

# Barbados Language Centre's Foreign Language Fair

*Building Bridges through Languages, Culture, and Tourism*



## Why was this initiative created?

The Barbados Language Centre (BLC), located on the College's Eyrie campus in St. Michael, launched the Foreign Language Fair in 2023 with the aim of promoting multilingualism, intercultural understanding and appreciation of global cultures among Barbadian students. Recognising the strategic importance of language learning for education, employment, and international engagement, the initiative was designed to make languages come alive through cultural immersion and interactive experiences. By fostering a deeper connection between language study and real-world applications, especially in sectors like tourism and hospitality, the Fair seeks to cultivate globally competent citizens equipped to navigate an increasingly interconnected world.

## What is it about?

The Foreign Language Fair is an annual celebration of world languages and cultures that brings together students, teachers, embassies, and cultural partners for a day of exploration, creativity, and engagement. The inaugural 2023 edition focused on introducing students to the richness of world cultures through music, food, dance, art, and games, while the 2024 edition expanded its scope under the theme "Languages and Tourism," highlighting the role of multilingual skills in supporting Barbados' tourism and service industries. Together, these events form a vibrant platform where participants experience firsthand how languages shape identity, foster empathy, and open pathways to education and careers.

## How It Works

The Barbados Language Centre's *Foreign Language Fair* functions as a dynamic, experiential learning platform that bridges the classroom with the wider world. Hosted annually on the scenic Eyrie Campus of the Barbados Community College, the Fair immerses third- to fifth-form secondary students (9–11 Grades) and college-level learners in a full day of interactive linguistic and cultural experiences. Each edition transforms the campus into a vibrant intercultural village,

where embassies, universities, cultural organisations, and private sponsors collaborate to bring languages to life through performance, dialogue, and discovery.

The inaugural 2023 Fair celebrated cultural diversity through the participation of sixteen (16) secondary schools, each bringing between 30 and 45 students, amounting to roughly 600 participants, alongside over 50 teachers, coordinators, and volunteers. Schools from both urban and rural parishes were represented, with 40% drawn from under-resourced communities. Embassies and consulates enriched the experience with interactive displays of traditional dress, cuisine, music, and games, creating a lively atmosphere of intercultural exchange.

Building on this success, the 2024 edition evolved into the *Language and Tourism Fair*, aligning foreign language education with one of Barbados' key economic sectors. The event attracted 15 schools with 40 students each, with a similar number of 600 participants to the previous year. On this occasion, students were able to explore how multilingual and intercultural skills can enhance employability, service excellence and global engagement within the tourism industry.

The Fair's implementation follows a clear, cyclical structure designed for sustainability and continuous improvement:

- Planning and Partner Engagement (October–November): Coordination with embassies, sponsors, and educational partners to define themes, activities, and logistics.
- Promotion (December–January): School outreach, media engagement, and distribution of promotional materials.
- Implementation (February): A one-day fair from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., featuring cultural booths, performances, workshops, and interactive sessions.
- Follow-up (February–March): Collection of feedback from schools and sponsors, and internal debriefing to refine future editions.

This structured, collaborative approach ensures that each edition of the Fair remains impactful, inclusive, and aligned with both educational and national development priorities.

### **Core Activities and Experiences**

The Barbados Language Centre's *Foreign Language Fair* offers a rich blend of educational, cultural, and professional experiences designed to inspire students to view language learning as a pathway to opportunity. Each edition features a dynamic programme of interactive activities, performances, and workshops that bring languages and cultures to life.

Core activities include:

- Interactive cultural booths hosted by embassies, universities, and cultural institutes from Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, and other countries, featuring displays of traditional attire, artefacts, cuisine, and music.

