

## Mardi Gras Overview

Mardi Gras...the mere mention of these two words convey thoughts of: raucous celebrations, beads flying through the air, ear-to-ear grins plastered on the faces of millions of revelers, and of course floats parading through the streets of New Orleans!

While these associations are accurate, this is only taking into account only a small portion of what Mardi Gras stands for and means to millions of people not just in the Bayous and Parishes of Louisiana, but across the world.

However, the first Mardi Gras in North America did not even occur under American rule but more appropriately the French. In 1704, France's King Louis XIV ordered the brothers Iberville and Bienville LeMoynes to sail from France to defend their territories, which include the areas that now represent: Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Upon arriving, the LeMoynes brothers found the mouth of a body of water, now known as the Mississippi River, and sailed upstream for a few miles until they located the perfect place to build a colony and designated the area as: Point du Mardi Gras.

From these humble beginnings a proud culture of French ancestors known as the Creole population of the Bayous began and prospered, and each year thousands of people become honorary Creoles during Mardi Gras celebrations held throughout the United States.

Mardi Gras, which in French translates to Fat Tuesday, is officially the day before Ash Wednesday. The day is also commonly referred to as Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day and can occur anytime between February 3rd and March 9th, depending on when Easter is held that particular year. But as the celebrations in America and across the world have grown larger with each passing year, Mardi Gras, has evolved from one day into week long celebrations.

There are other places in the world who take their Mardi Gras celebrations just as seriously, even if they are not as well known or publicized.

One of those celebrations is the Rio de Janeiro Carnival that is held in Brazil, each year for two weeks prior to the fasting period in the Christian calendar known as Lent. While Brazil's Carnival resembles and incorporates many of the similar aspects that define America's Mardi Gras: great music, tons of delicious and fattening foods, and parades, it is distinctively Brazilian due to the amount of Samba dancing that occurs over the two weeks.

Other noteworthy places throughout the world that hold Mardi Gras style parties around the same time as the celebrations are occurring in the United States are: Venice in Italy, Mazatlan in Mexico, and throughout many cities in Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Mardi Gras today is about various cultures coming together to celebrate the things that make them unique and uniting under the common theme of being people who like to have fun and enjoy each other and have a great time.

Hence the phrase, "Let the Good Times Roll"!

