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NIGERIAN ARTS AND CULTURE DIRECTORY PROJECT

Newsletter



Abuja Carnival 2007
Experience Culture...
Celebrate Life



Plateau State performers at the carnival

BACKGROUND

Being an ethnically diverse entity and the largest black nation on earth, with about 250 ethnic groups, the need for a unification of cultures in Nigeria through a yearly event such as the Abuja Carnival became quite imperative.

As against other national cultural festivals, this is the first ever national carnival in modern-day Nigeria and can boast of all the qualities of a world-class event of its kind. The first edition took place in 2005, when the concept finally received government's approval;



Carnival King and Queen from Nasarawa State

The second edition came up in 2006. Following this annual pattern, the year 2007 witnessed the Third edition of the Carnival, which took place between the 22nd and 25th of November.

OPENING DAY

From the activities of the opening day which began along Festival Route, from Transcorp Hilton, Maitama, along Shehu Shagari Way all the way to the Eagle Square, till the closing ceremony, tourists and visitors were treated to the unique display, for which different states of Nigeria are known; Dance, Music, Masquerades, Boat Regatta, Durbar Displays, Arts and Crafts, Traditional Institutions, etc.

During the opening parade, each participating state marched along the route with a Float and its whole contingent, fully costumed and accompanied by loud drumming and dancing.



Costumed girl at the Carnival



The Float, a depiction of the state's most prominent cultural or tourist icon is built on a low trailer-bed, constructed to replicate such an icon. These are proofs of the artistic and creative ingenuity of Nigerian artists as they left tourists gaping in wonder.

The breath-taking displays, flamboyant colours, glitz, and showcase of famous icons is better experienced than imagined. The participation of such African countries as Ghana and



Niger Republic at the carnival has lent it an international aspect whose prospects seem unstoppable over the next few years. The opening day was rounded off with an arts and crafts exhibition at the Abuja Arts and

Craft village where tourists and visitors had a chance at collecting rare pieces and mementos, original works of art by Nigerian artists which cannot be found anywhere else in the world.



Fire masquerade from Oyo State



Ijele masquerade from Enugu State

DAY 2: THE MASQUERADE FESTIVAL

The event witnessed an array of major and minor masquerades from across the length and breadth of Nigeria. The Eagle Square, venue of the event was taken over by such a large number of these masquerades that at one stage everything seemed to pass in a blur, with one only noticing the difference in sizes, colors and costumes, rather than their states of origin.

Some of the more notable ones include the Ekpe masquerade of Cross River, the Ijele masquerade of the Igbo people, Sango

Masquerade of fire from south-west, Kwahi masquerade of Benue State, the Wind Pole



masquerade of Niger State and Warrior Masquerades of North-Eastern Nigeria. These represent masquerades from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria which fully participated in the 2007 Abuja Carnival.

The performance of each masquerade differs from one culture to the other depending on the concept and idea behind its institution. Some are war cults while others are for peace and security, some are meant for entertainment through dancing and yet others are symbols of beauty, creativity and dignity. This Last variety is among the colourfully costumed and decorated masquerades in Nigeria.



DURBAR-CAMEL AND HORSE RIDING CONTEST

Later in the evening of the second day, the durbar display took place at the Royal Equestrian Club, Opposite the IBB Golf Course. It was a contest among the Muslim States of the north who have the Arabian culture of horsemanship. Due also to the savanna topography of the north, breeding of horses and camels are an ancient tradition in these parts. The history of past northern leaders is prevalent with exploits at war achieved through the art of horsemanship. It was equally a major factor in the spread of Islam. The Durbar event was meant to reenact these ancient glories. Horses



Royal Guards from Bauchi State



Colourfully decorated horses at the Durbar

and camels on display were costumed in expensive jewelry.

Expensive and elaborately designed velvet and lace materials were used for saddles and drapery, the riders royally garbed either as Emirs (traditional rulers) or as palace guards, armed with swords. The overall effect was that of power, wealth and beauty, an enchanting spectacle to watch.



CORPORATE AFFAIRS COMMISSION

DAY 3: BOAT REGATTA

This carnival event mainly involves participants from the Niger Delta States of Nigeria. These states are located in the riverine areas that traditionally have the culture of boatmanship and rowing. In most states of the Niger Delta region, boatmanship in a matter of daily living, as the masses depend on water transportation to go about the business of existence.



The carnival boat regatta is meant to showcase skill and prowess in the art of water maneuvering. The event took place at Jabi Dam



Boat Regatta

in Abuja and the major criteria for judgment are usually expertise and special skills.

Costume varied between the fishermen's garb and the Niger Delta traditional dress of caftan on wrapper, topped by a Stetson.

The boats are of the rural variety, rowed with several paddles and manned by able-bodied men and women. The more skills displayed, the greater the chance of winning the contest. It is one of the highpoints of the carnival.

CLOSING DAY-25th NOV:

This is the last day on which theatre, choral and dance groups entertained the public at the Eagle Square with professional cultural displays which are delightful to watch. It is equally a keen contest as states did their best to outdo each



Cross River State contingent



Katsina State contingent

other for the prizes. A closing parade followed this contest during which all state contingents took part in a match past, much like the opening parade. In this case however, they bade farewell and were sent off to their different states. It signals the end of the carnival amidst jubilation and award of prizes, dancing and merry making. It can be categorically stated that Abuja Carnival 2007 has been a tremendous improvement on the last two editions in terms of content, participation and organization, recording over two million spectators on the festival routes and venues, out of which two percent were foreign tourists. Its organization was much

improved, showing that the Abuja Carnival is a project expected to yield long-term dividends. It may eventually culminate in the much touted All African Cultural Olympiad (ACULO), by the Nigerian Arts and Culture Directory Project, which will be a convergence of all Africans at home and in the Diaspora. The possibilities are quite limitless.



Dancers from Osun State



Some foreign tourists at the carnival

Some of the prizes won and their different categories are as follows:

1. The overall winner of the carnival competition was Rivers State who received the highest number of prizes in the different categories.
 2. Best Decorated Float Category:
 Rivers State – First Position
 FCT – Second Position
 Nasarawa State – Third Position

3. Boat Regatta:
 Rivers State – First Position
 Bayelsa State – Second Position
 Akwa Ibom State – Third Position

4. Best Costumed Contingent Category:
 FCT – First Position
 Rivers State – Second Position
 Nasarawa State – Third Position

5. Durbar – Horse and Camel Riding
 Overall Winners – Yobe State
 Best Dressed Contingent – Bauchi State
 Special Award – Emir of Machina

6. Masquerade Festival:
 Nasarawa State – First Position
 Rivers State – Second Position



Yobe State Contingent



Anambra State Contingent