



Mardi Gras in New Orleans



Mardi Gras has been celebrated in New Orleans since the explorer Iberville first set foot here on Mardi Gras Day 1699. In French colonial days, wealthy members of Creole society threw lavish Mardi Gras balls from Twelfth Night (Jan. 6) to Fat Tuesday Eve. In 1857, the first parade rolled through the city streets, courtesy of the Mistick Krewe of Comus. And in 1872, Rex, the king of Mardi Gras made his debut. Today, hundreds of Mardi Gras clubs (krewes) host grand balls and dozens of parades.

Along the parade route, costumed riders on sparkling papier-maché floats toss “throws” to the greedy crowd who yells, “Throw me something, mister!” Along with beads, plastic cups and stuffed toys, parade-goers beg for prized throws like Rex doubloons, Zulu coconuts, Muses shoes, Nix purses and anything that lights up. Flambeaux carriers, snazzy marching groups, and clowns and characters of all kind strut down the street to marching bands who provide the perfect soundtrack to Carnival Season. And if you’re really lucky, you might spy a Mardi Gras Indian out and about on Mardi Gras day. Their hand-sewn costumes take all year to make and are truly a sight to behold.

Because the whole point of Mardi Gras is to enjoy life’s excesses before Lent begins, Creole and Cajun dishes such as jambalaya, gumbo, and red beans and rice are a major part of the celebration. And Mardi Gras just wouldn’t be Mardi Gras without king cake, an oval pastry with a sugary icing in Mardi Gras colors of purple, green and gold. Each cake contains a small plastic baby, and the person who finds the baby must buy the next king cake.