

Fastnachtzeit oder Fastenzeit: Carnival Season

Was ist Fastnachtzeit?

FASCHING VS. KARNEVAL

KARNEVAL, FASCHING, FASTNACHT, etc

German *Fasching* and *Karneval* What's in a Name?

Fasching and Karneval are not really the same thing!

There are two main words used in German for Carnival or Mardi

Gras, the pre-Lenten celebration that ends on Ash Wednesday

(*Aschermittwoch*): the Germanic *Fasching* and the Latin-based *Karneval*.

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

Of course, carnival is not limited to the big cities alone; throughout Bavaria and the Rhineland, even the smallest villages compete with each other in arranging carnival processions and setting up princes of their own. Each region has its own carnival "war cries." In the Rhineland it's "Helau" or "Alaaf," while Munich responds with "Eins, zwei, g'suffa," which is a frank avowal of the role that drinking plays in the merry-making of *fasching*.

What is it? Carnival season is a time of wild fancy-dress parties and costume balls, which are open to the public. Carnival reaches its climax in big street processions with elaborately decorated floats, usually on **Rosenmontag**. Carnival celebrations happen mainly in the Catholic parts of Germany. Nevertheless, Karneval parties do occur in some places in the north of Germany.

So now that we have gotten some of the cumbersome background out of the way, what really is Karneval in Germany? The highpoint of Karneval begins on the Thursday before and ends on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. These six days are considered the really "*tolle Tage*" or crazy days. The essence of the *tolle Tage* is letting loose. Normally serious and reserved, Germans use this time to let their hair down and allow themselves a few days of uninhibited partying. It is an event so engrained in the local psyche that if you do not partake of the festivities, you are ridiculed and laughed at.

Germany really is a conglomeration of regions and Karneval typifies those provincial beginnings with its varying Karneval traditions and customs. Right off the bat, Karneval isn't even called Karneval everywhere it is celebrated. Cologne and the cities and towns of the middle Rhein, including Bonn and Düsseldorf, refer to it as Karneval, but just further south along the Rhein, the city of Mainz and its surrounding area call it *Fasnacht*, which literally means the "eve before fasting", referring to Ash Wednesday, or the last day before fasting begins. Still further to the south, in towns in the state of Baden-Württemberg, it is called *Fastnet* in the regional dialect. Bavaria and Austria use the term *Fasching*. In some cities, like Cologne, the climax of the foolish times is Rosenmontag, while for others it is what we know as Fat Tuesday or Fasnachtsdienstag.