

Carnival 2006, Isla Taboga FIESTAS & SIESTAS

by Cynthia Cudmore-Mulder

Carnival 2006 promises to be another exciting event on enchanting Isla Taboga. Carnival is safe and fun on this little island of beaches, quaint candy-colored homes and lush green hilltops. So close to Panama City you can see it, but so far away in terms of hustle and bustle.

We have had so many requests to hear about events on Taboga during Carnival we have prepared this temporary (to be updated) schedule for this week and next.

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SOME BACKGROUND: Because of its excellent harbor, Isla Taboga was founded even before Panama City by the Spaniards, and prior to that there were numerous races represented on at least a transient basis: it was a favorite pirate port hosting such infamous pirates as Captains Morgan and Drake, and it is said that Asian and Pacific island fisherman would travel to Taboga after crossing the ocean in search of the big catch, or caught in a Pacific storm. Evidence of indigenous people can be found in several caves on the island. Its rich history gives it a depth and traditions that many communities don't possess. Carnival, among several other holidays during the year is very important to this small island of less than 1000 inhabitants.



People who attend Taboga Island Carnival annually say it is one of the best in the country as it is safe, you can walk everywhere, and it is not too big nor too small. Here is the schedule for this year, but as many of our readers know; very little in Panama has an exact time (except possibly quitting time – and that can even be early!). There is never an exact time, so 8-9 pm could possibly be 10 pm, this is part of the Latin, and particularly island, culture; my advice if you want it, kick your feet up, relax and have fun.

We apologize in advance for changes and possible errors to this schedule as the Taboga island people have nothing published, or in writing as far as I know; these events were given to me by the Queen's father who was busy preparing by the beach during our interview. So here is the line-up, as we have it.

FEBRUARY 18TH, 2006: Saturday evening, the 18th of February, 2006's lovely Queen, Nathalid Lopez, was presented to the island and the world in all her regalia, along with the celebrations that go with it. Some years there are 2 Queens, one for downtown and one for uptown. This year they are working together and Calle Arriba's Queen (the uptown Queen) is the representative for the island.



FEBRUARY 24, 2006: The evening of Friday the 24th there will be events starting up and continuing all weekend. The first even is a parade presenting last year's queen. This will begin after mass in front of the church at about 8 or 9 pm. Immediately following this will be another parade with the 2006 queen, Nathalid Lopez.

FEBRUARY 25, 2006: On Saturday from 10 am – 5 pm there will be music and dancing (including a Murga (typical street band) with water throwing) all day, the main venue for this event is in front of the church but it will be all over the main streets. After this they will stop for mass and start up again between 8 and 9 pm in the evening with a parade and the queen's coronation, held in front of the church between 10 and 11 pm.

FEBRUARY 26, 2006: On Sunday from 10 am – 5 pm again there will be music and dancing (including a Murga (typical street band) with water throwing) all day, the main venue for this event is in front of the church but it will be all over the main streets. After this they will stop for mass and start up again between 8 and 9 pm in the evening with a "pollera" parade which promises to be spectacular with girls from 4 or 5 years old to almost any age parading in typical flamboyant costumes complete with lace, appliqué and hair adornments.



FEBRUARY 27, 2006: On Monday from 10 am – 5 pm again there will be music and dancing (including a Murga (typical street band) with water throwing) all day, the main venue for this event is in front of the church but it will be all over the main streets. After this they will stop for mass and start up again between 8 and 9 pm in the evening with a "costume" parade which will be exciting for all ages.

FEBRUARY 28, 2006: On Tuesday at 5 am (yes, I wrote 5 am!) people will be on the beach in their pajamas concluding the carnival in the traditional fashion by "burying the sardines" after which everyone goes into the sea fully clothed. Later, between 8 – 9 am townspeople will crowd into the church to have a cross marked on their forehead and be forgiven for sins (among others, which may have occurred during Carnival while partying). That will conclude Isla Taboga Carnival for another year and very likely people will relax for the rest of Tuesday and return to the city and/or work on Wednesday. True to tradition there will be some Taboga people who cannot give up the party and will continue until Wednesday, or possibly the rest of the week.

Don't forget, in Panama during Carnival often there is a wet custom of throwing water at pass-erby on the streets so bring some dry clothes.

MUSIC ON THE STREETS: There will be a typical Panamanian folkloric band (a Murga) and that is always fun. A Murga has been compared to a Dixieland street band with followers... they often compete against each other... groups from Calle Arriba y Calle Abajo...basically up town and down town...with brass and drums; Murgas are often followed by a truck with water as well, hosing the party-goers.

CARNIVAL ON THE WATER: There is a tradition of people taking their boats in a parade around the island, always a cool way to spend some time and take a break from the street party!

Visit us at Cerrito Tropical this Carnival 2006; we are away from the crowd so you can enjoy the fiestas when you feel like it. A few vacancies are still available. **CALL TODAY!**

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