Carnevale, also known as carnival or *mardi gras*, is celebrated in Italy and many places around the world 40 days before Easter, a final party before Ash Wednesday and the restrictions of Lent. (Quaresima)

Italy celebrates Carnevale with a huge winter festival celebrated with parades, masquerade balls ( balli in maschera), entertainment, music, and parties. Children throw confetti at each other. Pranks (sherzi) are also common during Carnevale, hence (ecco perchè) the saying *"a Carnevale ogni scherzo vale*" (anything goes at Carnevale).

History of Carnevale in Italy

Carnevale has roots in pagan festivals and traditions and as is often the case with traditional festivals was adapted to fit into the Catholic rituals. Although carnival is actually one date, in Venice and some other places in Italy the carnival celebrations and parties may begin a couple weeks before.

Masks, *maschere*, are an important part of the Carnevale festival and are sold at many shops in Venice, ranging from cheap versions to elaborate and expensive ones. People also wear elaborate costumes for the festival and there are costume or masquerade balls, both private and public.

Italy has many Carnevale celebrations, but Venice, Viareggio, and Cento hold the biggest and most elaborate festivals. Many other Italian towns hold carnival festivals, some with very unusual events.

Venice Carnevale

Venice's Carnival season starts about two weeks before the actual date of Carnevale.

Events and entertainment are held ( si svolgono) throughout Venice, with people in costumes wandering around the city.

Most hotels hold masked balls during Carnevale and may be able to provide costumes for visiting guests. Tickets may be expensive for these balls, and most require reservations.

Venice's main Carnevale events are centered around Piazza San Marco, but events are held in every sestiere*.* There are gondola and boat parades along the Grand Canal, a mask parade in St. Mark's Square and a special Carnevale for Children event in the Cannaregio district. A fireworks show in [Piazza San Marco](https://www.tripsavvy.com/saint-marks-square-1548023), which can be seen all over Venice, marks the climax of Carnevale.

Viareggio Carnevale

Viareggio on the [Tuscany coast](https://www.tripsavvy.com/versilia-coast-guide-1548199) has one of the biggest Carnevale celebrations in Italy. It's known for its giant, allegorical paper maiché floats used in parades not only on Shrove Tuesday but also the three Sundays before and two weekends following.

The final parade is held on Saturday night and is followed by a huge fireworks show.

Festivals, cultural events, concerts and masked balls take place throughout the carnival season both in Viareggio and its surrounding areas, and restaurants have special Carnevale menus.

Ivrea Carnevale Orange Battle

The town of Ivrea, in the Piedmont region, has a unique carnival celebration with medieval roots. The carnival includes a colorful parade followed by orange-throwing battles in the center of town.

The origins of the orange battle are murky ( poco chiare), but local folklore cites the story of a young peasant girl named Violetta, who rebuffed (rifiutò) the advances of a ruling tyrant ( tiranno) in either the 12th or 13th century. She decapitated him and chaos ensued , with other villagers eventually burning the castle where he lived.

During the present-day reenactment (rievocazione), one girl is chosen to play the role of Violetta, and dozens of *aranceri*(orange-throwers) representing both the tyrant and the peasants throw oranges fruit at each other. The oranges are meant to represent stones and other ancient weapons.

A parade about a month before Carnevale is followed by orange battles from the Sunday before through the Tuesday of Carnevale. The culminating event is the burning of the *scarli* (big poles, erected in the middle of each district's square, covered with dry bushes) to end the carnival season.

Carnevale in Acireale, Sicily

Acireale holds one of Sicily's most beautiful Carnevale celebrations. Flower and paper-mache allegorical floats ( carri), similar to the ones made in Acireale as far back as 1601, parade through the town's Baroque center. There are several parades during  Carnevale, as well as music, a chess tournament , children's events and a fireworks finale.

Brazilian Carnaval in Italy

Cento, in the Emilia Romagna region, is linked to the most famous Carnivale celebration in the world, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Floats are very high quality and often include items from Brazil. The winning float in the Cento parade is actually taken to Brazil for their Carnaval festivities.

Participants arrive from all over Italy to march in the parade or ride along on their motorcycles and some 30,000 pounds of candy are thrown to spectators along the parade route.

QUESTIONS

1) Do you like Carnival?

2) When is carnival celebrated?

3) What do people wear on carnival days?

4) Where are the biggest festivals?

5) Who are “Aranceri”?

6) What are the origins of the orange battle?

7) What is the Italian for Lent?