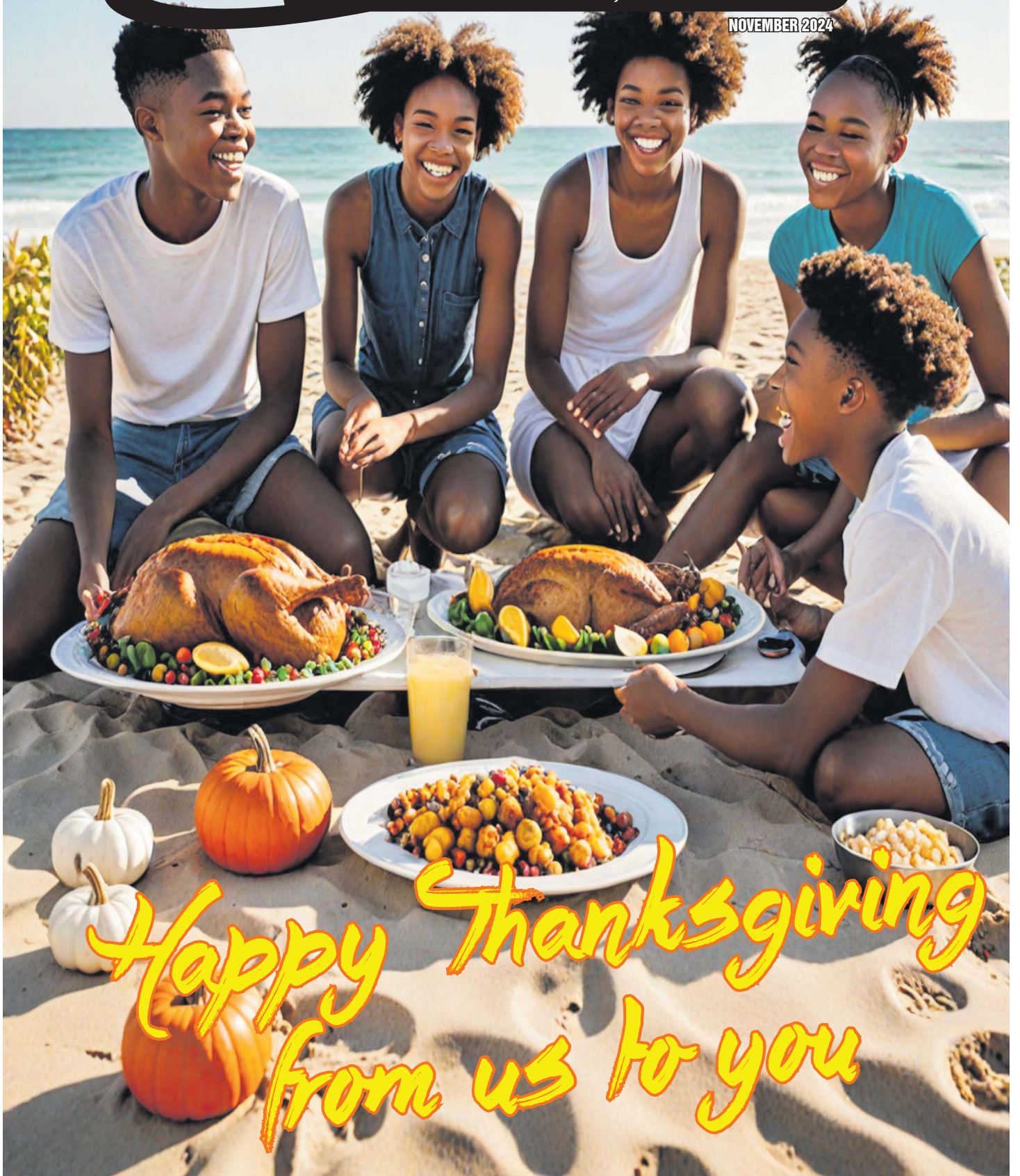


TEENTIMES

FOR THE YOUTH, BY THE YOUTH!

NOVEMBER 2024



Happy Thanksgiving
from us to you

Hair Politics

BY ASANTÉ PHILIPPS



Hair politics remains a serious issue not only in schools but in other establishments. Students and adults alike take pride in the natural beauty that is their hair, it's a part of them that forms their identity. By forcing students to cut or relax their hair is like forcing them to change a vital part of their character as a form of keeping their hair neat and/or contained. This leads to students feeling anxious of their looks and not wanting to go to school as a risk of getting bullied and judged by a look they didn't even want for themselves. Which raises many questions, is a student's hair really distracting them or others from learning?

Most students express themselves through their natural asset, that is their hair. By enforcing such strict hair grooming rules it allows students to feel like they are not accepted by society and their schools for who they are. In modern society students want to keep up with the latest trends, most definitely the ones that includes different hairstyles, for example trying new haircut styles or growing out their hair for different types of braided or loc hairstyles. The strict hair grooming policy hinders room for students to bring forth their creativity, and if students feel their creativity isn't welcome in their school, they feel less motivated to participate in their studies and that is the



real distraction to learning.

Allowing students to take pride in their natural traits boosts their self-esteem and confidence. Learning doesn't start with hair, it starts with commitment, motivation and the willfulness to learn. The beauty that is a students' hair doesn't distract the education that is being given, just the ones who are willing to be distracted by it. Instead of schools focusing on such strict policies they should focus on harboring an environment in the schools where students don't feel alienated for their hairstyles. By schools focusing on these rules, it distracts the initial purpose of what school is for.

Youth Council, which took place on November 2, 2024. Students of Milton Peters College and St. Dominic High school debated the topic: Relaxed hair grooming rules are a distraction to learning. The advocates for the topic were students from St. Dominic High Tanya Halley (first speaker), Adio Williams (second speaker), and Tamana Sharma (rebutter). The opposers of the topic were students from Milton Peters college Asanté Philipps (speaker one), Gabriella

Pauletta (speaker two) and Isaiiah Peterson (rebutter). During this debate a lot of good points were made, whether they were for or against the topic, all were well thought of and very convincing. The debate ended in the result of Milton Peters College being the winner. This debate was one for the books, the speakers were very articulate and powerful with how they expressed their points.

Students of St. Maarten are affected by such strict hair grooming rules and are openly expressing this, for instance, at the Annual Interscholastic Competition debate hosted by the St. Maarten Youth Parliament and St. Maarten



EMPOWERING MINDS WITH SHREYA PANJWANI

BY SANYA JANDIAL



Mental health is an integral part of our well-being, yet it often remains overshadowed by stigma and misunderstanding. Enter Shreya Panjwani, a licensed Clinical Psychologist with a wealth of expertise and a mission to change perceptions about mental health care. With over a decade of academic excellence and professional experience in psychology, Shreya has dedicated her career to helping individuals navigate life's challenges and rediscover their potential.

In this interview, Shreya shares her journey from India to her new role in the Caribbean, her insights into the complexities of mental health, and her passion for empowering communities. From addressing critical warning signs of mental health struggles to offering psychoeducation and advocating for self-compassion, Shreya's approach reflects her deep commitment to creating a more empathetic and mentally resilient society.