- Spanish-focused booths led by embassies from Spanish-speaking countries, offering language tasters, regional crafts, traditional food, and live music and dance performances.
- Language taster sessions in French, Spanish, Mandarin, and other world languages, encouraging hands-on engagement and conversational practice.
- Workshops such as “*Spanish for Hospitality and Tourism*” and “*Cultural Etiquette in Latin America*”, equipping students with practical communication and intercultural skills for real-world contexts.
- Mock tourism scenarios in Spanish (e.g., hotel check-ins, guided tours), facilitated by language educators and tourism professionals, linking classroom learning with workplace realities.
- Career Corner, supported by the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association, showcasing Spanish as a key skill for employability and professional growth in the tourism sector.
- Live demonstrations and performances, including Tai Chi, African and Latin dance tutorials, and musical numbers in various languages.
- Creative workshops on calligraphy, paper-folding, poetry, and writing names in Mandarin, encouraging artistic expression and fine motor learning.
- Information sessions from the Organization of American States, the Delegation of the European Union to the Eastern Caribbean, and the National Library Service, providing guidance on scholarships, study abroad, and literacy opportunities.
- Student performances, quizzes, and interactive games, reinforcing linguistic and cultural learning in fun, memorable ways.

The *Foreign Language Fair*, hosted by the Barbados Language Centre (BLC), thrives through the strong support of numerous partners, including Spanish-speaking embassies, local educators, the Ministry of Education, the University of the West Indies, and private sponsors. The initiative aligns with CAF’s SOMOS programme, which promotes regional integration through Spanish and supports the preparation of young Caribbean citizens for bilingual careers in tourism and other key sectors.

Through its dynamic and interactive design, the Fair transforms language learning into a multisensory journey of discovery. As students move through a vibrant network of exhibits, performances, and cultural activities, they engage directly with native speakers and cultural ambassadors, immersing themselves in authentic linguistic and intercultural experiences. By merging education with creativity and real-world relevance, the Fair nurtures curiosity, confidence, and global awareness; empowering a new generation of Barbadian learners to view languages not merely as academic subjects, but as vital bridges to opportunity, tourism, and active global citizenship.

### **Who makes it possible?**

The Foreign Language Fair is a flagship initiative of the Barbados Language Centre (BLC), conceived and coordinated under the leadership of Ms. Lamar Smith, whose vision and dedication have been central to its success. The initiative is guided by an organising committee composed of BLC faculty and collaborating educators, ensuring effective coordination across participating schools, embassies, and partners. It thrives on the Centre's long-standing commitment to innovation in language education and its capacity to mobilise a wide network of national and international stakeholders in support of multilingualism, cultural exchange, and youth empowerment.

The success of the Fair rests on strong partnerships and community collaboration, uniting education, culture, diplomacy, and the private sector in a shared mission to promote multilingualism and intercultural understanding.

Key partners include:

- The Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training, under the leadership of Ms. Peggy Agard, Education Officer for Foreign Languages.
- Students from public & private secondary schools and Barbado Community College.
- Embassies and Consulates of Argentina, Brazil, China, Cuba, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Martinique, Spain, and Venezuela.
- The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, and the Confucius Institute.
- The Delegation of the European Union to the Eastern Caribbean Countries, OECS and CARICOM/CARIFORUM, and the Organization of American States (OAS).
- Corporate sponsors such as the Armstrong Group of Companies, Williams Industries, Creamery Novelties, WIBISCO (Soldanza), Atlantic Marketing Co. Ltd., and Burger King.
- Cultural and tourism entities, including the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association, Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc., Caribbean Tourism Organization, Intimate Hotels of Barbados, Codrington College, and the Barbados Museum and Historical Society.
- The National Conservation Commission's contribution to the beautification of the event grounds added a welcoming and festive atmosphere.

Additionally, contributions from individuals such as Chef Dane Saddler (Caribbean Villa Chefs), Andrés Pedroso (Oñiokan Danza), and Modou Diagne (Senegalese cultural presentation) have enriched the fair with authentic, engaging experiences.

