

## Carnival day

*Carnevale*, also known as carnival or *mardi gras*, is celebrated in Italy and many places around the world 40 days before Easter, a final party before Ash Wednesday and the restrictions of Lent.

*Carnevale* in Italy is a huge winter festival celebrated with parades, masquerade balls, entertainment, music, and parties. Children throw confetti at each other. Mischief and pranks are also common during *Carnevale*, hence the saying *A Carnevale Ogni Scherzo Vale*, anything goes at carnival.

*Carnevale* has roots in pagan festivals and traditions and as is often the case with traditional festivals was adapted to fit into the Catholic rituals. Although carnival is actually one date, in Venice and some other places in Italy the carnival celebrations and parties may begin a couple weeks before.

Masks, *maschere*, are an important part of the *carnevale* festival and Venice is the best city for traditional carnival masks. Carnival masks are sold year round and can be found in many shops in Venice, ranging from cheap masks to elaborate and expensive masks. Walking through the streets of Venice, it's a pleasure to view the variety of masks on display in shop windows. People also wear elaborate costumes for the festival and there are many *carnevale* celebrations, but Venice, Viareggio, and Cento hold the biggest and most elaborate carnival festivals. Other towns have unusual ways of celebrating. Here's where to celebrate *Carnevale* in Italy.

Venice's Carnival season starts about 2 weeks before the date of *Carnevale*. Events and entertainment are held nightly throughout Venice. During carnival season people in costumes wander about the city..



Some public highlights are:

- Gondola and boat parades along the Grand Canal
- Mask parades in St. Mark's Square
- Carnival for Children in the Cannaregio district.
- Grand fireworks show on the final day to end the carnival celebration.

There are costume or masquerade balls, both private and public.

## GREECE

### The Carnivals

Important celebrations take place in Patra, Xanthi and Cephalonia with a wonderful chariot parade and costumes parties.

By the word Carnival – Latin in origin, the corresponding Greek word being *apókreo* or *apokria*) – we mean the three-week period before Ash Monday when it is the custom to masquerade. Literally “Apokria” means to say goodbye to the period of meat-eating, or abstinence from meat (*Apo-kreo* = away from meat). In the same way the word “Carnival” is made up from the words *carne* = meat and *vale* = take leave of.

Carnival is essentially the period leading up to Lent and the preparation for the biggest holiday of Christianity, Easter. It allows people to have some fun before Lent starts on Ash Monday. During Lent Christians fast to mentally and physically prepare themselves to participate in the Passion of Christ during Holy Week.



The roots of the Carnival customs can be traced back to antiquity. They are related to the celebrations in honour of the god Dionysus, where enthusiasm, gaiety and banter prevailed. When Christianity became the dominant religion, elements of ancient Greek worship were incorporated into the customs and traditions pertaining to the period before Lent.

Since the 19th century, Carnival starts on the Sunday of Teloni and Fariséou and ends on Shrovetide Sunday. In the past, the festive atmosphere was created by groups of masqueraded people who at night roamed the streets and the neighbourhoods, singing ribald and satirical songs. However, with the passage of time,

standardised celebrations with fancy costumes and floats organised by the local communities prevailed to a larger or smaller extent, to the detriment of the older, more spontaneous celebrations.

However, carnival is closely related to the cultural heritage of each region and in many parts of the country substantial efforts have been made in recent years to revive traditional carnival customs. Dominant elements in these customs are the phallus symbols and satire, which centres on local events or focuses on current Greek and international issues.

The most important carnival in Greece is held in Patras. The carnival festivities start each year on the 17th of January and end on the last Sunday of Carnival with the burning at the stake of the King of Carnival and a big parade of floats and costumed groups.