1. Could you please start by introducing yourself?

I am Shreya Panjwani, a licensed Clinical Psychologist with a passion for understanding the human mind. Born and raised in India, I began my journey in psychology in 2005 and graduated with distinction in Psychology, Sociology, and Economics in 2010. My interest led me to earn a Master's in Clinical and Applied Psychology, during which I gained valuable experience through internships with seasoned practitioners. To further specialise, I completed an M.Phil. in Clinical Psychology at the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences, Delhi University. In 2015, I earned my licensure from the Rehabilitation Council of India, formally beginning my career as a Clinical Psychologist.

2. What areas of psychology do you specialise in, and what types of clients do you typically work with?

I specialise in Cognitive and Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and am trained in Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT), Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), and Family Systems Therapy. Using an eclectic approach, I address issues such as anxiety, mood disorders, ADHD, PTSD, eating disorders, insomnia, and interpersonal difficulties. I also conduct assessments for IQ and childhood disorders like learning disabilities, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorders (ASD). My clientele ranges from ages 12 to 45.

3. What are some common warning signs that friends or family members should watch for in someone who may be struggling with suicidal thoughts?

Common warning signs include a noticeable lack of interest and/or pleasure in previously enjoyable activities, difficulty maintaining a routine, increased isolation, heightened irritability, or episodes of anger. Mental health professionals frequently identify significant alterations in mood, appetite, sleep patterns, weight, and libido as well. Some behavioral red flags at this time may include giving away valuables which may signal a sense of finality.

4. Would you be willing to visit local schools and speak to students about mental health and well-being? If so, what key messages would you want to share with them?

I would be interested in visiting the schools on this island as I believe it's essential to integrate mental health

practices into the curriculum, and I feel there's a lot of valuable information I can share with them. I would focus on concepts such as:

1. Psychoeducation
2. Your Feelings Matter
3. Self-Care and Self-Compassion Are Essential
4. You Are Enough
5. Be Proactive About Mental Health
6. You Are Not Alone
7. Compassion Makes a Difference

5. What do you think is most misunderstood about the work psychologists do?

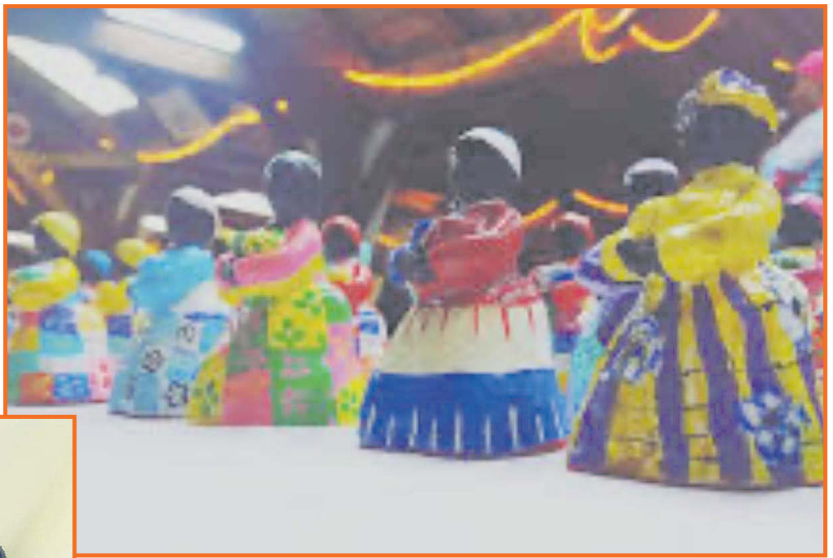
A major misconception is that psychologists only work with people who have severe mental health issues. While we assist individuals with conditions like depression, anxiety, and trauma, we also help with everyday challenges like stress, relationships, career concerns, and personal development. Especially among Caribbean parents, there's often a stigma surrounding therapy. However, therapy isn't just for "damaged" individuals – it's a tool for anyone seeking to improve mental well-being and enhance life.

6. Finally, what message would you like to share with our community as you begin your work here?

I'd like to emphasise that mental health is just as important as physical health. It affects everyone, regardless of background, race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Seeking help when needed is not a sign of weakness – it's an act of strength and courage. Imagine the possibilities of an island where mental well-being is prioritised – a happier, healthier, and more productive society that thrives on empathy and support. Let's take steps together to make this vision a reality.

Celebrating St. Maarten's Day: A day of Culture, History, and Fun

BY SUHANI NATHUMAL



Every year on November 11, the people of St. Maarten come together to celebrate its rich culture and history on St. Maarten's day. This historic day commemorates the discovery of the island in 1493 by Christopher Columbus and symbolises the unity between the Dutch and French sides of the island. He named the island after Saint Martin, whose feast day is celebrated on November 11. This day is a time for reflection, festivities, and honoring the traditions that make St. Maarten unique. This year, at St. Dominic High School, the history and culture of St. Maarten's day was brought to life with a day filled with activities and workshops, highlighting the island's vibrant heritage.

The day commenced with the ceremonial raising of the flag, a moment of pride and unity that set the tone for the upcoming celebrations. The auditorium slowly transformed into a sea of red, white, and blue as students poured in, their excited energy filling the air. Once everyone was settled down, the students and teachers joined in singing the national anthem, their voices rising in unison and harmony. With the formalities complete, each form split

up and headed into the activities planned and scheduled for them. The hallway came alive with cheerful chatter as the students eagerly made their way to workshops and presentations, ready to immerse themselves in the rich culture of St. Maarten.

The first workshop of the day explored the significance of the Tita Frock sculpture, a well-known cultural symbol in St. Maarten. This sculpture, with its vibrant colors and exaggerated shape, represents the strength and resilience of women in Caribbean society.

It represents the traditional attire worn by working women in the past, symbolising their role in preserving and passing down traditions through generations. As the workshop unfolded, students were captivated by the bold design and story behind the culture, understanding how art and culture are deeply intertwined. In addition to being informative, the workshop was also thought-provoking and fun. It sparked a new-found appreciation for the island's culture and highlighted how these symbols preserve the unique identity of St. Maarten.

Another fascinating workshop delved into the history of the iconic

LB Scott Road Bakery and Guesthouse, a landmark rich with stories from St. Maarten's past. Known for its freshly baked bread and warm hospitality, this establishment served as a testament to the island's sense of community, acting as a place of gathering where stories were shared, and traditions were passed down. As students listened to the guest speakers speak, they were fascinated by how the bakery played a role in connecting people across the island. The workshop painted a vivid picture of time where life on St. Maarten did not move at such a fast pace, and places like LB Scott Road Bakery were more than just a business, but cultural benchmarks.

One of the liveliest workshops of the day was the history behind Soualiga slang, allowing students to explore the unique dialect of St. Maarten. The workshop began with a small glimpse into the island's diverse cultural influences, such as African, Dutch, French, and Creole, and how they have eloped shape the local slang over the years. These slangs are more than just words; but rather a way for the people of St. Maarten to connect and express themselves in a way that celebrates their identity. This workshop filled the classroom with energy, excitement, and laughter. The presenters had students competing in fun games, enhancing their knowledge of these slangs. By the end of the workshop, students walked away with a stomach full of laughter and new phrases to add to their vocabulary.

