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ARTS & CULTURE

Ultra chic Dîner en Blanc Haiti returns to Cap-Haitien after 3 years

After a three-year hiatus, the Dîner en Blanc returns to Haiti during Cap-Haitien's annual celebration, Fet Okap. The Aug. 13 event promises to draw more guests, local and international, whom organizers hope will boost the local tourism trade.



BY GUEST AUTHOR

AUG. 09, 2022



Attendees enjoy balloons during the 2019 Diner en Blanc in Cap-Haitien. Photo courtesy of Modernique & Co and DEB Haiti.

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AD AURIS



By Christina Jane | Guest Author

Le Dîner en Blanc, a popular all-white chic outdoor dinner party, attracts Haitians and visitors worldwide for an unforgettable summer weekend in the country. As one of Haiti's finest annual upscale events Diner en Blanc is set to return to Cap-Haitien Aug. 13, after a three-year hiatus.

This time, organizers expect to draw nearly 1,000 participants worldwide to Haiti's second largest city.

"This year's Dîner en Blanc has seen a tremendous increase in event attendees despite the

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civil unrest in the capital,” said Fabienne Reid, project director and producer of Dîner en Blanc Haiti. “We’ve witnessed a 58% increase in event attendees from 2019 to now.”

Organizers last held the event in August 2019, just months after Haiti experienced “[L’operation Pays Lock](#),” a series of demonstrations that shut down the government and other institutions — and sent Haiti’s tourism into a deep decline as tourists stayed away. The following year, the coronavirus pandemic made the in-person event impossible. In 2021, organizers worked on the backend details to plan a comeback in 2022.

After all, this year offers an opportunity for guests to partake in numerous summer events, including the [352nd Fèt Okap](#) celebration.

“During the pandemic we were forced to take a pause with the climate of the world,” Reid said. “We are glad to be back and keep pushing the positive image of Haiti from a touristic perspective and more importantly, highlighting the hidden gems in Northern Haiti.”

“More to Haiti” than the capital

Dîner en Blanc originated in Paris in 1988 and has made its way to more than 50 cities, attracting more than [130,000 guests](#) since its inception. From Montreal to Atlanta, Dîner en Blanc is an exclusive night to remember in any city.

In Haiti, it is often a weeklong experience for attendees. [Dîner en Blanc Haiti](#) organizers hosted the outdoor picnic in Cap-Haïtien for the first time in 2013. Since then, they have organized four more Dîner en Blanc editions, that have included Port au Prince and Cap-Haïtien for the first time in 2019.

During the 2019 iteration, the local tourism industry saw a tremendous boost. According to the Dîner en Blanc Haiti organizers, several hotels were fully booked, restaurants ran at full capacity and street vendors were overwhelmed with business. With the event scheduled to take place this week, Dîner en Blanc Haiti may likely make an even bigger impact.

[Esland Berjuste](#), a registered nurse in West Palm Beach, is among the international attendees flying down to Okap, the city’s name in Creole. Berjuste plans to attend the soirée with a group of 15 people through her travel company, [The Travel Tribe](#).

The event being in Cap-Haïtien instead of Port-au-Prince, she said, makes her feel more secure.

“I am cautious anywhere I go, and Haiti is no different,” Berjuste shares. “I have always wanted my first Dîner en Blanc to be in Haiti, so I am looking forward to seeing everything come together.”

Another attendee, Shirley Dor, the creative director of [Haitians Who Blog](#) based in Orlando, is looking forward to her first visit to Okap.

“There is no better time to do so than during Dîner en Blanc,” Dor said. “There is more to Haiti than the capital. I want to experience the wonders of Haiti.”

Cap-Haïtien native Guerline T. Emmanuel is keen to participate and share the country’s history and culture with the world. A managing partner of [Belle Vue Tours](#), a company curating educational and adventure tours to Haiti, Emmanuel has visited nine out of Haiti’s 10 departments. She still makes annual trips to Haiti, despite the social unrest.

“What about the safety risk associated with all other places people travel to, including the United States,” Emmanuel said. “If we can put up with churches, schools, parks and supermarket killings in this country along with law enforcement execution of innocent people, and still attend functions despite these things, we can do the same for Haiti.”

Bringing back Haiti’s tourism

Such support for Haiti has apparently translated into registrations for the dinner and bookings at local hotels. About 900 attendees are expected to attend Saturday’s picnic, Reid

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said. As of June 28, she shared, the event has contributed to selling out six hotels on The Boulevard, the city's main thoroughfare. Tour companies like [Safe Trips Haiti](#) are completely sold out.

Many Dîner en Blanc guests who book through a tour company will also enjoy [a full week](#) of sightseeing and immersive cultural experiences, all leading up to the glamorous main event.



Haiti has beautiful beaches,
gorgeous mountains, delicious
cuisine, resilient people, and a rich
culture and history. All recipes for a
great future.

— RONALDE BATTIST, DÎNER EN BLANC HAITI GROUP LEADER

Cap-Haïtien's rich history, Revolution-era landmarks, majestic beaches and authentic cuisine make it a stunning getaway destination, locals and visitors alike say. Among the highlights are La Citadelle Laferrière, a UNESCO-recognized fortress sitting atop a [3,000-foot mountain](#), built in the 1800s. Another is [Labadee Beach](#), a popular locale to soak up surreal views, while enjoying fresh seafood seasoned with classic Haitian spices.

Local merchants and business owners are also [expected to do well](#) in sales with the arrival of attendees, drawing tourism dollars that will be poured back into the city's economy.

Mainstream media tends to highlight events in Port-au-Prince and paint it as a holistic image of Haiti. This is dangerous to Haiti's development as, over the years, potential visitors have strayed away from visiting Haiti.

Still, Dîner en Blanc organizers recognize Haiti's issues, including the acts of violence common around Port-au-Prince.

"The security of our guests is our number one priority," Reid said. "We've partnered with private firms to enforce and enhance security measures from departure points and along the route to the secret location holding the picnic-style experience in Haiti."

Reid and other organizers are confident and optimistic about what Haiti has to offer visitors and its diaspora in hopes of reviving the tourism industry and help pull the country out of economic stagnation.

"Haiti has beautiful beaches, gorgeous mountains, delicious cuisine, resilient people, and a rich culture and history," says Ronalde Battist, a group leader for Dîner en Blanc Haiti. "All recipes for a great future."

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