

OKTOBERFEST FROM A TO Z

Sitten und Gebräuche / Customs and Traditions

Trachten- und Schützenzug / Costume and Riflemen Parade (held first Sunday of Oktoberfest)

parade, all paths lead to the Munich Oktoberfest

There was more happening in Munich this week than just beer guzzling. Under glorious skies and a pretzel-baking hot sun, tens of thousands of people lined the streets of Munich's Old City to cheer as groups from as far away as the Ukraine paraded to this year's Oktoberfest, the largest folk festival in the world.

The "Trachtenzug," a parade of folk groups, musicians, and riflemen in traditional clothing that weaves through Munich to the Oktoberfest, was initiated in 1835 to celebrate the silver wedding anniversary of King Ludwig I and his wife, Therese of Saxony. The royal couple's wedding in 1810 was the occasion of the first Oktoberfest. An annual tradition since 1950, the parade follows a seven kilometer-long route along Munich's Maximilianstrasse, the grand city promenade that was laid out during Ludwig's reign.



As every year, this year's parade was led by the *Münchener Kindl*, a symbolic representation of the city of Munich as a child. Donning a black and yellow monk's tunic and riding a grey horse, she lugged a proportionately gigantic *Masskrug* (beer stein) while waving to the crowd. Following in medieval horse-drawn carriages were local dignitaries and over 8,000 parade participants, from flag bearers, musicians, and riflemen to massive workhorses hauling three meter-high ornamental beer kegs.

No details were spared for the groups' costumes, many of which harkened back to medieval times. The subtle differences between the ladies' *dirndl* dresses and men's *lederhosen* styles are a significant source of pride for the small municipalities in Bavaria.

Although it first served as an identifying force for Bavarians and a means for the Wittelsbach royal family to be close to its populace, the Oktoberfest has assumed a decidedly international character — and not only because of the well-travelled beer connoisseurs visiting from all corners of the earth. Among the international participants in this year's parade were groups from Italy, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the Ukraine. For several years, the parade has been broadcast throughout the world on international television.

Not to be missed is the procession of all of the oom-pah bands from all of the beer halls. Taking place on the second Sunday of the Fest, the bands all process down the main drag, past all of the beer halls and arrive at the Statue of Bavaria, where they line up on the steps leading up to Bavaria, and regale the crowd with booming beer-drinking tunes for a half-hour or so, before parading to their respective tents to kick off the partying. Back at the tents, the bands are greeted like conquering soldiers with raucous cheer and merriment, and the festivities then begin in earnest. The sights and sounds are a real treat, and this is a unique event to experience.