Each partner contributes vital expertise, resources, and cultural perspectives that enrich the experience for students and educators alike. Their collaboration has ensured that the Fair remains an inclusive, engaging, and sustainable model for language promotion in Barbados and the wider Caribbean.

### **What makes the Fair a noteworthy cultural initiative?**

The *Foreign Language Fair* stands out as a pioneering national platform that bridges education, culture, and development, transforming language learning into an engaging and participatory

experience. By continuously adapting its themes, such as the 2024 focus on tourism, it remains relevant to Barbados' evolving social and economic priorities.

Through its experiential and cross-sectoral approach, the Fair connects classrooms with real-world contexts, merging language education with industry applications. Students gain tangible insight into how proficiency in Spanish and other world languages can expand opportunities in employment, travel, and intercultural collaboration.

The initiative also exemplifies effective institutional cooperation, bringing together the Barbados Language Centre, the Ministry of Education, diplomatic missions, cultural organisations, and the private sector. This collaboration positions the BLC as a national hub for cultural diplomacy and regional engagement, while promoting multilingualism as both a personal asset and a pillar of sustainable development.

Its growing success and sustained partnerships have earned the Fair a permanent place on the BLC calendar and increasing recognition from regional and international partners as a model for innovation in language education and cultural exchange.

### **What difference has it made?**

The Language and Tourism Fair has had a measurable and meaningful impact on students' confidence, motivation, and awareness of career pathways where Spanish is a key asset, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Observed outcomes from the 2024 fair include:

- Over 90% of student participants reported in feedback surveys that they felt more confident using basic Spanish phrases in tourism-related scenarios.
- Teachers from participating schools noted an increase in student enthusiasm for Spanish classes following the Fair, with some schools reporting a 15–20% rise in enrollment for optional Spanish courses at the senior level.
- Several students indicated that the Fair helped them consider new career paths, especially in tourism and international customer service roles, where Spanish fluency is a competitive advantage.
- In addition to classroom impact, the event created opportunities for students to interact directly with tourism professionals and embassy representatives, which helped demystify the practical application of language skills and build aspirations for real-world engagement.
- Institutions have built stronger cross-sectoral partnerships that enhance opportunities for academic and professional mobility.
- Barbados' tourism sector benefits indirectly from a growing pool of young people aware of how language and culture contribute to hospitality, communication, and customer service.

### **Testimonials**

“One of our goals is to help Barbados transform into a fully bilingual society.”  
*Mr. Paul Blackman, Director, Barbados Language Centre*

Coordinator of the Foreign Language Fair, Lamar Smith said: “it's important students have options when leaving school and charting their course of study.” “We wanted to expose them to various options for study but also for education and training. To do that, we’ve partnered with the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA) and they led a variety of presentations from some of their members, coming from accommodation, coming from aviation, and so on. They also manned a booth.”

The Fair seeks to create “lifelong language learners who recognise the importance of world language skills in the tourism sector, equipped with qualifications, adaptability, intercultural awareness, and the ability to transcend borders.” *Lamar Smith*

“Last year we had 16 [schools] but because of the environmental challenges with The Lodge School, they weren’t able to organise themselves accordingly. Nonetheless, what we were able to do is to increase the number of students that could come from each school. So, we had a maximum of 40, and instead of just using the courtyard, we expanded to the building as well,” *Lamar Smith* said, noting that students could move around freely, and be exposed to a greater number of activities and experiences.

### **What can others learn from this experience?**

The Barbados Language Centre’s approach demonstrates that language promotion succeeds when it is community-driven, experiential, and connected to national priorities. Rather than focusing solely on academic mastery, the Fair nurtures cultural curiosity and human connection, showing that languages are not only subjects to be learned, but bridges to understanding, creativity, and opportunity. This model is easily replicable across the Caribbean and beyond, especially in multilingual and tourism-oriented societies seeking to engage youth through culture-based education.

