

## Carnival time: A festival for all people!



Carnival is a festival and a very old tradition full of colourful costumes, floats, masks and parties.

The word Carnival comes from Latin “carnem levare” which literally means “to eliminate meat”, in fact it precedes the beginning of Lent (forty days before Easter). In the Middle Ages, it referred to a period following Epiphany season that reached its climax before midnight on Shrove Tuesday, although the origins of this festival are ancient and they date back to the Greek and Roman civilisations.

The use of a mask and a costume was a way of being equal, eliminating all social divisions, public derisions of authorities and aristocracy were also authorized.

In Italy Carnival is celebrated everywhere from the North to the South.

The city of Fano is famous for the launch of sweets: from the carnival floats chocolates and sweets are thrown to the people in the streets.

In Viareggio, in Tuscany, craftsmen make very original floats using poor materials such as papier maché (paper mixed with glue) and their masterpieces are appreciated all over the world. Every year they usually choose a topic and use their art to communicate important messages.

The city of Venice is also famous all over the world for the events related to its Carnival and it attracts tourists who come to admire great costumes and masks. Events are organised everywhere in the city, but the centre of all happenings is St Mark’s Square. On the last Sunday and the last Tuesday of Carnival, a big wooden stage in the square hosts the ceremony of the best masked costume.

In Italy there are also a lot of traditional Carnival characters.

Arlecchino has a colourful and multi-coloured costume: a jacket, trousers and a black mask on his face. Arlecchino is a servant and he is a typical mask of Bergamo, a city in the north of Italy. Colombina is his wife or girlfriend, she is a maid and she is always related to love affairs.

Pantalone is another Italian Carnival character. He comes from Venice, he is an old man, he is also mean, stingy and grumpy.

Pulcinella is a typical character from the south of Italy, from the city of Naples, He represents vices and virtues of the middle-class man. He wears a white costume and a white hat, he is slow and clumsy but sincere and frank.

Typical Carnival sweets and cookies vary from the North to the South. You can eat delicious pastries with different shapes, cream and custard. Moving from north to south you can eat “frappe”,

“chiacchiere” and “cenci” which are very thin fried pastries or “castagnole” and “frittelle” which are small soft cakes. The names change in almost every city or region but the taste is always appetising. If you come to Italy you can’t miss the famous Carnival of Bagolino in a small medieval village in a deep valley between the province of Trento and Brescia, not far from the lake of Idro. It is one of the oldest and most famous carnival in Italy with music, dancing and costumes which dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Dancing and music are different from the other Italian traditions as they are probably influenced by Austrian traditions: this village was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of World War I.

Dancers and musicians go around the narrow streets and stop in front of friends’, relatives’ and girlfriends’ houses to perform their dance and songs, the people of the village offer them something to drink and some money for the Great Dinner, which takes place for all at the end of the Carnival time. Together with dancers and singers in this small village you meet some Carnival characters called “Maschèr”(masks) dressed up with costumes from the peasant life; they go around the village wearing wooden clogs and making fun of everyone they meet.

All the people enjoy this historical tradition and just for some days they forget problems and difficulties of everyday life.

Choose Italy to enjoy Carnival next year!



Authors: Alex Draghici and Christian Scalfi