



Remember Me: How the Caribbean Honors Those Who Came Before

Across the Caribbean, families honor their ancestors in ways that blend faith, memory, and music. From quiet prayers in churches to lively street parades filled with drums and song, remembrance is both sacred and joyful.

For many, these customs connect to Christian All Saints' Day (November 1) and All Souls' Day (November 2)—times when people pray for loved ones who have died.

But across the islands, these observances often weave together with African and Indigenous traditions, creating celebrations that reflect our shared Caribbean spirit.

Some families attend Mass, light candles, and decorate graves with flowers, while others sing, drum, cook favorite dishes, and tell stories that keep the ancestors close. Whatever the form, all carry the same message:

Love doesn't end. It changes form—and lives on through memory.

Here is a VERY incomplete list of examples – feel free to have your child look up their country of origin and explore the various ways people in the Caribbean honor their loved ones using the complexities of a mixed heritage.

How Caribbean Families Remember

Haiti – Fèt Gede

Families visit cemeteries, light candles, wear purple, black, and white, and make offerings of food and flowers. Drumming, dancing, and laughter fill the streets—a joyful way to honor those who came before.

Haiti – All Souls Day – Jour des Morts

Christians may celebrate a mass at their church for their deceased either on All Souls Day on November 2, or on the anniversary of their death.

Jamaica – Nine Night

Friends and relatives gather for nine evenings of song, prayer, and storytelling to help the spirit journey peacefully. Hymns and folk music remind everyone that every life deserves celebration.

Trinidad & Tobago – Spiritual Baptist Wakes

Candlelight, drumming, and bell ringing blend African praise with Christian prayer. These wakes turn sorrow into gratitude, rhythm, and faith.



Cuba – Santería Bóveda

Families build home altars with candles, fruit, coffee, or rum to “feed” and thank their ancestors. The practice often sits beside Catholic devotion—a quiet daily act of love.

Dominican Republic – All Souls’ Day Visits

Families clean and decorate graves, bring food, and pray together in remembrance, blending traditional offerings with Catholic rites.

Barbados & Eastern Caribbean – Floral Offerings & Services

People attend Mass, sing hymns, and visit cemeteries with flowers and candles. Some combine these customs with older practices of storytelling and song at home.

Across the Islands

From Haiti’s Gede drummers to Trinidad’s Steel Pan funerals, Jamaica’s Nine Night songs, and Cuba’s Santería chants, remembrance takes many forms. In every island, people find their own way to blend church and culture, prayer and drum, silence and song—all saying the same thing:

“We remember you. We thank you. We carry you forward.”

Family Activity: Build Your Own Altar

Some families find a lot of value in having a place to remember their deceased on in their house. If this resonates with your family, here are instructions to make your own altar.

Ages: 5 + | Time: 25 minutes | Materials: Small table or paper, candles, flowers, photos, favorite foods, meaningful items

- Choose a small space—a shelf, table, or drawing on paper.
- Add items that remind you of someone you love.
- Light a candle or say a prayer of thanks.
- Share a story, song, or recipe that keeps their memory alive.
- Keep your altar for as long as it feels meaningful to you.

Reflection

Draw your altar or write:

One way your family remembers loved ones _____

One object you would include on your altar _____