

CARNIVALS

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Carnivale is a festive season which occurs immediately before Lent; the main events are usually during February. Carnivale typically involves a public celebration or parade combining some elements of a circus, mask and public street party. People often dress up or masquerade during the celebrations, which mark an overturning of daily life.

Carnivale is a festival traditionally held in Roman Catholic and, to a lesser extent, Eastern Orthodox societies. Protestant areas usually do not have carnival celebrations or have modified traditions, such as the Danish Carnival or other Shrove Tuesday events. The Brazilian Carnaval is one of the best-known celebrations today, but many cities and regions worldwide celebrate with large, popular, and days-long events. The Carnival of Rio de Janeiro is the biggest carnival in the world, and the biggest popular party on the planet, according to The Guinness Book of World Records 2010. The Rio de Janeiro Carnival is also considered the world's most famous.

Some of the best-known traditions, including carnival parades and masquerade ball masquerading, were first recorded in medieval Italy. The carnival of Venice was for a long time the most famous carnival. From Italy, carnival traditions spread to the Catholic nations of Spain, Portugal, and France. From France, they spread to the Rhineland of Germany, and to New France in North America. From Spain and Portugal, they spread with Catholic colonization to the Caribbean and Latin America.

Today there are two world-known carnivals: Venetian and Brazilian one.

The Carnival in Brazil is a big part of the Brazilian Culture, and it is sometimes referred to by the Brazilians as the "Greatest Show on Earth".

The most important Brazilian Carnival takes place in Rio. The Carnival in Rio de Janeiro is a world famous festival held before Lent every year and considered the biggest carnival in the world with two million people per day on the streets. The first festivals of Rio date back to 1723.

It's the largest carnival event in this country, considered to be the largest of the kind in the world. Parade is taking place in the Sambadrome and the balls are being held in the Copacabana Palace and beach, many of the carnival participants are at other locations around Rio. The festival attracts millions of tourists, both Brazilians and foreigners who come from everywhere to participate and enjoy the great show. Samba Schools are large, social entities with thousands of members and a theme for their song and parade each year. Tourists are allowed to participate, paying (\$500–750) to buy a Samba costume and dance in the parade through the Sambadrome with one of the schools of samba. The price paid is used to buy the tourist's own costume and also the costumes of the people who do not have the money to afford it. Blocos are generally small informal groups also with a definite theme in their samba, usually satirical of the current political situation. But there are also a lot, about 30 of them in Rio de Janeiro, that are very big in number of participants, gathering hundreds of thousands of people. There are more than 400 blocos in Rio de Janeiro. Bandas are samba musical bands, usually formed by enthusiasts in the same neighborhood.

The **carnival parade** is filled with people and floats from various samba schools. A samba school can either be an actual school or just a collaboration of local neighbors that

want to attend carnival. Samba schools include: Mocidade Independente, Imperio Serrano, Academicos do Salgueiro, Unidos da Tijuca, and Beija-Flor de Nilopolis.

The purpose of carnival is for samba schools to compete with fellow rival schools; this competition is the climax of the whole carnival festival. Each school chooses a theme to try and portray in their entry. The samba schools work to build the best floats and costumes to represent their themes, and to include the best music they can from their band called the bateria. There are many parts to each school's entry including the six to eight floats and thousands of participants.

There is a special order that every school has to follow with their parade entries. Each school begins with the "comissão de frente", which is the first wing. The "comissão de frente" is made up of ten to fifteen people only, and they are the ones who introduce the school and set the mood. These people have choreographic dances in fancy costumes that usually tell a short story. Following the "comissão de frente" is the first float of the samba school, called "abre-alas".

Some of the important roles include the porta-bandeira and mestre-sala. The porta-bandeira is a very important lady who is in charge of the samba school flag, including making sure to not allow the flag to roll. She is accompanied by the mestre-sala, who is supposed to draw everyone's attention to "his queen", the porta-bandeira. Floatees, who are also important, are the people who populate the floats, also known as destaques. The floatees have the most luxurious and expensive costumes that can be extremely heavy. Along with all the floatees is one main floatee that is located at the top of each float. The main destaque dances and sings for the entire time that the float is on the runway.

One other aspect that is mandatory is the presence of the ala das baianas. This is a wing of the samba school entry that includes at least 100 females only. These women along with many other people do not ride on the floats as many others do, instead they are passistas, the people who belong to the samba school that do the marching alongside and between the floats.

However, the true spirit of carnival in Rio de Janeiro is not necessarily in the official parade hosted at Sambadrome, where 12 different teams of samba schools compete to see who delivers the most luxurious and exciting parade. In fact, the real carnival that the cariocas – and an increasing number of tourists – enjoy during Brazil's holy week takes place in the streets and is completely free.

Carnival street bands, called **blocos**, are some of the names given to the street carnival bands that organise free parades in various areas of Rio. Differently from the official carnival parade at Sambodromo, in which the samba schools compete against each other, the blocos make their parade with only one simple purpose: bring free music and fun for all.

The blocos carry the genuine spirit of carnival as they play old marchinhas de carnaval, short old samba songs that have a contagious rhythm and usually have a funny content. Each bloco also composes their own theme samba song for the year, often based on recent happenings in Brazil and, again, with a very funny approach in the lyrics.

Besides all the joy provided by the music that the musicians play in the blocos, the atmosphere of each different bloco relies on the spirit of the public that attend the parade. All dressed in funny costumes – as in a fancy dress party – the cariocas go dancing and singing from bloco to bloco spreading their unique happiness through the streets of Rio.

