

The Idea Behind Mardi Gras

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. Temptation (Noun) /tɛmp'teɪʃən/ a desire to do something, especially something wrong or that one should not do
Example: Desserts are a temptation I find hard to resist.
2. Fast (Verb) /fæst/ to not eat for a period of time, usually for religious or medical reasons
Example: She must fast six hours before her ultrasound.
3. Blowout (Noun) /'bləʊaʊt/ a large or excessive meal or social gathering
Example: The birthday celebrant treated us to a blowout at the luxury restaurant in town.
4. Wilderness (Noun) /'wɪldərnɪs/ a natural area where no people live
Example: Animals are roaming free in the wilderness.
5. Pagan (Adjective) /'peɪɡən/ having religious beliefs different to those of the world's major religions
Example: The famous standing stones of Stonehenge are thought to have been used for pagan rituals and ceremonies.
6. Bead (Noun) /bi:d/ a small piece of plastic, glass, etc. with a hole in it
Example: I used to make accessories such as earrings, necklaces and bracelets from beads.



Giving something up can be difficult — it's a challenge to resist temptation. And if you're going to give something up properly, you'll want to enjoy it one last time first, right? That's the idea behind Mardi Gras, the largely Roman Catholic celebration that marks the beginning of Lent, a traditional Christian time of fasting. Mardi Gras is a blowout, and a time to enjoy foods that won't be eaten until Easter. At least, historically that's been the idea.

Mardi Gras, which means "Fat Tuesday" in French, is known as Shrove Tuesday, or Pancake Day, in many English-speaking countries. It was traditionally a time to use up all the

things that wouldn't be allowed during Lent's 40 days. During this time, people would remove things like eggs, butter, meat and fish from their diets — and making pancakes was a good way to use up some of these products.

Lent represents a time that Jesus is said to have spent fasting in the wilderness. But the first Mardi Gras celebrations may actually have grown out of pagan festivals welcoming spring, or even the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia. For many nowadays, Mardi Gras isn't about religion anymore, although some still do choose something — often a sweet thing — to give up. Instead, it's often an excuse for a party — a really big one.

In New Orleans, which some call the "home" of Mardi Gras, the partying actually begins in early January. People from across the world visit the city to experience the colorful parades of what's known as Carnival season. During Carnival, people carry large torches called "flambeaux," rings of beads are thrown around people's necks, and the traditional "king cake" pastry is eaten.

But perhaps the best known Carnival happens in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, where more than a million people come to celebrate. Other popular Carnivals take place in Venice, as well as Quebec in Canada, and across Germany. And if there's one thing people won't be giving up, it's their parties.

DISCUSSION

1. What sweet foods do you think you'd have the hardest time giving up?
2. Are there any food-related festivals or celebrations where you live?
3. What are the most unusual festivals or celebrations that you know of?
4. What festivals would you like to attend abroad someday?
5. What are the biggest parties you've ever been to?