

CARNIVAL SEASON

ARTICLE

The Fasching or carnival season is also known as the "fifth season" in German speaking countries. It is a time between Christmas after Three Kings (which closes Christmas period) and before Ash Wednesday, which starts the big lent until Easter, when Europeans loosen up a little, dress up in funny costumes and party for days at a time. It is the most celebrative season in the cold months when nothing is forbidden and everyone loves to take part on the parties, balls and celebrations.

Carnival has a long tradition in Europe and is celebrated with vigor in many countries. It originates in the preparation for the six-week fasting time during lent, which ends on Easter. Because the Fasching and lent seasons are based on the church calendar, the dates fluctuate every year; while the official start of the season is always on the 11th day of the 11th month at 11:11 a.m., the revelers stay mostly dormant during the Advent and Christmas season until the actual high Fasnacht season in the following spring.

In 2019, the Ash Wednesday is on March 6th and Easter Sunday is on April 21st. Here are the most popular carnivals in the world.

RIO CARNIVAL

“Carnaval do Rio de Janeiro” is a festival held every year before Lent and considered the biggest carnival in the world with two million people per day on the streets. The first festivals of Rio date back to 1723.

The typical Rio carnival parade is filled with revelers, floats, and adornments from numerous samba schools which are located in Rio (more than 200 approximately, divided into five leagues/divisions). A samba school is composed of a collaboration of local neighbors that want to attend the carnival together, with some kind of regional, geographical and common background.

There is a special order that every school has to follow with their parade entries. Each school begins with the “comissão de frente” (“Front Commission”), that is the group of people from the school that appear first. Made of ten to fifteen people, they introduces the school and sets the mood and style of their presentation and dance in fancy costumes that usually tell a short story.

Following them is the first float of the samba school, called “abre-alas” (“Opening Wing”). These are followed by the Mestre-sala and Porta-Bandeira (“Master of Ceremonies and Flag Bearer”), with one to four pairs, one active and three reserve, to lead the dancers, which include the old guard veterans.

CARNIVAL OF SANTA CRUZ DE TENERIFE

The Carnival of Santa Cruz de Tenerife is held each February in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, the capital of the largest of the Canary Islands, and attracts people from all over the world.

In 1980, it was declared a Tourist Festival of International Interest by the Secretary of State for Tourism. The Carnival of Santa Cruz de Tenerife aspires to become a World Heritage Site. In 1987, singer Celia Cruz went to the Carnival Chicharrero with Billo's Caracas Boys; attended by 250,000 people, the concert was registered in the Guinness Book of Records as the largest gathering of people in an outdoor plaza to attend a concert.

The festivities on the streets of Santa Cruz de Tenerife start on the Friday before Carnival with an opening parade, which reaches its height during the night when thousands of people in fancy dresses dance until the early hours of the next day. The party continues night after night until Ash Wednesday. That day, people of Santa Cruz de Tenerife celebrate the "entierro de la sardina" (burial of the sardine), and with this event the carnival is officially over. However, the party starts up again the following weekend, known as the weekend of the piñata.

VENETIAN CARNIVAL

Best known to international tourists is probably the Carnevale di Venezia, the Carnival of Venice, with its fancy costumes and elaborate masks.

It's said that the Carnival of Venice was started from a victory of the Republic of Venice against the Patriarch of Aquileia, Ulrico di Treven in the year 1162. In the honor of this victory, the people started to dance and gather in San Marco Square. Apparently, this festival started on that period and became official in the Renaissance. In the seventeenth century, the baroque carnival was a way to save the prestigious image of Venice in the world. It was very famous during the eighteenth century. It encouraged license and pleasure, but it was also used to protect Venetians from present and future anguish.

However, under the rule of the Holy Roman Emperor and later Emperor of Austria, Francis II, the festival was outlawed entirely in 1797 and the use of masks became strictly forbidden. It reappeared gradually in the nineteenth century, but only for short periods and above all for private feasts, where it became an occasion for artistic creations.