The next workshops focused on the wildlife and local herbs on St. Maarten. This workshop introduced students to the interesting creatures that call the island home, ranging from iguanas to tiny hummingbirds. The presenters highlighted the island's rich biodiversity and natural beauty, emphasising the importance of maintaining the island's delicate ecosystem. The next session about local herbs delved into the multitude of herbs used on the island which enhance the taste of our cultural food. Students were amazed to learn how so many herbs came together to produce such a flavorful blend. The two workshops combined provided a vivid reminder of the deep connection between St. Maarten's people and its natural environment.

St. Maarten delicacies – tamarind balls and johnny cakes. Students got a visual presentation on how to prepare these beloved local snacks that have been passed down through generations. The presenters demonstrated how the tangy tamarind fruit is transformed into delicious sweet and sour balls with the help of simple ingredients like sugar. Next up was the well cherished johnny cake. The students watched as the ingredients were mixed and the dough was formed into perfect round balls. As the dough was kneaded and dropped in the oil, they sizzled, filling the room with a delicious aroma. Chatter echoed through the walls as the students experienced mixing, rolling, and frying together.

One of the tastiest workshops of the day was about making two iconic

The last two workshops showcased some of the many local talents here on St. Maarten – photography and playing steel pans. In the steelpan workshop, students were introduced to the island's iconic instrument, which acts as a symbol of the Caribbean's vibrant music culture. Students were given a chance to try their luck at playing the seemingly simple, yet complicated, instrument. With little guidance and a lot of enthusiasm, they started to produce the lively sound that steel pans are known for. The workshop filled with joyful music of students creating their first tunes. The local photography workshop allowed students to learn about the art of capturing the rich culture and landscapes of St. Maarten through the lens of a camera. By the end of the workshops, the students were both inspired and in awe of the hard work and dedication required to capture the joyful sounds and sights of St. Maarten.

The celebration-filled day ended with a short presentation by each class. The presentations each had a theme that delved into a specific part of the island's history. Whether in the form of a dance, a poem, or a skit, the auditorium filled with excitement, cheers, and pride as the students showcased what they had learned. Each performance provided an increased connection to St. Maarten's rich heritage. The students' enthusiasm was contagious, and the applause was deafening as each class took their bow. It was the perfect ending to a day filled with learning, laughter, and a deep sense of community.



Feature

Diving into Kjeld's Life

At just 13 years old, Kjeld van der Meer is making waves in the world of swimming. Living on an island, Kjeld's journey into the water was inspired by his mother, who wanted him to be safe and confident in the sea. Starting with his A, B, and C-level swimming diplomas, Kjeld quickly progressed, joining the Carib Swim Team and dedicating himself to the sport with rigorous eight-hour weekly training sessions.

"My training usually focuses on controlling my pace at different distances," Kjeld explains. "When there's a big race, I get really excited. During races, I don't let nerves take over — I just focus on finishing as fast as I can." His hard work has paid off, earning him silver and bronze medals at prestigious competitions like Carifta and OECS.

Chasing Inspiration

Kjeld doesn't shy away from comparisons, but instead uses them as motivation. "I compare myself to older swimmers and see them as rabbits I have to catch," he says. His swim role model is his teammate Pepijn Vriezen. "It's amazing how fast he can swim in such a short time," Kjeld shares, underscoring the camaraderie and inspiration within the swimming community.

Balancing School and Swimming
Balancing academics

with the demands of competitive swimming isn't always easy, but Kjeld has found a system that works. "I try to complete my homework at school, so I can focus on swimming afterward," he says. However, when school gets particularly demanding, Kjeld isn't afraid to prioritise his studies. "Sometimes I skip swimming if I have a difficult test the next day." Even outside the pool, Kjeld's swimming skills shine. "When I'm at the beach with big waves, I use what I've learned to swim and dive confidently in strong currents," he adds, emphasising the life-saving benefits of swimming.

Dreaming Big

Looking ahead, Kjeld envisions himself competing on a global stage. "In five years, I hope to be participating in the World Championship Swimming and still competing at a high level," he says.



A Message for the Minister of Sports

Kjeld also has advice for the Minister of Sports: "Promote swimming for children. It's not just a great workout — it uses 85% of your muscles — but also a vital skill for safety, especially on an island. Too many children still drown because they don't know how to handle strong currents or waves."

Kjeld van der Meer's story is a testament to the dedication, passion, and discipline it takes to excel in swimming. Whether it's winning medals or advocating for water safety, Kjeld is a young athlete making a big splash.



SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON MILA VAN BAALEN

wanted to do more swimming events," Mila shares, and she has been training diligently ever since.

Training and Preparation

Mila dedicates six hours a week to training, focusing on technique and building endurance. Before a swim meet, she experiences a

mix of excitement and nerves. "To calm myself, I use breathing techniques, which usually help," she explains.

Her dedication paid off at the OECS championships in Saint Vincent, where she proudly won a bronze medal. "I was nervous about making mistakes, but I stayed focused, and everything went really well," Mila recalls.

Teamwork and Inspiration

Although swimming is often seen as an individual sport, Mila values teamwork. "It feels really good to relax with my teammates — it makes everything more fun," she says. Her swim role model is Olympic champion Ranomi Kromowidjojo. "She's not only an amazing swimmer, but my dad, who has spoken to her, says she's also a really nice person," Mila adds.

Balancing Swimming and Life

Mila's schedule is packed, balancing swimming, gymnastics, and online Dutch classes. "Sometimes it's hard to finish all my homework, but I've made a schedule with my parents, so now I know exactly what to do each day," she explains. Through swimming, Mila has learned valuable lessons in perseverance and hard work. "It's taught me to work hard to achieve my goals, even outside the pool," she says.

Looking Ahead

In five years, Mila envisions herself back in the Netherlands, continuing her swimming journey. "I hope to have earned more important medals by then," she says with determination.

A Message to the Minister of Sports

Mila hopes the new Minister of Education, Youth, and Sports will prioritise swimming. "Swimming has given me so much. I hope the minister will sup-

port the Sint Maarten Aquatic Federation (SMAF) in teaching more kids how to swim and encouraging them to compete, both locally and abroad," she says.

With young athletes like Mila, Sint Maarten's swimming future looks incredibly promising. Her passion and drive serve as a reminder of the talent and potential within the island's swimming community.



When we think about sports, baseball, soccer, and basketball often come to mind. Yet, one group of athletes deserves more recognition — our swimmers. Sint Maarten has a vibrant swimming community, with a swim team dedicated to honing young talent. This month, we highlight Mila van Baalen, a determined 9-year-old swimmer whose career is brimming with potential.

Meet Mila

Mila moved from the Netherlands to Sint Maarten about two and a half years ago and has since made a splash in the local swimming scene. Her passion for swimming began in 2023 when she participated in a school swim meet at Carib Swim Team (CST). "From that moment, I knew I



Dive into your Heritage: A Dive into our Museum

BY ALISAH KIRTON

The Sint Maarten Museum, maintained by the Sint Maarten National Heritage Foundation, is crucial in conserving and promoting the island's significant cultural and historical background. This non-profit organisation was established on October 4th, 1993, and is located in Philipsburg. It exhibits relics from the pre-Columbian era to present-day times, encompassing items associated with the salt industry, slavery, and notable historical occurrences. The museum aims to foster respect for Sint Maarten's history and environment, targeting both visitors and, especially, the island's youth.

