

Five Spectacular Carnival Celebrations in the World

Carnaval, Carnevale, Mardi Gras, Fasching. No matter how you say it, it's that time of year when costume-clad, circus-masked party-goers all over the world celebrate Carnival—the time leading up to Lent. Even though the festive season has religious roots, anyone can partake in the season of parties, parades, foods, extravagant balls before the repentant 40-day Easter season begins on Ash Wednesday.



Carnival in Rio, © Wiki
photo by Sergio Luiz

The early Christian church incorporated pagan practices to influence people to convert, tying them to the period of abstinence known as Lent. For some, it's basically a time to get your party on before fasting and abstaining. For faithful followers, after Carnival from Ash Wednesday on is a time to pray and repent through prayer.

No matter what part of the world you live in or are visiting, believer or non-believer, here are five spectacular Carnival celebrations in the world you should visit.

[Cologne, Germany](#)

In Cologne the locals take Karneval (also called *Fastnacht*,

Fassenacht, or *Fasnet* depending on the region) very seriously. *Fasching*, the “Fifth Season” of the year actually begins on November 11th at 11:11 a.m., but the party really gets going the following year during *Weiberfastnacht* (Shrove Thursday) and the Thursday before *Rosenmontag* (Carnival Monday), and all of the so called “Crazy Days” festivities.



Cologne Carnival,
Wiki photo by Rolf
Hahn

Locals and visitors make these celebrations a family affair, so if you don't dress up in really bright wild colors, you'll feel really out-of-place on the streets. At least wear a mask to scare away winter spirits and welcome the rebirth of nature with a mug of local beer Kölsch which will have you singing and dancing with the locals.

Women's Carnival Day or *Weiberdonnerstag* is fun for women in Cologne, but can be a bit unnerving for men. On the Thursday before Ash Wednesday, groups of scissor happy women search for male victims wearing neckties. The men know better and tend to run in the opposite direction when they see them coming. This is because a man's tie is considered to be a symbol of male power and women in the Cologne area use the Women's Carnival Day to loosen their inhibitions by cutting off a man's tie.

This carnival tradition can be costly for the male victim wearing expensive ties or the female accused of cutting them off especially if the man presses charges and wins the court case. Maybe that's why after the tie is snipped off the woman gives the man a kiss.

Sounds crazy, huh? Well, that's why they call it "Crazy Days".

[New Orleans, Louisiana, USA](#)

You are cordially invited to the world's most fun, outrageous free street party, so as they say in the Crescent City, "Let the good times roll!" Since the 1800s people have been joining in Mardi Gras fun which officially kicks off with Epiphany on January 6.

Most people just head to the French Quarter to enjoy the parades, but you'll find them all over the city from the gorgeous tree-lined St. Charles Avenue where the street car normally runs to Central Business District and Canal Street.



#NOMG41 Mardi Gras, NOLA ©Alex Demyan (504)469-3581

Mardi Gras French Quarter scenes

©NewOrleansOnline.com,
photo by Alex Demyan

While in New Orleans you'll want to catch at least a few of the 50 plus parades beginning February 15, 2014 and ending this year on Mardi Gras day, March 4, 2014. To enjoy the colorful festivities, just decide where to take family,

friends, and visitors and be sure to dress up in typical Mardi Gras colors; purple, green and gold which symbolize justice, power and faith.

There's a parade type for everybody so get ready to watch the fantastic marching bands, decorated floats full of costume-clad Krewe members who will throw cups, beads, doubloons, and toys such as Rex, Bacchus or Zulu whose members hand-off coconuts (they stopped throwing a while back because too many people got hit in the head).

If you really want a bead doubloon, you can say "Throw me something mistah" and trust me ladies; it's not necessary to show your coconuts in order to receive a coconut or inexpensive string of beads.

Tip: By no means bend down to pick up the beads or doubloons unless you want to lose your head, hand, or fingers. There are over 4 million Mardi Gras visitors annually, who all want one of the over 2 million cups, 3.5 million doubloons and 350,000 gross of beads and know that to secure one, you need to stomp it with your feet, and then carefully bend down to pick it up.

