

# The Greater Caribbean Day: Recognising a Shared Region, Strengthening a Shared Future



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## Introduction

The Greater Caribbean is one of the world's most interconnected regional spaces, linked by a shared sea that has shaped centuries of human exchange, cultural interaction, and regional interdependence. Although widely recognised for its extraordinary cultural diversity, rich natural heritage, and strategic importance, it has never before had a common observance acknowledging its collective widespread global reach. The Greater Caribbean already exists geographically, historically, culturally, and institutionally, but it lacks a recurring civic observance that enables its peoples to recognise and celebrate their collective identity. The establishment of 24 July as the Greater Caribbean Day fills this gap. More than a commemorative date, it provides an annual platform through which the peoples of the Greater Caribbean can celebrate their shared identity, strengthen regional awareness, encourage public participation, and reinforce the solidarity and cooperation needed to promote common opportunities and address shared challenges. In doing so, it creates a civic occasion through which the region can better understand itself, celebrate what connects its peoples, and project a stronger collective voice internationally.

## 1. A Region Connected by a Common Patrimony

The Greater Caribbean extends beyond the archipelago traditionally associated with the Caribbean. It encompasses both insular and continental countries and territories connected by the Caribbean Sea, a semi-enclosed sea covering approximately 2,753,000 square km that has long served as a corridor of exchange linking the Americas (Ogden, 2026). Across this maritime space, Indigenous navigation, migration, commerce, and cultural exchange have all shaped societies whose histories remain deeply interwoven. This shared yet diverse heritage continues to influence the region's cultural identity, social relations, and traditions.

Despite its linguistic diversity, the Greater Caribbean has never been culturally compartmentalised. Musical traditions, cuisines, festivals, and even languages have travelled with the people who moved throughout the region, evolving through encounters with new communities. The emergence of zouk illustrates the co-creative dynamics of the Greater Caribbean. Drawing on Haitian kompa alongside

Guadeloupean *gwo ka*, Martinican *chouval bwa* and *biguine*, it demonstrates how the movement of people, ideas, and artistic traditions across the Caribbean generated new cultural expressions that came to embody a shared regional identity (Guilbault, 1992). Likewise, Creole languages reflect parallel histories of contact and exchange and continue to facilitate cultural connections across the region. They were entirely new languages created because no existing language could express the idiosyncratic social realities produced throughout Caribbean history.

Rather than viewing this diversity as evidence of fragmentation, Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant argued that Caribbean identity is best understood through the concept of Relation, according to which identities are continually constituted through interactions with others rather than derived from a single cultural origin (Glissant, 1997). The Caribbean emerged through centuries of movement, displacement, exchange, and coexistence that did not erase cultural differences but transformed them into new forms of social and cultural expression. Diversity, therefore, is not the absence of regional identity; it is the historical outcome of the very processes that have connected the peoples of the Greater Caribbean (Glissant, 1997). Its multiple languages, legal traditions, religions, cultural expressions, and historical experiences are therefore not barriers to regional identity but expressions of a common historical process. Recognising this shared yet plural character provides a stronger foundation for cooperation, particularly as Caribbean societies increasingly confront challenges—such as climate change, disaster risk, marine pollution, biodiversity loss, and sustainable development—that transcend national borders.

## **2. Why a Greater Caribbean Day?**

If regional cooperation depends upon shared interests, it also depends upon a common consciousness. Institutions can facilitate dialogue and coordinate action, but lasting regional cooperation ultimately requires that people recognise themselves as belonging to a broader community. Frantz Fanon argued that collective self-definition is fundamental to political agency, writing that "national consciousness... is the only thing that will give us an international dimension" (Fanon, 1963, p. 247). In the context of the Greater Caribbean, this insight highlights the importance of defining the region through its own history, geography, and aspirations. Greater Caribbean Day therefore offers an opportunity for the peoples of the region to collectively define the Greater Caribbean through the relationships, histories, and common challenges that unite them, rather than through political and administrative divisions that historically fragmented the Caribbean.

Greater Caribbean Day could be marked through initiatives that celebrate regional narratives, encourage citizen storytelling, support oral history projects, and foster cross-border cultural encounters, creating opportunities to recognise the everyday interactions, movements, and exchanges through which the peoples of the region have shaped a shared Caribbean identity, strengthening its collective consciousness. One such story is that of the *pacotilleuses* who crossed the Caribbean aboard schooners, linking islands through commerce, kinship, and knowledge (Raapke, 2022). Carrying fabrics, spices, and household goods from one shore to another, they also transmitted recipes, fashions, songs, expressions, news, and social ties across linguistic and national boundaries. Their journeys reveal that the Greater Caribbean was forged not only through diplomacy or institutions, but also through the everyday mobility of ordinary people whose lives intertwined the region long before it was conceived as a political community. Commemorating stories such as theirs would help reposition these lived experiences—not as peripheral episodes in Caribbean history, but as foundational to understanding how the Greater Caribbean has been imagined, experienced, and continuously created by its peoples.

Greater Caribbean Day is not intended simply to celebrate the past, but to strengthen the relationships that will shape the future of the region. It recognises not only what the peoples of the Greater Caribbean have inherited, but also what they continue to build together through regional

cooperation, resilience-building, environmental protection, scientific and technical exchange, and the sustainable use of the Caribbean Sea. The recognition of Greater Caribbean Day provides a platform and cornerstone for the region to continue its growing legacy with a focus on driving people-centred, inclusive and equitable models for future growth and sustainable development.

### **3. Why 24 July?**

The choice of 24th July gives this observance both historical legitimacy and regional relevance. On this date in 1994, the Convention Establishing the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) was signed in Cartagena de Indias, creating the first intergovernmental organisation to bring together the countries and territories of the Greater Caribbean around a shared vision of consultation, cooperation, and concerted action (ACS, 1994). Greater Caribbean Day draws on this history to celebrate the peoples, cultures, histories, and diversity of the Greater Caribbean, beyond the ACS. It also seeks to uniquely complement the many national, regional, and subregional observances notably organised by regional bodies such as CARICOM and the OECS that already enrich the Caribbean calendar. Its distinctive contribution is to provide an annual occasion dedicated to the Greater Caribbean in its broadest geographic and cultural sense.

### **4. From Recognition to Participation**

As an annual observance, Greater Caribbean Day provides a recurring platform through which the region can strengthen public awareness of its shared identity and encourage dialogue across generations, communities, and sectors. This can serve as a primary opportunity to inspire meaningful participation by governments, regional institutions, civil society, academia, the private sector, and citizens across the Greater Caribbean. By creating and facilitating opportunities for educational, cultural, scientific, and environmental initiatives, the Day helps translate regional identity into public participation, making cooperation more visible and accessible beyond diplomatic dialogue. In doing so, it reinforces the understanding that regional integration is sustained not only through policy, but also through the active engagement of the people it serves.

### **Conclusion**

Greater Caribbean Day is more than a commemorative date. It is an annual opportunity for the peoples of the Greater Caribbean to recognise a regional space shaped by centuries of interaction, celebrate the diversity that defines it, and strengthen the solidarity needed to address shared opportunities and challenges. By fostering regional awareness, encouraging public participation, and reinforcing the relationships that unite its peoples, the designation of the 24th July each year can help ensure that the Greater Caribbean is recognised not simply as a region shaped by a shared history, but as one actively shaping its own future through cooperation, solidarity, and collective action.

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