Amaris Richardson, a native of St. Maarten who studied architecture, presently serves as the Manager of the Sint Maarten National Heritage Foundation & Museum, dedicated to promoting, preserving, and elevating awareness of the culture, history, heritage, healing, and traditions of St. Maarten, while fostering connections within the Dutch Kingdom, the Caribbean, and abroad. Before managing the museum, she briefly worked for the Government of Sint Maarten. She received several monument permits and was disappointed since the monuments were not being appropriately preserved and were being damaged. That's when she decided that she had to take a stand to preserve her country's history.

One of the main challenges is funding and resources at the museum. As the museum is a non-profit organisation, it runs on donations and subsidies from the government, which is not enough. "We do have a lot of plans. We do have a lot of initiatives. We do have a lot that we want to do, but we're always dependent on funding. That's one of the biggest problems," Di-

rector Amaris expressed.

Director Amaris agreed that youth should be more involved in the museum and Sint Maarten's heritage.

"One of our biggest problems right now is having professionals in this field. Go and study history. Go and study to be an archaeologist. Go and study to be a curator or a museum specialist. You. Those are things that won't come up, but these are the people that we need. We need researchers, we need curators, we need even technicians to be able to create, to work with the ICT, to create innovative things. So, having the youth aware and building that awareness amongst the youth, even from the smallest age, guess what? You can tap into this as well, you know, so that maybe if you are interested in culture, history, and heritage, that is something you can go and study."

She expressed that we needed more museum field trips, workshops and educational projects, collaborations with school and community youth groups, and empowering youths as innovators. Expanding digital engagement, such as virtual tours and online educational content, can attract younger audiences. Collaborations with tech-focused organisations could amplify the museum's reach and relevance.

Amaris Richardson emphasises that the museum is more than a repository of historical artifacts — it is a living space for cultural education, reflection, and growth. Without knowing your roots, then it's difficult for you to know who you are. She is on a quest now to promote the museum more. "When I get students in here, you see that the students don't know St. Maarten's history. It's something that we have been fighting with, not only with the schools but just in general, so that people can know and learn the true history

and story of St. Maarten."

Under the stewardship of Amaris Richardson, the Sint Maarten Museum continues to play a pivotal role in preserving and celebrating the island's unique cultural heritage. Its commitment to educating and empowering youth demonstrates the importance of cultural heritage in shaping the future of the island. As an essential institution, it not only preserves the past but actively involves the next generation in celebrating and sustaining their identity. As Richardson aptly puts it, "The museum is not just about history; it's about who we are today and who we aspire to be."





Youth unleashed have your say panel discussion

BY ASANTÉ PHILIPPS AND SHILOH WILLIAMS



Teens face many challenges throughout their daily lives, whether the case may be bullying, drugs, strict parents, failing grades etc., the Youth unleashed have your say panel discussion was a great way to communicate those issues openly, leaving teens with a sense of relief. It is important to know that you should never give up on yourself and that you can reach out to someone who is close to you or seek professional help. Life may be tough, but you are tougher, indulging in different activities, pursuing hobbies or journaling your emotions are all ways to overcome the stress, anxiety and anger you feel on the inside. Once you've overcome those thoughts and emotions nothing is impossible for you as a teen.

At the Youth unleashed have your say panel discussion teens got to openly discuss issues and experiences that they went/go through in their life such as: bullying, low academic motivation, dropping out of school, strict parents, drugs in schools and suicide, all of which teens struggle with. The Youth unleashed have your say panel discussion was a

good way to bring teens together to talk about their obstacles instead of being against each other. This discussion and discussions like this in the future will harbor a sense of unity among the youth of St. Maarten, making them feel safer and more confident to openly communicate what they're going through so they can get the help they need.

A great point that was mentioned at the panel discussion was the topic of safe sex. It is important for teens to learn the importance of safe sex, but it is also important for them to be able to have a discussion with an adult about it because of the risk of pregnancy. By having an open relationship about the topic of safe sex teens can get a better feel and understanding of it and take their parents' words into consideration, learning to not get peer pressured into something they do not want to do or don't feel safe doing. Learning safe sex as a teen is the best, reason being that if there is pregnancy involved, chances are that the parents of the child will have to miss or drop out of school in order to make an honest living for their newborn while they lack the education they

The feedback of the panel discussion from the youths who attended was that all in all it was a great way to come together and hear each other out, be there for each other and understand what others go through in life and lend a helping hand to their peers in need. Moreover, the teens felt like their island needs a variety of organisations that can host discussions whether in schools or out of school on youth matters, where they can get the advice they need to feel more relieved and less anxious in their environment in order to have a better school life, personal life and social life. Some teens brought forth that it isn't easy opening up about certain personal issues they have and they would feel more safe going to someone who wouldn't share their personal stories, they'd rather go to someone they feel safe, trusted and heard around like their parents, so a suggestion was that there should be panel discussions for parents to better understand why it's important for them to not make the children feel alienated and shut out for the issues they bring to them but rather heard and respected. Neglect, bullying and hatred are all things that push not only teens but everyone to suicide, so as Henry Ford once said, **"Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."**



Feature

How to have Fun this Thanksgiving Season

BYDRISHTI BABANI

When roasted turkey, mashed potato, and pumpkin pie fill the air with their aroma, Thanksgiving doesn't just come as a holiday of tempting delights but as an occasion to remind us of the importance of thankfulness. While holiday festivities focus much on food and the gatherings that come with it, the true meaning lies in giving thanks, especially to those closest to us, friends and family.

Living in the haste of life, sometimes family and loved ones become an afterthought. Thanksgiving provides a time to step back and thank all those around us who enable, care for, and build up our lives. This year let's dive into more meaningful ways to give thanks and make the holiday a time to connect from the heart.

1. One of the simplest yet most impactful ways to give thanks is to express it directly. Take time during Thanksgiving

dinner to share specific things you're grateful for about each person at the table. Whether it's their sense of humor, support, or the countless small things they do, heartfelt words can strengthen bonds and make loved ones feel seen and appreciated.

2. A handwritten note or card can let someone know how much they mean to you. Write a letter to a family member or close friend telling them about an unforgettable memory, expressing appreciation for their presence in your life, or just how much you value them. Rather than any quick message, these can be cherished for years to come.

3. Actions speak louder than words. Express your appreciation through acts of thankfulness towards your loved ones. Offer to assist in preparing for Thanksgiving dinner, cleaning

up afterward, or engaging in a task that family members have been putting off. Such thoughtful gestures display your gratitude in ways they can see.

4. Thanksgiving is more than about the meal itself, it's about making memories. Plan an activity that brings everybody together, whether playing a famous board game, or cards or watching a holiday movie. Such shared moments can create a strong connection and remind us of how much joy there is in family and friends.

5. Gifts do not have to be big to be important or meaningful. Think about little things that express your appreciation. A personalised gift holds emotion and shows the thought you have put into the gesture.

6. Thanksgiving can be a time of healing broken relationships, too. If there has been tension or distance between you and someone, take the first step in reconciliation. A simple "I appreciate you and want us to be back to normal" may open up a door to recovery.

7. Friends and family are not always around the corner, but thankfulness knows no bounds. A call, video or even text can show a person that they are loved and remembered from miles apart. Let those who can't join your celebration know they're in your thoughts.

Don't just do this because it's Thanksgiving but do it all the time.



