

## KARNEVALSBRÄUCHE

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

### Karneval (Fasching)

Dating back to the Middle Ages, the celebration of Carnival (Karneval or Fasching) -- from which the New Orleans tradition of Mardi Gras is derived -- is a time for eating, drinking and merriment before the solemn days of Lent. This colorful festival takes place for one week, starting 52 days before Easter, generally ending with a bang in time to calm down for Ash Wednesday. Carnival is celebrated in several regions throughout Germany, the two most popular versions being Karneval with its hub in the Rhineland region and Fasching (also Fastnacht) in Southern Germany.

For all the Münchners' claim to Fasching's pre-eminence, Rheinlanders point to Karneval in Cologne and Düsseldorf, and Fastnacht in Mainz as the mecca of merrymaking. Along the Rhine River, as in Munich, societies formed centuries ago are responsible for the traditional rituals of the celebration.

For all the regional variations on Fasching or Karneval and the sometimes obscure significance of local customs, visitors are welcome additions to the singing, dancing and fun that mark this festival throughout Germany.

#### Rhineland

In the Rhineland festivities developed especially strongly, since it was a way to express subversive anti-Prussian and anti-French thoughts in times of occupation, through parody and mockery. Modern carnival there began in 1823 with the founding of a Carnival Club in Cologne. Most cities and villages of the Rhineland have their own individual carnival traditions. Nationally famous are the carnival in Cologne (Köln), Düsseldorf and Mainz.

Although most of the serious partying and dressing up is left to the adults, children also participate in the Karneval activities. Certain days are designated as Kinderfasnacht and the kids dress up and come out to learn the Karneval ropes.

EACH community chooses a carnival prince and princess. Their "court" is formed -- an honor guard for the prince, ladies-in-waiting and pages for the princess -- and the party begins to warm up.

Carnival simmers quietly for a while, gathers momentum as more and more revelers get into the act, and finally explodes

into an "anything goes" rout in the week before Lent.

The uninhibited bout of drinking before the 40 days of fasting is not in any way an invention by tourist managers: the Germans have been celebrating Fastnacht in this wild fashion for centuries -- restricted only now and again by prohibitions issued by the authorities.