

KARNEVALSBRÄUCHE

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

Umzüge und Züge (parades and processions)

Floats and fun at German Carnival

Not even snow flurries could put a damper on this week's "Karneval" festivities across the Rhineland region of Germany, where thousands of revelers donned colorful costumes and filled the streets for traditional Rose Monday processions.

Cologne, Mainz, Duesseldorf and Bonn were a few of the western cities brought to a stand-still by the raucous celebrations that are also known as Fastnacht, Fasching or Fosnat.

Even the German capital Berlin saw its share of outlandish costumes and beer-swilling — mainly among civil servants uprooted from Carnival-crazed Bonn, the country's former administrative capital — during a well-attended parade last Sunday.

In Cologne, Germany's fourth-largest city and self-proclaimed Carnival capital, some 1.3 million people were on hand for festivities that got underway at 11 minutes to 11 a.m. on Monday.



Carneval floats traditionally poke fun at politicians, including this one in which German Chancellor Angela Merkel is portrayed as a character from the animated hit "The Incredibles."

The huge crowds danced and sang as marching bands blared and an estimated 150 tons of candy rained down from 96 giant floats along a 4-mile parade route through the city center.

Many of those floats poked fun at politicians, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who was portrayed as a character from the animated hit "The Incredibles."

Other floats featured an irreverent take at the bird flu crisis in northern Germany and the World Cup soccer tournament that kicks off in Munich on June 9.

The German carnival is a version of the Mardi Gras festivals held in different parts of the world, including New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro.

It is rooted in the spring celebrations of pre-Christian times, when people wore masks to scare away the evil spirits of winter and welcomed the rebirth of nature with singing and dancing.

Later, in the Roman period, festivals were characterized by wanton raillery and unbridled freedom, and habitually caused a temporary breakdown of law and order. Historians believe that this spirit has fed into the contemporary "Crazy Season."

Today Carnival is also very much a Roman Catholic tradition, representing, as it does, the season of feasting before the fasting period leading up to Easter.