The Origin of Thanksgiving and Celebration Sint Maarten

BY ARTI BULLAND

Thanksgiving is a very important holiday both in the United States and Canada, which is associated with feasts, gratitude, spending time with one another and being thankful. Its origins go back to early colonial America with the Native Americans and Pilgrims in the early 17th century. However, Thanksgiving has its own unique resonance in the Caribbean, where it is celebrated with local traditions and cultural diversities.

Thanksgiving is celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November. Despite not being recognised as an official public holiday in most Caribbean islands, it has grown in popularity as a time for family gatherings and gratitude, often mixing American traditions with Caribbean flavors. Thanksgiving is much more than a good dinner for the people of Sint Maarten; it is a time to give thanks for blessings, especially after the annual hurricane season and come together in community. Sint Maarten, which is in the hurricane prone Caribbean, frequently faces the uncertainties and difficulties that come with hurricane season, which runs from June to November. At Thanksgiving, which marks the end of that season, everyone on the island breathes in relief and expresses gratitude for their safety, protection and even the courage to rebuild when necessary. For a community that has faced severe storms in the past, such as Hurricane Irma in 2017,

Thanksgiving becomes a meaningful opportunity to appreciate life, loved ones and the resilience of the island.

Sint Maarten's Thanksgiving has a unique flavor that reflects the island's cultural diversity and togetherness. During this time, communities, families, and friends get together, eat together and express gratitude. American classics and local Caribbean cuisine are mixed together to create the vibrant Thanksgiving meals in Sint Maarten. Typically, island delicacies like callaloo soup, rice and peas, fried plantains, Johnny cakes, and even stewed conch are served with the basic classics of turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce. Seafood dishes, such as grilled fish or lobster, go alongside these foods and also serve to highlight the island's diverse traditions. Caribbean sweets like sweet potato pudding or guavaberry rum cake can be served with desserts like pumpkin pie to create a menu that combines the best of both worlds.

In Sint Maarten, expressing gratitude has both a personal and a communal significance. Families gather around the dinner table to express their gratitude for many things while others go to special church services that focus on reflection and thankfulness. In order to give everyone a chance to take part in the celebration, many people also use the occasion to lend a hand by helping at local activities or donating food. The foundation of the island's Thanksgiving celebration is this sense of giving and unity.



Thanksgiving in Sint Maarten is more than a day of giving thanks; it is the beginning of the holiday season. Many take advantage of the occasion to hang lights, decorate their homes for Christmas, and prepare for all of the festivities and celebrations that will take place in the upcoming weeks. The island comes alive with the feeling of joy and anticipation toward celebrating Christmas and New Year's. The day offers an opportunity to consider the value of community and resilience. Thanksgiving is a reminder of the strength that comes from staying together, especially in times of difficulty for a small island nation that much depends on its feeling of community.

In Sint Maarten, Thanksgiving Day is a way to express gratitude for the island's resilience and cultural diversity. It's all about sharing meals, expressing gratitude and re-establishing relationships with loved ones while honouring this island's uniqueness. The day serves as a beneficial reminder to appreciate life's abundance and the resilience of community, whether it is observed with a turkey feast, a variety of seafood or a prayer of gratitude. This is especially true as the island transitions from hurricane season to the joyous celebrations of Christmas.



FROM ST. MAARTEN TO THE WORLD: ZARA BUDHRANI SHINES ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE!

BY LEHAR MARATA



Zara Budhrani, a local Bharatanatyam dancer, has spent over a decade learning Bharatanatyam at the Naatya Arts Center under the guidance of Mrs. Aparna Samaga Lulla and Ms. Inessa Careto. She is currently in 12th grade at the Learning Unlimited Preparatory School. Zara recently represented St. Maarten at a prestigious dance competition organised by GOPIO Guadeloupe. The competition was structured into two rounds: the first required participants to deliver a speech, while the second focused on performing a classical dance piece. Zara competed against dancers from all over the world including Sri Lanka, South Africa, Belgium, Poland, India, Reunion Island, Guadeloupe, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. She won second place despite being the youngest contestant!

of my heritage. Living far away from India, I feel it is essential to maintain that connection, and through this dance form, I feel I can truly achieve that.

3. Do you have any Bharatanatyam role models or dancers who inspire you? How have they influenced your own style and journey in dance?

My Bharatanatyam role models are my teachers, Aparna Samaga and Inessa Careto. Watching them dance and perform fills me with honour and gratitude for the opportunity to learn from them. They embody the love and passion for Bharatanatyam, inspiring me to better myself and strive to become the best dancer I can be. Their dedication and effort, combined with the love they show their students, creates opportunities for us to connect deeply with our culture. Because of them, I cannot imagine my life without Bharatanatyam as an integral part of it.

1. How would you describe your dance journey over the past years?

I started dancing Bharatanatyam over ten years ago, and it has become such a big part of who I am. I have had the privilege of dancing alongside and growing up with so many amazing people who are some of my closest friends. Aunty Aparna, who has been teaching for many years, is like a mother to me, constantly supporting and guiding our entire dance group throughout our journey. Performing with my friends at cultural events around St. Maarten has been such a special experience. From dancing for local audiences to performing for the King and Queen of the Netherlands and the Indian Ambassador of the Netherlands, these moments have not only helped us share the beauty of Bharatanatyam but also connect with other cultural dance forms and celebrate our passion for dance.

4. How did you feel when you first learned that you would be representing St. Maarten at this prestigious event?

I felt deeply honoured and proud to have the opportunity to represent St. Maarten at such a prestigious event. Though St. Maarten is just 37 square miles, it is rich with vibrant cultures and people. Being able to represent not only my island but also one of its cherished art forms on such a grand stage is truly a privilege. It feels amazing to share a piece of my home with the world.

5. What was the most memorable moment from the competition for you, both on and off the stage?

The most memorable moment for me offstage was meeting all the other participants for the first time and connecting with them instantly. From the very beginning, it was clear that we were all connected by our passion for classical Indian dance and the joy of sharing its beauty with others. Everyone was so welcoming and easy to talk to, and the experience would not have been the same without the people I met. Onstage, the most memorable moment was performing and knowing I was representing St. Maarten, sharing the beautiful art form of Bharatanatyam with the world.

2. What is it about Bharatanatyam that makes it so special to you that you decided to dedicate so much of your life towards it?

For me, what makes Bharatanatyam so special is the ability to practice a dance form from my culture that embodies both history and artistic expression. It allows me to stay connected to my roots and deepen my understanding



6. Winning 2nd place at the competition must have been incredible. What went through your mind when you found out the results?

At that moment, I was truly happy. I was happy because I could share that moment with my parents, who are my rocks, knowing that none of this would have been possible without their unwavering love and encouragement. My heart was equally full of gratitude for my teachers, Aparna and Inessa, whose guidance and dedication helped me perform my best and shaped me into the dancer I am today. At that moment, I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for all the support I have in my life.

7. How did you handle the nerves or pressure before performing in front of an international audience and judges?

When I got nervous, I remembered Aunty Aparna's words: "It's not about winning but about being there for the experience and having the chance to represent and perform Bharatanatyam." This mindset guided me going into the performance because, for me, the experience was what truly mattered. Leaving for university next year and knowing an opportunity like this might not come again, I went for the privilege of performing and connecting with others through this beautiful art form and representing my island. This helped me set aside my nerves and fully embrace the moment.