VENETIAN CARNIVAL TODAY

After a long absence, the Carnival returned in 1979. The Government decided to bring back the history and culture of Venice, and sought to use the traditional Carnival as the centerpiece of its efforts. The redevelopment of the masks began as the pursuit of some Venetian college students for the tourist trade.

Since then, approximately 3 million visitors come to Venice every year for the Carnival. One of the most important events is the contest for la maschera più bella ("the most beautiful mask") which is judged by a panel of international costume and fashion designers.

Venetian masks are very special sing of the carnival. They can be made of leather, porcelain or using the original glass technique. The original masks were rather simple in design, decoration, and often had a symbolic and practical function. Nowadays, most Italian masks are made with the application of gesso and gold leaf and are hand-painted using natural feathers and gems to decorate. However, this makes them rather expensive when compared to the widespread, low-quality masks produced mainly by American factories. This competition accelerates the decline of this historical craftsmanship peculiar to the city of Venice.

GERMAN CARNIVAL

Germany has developed its own cherished Fasching traditions and costumes over the centuries, with significant regional differences.

The south-west of Germany and parts of Switzerland celebrate the Swabian-Alemanic Fastnacht where people wear large masks typically made from wood; the masks and matching costumes are often passed on in families for generations and worn during traditional parades and events.

Karneval is especially popular in big cities like Cologne, Mainz or Düsseldorf more or less shut down to party during the high season. In the time between New Year's and the high Fasching season many towns and villages host balls, parties and parades. Party goers typically dress up as a character, similar to Halloween.

Many communities host parties called "Kinderfasching" for the young ones, usually taking place in a community center or gym. These events involve dress-up for the kids, a lot of loud music and dancing, games, face painting and food.

GERMAN TRADITION

The high season, when the true madness begins, starts traditionally with Altweiberfasnacht, or crazy Thursday (Feb. 8). In many towns the women take over the city's courthouse, grab the keys to the city and cut off the tie of any man who dares to wear one. A long weekend of parties follows; on Monday, people flock to the large cities like Cologne or Mainz to watch the Rosenmontag ("Rose Monday") parades (Feb. 12), which are also shown live on TV. Others stay local and enjoy smaller parades, which often feature folklore background and quirky local traditions.

Faschingsdienstag (Feb. 13) - Shrove Tuesday or Mardi Gras - offers one last chance to party hard and then "bury" the carnival at midnight until following year. Aschermittwoch (Ash Wednesday) marks the end of the carnival revelry and the beginning of Fastenzeit ("fasting time" - lent); the weeks before Easter are often used as a time for reflection and renunciation of personal vices, like smoking, alcohol or candy, or more recently, television or internet use.

SLOVAK TRADITIONS



Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas school holidays and the beginning of a new season called Shrovetide.

It is now very usual to attend a ball (official) or party (more unofficial), wear masks, organize mask parties for kids. The Slovaks love food and have a typical food for each feast and the same is with fasching – Fanky or buchty, šišky, which is a form of sweet pastry filled or unfilled again making the time “rich” not only in cultural life but food, too.

This was always a season of entertainment and feast, and it culminated with a carnival representing different animals. Shrovetide ended with a "burial of a contrabass", a parody of an actual burial. After Shrovetide, Christians observe Lent, a forty-day period of fasting (simple foods, no entertainment, etc.) leading up to Easter. Ash Wednesday reminds believers to keep in mind the importance of penance, deepened faith in God and to love their neighbors.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you spend the time of fasching?
2. Do you have any special fasching ceremonies? At home, in your home town?
3. Did you ever attend a big carnival? What did you like the most? Would you like to attend any?
4. Are these religious holidays for you? Is attending a temple or a church on that day part of the celebration?
5. Are there special songs / feasts / foods associated with the celebration?
6. Do you hold the big lent until Easter? What is your object of the Lent? How do you manage it, plan for it?
7. If you could choose any mask for a carnival, what would it be?