

Film brings Tobago's history to life

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Cannons, circa 1677, in Scarborough Harbour, Tobago

Oceans Discovery Tobago LTD (OD), in association with the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), the Tourism Development Company Ltd (TDC) and the Trinidad & Tobago Film Company (TTFC), present *Tobago 1677*, a path-breaking historical docudrama that brings to life two of the most dramatic battles to ever take place in the waters around Trinidad and Tobago. The 90-minute international feature documentary will be unveiled at a press launch on April 1, at 10 am, at the Harbour Esplanade in Scarborough. Proman AG Switzerland, Proman AG Trinidad Ltd, Caribbean Nitrogen Company Ltd and Nitrogen (2000) Unlimited have generously supported this film. But many other companies, organisation, institutes, experts and individuals have pledged substantial in-kind contributions as well. The catalyst for this project was the 333rd Anniversary in 2010, of two of the most ferocious sea battles in history fought by Dutch and French warships in Tobago waters.

Nearly 20 shipwrecks, an unheard of archaeological treasure, still lie on the seafloor of Scarborough harbour virtually untouched, since those battles over three centuries ago. Oceans Discovery states: "Details about how vessels were built, the daily lives of the crew and passengers, cargo composition and stowage, navigation instruments, crockery, tools, clothing and even foods and medicines used aboard the ships can provide new historical insights. "Trinidad & Tobago's historical shipwrecks therefore represent a fragile, non-renewable resource that is of immense national and international archaeological and cultural significance, and which must be carefully documented, preserved and managed to ensure its long-term survival."

Preparations for this film have been going on since 2009 following almost five years of research about this epic event. The initiator for this project has been Kevin Kenny who introduced this story to Rick Haupt and Sylvia Krueger at an EU-Tourism symposium in Montego Bay, Jamaica in 2004. More than 80 Tobagonians—men, women and children—have been cast to re-enact this dramatic event in the history of Tobago. A large part of the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force, as well as the Trinidad & Tobago Coast Guard, is playing a substantial role in this film. Set building and costume making are all being done right in Tobago. A good portion of this film will feature stunning computer animations that will, in much detail, bring the warships in Scarborough harbour back to life. The highly talented Trinidad CGI firm Eyescream Animation will be involved in the creation of battle scenes and how Tobago looked like in those days. This film also offers an amazing showcase for world audiences to see Tobago's underwater natural and historical treasures. In this regard, it serves as part of a strategic approach to tourism destination development with the potential to substantially boost the island's reputation as an international cultural tourism destination.

The Tobago 1677 project is one of the most exciting and significant cultural heritage missions in recent years. It will build on that base to produce a world-class documentary film highlighting the role of European history in Tobago as well as the role of Tobago in European history. It will also build local capacity in documentary film productions by actively involving local organisations and individuals in an effort to document and preserve the marine environment and the Caribbean's cultural heritage. Finally, it will represent a first step by Caribbean nations to take both ownership and responsibility for the region's underwater heritage represented by the many shipwrecks in the Caribbean Sea.

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