8. How did the experience of competing in Guadeloupe shape your perspective on Bharatanatyam and your growth as a dancer?

Competing in Guadeloupe gave me the incredible opportunity to learn from and watch performers showcasing various forms of classical Indian dance. I saw dances I had never witnessed before, like Odissi, and even a performance that beautifully blended South African dance traditions with Bharatanatyam. This experience showed me how classical dances can evolve and incorporate other styles along the way. I also realised that even within Bharatanatyam, everyone brings their own unique style. Learning from everyone reinforced the idea that growing as a dancer means staying open to learning from others and constantly seeking to expand your understanding and skills.

9. What advice would you give to other young dancers who want to pursue their passion but are also trying to balance school and other commitments?

Growing up, school has always been one of my top priorities, and while it still is, I have come to realise how important it is to prioritise other things in life that bring happiness. For me, Bharatanatyam is one of those things. It makes me happy, so I make time to practice and perform. To any young dancers trying to balance school and other commitments like dance, I would say, yes, school should be a top priority, but do not forget to make time for the things that bring you joy. It is easy to feel overwhelmed and struggle with managing multiple commitments, but it is important to remember that you are capable of achieving what you set your mind to. Above all, prioritise your happiness, it is

just as essential as your other responsibilities.

10. Looking ahead, what are your future goals in dance? Do you have plans to continue pursuing Bharatanatyam at college?

I definitely plan to continue pursuing Bharatanatyam in college if I have the opportunity. It would be amazing to keep practicing for as long as I can, even beyond college. I hope to continue learning from others and deepening my understanding of this beautiful art form. There's something truly special about connecting with people through a shared passion – just like I experienced at the competition, where sharing our love for Bharatanatyam was incredible. Zara's achieve-

ments are a testament to her hard work, support from her teachers and family, and her unwavering love for Bharatanatyam. Her journey is an inspiration to young dancers as she exemplifies that school and extra-curricular activities can co-exist once you have the determination and love for what you do! Once again, congratulations Zara, on this remarkable achievement!



Feature

A DISCONNECT FROM OUR ROOTS



BY ISABELLA CARAZO GRAVES

In an increasingly globalised world, it seems like many young people in St. Maarten find themselves growing further and further away from their roots. The attraction of other cultures, often glamorised in social media and popular entertainment, plays a vital role in this detachment. Many teenagers are more inclined to try and emulate lifestyle and trends from around the world instead of embracing their own roots. But this is not a problem unique to St. Maarten but a common phenomenon across smaller countries especially island nations, which struggle to maintain their cultural identity in the face of globalisation.

One reason for this disconnect is our education, with curriculum heavily focused on sciences, math's and languages, local history and cultures often takes a back seat. As a result, students grow up with minimal information of their cultural heritage and tradition, leading to a lack of pride and connection. On top of that, economic pressures of modern day push

young people to prioritise academic and work careers over cultural engagement.

The rapid technological advances also contribute to this disconnect. As digital communication becomes more and more accessible, global culture begins to form a melting pot of influences that overshadow local culture. Young people today are more exposed and influenced by global trends, music, fashion, and lifestyles which seem more exciting than cultural practices. The homogenisation of culture leads to the lines that separate St. Maarten's culture to be blurred leading to an often-forgotten heritage.

Despite this, it is important to stay connected to our roots. Cultural heritage is important to our sense of identity and belonging, it fosters a sense of unity among the community. Especially in St. Maarten, an island with such diverse and cultural history, embracing your heritage means celebrating cultural diversity allowing you to appreciate and celebrate your own unique background while helping create a beautiful cul-

tural mosaic where instead of each culture being mixed with the next, each tile creates a beautiful image while still being visible as a self-standing unit.

Furthermore, cultural engagement can help the economy by boosting touring through the showcasing of local traditions and history, which creates jobs and preserves cultural practices. As well as bettering our community by fostering love and respect.

To bridge the gap between young people and their heritage, several measures can be taken. Integrating more cultural education into school curriculums is a fundamental step. This includes teaching local history, language, arts, and traditions, and organising cultural events and field trips to historical sites. Communities can also encourage inter-generational activities where elders share stories, skills, and traditions with the younger generation, ensuring that knowledge and practices are passed down.

Moreover, leveraging technology

to promote cultural heritage can be an effective strategy. Creating engaging digital content about St. Maarten's culture, such as videos, social media campaigns, and interactive websites, can captivate the youth's attention and make learning about their heritage more appealing. Collaborations with local influencers and artists to highlight cultural pride can also resonate with young audiences.

In conclusion, while globalisation presents challenges to maintaining cultural connections, it is vital for the youth of St. Maarten to embrace and celebrate their heritage. Doing so not only preserves the rich cultural tapestry of the island but also strengthens personal and communal identity, fostering a sense of pride and unity that is invaluable in today's world. By taking active steps to promote cultural education and engagement, we can ensure that the vibrant traditions of St. Maarten continue to thrive for generations to come.

Feature

INFLUENCER NOT ROLE MODELS

Social media influencers do hold immense power in today's digital era; they shape opinions, set trends, and mold behaviours of audiences. But the question is, should they? Although some of them do create positive content, there are ample reasons as to why influencers may not be considered fit as role models for impressionable audiences.

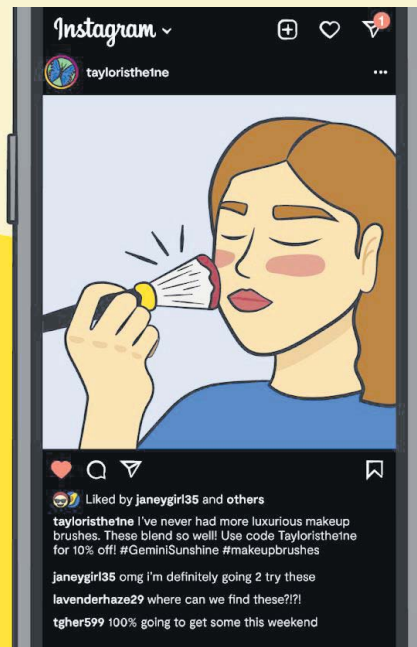
Most influencers often create and share highlight reels of their ideal lives, which often serve to create unrealistic standards for their followers. From heavily photoshopped pictures to meticulously staged content, this often creates unattainable beauty standards, materialism, and a fake success. This can result in low self-esteem and a misconception regarding reality among viewers, more so young audiences. These are not role models because they are deceitful, promote unrealistic health goals, and they exploit the youth.

With great power, influencers often lack ethical accountability, creating a host of negative impacts on their audiences, especially impressionable youth. In their desperation for income

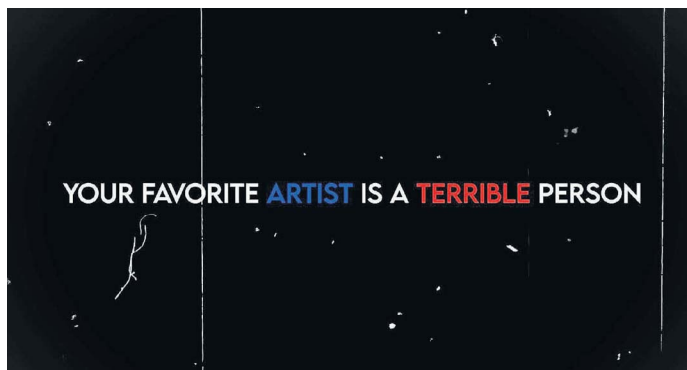
through brand deals some have reverted to deceit-inflated follower counts, and dishonest claims are common in order to attract partnerships. Additionally, platforms like TikTok have fueled the spread of misinformation, with influencers encouraging self-diagnoses for mental health issues, leading teens to trust them over professionals. These behaviors highlight the need for audiences to critically evaluate influencers' content and avoid taking unqualified advice at face value.