### **Key transferable insights include:**

The Barbados Language Centre’s *Foreign Language Fair*, particularly its 2024 *Language and Tourism* edition, demonstrated how experiential learning, institutional collaboration, and cultural engagement can make language education a catalyst for national development.

- Integrating languages into national development priorities connects education with strategic sectors such as tourism, trade, and international business, highlighting multilingualism’s contribution to Barbados’ economic and cultural advancement.
- Embedding experiential and intercultural learning through interactive activities, mock tourism scenarios, language taster sessions, and cultural performances, enhances motivation, retention, and authentic language use.
- Building sustained partnerships among educational institutions, embassies, international organisations, and private sponsors ensures authenticity, visibility, and long-term viability.

- Showcasing multilingualism as a shared Caribbean asset strengthens regional identity, cultural diplomacy, and integration.
- Empowering students as hosts, performers, and cultural ambassadors nurtures confidence, leadership, and lifelong commitment to language learning.
- Live simulations in Spanish, such as hotel check-ins and restaurant interactions, paired with professional career talks helped students see the immediate, practical relevance of their studies.
- The collaboration of embassies, educators, and tourism professionals added authenticity and depth, making the experience both educational and inspirational.

## **Challenges and Solutions**

- Complex logistics and coordination among multiple partners were effectively managed through early planning, a cyclical implementation structure, and clear delegation of roles supported by inclusive communication strategies.
- Equitable participation was ensured through Ministry-supported transportation and targeted outreach to under-resourced schools, allowing students from diverse backgrounds to benefit fully from the Fair's opportunities.

## **Recommendations for Replication**

The Foreign Language Fair model is highly adaptable and can be replicated across other Caribbean countries seeking to bridge language education with tourism and employability goals. To ensure success, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Contextualise content by aligning it with local priorities through brief consultations with the tourism and service industries to identify the most relevant language skills and cultural competencies. Schools and language centres can then design appropriate activities, such as role-playing games with tourism scenarios, creating multilingual signage, and workshops on “Spanish for hospitality”, which directly reflect real workplace contexts. This practical link helps students understand the tangible value of language learning for their professional future.
- Strengthen and maintain institutional partnerships by formalising collaboration between ministries of education, tourism offices, embassies and private sector partners through memoranda of understanding (MOUs) or annual co-organisation agreements. A commitment to sharing resources (e.g. transport, venues, prizes and cultural materials) will ensure long-term continuity and reduce dependence on ad hoc funding.
- Embed cultural relevance by incorporating authentic cultural content from partner countries to enhance intercultural awareness and appreciation.
- Ensure inclusion and accessibility to facilitate participation from rural and underserved schools by providing logistical support and maintaining a no-cost participation policy to guarantee inclusion and equitable access for all learners.
- Promote sustainability through secured local sponsorships, engage alumni as mentors and facilitators, and integrate the Fair into national or regional language promotion and tourism development strategies to promote sustainability and institutional ownership.

The Barbados experience demonstrates that when language learning is connected to career readiness, culture, and community, it becomes a catalyst for empowerment and regional cohesion, offering a replicable, sustainable model for the Caribbean and beyond.

Through the Foreign Language Fairs of 2023 and 2024, the Barbados Language Centre established a sustained platform that promotes linguistic diversity, intercultural understanding,



and youth empowerment. Across both editions, the initiative engaged over 1,200 students and more than 100 educators from 31 secondary schools and the Barbados Community College, including significant participation from under-resourced communities. The events also attracted hundreds of additional visitors, including diplomats, cultural representatives, and members of the public, and received extensive coverage in national media and digital platforms, enhancing visibility and impact. The Fairs exemplify a best practice in Caribbean language education, demonstrating how strategic collaboration, cultural diplomacy, and experiential learning can transform language instruction into a mechanism for global citizenship, workforce readiness, and regional integration.

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Enlaces a **los videos** que están en el drive de las mejores experiencias.

Barbadians encouraged to learn a 2nd language.

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