Magazine

Carnival

Carnival is an annual festival celebrated in many different ways in many countries around the world. Some of the world's most famous carnivals are held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, New Orleans, USA, and Venice, Italy. Find out what happens in these and one other carnival you may not have heard of.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–j) with the vocabulary (1–10).

Vocabulary	Definition
1. ..... a parade	a. the period that begins 40 days before Easter in the Christian religion
2. ..... Lent	b. a large vehicle that carries people and decorations in a parade
3. ..... a costume	c. a man-made river
4. ..... a mask	d. soft, light things that cover a bird's body
5. ..... a ball	e. something you wear to cover your face
6. ..... a float	f. when many people go in the same direction as part of a celebration
7. ..... a fast	g. a small, coloured, round piece of plastic with a hole in it, used as jewellery
8. ..... a bead	h. special clothes worn at a festival
9. ..... a canal	i. a period of time when you eat no food or only very plain food
10..... a feather	j. a large, formal party where you dance

Carnival

What's carnival all about?

Carnival is a festival that happens over a few days, usually just before Lent, in February or March. Because traditionally many people go on a fast during Lent, giving up meat, sugar or other foods and drink, carnival is an opportunity to enjoy these treats for the last time. It is a time to celebrate and party, with music and dancing in the streets. Some people believe that carnival is actually older than the Christian period of Lent, and that it started as the Roman festival of Saturnalia.

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New Orleans

One of the most famous carnivals in the world is in New Orleans, USA. It is called Mardi Gras, which is French for 'Fat Tuesday', the day when people would traditionally eat up all the fat before starting the Lent fast. The celebration in New Orleans lasts around two weeks, with a parade every day. Groups of people, called 'krewes', dress up in special costumes and ride on decorated floats. They throw small gifts to the people watching, especially strings of beads. There are also many balls, especially masked balls. Mardi Gras is very popular with tourists, and it is estimated that well over a million people visit every year to join the celebrations.

Rio de Janeiro

The carnival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, is considered the biggest in the world, with around two million people celebrating on the streets each day. Rio Carnival is famous for its samba music and for the amazing costumes and floats. In 1984, the government decided to give the carnival a special stadium, called the Sambadrome, where people could buy tickets to go and see the parades. However, there are still plenty of street parties and parades happening all over the city.

The parades are a kind of competition and the samba 'schools', or groups, are judged on their costumes, dancing, floats and music. Some samba schools spend millions of dollars on their preparations, but it is estimated that carnival makes over $40 million from ticket sales and advertising.

Venice

Carnival in Venice is a much quieter celebration, but it is still very famous, mainly for the beautiful masks that people wear. Traditionally, the masks are made and decorated by hand, with gold, jewels and feathers. There is a competition for the most beautiful mask, and there are many masked balls and other celebrations.

In St Mark's Square, there is an open-air theatre where you can watch traditional plays, and there are also classical music concerts. Because the streets are very narrow, there are candlelit parades on boats through the canals of the city. Watching all the people dressed in masks and costumes wandering through the city makes you feel as if you have stepped back in time to the 18th century.

Binche

The carnival in Binche, Belgium, is not as famous as some of the others, but it may have the longest history. It dates back to the 14th century. Up to 1,000 men and boys, called 'Gilles', dress up in masks, costumes and wooden shoes. They also wear very tall feather hats, up to 90cm tall. The Gilles dance through the streets and throw oranges at the crowd. This can sometimes cause accidents and break windows, but it is supposed to be good luck if you are hit by an orange.

All over the world, carnival is a time to celebrate and have a good time with friends and family. Have a great carnival, if you're celebrating this year!

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Tasks

Task 1

Choose the city to answer the questions.

1. Which carnival brings in around $40 million?

   a. Binche b. New Orleans c. Rio de Janeiro d. Venice

2. Which carnival has people wearing very expensive masks?

   a. Binche b. New Orleans c. Rio de Janeiro d. Venice

3. Which carnival has a special name?

   a. Binche b. New Orleans c. Rio de Janeiro d. Venice

4. Which carnival uses a fruit as part of the celebrations?

   a. Binche b. New Orleans c. Rio de Janeiro d. Venice

5. Which carnival has the largest crowds?

   a. Binche b. New Orleans c. Rio de Janeiro d. Venice

6. Which carnival puts on plays in the main square?

   a. Binche b. New Orleans c. Rio de Janeiro d. Venice

7. Which carnival is the oldest?

   a. Binche b. New Orleans c. Rio de Janeiro d. Venice

8. Which carnival gives people watching the floats the chance to get small presents?

   a. Binche b. New Orleans c. Rio de Janeiro d. Venice

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Task 2

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. Christians do not eat meat or sugar during carnival.	True	False
2. Carnival may have started before Christianity.	True	False
3. Around two million tourists visit New Orleans for carnival each year.	True	False
4. All the parades in Rio de Janeiro take place in the Sambadrome.	True	False
5. It is difficult to have big parades on the streets of Venice.	True	False
6. People are often happy if they get hit by an orange during carnival in Binche.	True	False

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Answers

Preparation task

1. f
2. a
3. h
4. e
5. j
6. b
7. i
8. g
9. c
10. d

Task 1

1. c
2. d
3. b
4. a
5. c
6. d
7. a
8. b

Task 2

1. False
2. True
3. False
4. False
5. True
6. True

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