So many social media content creators have spent more energy seeking attention and followers rather than using their platforms to inspire and teach. Whereas some creators engage in dangerous behavior or shallow content, others, such as small TikTokers

Brittani Lancaster, with her body positivity, and Alexis Loveraz, with her study tips and SAT/ACT tips, speak to real issues in teens' lives and provide meaningful resources. Creators have it within their ability to shape an entire generation.



CAN YOU SEPARATE ART FROM THE ARTIST



BY JAHZARA PAYNE

When it comes to the word “Art” it can mean many different things, from music to poetry to drama and much more. Art is a way for artists to express themselves and let us, the viewers, feel each emotion or trauma they themselves have been through. Art can tell so much yet so little. There is one thing some people may wonder and that is if you can separate the art from the artist. Yes, art is a way for artists to express themselves, but some artists do not match their art. This question can lead to arguments or disagreements between people where one side says yes, they can, and the other side would say no. With this question, five people were asked if you can separate the two and these are their responses:

Person #1

Yes art can be looked at without thinking of the artist, but at the same time, the artist’s actions are connected to their work, for instance their intentions of creating the art piece, especially if the art has a wrong impression or message being sent out. So, it can be hard sometimes to separate the two, but in my opinion, it depends on the person and how they feel about the situation.

Person #2

Yes, I can. The art itself can exist separately from the artist’s personal life or views. I think that people view art as the way they perceive reality. Therefore, the art can be perceived in contrast to the artist’s feelings. Even when the artist is problematic, we can still choose to appreciate the artwork on its own.

Person #3

Yes. I believe you can. Depending on the type of person you are, you will pick a side; whether you view it as separate or inseparable. While some believe that once an artistic work has been produced, it gains autonomy from the artist and can be enjoyed without considering the artist’s personal life or actions, others believe it is impossible for one’s work to stand completely apart from his life, beliefs, and actions. In this perspective, the interpretation of the art may get deeper once the background of the artist is understood, while the moral performance of the artist could affect reception. The middle ground considers the ethical implications of supporting an artist with personal problematic actions; some choose to distance themselves from the artist’s work, while others continue to appreciate the work despite its complexities. For me however, I support

the arts of the artist. I don’t listen, watch or admire art based on other perspectives. Let’s take Drake for example. Recently, people started to hate him, I don’t know why but they do. But just because others don’t like him, doesn’t mean I shouldn’t either. Besides, if the type of music they do is really great and impactful, why stop yourself. Ultimately, whether or not to separate art from the artist is a decision based on personal values, specifics in the life and works of the artist, and broader social contexts, which involve some balance between artistic appreciation and ethical reflection.

Person #4

We can argue that art can be separated from the artist by examining several compelling examples:

Pablo Picasso: His painting *Guernica* serves as a powerful anti-war statement, reflecting the horrors of conflict regardless of Picasso’s personal life. The work’s impact transcends his character, allowing viewers to appreciate its message independently of the artist’s flaws.

Woody Allen: Despite allegations against him, many still find value in films like *Annie Hall* for their artistic merit and cultural significance. The film’s themes and storytelling can be appreciated without endorsing Allen’s personal actions.

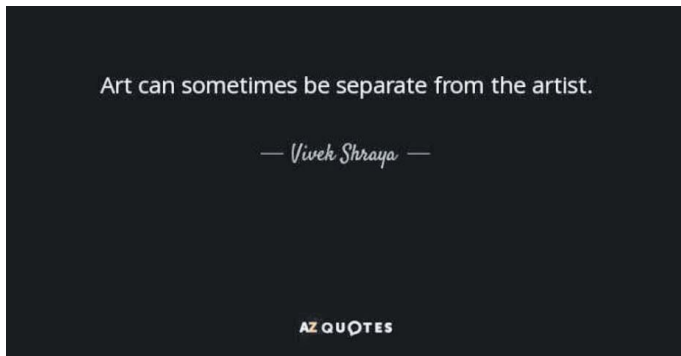
Literary Figures: Authors like J.D. Salinger and Roald Dahl produced influential works despite their problematic behaviors. Their literature continues to resonate with readers, demonstrating that the art can stand on its own, separate from the artist’s moral failings.

These examples illustrate that while artists may be flawed individuals, their creations can evoke emotions and provoke thought independently of their personal lives.

Person #5

No, art is deeply influenced by the beliefs, values, and experiences of the artist. All art carries something of the worldview of its creator and therefore are inherently political or religious. It’s inextricably born from and shaped by its creator and trying to separate them is like denying a child it’s mother; The art is born from this artist, carrying his struggles, joys, and his essence and no matter how hard we try to avoid it, their presence flows through every part of their work. When we consume art, we’re soaking up the perspectives and beliefs of the creator whether consciously or unconsciously which of course begs the question “can we ethically enjoy or consume their work?” in the case of the artist having morally questionable beliefs. You can consume the art without sharing the same beliefs of course but you’d be platforming an artist with potentially harmful ideologies which can help their beliefs spread.

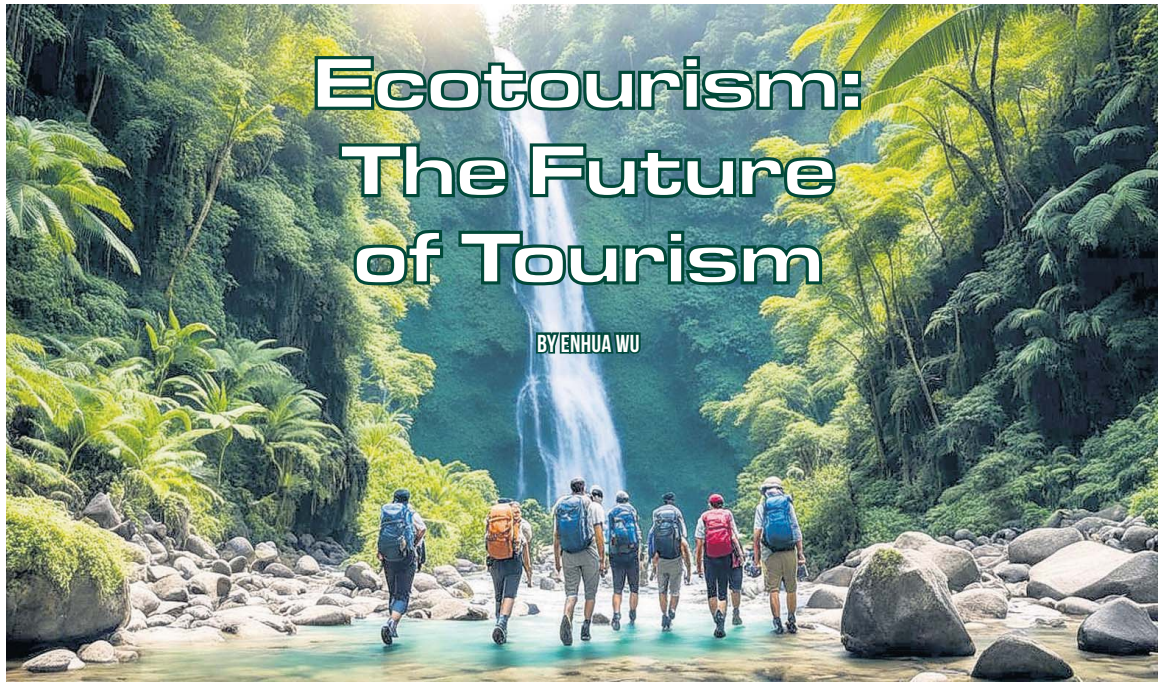
Majority says yes, you can separate the art from the artist, yet it is sometimes difficult to do so. Artists may have their inner dialogues or problems in their lives which would make them problematic to the world but that does not mean the art has to be viewed in this way as well. Most times these situations in the artist’s life assists in the newest creation they come up with so they can showcase to us, the viewers. This is a question where everyone has their opinions, and no one can be wrong or right with expressing their points.



