HISTORY

The word ***Carnaval*** comes from Latin meaning "goodbye to the flesh" which refers to the 40 days of ***Cuaresma***, or Lent, during which time the Roman Catholics would not eat meat. There were many other restrictions during the 40 days of fasting and praying.

In the 1800's, Cuaresma meant the end of drinking and the end of eating certain foods. Meat was replaced by fish and eggs; colorful clothing was replaced by dark gloomy attire; celebrations stopped; even marriages did not take place during this solemn period.

The days preceding Cuaresma, therefore, became days of carefree abandon and indulgence. Wild behavior was accepted as a necessary outlet. This evolved into the Carnaval season, officially started January 6, Epiphany, and continued until midnight on the Tuesday before ***Miércoles de Ceniza***, or Ash Wednesday, sometime in February or early March. Most Carnaval celebrations now take place the week before Miércoles de Ceniza.

Many people associate ***máscaras*** with Carnaval. The traditions of wearing masks goes back to ancient pagan rituals, in which one disguised oneself for protection against evil spirits when these spirits were thought to be wandering about.

ESPAÑA

Carnaval is celebrated throughout Spain but it is especially popular in the south. The city of Cádiz, for example, is well-known for its ***desfiles***, elegant processions of elaborate costumes. Students do not have classes during these ***días de fiesta***. A rocket is fired to open the celebration, then the streets fill with floats and people. The parades, dances, and ***enmascarados***, or masquerade balls, play a big part in the Carnaval celebrations.

In the region of Galicia, the celebrations include a day in which people throw ***harina y salvado***, or flour and oats, on each other. Another day of Carnaval, roosters are set loose to run through the streets. The last day of Carnaval, another ceremony called ***el Entierro de la Sardina*** or Sardine Funeral occurs. The fun times are “buried” and Cuaresma begins.

The ***sardina*** is a symbol which reminds the people that now they will be eating fish instead of meat. To this day, Catholics observe the tradition of not eating meat on Ash Wednesday or Fridays during Lent. In the past, a real sardine was used in the mock funeral procession but now a plastic, wooden, or papier-mâché version takes its place.

The people in the funeral procession are dressed in black. Men wear suits and ***chesteras***, or top hats. Women wear black dresses and veils. The women pretend to cry as they join the procession. When they reach the river, the sardina is either thrown into it or burned. Later in the day, people go to church where they receive ***cenizas,*** or ashes, in the form of a cross on their foreheads to begin a solemn period of fasting and prayer.

VENEZUELA

In Caracas, the capital city, people celebrate four days preceding Ash Wednesday. They choose ***los reinos***, or a king and queen to reign over Carnaval events. There are ***bailes*** and ***fiestas***. Salsa music fills the air and people dance in the streets. They also bombard each other with confetti, eggs, even tomatoes. Water fights used to be a popular activity but now the police will fine or arrest people that throw ***globos de agua*** in the streets because it has caused car accidents.

COLOMBIA

During Carnaval of Barranquilla, ***el alcalde,*** or mayor opens festivities with a ***batalla de flores,*** *or flower battle*. Four days of desfiles, fiestas and bailes de enmascarados follow. Children get in on the fun, too. They fill ***cascarones***, or hollow egg shells, with confetti and throw or break them over each other’s heads. They also enjoy throwing balloons sometimes filled with perfumed water.

MÉXICO

Carnaval is not celebrated everywhere in Mexico but it is popular in Mérida, Varacruz and Mazatlán. In Mexico, the Carnaval celebrations are called ***carnestolados***. Like many other Hispanics, Mexicans celebrate Carnaval with desfiles and bailes de enmascarados and dance in the streets to the music of the mariachi bands or attend bullfights.

ISLAS CANARIAS

A small island two hundred miles off the African coast, Tenerife seems an unlikely spot for one of the world’s largest carnival parties, but with over three hundred entries on the island’s annual festival calendar, it perhaps shouldn’t be a surprise that its Carnival, the biggest event of them all, is one massive, raucous party. For two weeks each year in the run-up to Lent over a quarter of a million costumed revellers converge on the island’s capital, Santa Cruz, to party hard enough to eclipse even the activities in the notoriously hedonistic holiday resorts for which the island is best known. By attracting musicians and party-goers from as far away as Latin America, the event captures a great deal of the passion, fervor and debauchery of the vast events and makes it Europe’s premier party.

