

Christmas! Jamaican Style

Jamaicans have a passionate and abiding love for Christmas and year after year they enjoy the yuletide season to the fullest, despite the trials and tribulations they've experienced all year...

That is, of course, once certain basic things are in place. The "basic things" required for the full and proper enjoyment of a Jamaican Christmas, include:

1. Ham. You MUST have a ham for Christmas dinner. Even if it's the size of a chicken wing. Even (God forbid) if it has to come out of a tin.
2. Sorrel mixed with lethal amounts of white rum is a must. (In some homes the sorrel is entirely optional. The "Whites" is all that's needed.)
3. Christmas cake is also essential. Said cake must be made according to the exact specifications of Great Aunt Ruby's 100-year old family recipe. The end result should be black as tar, heavy as lead and able to last for 2 years without refrigeration. It should also contain enough rum to make an adult male drunk from a single whiff of its pungent aroma. Finally, it should have so many fruits, nuts and the like mixed in that if you took the fruit from a single slice and planted it you would have an orchard the size of Appleton Estate.
4. Family members from London, New York, Atlanta and Miami must be present. No matter if they have to sleep three to a bed, two to a couch or even "one-bi-one" on the floor.
5. The only thing better than family from farin is money and gifts from farin. Take a drive past the nearest Western Union and you'll see what I'm talking about. Despite the recession, the place "dark wid people". It's a similar story on the wharf. I'm told that in the weeks leading up to Christmas "down deh ram like dance".
6. Being able to laugh heartily at the "mix-up" accents of the people sending greetings from farin on TVJ. (All the while silently praying that Great Uncle Adolphus from Birmingham doesn't make an appearance and embarrass you again like he did four years ago.)
7. Even if you have to steal the paint, the entire house has to get a "touch-up", from top to bottom. Fence, grill and sidewalk included.
8. If at all possible, run out and buy something new from Courts or Singer. There's nothing so festive as having some nice new appliances and furniture you can show off on your friends with come Christmas day. The additional debt can be sorted out in January.
9. The vague, hard-to-define, but nevertheless inescapable feeling that, even if its just for one day of the year, people are a little bit nicer, your burdens are a little bit lighter and "peace on earth, goodwill to all men" isn't just a saying but a way we can actually all live.

Seasons Greetings from Chat-bout!