Feature

Ecotourism: The Future of Tourism

BY ENHUA WU



What is Ecotourism?

Exploring breathtaking landscapes is only one aspect of ecotourism; it is also a powerful way to protect the environment and support local communities. Furthermore, ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism that focuses on responsible travel to natural areas, preserving the environment, promoting community well-being and education. It aims to encourage the appreciation of nature and local culture while minimising negative impacts on the environment. This is particularly essential on our island, St. Maarten, because our economy heavily relies on tourism as our main source of income.

Why is it important?

Ecotourism plays a crucial role in addressing several global challenges such as: minimising pollution, conserving wildlife and ecosystems and engaging in cultural sensitivity and respect. Additionally, there are educational, social,

economic and environmental benefits of ecotourism. It provides tourists with enriching experiences that can empower their understanding and knowledge about environmental issues and educate them on how to cherish and protect nature. Moreover, it can provide economic benefits such as: creating new job opportunities for locals, ecotourists support locally owned businesses instead of commercial businesses, and improves quality of life. Not to mention, it benefits in a social way because it encourages the respect of practices and heritages of different cultures, hence promoting diversity and cultural integration. The Great Barrier Reef in Australia is a great example of an ecotourism success, certified since 1997, it provides an abundance of coastal experiences, and every visitor contributes to its conservation via environmental management charge (EMC) applied to reef tours.

Ecotourism on St. Maarten

Although ecotourism is experiencing growth worldwide, smaller islands like St. Maarten, where unique natural environments and cultural diversity – melting pot – draw many tourists, are equally affected. St. Maarten is a tourism dependent country, where our main source of income is through tourists and therefore ecotourism is very essential to our island. Here are some examples of how to engage in ecotourism activities on St. Maarten.

- Diving and snorkelling – St. Maarten is entirely surrounded by beautiful marine ecosystems, including coral reefs and seagrass beds. There are many guided snorkelling and diving tours on the island that often focus on conservation and education about marine life and habitats.
- Hiking in nature reserves – The island is

abundant in beautiful hills and greenery that are the most suitable for hiking. Nature reserves such as Loterie Farm greatly support ecotourism by providing activities like zip-lining, hiking on the tallest hill of the island and treetop courses while preserving the environment. In addition, it also provides education to visitors about the culture and history of the island.

By taking ecotourism into account, we guarantee that future generations will be able to appreciate the natural beauties of locations like St. Maarten. If not, there will be great consequences such as further pollution, climate change, and endangerment of habitats that can really affect our world in the future.



CYBERSECURITY AND ITS IMPORTANCE



Cybersecurity is the practice of safeguarding personal data from unauthorised access, theft, and attacks. It's essential in our digital age, where much of our daily lives banking, communication, and even shopping takes place online.

Sharing personal information online can seem harmless but poses serious risks. Cybercriminals often exploit overshared details, like names, addresses, or birthdates, for identity theft. For instance, if you post your pet's name and also use it as a password, hackers could easily guess it. It is not wise to set any private codes or passwords as a birthday or your name. Even sharing your vacation plans publicly can signal that your home is unattended, increasing

physical security risks. The consequences of poor cybersecurity can be severe, ranging from financial loss to stolen identities and damaged reputations.

To stay safe:

1. **Use strong, unique passwords** and enable two-factor authentication for added protection.
2. **Think before you share online**, avoiding sensitive details like addresses or financial information.
3. **Keep your devices and software updated** to guard against vulnerabilities.
4. **Be cautious with e-mails and links**, verify-

ing their authenticity before clicking.

Cybersecurity is vital for protecting personal privacy and ensuring a secure digital environment. By staying vigilant and adopting smart online

practices, we can reduce risks and enjoy the benefits of the internet without compromising our safety. Remember, in the digital world, your information is as valuable as any physical asset — protect it wisely.



The Dangers of Driving in Bad Weather.

BY ADITI RAJPAL

Driving in rainy weather has it challenges. It's important to know the risks and how to make sure to prevent it. Sint Maarten's weather recently has been changing very often from stormy to sunny to then flooding. Whether it's a light drizzle or a heavy downpour, rain affects the roads and the driver's behavior towards the conditions. Here are some examples showing how bad weather can get and a few tips.

Visibility:

Rain, especially with fog or mist, can reduce visibility for drivers and even pedestrians in some cases. When rain falls it can cause your windshield to become smeared, which can restrict your vision to see clearly. The glare from headlights, taillights, and streetlights can have an overwhelming effect

on the driver, making it harder to judge distances and/or potholes. **Safety Tip:** Always make sure your wipers are in good condition and your headlights are one when it's raining.

Slippery roads:

Rainwater can cause water to accumulate on the surface of the road, which can lead to slippery conditions, especially in the first few minutes of rainfall. Wet roads reduce the friction between your tyres and the roads surface. This can cause, the driver losing traction, hydroplaning or skidding. **Safety Tip:** Slow down when driving in the rain. Lower speeds allowing your tyres to have better contact with the road.

Flooding:

Heavy rain can lead to localised flooding, which can hide potholes or cause more serious hazards.



Even just a few inches of standing water can cause a vehicle to lose traction and spin out of control. **Safety Tip:** Never drive through flooded areas, the depth of water can deceive you, and even a few inches of rainfall can do more than enough damage to your car.

Drivers Attention:

Rain can also impact the driver, like in the way they react to situations. The stress of reduced visibility, slippery roads, the change in conditions can make the driver unaware, and more prone to making mistakes. Rushing to get to where they need to can lead to driver ignoring safety precautions.

Safety Tip: Stay calm and focused. Take your time, and be patient and more aware of the road, as

Sint Maarten has lots of potholes.

Remember these precautionary actions to keep in mind when driving:

1. **Check Weather Forecast:** Avoid driving during storms or extreme conditions if possible.
2. **Check Your Vehicle:** Make sure tyres, wipers, lights, brakes, and battery are in good condition.
3. **Driving Habits:** Drive slower, leave a good distance from cars, and avoid sudden turns.
4. **Stay Visible:** Use headlights and signals to make sure other drivers can see you.
5. **Essentials:** Pack an emergency kit with tools, first aid, and supplies in case of any emergency.

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