



MARDI GRAS CELEBRATIONS AND HISTORY



- Mardi Gras is a Christian holiday and popular cultural phenomenon that dates back thousands of years to pagan spring and fertility rites.
- Also known as Carnival, it is celebrated in many countries around the world—mainly those with large Roman Catholic populations—on the day before the religious season of Lent begins.



WHEN IS MARDI GRAS?



- Mardi Gras is traditionally celebrated on “Fat Tuesday,” the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent.
- This year, Mardi Gras fell on Tuesday, March 4, 2025. However, the Carnival season is much longer than just one day.



WHAT IS MARDI GRAS?



Mardi Gras is a tradition that dates back thousands of years to pagan celebrations of spring and fertility.

- When Christianity arrived in Rome, religious leaders decided to incorporate the popular local pagan traditions into their new faith.
- The excess and debauchery of the Mardi Gras season became a prelude to Lent, the 40 days of fasting and penance between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday.



WHAT DOES MARDI GRAS MEAN?



This 19th-century scene, illustrated in a painting now housed at the Louvre in Paris, shows several French party-goers partaking in a social dance at a carnival.

- *Mardi* is the French word for Tuesday, and *gras* means fat. In France, the day before Ash Wednesday came to be known as Mardi Gras, or “Fat Tuesday”.
- Traditionally, in the days leading up to Lent, merrymakers would binge on all the rich, fatty foods—meat, eggs, milk, lard and cheese—that remained in their homes, in anticipation of several weeks of eating only fish and different types of fasting.



FAVORITE MARDI GRAS FOODS



Hushpuppies



Steak



Jambalaya



Icecream



Cheese



Deep Fried Catfish



NEW ORLEANS MARDI GRAS



- The first American Mardi Gras took place on March 3, 1699, when French explorers Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and Sieur de Bienville landed near present-day New Orleans, Louisiana. They held a small celebration and dubbed their landing spot Point du Mardi Gras.
- In the decades that followed, New Orleans and other French settlements began marking the holiday with street parties, masked balls and lavish dinners.



NEW ORLEANS MARDI GRAS



- On Mardi Gras in 1827, a group of students donned colorful costumes and danced through the streets of New Orleans, emulating the revelry they had observed while visiting Paris.
- Ten years later, the first recorded New Orleans Mardi Gras parade took place, a tradition that continues to this day.



MARDI GRAS CUSTOMS



Mardi Gras – King Cake



One custom includes throwing beads and other trinkets.

- It's traditional during Mardi Gras to bake a cake in honor of the three kings – the King Cake.
- King Cakes are oval-shaped to symbolize the unity of faiths.
- Each cake is decorated in the traditional Mardi Gras colors:
 - Purple representing justice
 - Green representing faith
 - Gold representing power
- A small baby, symbolizing the baby Jesus, is traditionally hidden inside each King Cake.