

Fastnachtzeit oder Fastenzeit: Carnival Season

Fasching und Karneval: Beschreibung (description)

CARNIVAL TIME IN GERMANY

It's New Year's Eve, Halloween and Mardi Gras all rolled into one, a spirit of fantasy that ignites the imagination of entire cities and at its peak is a kaleidoscope of confetti, masquerade balls and parades. It happens every winter in Germany and they call it "Fasching", "Karneval" or "Fastnacht".

This celebration isn't as familiar to Americans as the malty autumn spectacle, Munich's Oktoberfest, but this isn't due to any lack of enthusiasm on the part of the participants.

MUNICH, Germany — In the Rhine-land it's Karneval. In Bavaria they call it Fasching.

It's the German way of brightening up the back end of winter between New Year and Ash Wednesday when the beginning of Lent stops the bacchanalia in mid-swallow and the ompar bands pack up their brass until after Easter.

Described by some as a pagan festival in a modern idiom, it begins officially on Nov. 11 each year. Cities, towns and villages throughout Germany start planning in earnest for the binge to follow as soon as Christmas and New Year are out of the way.

Adultery is grounds for divorce in Germany except, so the story goes, during Fasching.

The frenetic festival masquerades under different names—In New Orleans it's Mardi Gras, in Rio de Janeiro it's Carnival and in Munich it's Fasching—but whatever you call it, the few weeks before Ash Wednesday are celebrations of the hedonistic joys of life.

But it is perhaps in Germany that the celebration finds its true home. Germans, who drink prodigious amounts of beer during normal times, view Fasching as an excuse to drink abnormal amounts.

CARNIVAL - CRAZY, ZANY WINTER DAYS



Karneval, also known as Fasching, Fassenacht and Fasnet, officially lasts from November 11 to Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. It has its roots in the spring celebrations of pre-Christian times, when people wore masks to scare away winter spirits and welcomed the rebirth of nature with song and dance. Since medieval times, Karneval has been a Catholic tradition representing the season of feasting before the fasting of Lent. However, during the times when kings and counts reigned in Germany, Karneval celebrations were also used as a way to criticize and mock the authorities.

Whether the celebration is called *Fasching*, *Fastnacht* or *Karneval*, it is a time to let off steam and live it up before the Lenten period that traditionally called for fasting (*die Fastenzeit*) and sacrifice. It is this fasting tradition that gave the celebration its *Fastnacht* name ("night before fasting," "fasting eve").