

KARNEVALSBRÄUCHE

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



Carnival in Rio is probably the world's most famous. In the U.S., New Orleans is well known for Mardi Gras. While that former French possession is one of the few cities in the United States with a major Carnival celebration, almost all of the Catholic regions and cities across the German-speaking world (and the rest of Europe) celebrate Mardi Gras in a big way. Only a few Protestant areas in northern and eastern Germany also observe **Karneval**. Some of Germany's best known celebrations are held in Cologne (*Köln*), Mainz, Munich (*München*), Duesseldorf and Rottweil. But Cologne's **Karneval** is not really the same as Munich's **Fasching**. Germanic Carnival celebrations vary from region to region, sometimes even taking place at different times! (The **Fasnacht** event in Basel, Switzerland happens a week after most other Carnivals.) The main event of **Karneval in Köln** is the parade on **Rosenmontag** (Rose Monday). Further south in Bavaria and Austria, the culmination of **Fasching** takes place on Shrove Tuesday (**Faschingsdienstag**), like Mardi Gras in New Orleans. These and other differences reflect the long history and local traditions of the celebration, and they are also seen in the language.

In Catholic tradition, carnival is a season of rich meals, partying and fun before the fast of *Lenten* (Lent) begins.

No "Grabbing for Checks"

A word of advice in case you attend a folk-festival for the first time: generally, there is little "treating." Each orders and pays for his own beer and food. If a German should offer to buy you a beer, accept with thanks, then later on reciprocate. There is no "grabbing for checks," however.

Celebrations reach their peak on Rose Monday (**Rosenmontag**) and Shrove Tuesday (**Faschingsdienstag**), the last two days of the Karneval season. During those final days, normal rules of behavior are forgotten. People dress up as anything or anyone they want, run wild, make a lot of noise and even kiss total strangers!

In southwestern Germany, revelers parade through the streets dressed as witches or wear wooden masks, feathered costumes and necklaces of clanging bells once used to scare off demons. Cologne, which – together with the cities of Duesseldorf, Aachen and Mainz – has one of the biggest carnival celebrations, holds a **Rosenmontag** parade with giant floats and marching bands in fools' costumes, while Munich is famous for its extravagant costume balls.

Celebrate Carnival in Germany - Karneval, Fasching

Travel to Germany during carnival season, called *Karneval* or *Fasching* (pronounced FAH-shing), and join the colorful celebrations, street parades and costume balls.

As we can see from the examples above, keeping track of carnival customs is far from simple. The term *Fasching* is also seen and heard in Berlin and other parts of northern Germany. *Fasnacht*, mostly used in Swabia and Switzerland, is also used in the northern city of Mainz. However, that still does not mean that these words are interchangeable. In fact, if we examine the origin of the three words, we discover that each is derived from a different source.

Karneval, Fasching — The Crazy Time



An American coming directly from New York to Mainz or Cologne on Rose Monday might easily believe that the Germans had suddenly gone crazy. In the streets he would see crowds of laughing, singing people, often dancing or swaying arm in arm in crazy costumes and masks. Those days before Ash Wednesday, usually in February, are the climax of the carnival season. Karneval is most enthusiastically celebrated in those parts of Germany where there is a Catholic majority, particularly in the South and along the Rhine.

Today it may seem as if carnival is nothing more than an outburst of gaiety and enjoyment of life before Lent begins. But actually in olden times there was a different meaning behind all this.