The cornerstone of the official proceedings is a series of daytime costume events and parades held throughout the carnival fortnight. However, although these are both impressive and fun, the real core of celebrations takes place every night in the town center, when stages are set up for bands to pump out vibrant rhythms and hundreds of kiosks lining the street host various kinds of dance music until dawn.

While drinking alcohol is a large part of many people’s carnival, the entire spread of age-groups is present —no surprise to those familiar with easy-going Spanish society. The big fairground along the seafront is a winner with kids and the elderly are also content to sit and sip drinks and people-watch.

Also, unusually for such a vast festival, not only do drugs play little part, but the police presence is refreshingly minimal and generally unnecessary—there's little crime during the festivities and people are mostly well-behaved.

History

Carnival of some sort has been celebrated on Tenerife since the early years of colonization at the end of the fifteenth century. However, due partly to its reputation as one of the most irreverent and subversive festivals, it has been subject to many prohibitions and revivals over the centuries—and it's only the locals' undying devotion to the proceedings that has kept it alive at all.

One of the earliest references to masquerading and public pranks on the island came in 1523 when King Carlos I passed a law prohibiting masks. The flamboyant custom was revived by the debauched Felipe IV in the mid-seventeenth century, and so it continued until the early part of the twentieth century, when in 1927 the church condemned men dressing as women—a key feature of the Carnival.

The result was the formation of a commission of 'even-tempered' men, sent to visit all island houses before Carnival to verify the sex of masked participants and issue licenses to be pinned on the costumes of the true women.

The carnival bounced back from this the following year, when the ordinance was largely ignored, and the celebrations even managed to continue throughout most of the repressive Francisco Franco era, thinly disguised as a winter festival—mostly because Franco had a soft spot for Tenerife. This was the only place it was allowed to continue in the whole of Spain during the Franco years.

Now, due to the Canaries' strong links with Latin America it is stronger than ever. Almost as soon as one carnival ends, preparations for the next one begin, continuing throughout the year and attracting more column inches in island newspapers than almost any other news item. During the carnival period few islanders do much work, banks and shops barely open, since no one wants to work with a hangover; and despite originally being a religious festival—a brief indulgence before the sober period of Lent—religious observance has now taken a back seat to partying. Indeed, rather than ending on Ash Wednesday, like most carnivals, proceedings now actually extend several days into Lent itself.

Celebrating Carnaval

The center of Tenerife's carnival festivities is easy to find, lining the seafront and around the city's main square the Plaza de España. During the day there's really nothing going on as the town heaves a sigh of relief and street sweepers clean up. The carnival's official events begin no earlier than late afternoon, so if you're up and about, not recovering in bed like everyone else, you'll find little to do and only a few bars and cafés open.

Most islanders are experts in pacing themselves during the carnival season, and will only slowly begin to emerge around mid-afternoon, taking their time getting ready, assembling their costumes and hanging out with friends before heading into the fray. Few turn up in the center until around midnight, so to catch the islanders at their best and the party at its wildest, you too should take your time be well rested in preparation for an all-nighter.

In their quest for winter sun, the bulk of the holidaymakers on the island will probably be oblivious to the goings-on in Santa Cruz, and those who do make the trip to the capital usually leave when the formal events have finished—certainly before the party really gets going. This doesn't mean that outsiders aren't welcome; on the contrary, the gregarious locals will be more than happy to party with you—as long as you're in fancy dress.

This varies from basic tiger and lion jumpsuits to extremely elaborate get-ups, often designed to fit in with whatever the carnival's theme is that year. Recent themes have included space exploration and piracy. Following the theme is an easy way to get inspiration for your own outfit, and you will be well provided-for by the fancy dress stores including those along Santa Cruz's main drag, the Calle del Castillo. Otherwise just improvise—and don't hold back.

The glue that holds all this partying together is made up of a number of more organized carnival events, mostly parades, which are held mostly in the late afternoon or evening. The season kicks off the selection of the Carnival Queen, held on the Wednesday before Shrove Tuesday, when various good-looking girls strut around in elaborate costumes in a bid to be elected. It takes the best part of a year for designers and dress-makers to produce many of these incredible, cumbersome, oversized structures, some of which require the assistance of trolleys to enable the wearer to move around the stage. The huge, heavy and precarious head-dresses in particular owe more to engineering than clothing design. Beyond this, though, it's a beauty pageant like any other, heavily sponsored by local businesses.

