

KARNEVALSBRÄUCHE

Wie feiert man Karneval? heutige Bräuche (How is Carnival celebrated? / customs of today)

MORE THAN A NAME

It is not just that the names are different, so are the customs.

Some of Germany's best known Carnival celebrations are held in Cologne (*Köln*), Mainz, Munich (*München*) and Rottweil. But Cologne's *Karneval* is not really the same as Munich's *Fasching*. Germanic Carnival celebrations vary from region to region, with each community often having its own unique traditions. One Swiss city even has its Carnival at a different time than all the others! The *Fasnacht* event in Basel happens a week after most other Carnivals, starting at 4:00 a.m. on the Monday after *Aschermittwoch* (Ash Wednesday). The main event of *Karneval in Köln* is the parade on *Rosenmontag* (Rose Monday). Farther south in Bavaria and Austria, the culmination of *Fasching* takes place the day before, on Carnival Sunday, while Mardi Gras in New Orleans has its big parade on Shrove Tuesday (*Faschingsdienstag*). These and other differences reflect the long history and local traditions of the celebration, and they are also seen in the language.

Millions of people in Germany "go wild" in the period preceding the 40 days of Lent and Easter. They celebrate Carnival – with noise, costumes, masks, music, and dancing. This exuberant, public merry-making originated in heathen and Christian ceremonies. The Romans on the Rhine and Danube greeted the return of spring by having a "carrus navalis", a boat on wheels, dragged through the town. Under Christianity there was the added incentive of having a final fling before the stringencies of Lent. The highpoint of Carnival in both town and country is reached in the loud and colourful processions. Precious carved and painted masks are worn in Swabia. In the Rhineland, people, dressed up in costumes, romp and surge through the streets during the final days of Carnival. The processions on the last Monday before Lent attract many hundreds of thousands of people – even from neighbouring countries – to the main Carnival centres. Everyone is free to play the fool.

Catholic Carnival

Carnival is a Catholic tradition and is found almost exclusively in Catholic countries (such as Austria) or Catholic regions (such as Bavaria and the Rhineland). However, there are carnival celebrations in some Protestant areas, notably in Berlin and in Zurich (where *Fasnacht* takes place after Lent has begun). As we shall see below, there are as many ways to celebrate what Germans call "the fifth season" as there are locations where it is celebrated!

In München, as much as in Rio, Venice and New Orleans, **Carnival** or **Mardi Gras** is a time for celebration, dancing, **feeling free to be oneself** (behind a mask) and participating in fabulous parades.

Germany is not the exception. In fact, the German-speaking world boasts a wonderful variety of regional Mardi Gras celebrations and festivities.

Although Carnival in Rio is probably the craziest of all, **Germany is undoubtedly the most enthusiastic Karneval center in Europe.**

Nearly every town has its own festivities and it is celebrated in homes across the country with the same enthusiasm in which we celebrate Halloween. The Karnevals vary from area to area, but no matter where the celebrations are held, there is fun, happiness, laughter and a certain nostalgia.