



Fasching

... is a good time in Germany

The carnival session begins each year on 11 November at 11:11 a.m. and finishes on Ash Wednesday; this time is also called the "Fifth Season."

Dating back to the Middle Ages, the celebration of Carnival (Karneval or Fasching) – from which the New Orleans tradition of Mardi Gras is derived – is a time for eating, drinking and merriment before the solemn days of Lent. This colorful festival takes place for one week, starting 52 days before Easter, generally ending with a bang in time to calm down for Ash Wednesday. Carnival is celebrated in several regions throughout Germany, the two most popular versions being Karneval with its hub in the Rhineland region and Fasching (also Fastnacht) in Southern Germany.



Fastnacht season begins on Three Kings Day, January 6 (Epiphany) and is a more subdued celebration observed in cities and rural areas of Baden-Württemberg, parts of Bavaria and Alsace. Costumes have evolved around themes of dark ghosts representing the cold season contrasted by the bright, colorful spirits of spring. These traditional themes symbolize the eager anticipation of the growing season, a time farmers and consumers long for.

Carnival season officially starts much earlier, on November 11th at 11:11 am. At this time people celebrate the beginning of what is often referred to as the "fifth" (Carnival) season. In the weeks leading up to the festivities, Carnival clubs meet to discuss upcoming performances, costumes, and parades. The undisputed Carnival capital is Cologne, followed by Düsseldorf and Mainz.

Carnival is traditionally kicked off on Thursday with "Women's Carnival" (Weiberfastnacht). On this unofficial holiday women dress up in costumes and misbehave in harmless ways, thus

symbolically taking control for a day. A popular tradition is to cut off men's ties, leaving only a short stump of this perceived token of male supremacy. In return the male victims are usually rewarded with a peck on the cheek.

The Monday following Women's Carnival is called Rose Monday (Rosenmontag). This day marks the peek of Carnival season, with 11:11 a.m. as the official kick-off time for the popular parades. With excitement and anticipation, people line up along main street to wait for the parade to pass by. The floats are works of art portraying a variety of themes and usually focus on what's happening in the world; for example, one float may make fun of a contemporary governmental leader or recent political event. After the parade wild and free-roaming marchers dressed in crazy costumes (Narrenkostümen) gather in the side streets to continue the celebration. Bars stay open through the early hours of morning, and the spirit of Carnival reigns in the streets and public squares, in offices and at home, and above all in places for dancing and drinking. To accompany this great fun, street vendors offer simple German fare to keep Carnival enthusiasts happy. On every corner one can buy fresh pretzels, hot sausages (Bratwurst) or Krapfen, the German answer to donuts, and enjoy mugs of hot-spiced wine (Glühwein) which helps the Carnival crowd stay warm.



The Tuesday after Rose Monday marks the last day of the carnival season and is observed with smaller parades and parties in Germany. For carnival enthusiasts in other parts of the world, however, Shrove Tuesday, also known as Fat Tuesday or Mardi Gras in French marks the highlight of the carnival season. In cities such as New Orleans, Venice and Rio de Janeiro cheerful and colorful crowds take over the streets with spectacular parades. Ash Wednesday marks the end of the year's craziest "season" and ushers in the solemn weeks of Lent.





Carnival in Cologne

In the Rhineland festivities developed especially strongly, since it was a way to express subversive anti-Prussian and anti-French thoughts in times of occupation, through parody and mockery. Modern carnival there began in 1823 with the founding of a Carnival Club in Cologne. Most cities and villages of the Rhineland have their own individual Carnival

traditions. Nationally famous are the Carnival in Cologne (Köln), Düsseldorf and Mainz.

In the Rhineland, the Carnival season is considered to be the "fifth season of the year", starting on November 11 at exactly 11:11 a.m. (German: am elften elften um elf Uhr elf). Clubs organize "sessions" which are show events called Sitzung with club members or invited guests performing dance, comedy and songs in costumes. |



The Carnival spirit is then temporarily suspended during Advent and Christmas, and picks up again in earnest in the New Year. The time of merrymaking in the streets is officially declared open at the Alter Markt during the Cologne Carnival on the Thursday before the beginning of Lent. The main event is the street carnival that takes place in the period between the Thursday before Ash Wednesday and Ash

Wednesday. Carnival Thursday is called Altweiber (Old women day) in Düsseldorf or Wieverfastelovend (The women's day) in Cologne. This celebrates the beginning of the "female presence in carnival", which began in 1824, when washer-women celebrated a "workless day" on the Thursday before carnival. They founded committee in 1824 to strengthen their presence in the still male-dominated carnival celebrations.





Alemannic Fastnacht

The "Swabian-Alemannic" carnival begins on January 6 (Epiphany/Three Kings Day). This celebration is known as Fastnacht. Variants are Fasnet, Fasnacht or Fasent. Fastnacht is held in Baden-Württemberg, parts of Bavaria, and Alsace. Switzerland and Vorarlberg, in Austria, also hold this celebration. The festival starts on the Thursday before Ash Wednesday, known in these regions as Schmutziger Donnerstag or Fettdonnerstag. In standard German, schmutzig means "dirty", but actually the name is from the local dialect where schmotzig means "fat." Elsewhere the day is called "Women's Carnival" (Weiberfastnacht), being the day when tradition says that women take control. In particular regions of Tyrol, Salzburg and Bavaria traditional processions of the Perchten welcome the springtime.

The Schönperchten ("beautiful Perchts") represent the birth of new life in the awakening nature, the Schiachperchten ("ugly Perchts") represent the dark spirits of wintertime. Farmers yearn for warmer weather and the Perchtenlauf (Run of Perchts;) is a magical expression of that desire. The nights between winter and spring, when evil ghosts are supposed to go around, are also called Rauhnächte.





Anthropological interpretation

An old tradition in Southern Germany, carnival is the time of the year when the reign of bad spirits of the cold and grim winter period is over and these spirits are symbolically being hunted down and expelled. By the end of winter, each year around January and February, people dress up as demons, witches, earthly spirits and dreadful animals to enact this scene of symbolic expulsion. What happens in fact is an expulsion of the winter season that symbolises death, silence and destruction. (Just look at what happens to plants in a cold winter and you get the image.) So before spring can come and the perennial cycle of life can start over again, old forms have to be destroyed for new ones to come into existence. The notions 'carnival' (carne = meat) or 'fastnacht' (= at the wake of Lent) also refer to the beginning of the Christian tradition of the 40 day-long fasting (or Lentening) season. Whereas during carnival, people go mad, chaos rules, hierarchies are overthrown and one indulges in food and drinks, the fasting season marks an end of this. Remembering the suffering and death of Jesus, many Christians abstain from meat, alcohol, sweets and festivities until Easter, the resurrection of Jesus. All these rituals are telling stories of death, chaos, life-cycles and resurrection.

Traditional
Costumes



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