Things pick up the following Friday night, when after an opening parade of bands and floats that announces the start of the festivities proper follow what are usually the two wildest nights of the Carnival.

After the weekend, the flagship event of the official carnival is the Coso or 'Grand Procession' on Shrove Tuesday afternoon, a huge, lively cavalcade of floats, bands, dancing troupes and entertainers that march and dance their way along the dockside road, passing beside the Plaza de España for about five hours.

Again, the costumes worn by those parading (a good many of the islanders it seems) are impressively imaginative and labor-intensive designs. This is followed by fireworks after dark, which act as a starter gun for another night's partying to begin.

The following night, on Ash Wednesday, the Burial of the Sardine is one of the best-attended events. Originally a parade to mark the closing of the carnival, it has now been left stranded in the middle of the festival, and has become a tongue-in-cheek event in which many dress—or more commonly cross-dress—in mourning. Central to the occasion is a huge wood and paper sardine which is paraded, at a painfully slow pace, down the Rambla de Pulido into the center of town. The procession is accompanied by funereal music and followed by a cortege of priests, and 'widows'—mostly mustachioed men in drag—wailing miserably. A cremation, just southwest of the Plaza de España, follows, with the widows doubled over with grief and seemingly inconsolable—often more than a little drunk—until fireworks launch everyone back into party mode.

Still not put off by the onset of Lent, the carnival does not come to its climactic end until the next weekend, when some of the festival's most intense partying follows a kid's parade on the Saturday and a seniors' parade (the Piñata) on the Sunday. While these may be the end in Santa Cruz, many smaller towns around the island, not wishing to compete with (or miss out on) the capital's carnival, will wait to start their own festivities.

The Sardine

The Burial of the Sardine is probably the most irreverent and uninhibited spectacle of the entire Carnaval celebration. It announces the end of the revelry, the practical joking, and begins Lent, a period of religious observance and reflection. The Burial of the Sardine treats the church with sarcasm. It is a profoundly anti-clerical event, the people's defiance of moral authority that constrains them throughout the year.

In the annual Burial, thousands of "widows" dressed in black, mock-priests, nuns, bishops, cardinals, and even popes disconsolate with the "death" of Carnaval fall to the ground and bathe it with their tears for the loss of the freedom that has reigned during the pre-Lent celebration.

When the sardine is consumed by the flames, a clamorous wail for its demise is raised; for this bids farewell to the astonishing revels of a people which must now return to their humdrum daily order and habitual chores.

http://www.carnavaltenerife.com
http://www.promocionlaspalmas.com

PREGUNTAS

Please answer these questions on a separate piece of paper.

1. Where does the word "carnaval" originate? What does it mean?

2. What is la cuaresma and what role does it play in this holiday?

3. What practices are prohibited during la cuaresma?

4. What five things, according to the article, do people throw on each other?

5. Why do Carnaval participants have a funeral for a sardine, and why do they wail?

6. What are cenizas, how are they used, and what do they represent?

7. What activity celebrated by Mexicans is not a traditional Carnaval event?

8. Where is Tenerife, and why is this significant?

9. Who participates in the Carnaval of Tenerife?

10. How was Carnaval affected by the declaration of 1523?

11. What role did Felipe IV play in the evolution of Carnaval?

12. How was the church's policy against cross-dressing during the holiday enforced?

13. What privilege did the island of Tenerife enjoy during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco?

14. What is the number one daytime activity for Carnaval-goers?

15. According to the article, on what condition are outsiders allowed to join in the celebration?

16. How long is a Carnaval dress in the making for the annual beauty pageant?

17. Carnaval dress is not strictly a matter of fashion design, but… what? Explain why this is so.

18. What is the Coso, and what does it involve?

19. Why do you think El Entierro de la Sardina one of the best-attended events?

20. Who are the sardine's "widows" and what is their part in the parade?

21. What is a "piñata," according to the article?

22. How is the burial of the sardine an act of revenge?

23. How does the burial of the sardine characterize the church?

24. What two meanings does the word "enmascarados" have?

25. How long does the Tenerife Carnaval usually last?

26. How has Carnaval changed since its inception as a holiday?

27. What kinds of formal activities are conducted during Carnaval?

28. According to the article, when do the "real" carnaval festivities take place?

29. Why do you think Carnaval celebrants wear masks, besides the reason noted in the article?

30. What carnaval customs are also practiced in the United States?