



Fasching – Karneval Background

What Is Fasching? If you're in Germany during Fasching, you'll know. Many streets come to life with colorful parades, loud music, and celebrations around every corner.

It's New Orleans Carnival, German style.

Actually, a more precise question would be: What is Fasching, Karneval, Fastnacht, Fasnacht, and Fastelabend?

They are all one and the same thing: pre-Lenten festivities celebrated in grand style, mostly in the predominantly Catholic regions of the German-speaking countries.

The Rhineland has its Karneval. Austria, Bavaria, and Berlin call it Fasching. And the German-Swiss celebrate Fastnacht.

When Is It Celebrated? Fasching officially begins in most regions in Germany on Nov. 11 at 11:11 a.m. or the day after Dreikönigstag (Three Kings Day), so on Jan. 7. However, the big bash celebrations are not on the same given date each year. Instead, the date varies depending on when Easter falls. Fasching culminates into Fasching week, which begins the week before Ash Wednesday.

Carnival is the merrymaking and festivity that takes place in many Roman Catholic countries in the last days and hours before the Lenten season. The derivation of the word is uncertain, though it possibly can be traced to the medieval Latin *carnem levare* or *carnelevarium*, which means to take away or remove meat. This coincides with the fact that Carnival is the final festivity before the commencement of the austere 40 days of Lent, during which Roman Catholics in earlier times fasted, abstained from eating meat, and followed other self-denial practices.

The first day of Carnival varies with both national and local traditions. Thus, in Munich in Bavaria the Carnival season, there called Fasching begins on the feast of the Epiphany (January 6), while in Cologne (Köln) in the Rhineland it begins on November 11 at 11:11 am (11th month, day, hour, and minute).

In the United States the principal Carnival celebration is in New Orleans, Louisiana. The Carnival season there opens on Twelfth Night (also called Epiphany, which is observed on January 6) and climaxes with the Mardi Gras festivities commencing 10 days before Shrove Tuesday.

This period is filled with citywide revelry and elaborate parades, both day and night, building up to Mardi Gras. Beads of gold, green, and purple (representing power, faith, and justice, respectively) are commonly distributed, and the eating of king cake is an iconic part of the celebration. The French name Mardi Gras means Fat Tuesday, from the custom of using all the fats in the home before Lent.

A variety of customs and traditions are associated with Carnival celebrations in the German-speaking countries of Germany, Switzerland and Austria. They can vary considerably from country to country, but also from one small region to another. This is reflected in the various names given to these festivities occurring before Lent.

Beginning and peak of the festival season - The carnival season, also known as the "Fifth Season", begins each year on 11 November at 11:11 a.m. and finishes on Ash Wednesday of the following year with the main festivities happening around Rosenmontag (Rose Monday). The carnival spirit is temporarily suspended during Advent and Christmas and picks up again in earnest in the New Year. Although the festivities and parties start as early as the beginning of January, the actual carnival week starts on the Fat Thursday (Weiberfastnacht) before Ash Wednesday (in Germany). The big German carnival parades are held on the weekend before and especially on Rosenmontag, the day before Shrove Tuesday. During these events, hundreds of thousands of people celebrate in the streets, even if temperatures are low, most of them dressed up in costumes. Many regions have special carnival cries (Cologne, Bonn and Aachen: *Alaaf!*; Düsseldorf and Mainz: *Helau!*).

Fasching is the lively German carnival season, filled with parades, parties, and, of course, lots of creative costumes! No matter what it is called Karneval or Fastnacht in different areas, this event is a time for fun, music, and dressing up. Right before Lent, everyone gets a chance to forget about daily life and enjoy pretending to be someone (or something) else. If you're looking for ideas on what to wear, there's no shortage—everything from classic costumes to the latest trends, whether you're going solo or planning a group outfit.

Whether you're joining a huge parade in Cologne or just celebrating at home with friends, choosing your Fasching costume is one of the highlights. It's a chance to show who you are and be as bold or creative as you want. So, find just the right look to help you make the most of Germany's "fifth season." ***Helau und Alaaf!!!***

(information edited from various sources)