

Fastnachtzeit oder Fastenzeit: Carnival Season

Fasching oder Karneval?

Carnival in Germany, Switzerland and Austria

There is a huge variety of customs and traditions associated with Carnival celebrations in the German-speaking countries of Germany, Switzerland and Austria. They can vary considerably from country to country, but also from one smaller region to another. This is already reflected in the various names given to these festivities occurring before Lent.

German carnivals include Mainz, Düsseldorf, and several towns in the Black Forest. There is a new carnival in Berlin that is humble but heartfelt, transplanted by Cologne refugees. Munich sports a one-day street party. Swiss carnivals include Lucerne, Bellinzona, and Berne.

Two cities showcasing how different carnivals can be, with schedules that allow revelers to visit both, are Cologne, Germany, (www.koeln.de) and Basel, Switzerland, (www.basel.ch).

The Geography of Fasching, Fastnacht and Karneval

Although the division is roughly north/south, where the three words are used is actually a bit more complex.

Fasching – Austria (central, eastern), Bavaria (Munich, Würzburg); Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony (Sachsen)

Fastnacht (*Fasent, Fasnet, Fasnacht, Fassenacht*) – Arlberg (western Austria), Baden (Black Forest, Freiburg, Konstanz), Franconia (*Franken*, northern Bavaria), Hesse (Wiesbaden), Saarland, Mainz, Swabia, Switzerland (Basel, Bern, Lucerne, Zurich), Luxembourg (*Fuesend*, “fasting evening”)

Karneval – Rhineland: Aachen, Bonn, Cologne (Köln), Düsseldorf

In general, **Karneval** is the word used for the Rhenish (Rhineland) version of carnival in northwest Germany (except in Mainz), while the word **Fasching** refers to the similar celebration in southern Germany and Austria.

Fastnacht, Karneval and Fasching

Different regions all over Germany and beyond have different carnival traditions, and they even call their Mardi Gras celebrations by different names. The Rhineland has its *Karneval*, Austria, Bavaria and Berlin have *Fasching*, and Southern Germany and Switzerland celebrate *Fastnacht*.

Carnival or Mardi Gras goes by many names in German, depending on the region and dialect: **Karneval** (Rhineland, former Roman settlements), **Fasching** (Austria, Bavaria, Berlin), **Fastnacht** (Baden, Switzerland), **Fosnat** (Franconia) or **Fasnet** (Swabia).

Carnival is celebrated enthusiastically all over Germany, but there are three major “carnival cities,” Cologne, Mainz and Munich. They have developed their own characteristic styles of playing the fool.