[Rio de Janeiro, Brazil](#)

We all know the Brazilians do Carnival and they do it well. Today's modern Brazilian Carnival originated in Rio de Janeiro in 1641 and is held annually before Ash Wednesday from February 13th – 16th. Brazil's famous colorful festival is televised worldwide and begins with the crowning of the Fat King (King Momo), who is presented a giant silver and gold key by the city's mayor.

The next headliner event focuses on dance, so you if Samba, you'll want to head off to Rio where dancers wear elaborate sequined and feathered costumes which become larger and more impressive every year. The best samba schools in Rio march through the half-mile long Sambodromo theater competing to become the best in Brazil. Up to 50,000 spectators come to

watch, and if you want to join in the samba parade, samba schools are always looking for extra performers to be part of the show, so get ready to shake those hips or go to a Zumba class to get your rhythm on.



Sambadrome parade; Wiki photo by Alan Betensley

If you don't have a ticket to the spectacular Sambadrome show, do like the locals and head toward the streets, squares, bars, clubs and any other venue to Samba.

[Santa Cruz, Tenerife](#)

I was lucky enough a few years ago to have booked a vacation to Santa Cruz de Tenerife during Carnival. Having only experienced Mardi Gras in New Orleans and Karneval in Cologne, Germany, I wasn't sure what to expect. I later learned the Santa Cruz de Tenerife is twin city to Rio de Janeiro, so of course Carnival in Santa Cruz did not disappoint.

We arrived early for the Carnival Tuesday "el Coso" parade and noticed people purchasing tickets for seats which line the streets. We followed suit and had an upfront experience to spectacular open street parade.



Carnival preparation
in Santa Cruz de
Tenerife

Throughout the early evening and well into the night, Caribbean themed music and hot rhythms beat as colorfully decorated parade trucks house gorgeous scantily clad dancers.

The following day is the *Eentierro de la Sardina* (Burial of the Sardine) where a sardine is carried through the streets and set on fire and consumed by the flames to the despair of the inconsolable/grief-stricken widows, widowers and mourners. The Burial of the Sardine marks the official end of Carnival, but one week later another party known as piñata begins. So much for repentance and fasting.

[Venice, Italy](#)

So are you ready for the world's best-known baroque-themed party? If so, be ready to don a mask and party away either at a ball or on the streets watching the gondolas maneuver through the the romantic waterways of Venice. Imagine, this year for 12 days of carnival leading up to the start of Lent, you could be enjoying living this year's theme 'Wonder and Fantasy of Nature'.

The Venice Carnival dates back to somewhere around 1162 when

people celebrated the victory of the *Serenissima Repubblica*. A tradition of slaughtering a bull and 12 pigs in the Piazza San Marco commemorated the victory and locals joined the festivities which gradually grew.

By the mid-17th Century the Venice Carnival had become the most famous festivity throughout Europe but eventually ceased when Napoleon's troops brought an end to the Venetian Republic in 1797.



Venice carnival masks, Wiki photo by Frank Kovalchek

For nearly two centuries no celebrations were held, but in 1979, a group of Venetian artisans came together to restart carnival and today, approximately 3 million visitors come to Venice for the pre-Lent activities.

And what about those masks? People used them to hide their social class and protected their identity during promiscuous or so-called indecent sexual behaviors. Due to the risqué conduct, masks were eventually banned.

Before you can even begin to enjoy Carneval in Venice, you'll want to find a festive mask to wear. There are four types of *Maschere*, as they are called in Italian; square bauta, the columbina half-mask, the creepy looking long-beaked mask worn by the plague doctor, and the volto or larva full-face mask. No matter your style, in Venice you'll find all sorts of traditional and elaborate masks and at every price point.

If you get the chance to attend one of the five spectacular Carnival celebrations in the world, plan early, charge your camera battery, and get ready for a time full of festive fun. As they say in Venice, A Carnevale Ogni Scherzo Vale (Anything goes at Carnival).