The pioneer bloco Banda de Ipanema promoted their first parade in the streets of Rio's famous Ipanema in 1965. Being the first to launch this new exciting way of enjoying carnival, they inspired the creation of other similar bands and blocos, which also wanted to have their own space and attract the people to enjoy themselves for free.

Although the blocos experienced great success for three decades, in the 1990s the public seemed to have lost interest in joining the free parades. Disorganisation, huge crowds,

and mainly the increase of violence in the streets of Rio could be pointed out as some of the main reasons for the blocos fall in popularity.

In the last five years however, it seems like the cariocas have rediscovered how to have fun in the blocos. A new generation of young cariocas have joined the idea of blocos, not only as fans but also as musicians. There are many new blocos being created everywhere by groups of friends with a common interest (neighbourhood, work place, music, etc.).

The success of the bloco and the number of people that will attend the parade depends on the word of mouth and a bit of luck for the organizers. There are some blocos that can gather up to 500,000 people. This is the beauty of the street blocos: everything is possible.

Although the street blocos are the best way of enjoying Rio's carnival, it has to be said that the official parade at Sambodromo is still a great (and expensive) event that is worth experiencing, at least once in a life time. It remains the first option for the tourists that visit Rio during carnival. And it is a mind-blowing party.

Incorporated into every aspect of the Rio carnival are **dancing and music**. The most famous dance is the samba, an Brazilian dance with african influences. The samba was created by the African slaves mixing with the choros, street bands, of Brazil. The samba remains a popular dance not only in carnival but in the ghetto villages outside of the main cities. These villages keep alive the historical aspect of the dance without the influence of the western cultures. Other dances include the lundu, the polka, and the maxixe.

The samba is the main dance of Rio Carnival but it is not performed in silence. Music is another major aspect of all parts of carnival. As stated by Samba City, "Samba Carnival Instruments are an important part of Brazil and the Rio de Janeiro Carnevale, sending out the irresistible beats and rhythms making the crowd explode in a colourful dance revolution fantasy fest!" The samba that is found in Rio is batucada, referring to the dance and music being based on percussion instruments. It "is born of a rhythmic necessity that it allows you to sing, to dance, and to parade at the same time." This is why the batucada style is found in most all of Rio's street carnivals.

The **carnival in Venice** was first recorded in 1268. The subversive nature of the festival is reflected in Italy's many laws over the past several centuries attempting to restrict celebrations and the wearing of masks, a central feature of the carnival.

Carnival started as a time for celebration and expression throughout the classes, as wearing masks hid any form of identity between social classes. During the 1970s, the Italian government decided to bring back the history and culture of Venice, and sought to use the traditional Carnival as the centerpiece of their efforts. Today, approximately 30,000 visitors come to Venice each day for Carnivals.

The Venice Carnival begins two Fridays before the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday! Basically it starts on a Saturday then runs for one and a half weeks until ending on Mardi Gras Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday.

The whole of Venice becomes a platform for the Carnival with different events happening here and there. St Mark's Square is usually the hub, but during the nearly 2 weeks of celebrations you'll find people wearing masks all over the city. Performances at the Venice Carnival Visitors will find that along with many people wearing masks and lavish costumes there are numerous different events taking place around the city. The arts, including ballet and theatre, music and other performances usually take a central seat though the exact schedule varies from year to year.

Masks have always been a central feature of the Venetian carnival; traditionally people were allowed to wear them between the festival of St. Stephen's Day, December 26 and the start of the carnival season and midnight of Shrove Tuesday. They have always been around Venice. As masks were also allowed Ascension and from October 5 to Christmas, people could spend a large proportion of the year in disguise.

Venetian masks can be made in leather or with the original glass technique. The original masks were rather simple in design and decoration and often had a symbolic and practical function. Nowadays, most of them are made with the application of gesso and gold leaf and are all hand-painted using natural feathers and gems to decorate.

Bauta is usually the most common type of mask seen during the Venice Carnival and they're a popular design for tourists to buy too. A Bauta mask would traditionally cover the whole face, though there are some available that go from just above the mouth so that eating, drinking, and talking is easier! These striking masks often feature lots of gilding, so they can be very beautiful.

A *Columbine Masks* a half face mask and they're usually very highly decorated. The decorations could include gold or silver, as well as crystals and feathers. These masks are sometimes sold on a baton so that the wearer can choose whether to hold the mask over the face or not.

Moretta Masks were always popular in Venice because they helped to bring out the feminine features of the women who wore them. Basically this was an oval mask made of black velvet and was also worn with a veil. The wearer had to put up with a bit in their mouth to keep it in place and so couldn't speak while wearing a Moretta Mask. Perhaps this is why these masks haven't been very popular since around 1760!

The *Volto*, also called *Larva Mask* is a very typical Venetian mask that's really quite plain compared to the Bauta or Columbine masks. It is mainly white and was traditionally worn with a 'tricorn' hat and a cloak and was made from a fine wax cloth that made them light and comfortable.

The *Plague Doctor Mask*, or *Medico dellaPeste* is a macabre mask that despite its somewhat scary appearance is popular and well known in Venice. The mask includes a long beak and stems from the design of a 16th century French physician who wore it in the hope of protecting himself from contracting the plague. Traditionally this would have been very plain but today you'll see much brighter versions on the streets of Venice!