

Germany's Famous, Fabulous & Fun

FASCHING

By Genevieve Northup

Carnival. Its name varies by German region, but everywhere the “fifth season” is an opportunity to join throngs of people, flaunt a crazy costume and have one more fabulous party before abstaining for Lent.

In much of the country, the celebrations begin on Nov. 11 at 11:11 a.m. But most of the hoopla takes place during the “crazy days,” starting with the Women’s Carnival and ending as Shrove Tuesday fades into Ash Wednesday.

The Thursday prior to Ash Wednesday is devoted to women’s empowerment and dubbed Weiberfastnacht (Women’s Carnival Night). Men, beware — while ruling the roost for the day, women have free reign to cut off your tie. Following the Women’s Carnival, a raucous weekend gets underway with costume parties, dances, concerts and more. In many cities, Rosenmontag (Rose Monday) is the grand finale, with parades and street parties interrupting the normal workweek. It’s a great reason to call in sick!

In Cologne, the proper carnival cheer is “Alaaf!” but in most other areas of Germany, you should say “Helau!”

Cologne Karneval

During the crazy days, nearly 50 parades and expositions take place in Cologne, leading up to the Rosenmontag parade. Every year, more than 100 floats and thousands of people participate in the parade. Join more than 1 million other revelers to admire the whimsical costumes and over-the-top floats. Want to know more about Europe’s biggest Carnival party? Visit the Kölner Karnevalsmuseum (Cologne Carnival Museum) to learn about the religious beliefs, music and costumes that have inspired the Rosenmontag parade since 1823 and various Carnival celebrations for hundreds of years. Plan your trip to Cologne by heading to www.koelnerkarneval.de.

Düsseldorf Karneval

In Düsseldorf, nearly 300 extravaganzas commemorate Carnival. Children and teens march through the city center on Carnival Saturday during the Jugendzug (Youth Procession). The following day, thousands of revelers wander along Königsalle in costume with beer kegs in tow. At 3 p.m. on Sunday, visit Niederkassel to cheer on locals as they race while balancing barrels in wheelbarrows. Then join the anxious crowds as they await the grand event on Rosenmontag, a parade with more than 60 floats that stretches indefinitely to provide hours of amusement. For more details: www.duesseldorf-tourismus.de/en/our-top-events/carnival or www.karneval-in-duesseldorf.de.

Mainz Fastnacht

For more than 175 years, various Carnival clubs and groups have helped transform Mainz into a citywide pre-Lenten circus. Wherever you look, you’ll see clowns, the favorite character of the festival. During the crazy days, a street carnival showcases a Fools Circus, dancing, music and refreshments. Get your share of laughs at the comedic theatrics and parodies performed at the Saalfastnacht (Hall Carnival); advance tickets are recommended. On Rosenmontag, a 4-mile-long parade zigzags through the streets, bathing the city in the traditional festive colors: blue, red, white and yellow. At the Mainz Carnival, the goal is to be as silly as possible, so have no fear about

dressing up and acting a bit absurd. Find out more at www.mainzer-fastnacht.de or www.mainzer-carneval-verein.de.

Munich Fasching

Thousands of people dress in elaborate costumes or formal attire during hundreds of Carnival dances and parties. On Carnival Sunday, take little ones to Karolinenplatz or Königsplatz for views of the boisterous parade. On Shrove Tuesday, arrive early to Viktualienmarkt to witness local women perform a variety of dance styles with impeccable synchronization, despite cumbersome costumes, during the Tanz der Marktfrauen (Dance of the Market Women). For a roaring farewell to Fasching, stroll through the street carnival erupting from Neuhauserstrasse, Kaufingerstrasse, Marienplatz and Viktualienmarkt. Also save time to enjoy the Bavarian merriment at the traditional beer halls. For more information, visit www.muenchen.de/veranstaltungen/fasching.html.

The crazy days give you the opportunity to see a new city, have fun and reuse that old Halloween costume, funny frock or colorful wig taking up space in your nonexistent German closet. If you don’t have the time or budget to travel far, look for celebrations in your local area. Wherever you end up, make sure you have a bag to catch the loot being tossed from parade participants and remember a camera to capture memories of the silly partygoers. Take life less seriously for a few days and party with the locals. *Helau!* ■

The Crazy Days 2014

Women’s Carnival: Thursday, Feb. 27

Carnival weekend: Friday-Sunday, Feb. 28-March 2

Rose Monday (Shrove Monday): March 3

Shrove Tuesday: March 4



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