

CELEBRATIONS

CELEBRATING MARDI GRAS? HERE'S HOW THE LOCALS DO IT

No one does it quite like New Orleans.



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Mardi Gras is tomorrow, which means it's time to **break out your best outfit** and don your purple, gold and green beads. Even if you don't live in New Orleans, you can still celebrate the iconic holiday no matter where you are in the world—all you need is a little spirit and, although optional, some **delicious eats** to indulge in.

Have you ever wondered what it's like to celebrate Mardi Gras like a New Orleans local? Lucky for you, we've got an inside look into what it's *really* like to celebrate in Louisiana. Ashley Dean has lived in New Orleans, Louisiana for a little over four years, making this year's Mardi Gras her fifth as a local. Dean shares with us some of her tips and tricks for celebrating Mardi Gras like you're in New Orleans, from classic traditions to decorative ideas around the home.

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When is Mardi Gras 2024?

Mardi Gras, or 'Fat Tuesday', lands on **Tuesday, February 13** this year. It may fall on a different date every year since it comes the day before Ash Wednesday, kicking off the Lenten season, which is also different every year.

What is Mardi Gras?

Mardi Gras is the French translation for 'Fat Tuesday', also called Carnival Tuesday and Pancake Tuesday as well. The day, filled with indulgence and celebration, always comes before Ash Wednesday, which marks the season of fasting for Christians. Fat Tuesday became an official holiday in Louisiana in 1875.

Mardi Gras celebrations date back to Medieval Europe. But in New Orleans, Mardi Gras celebrations grew out of Catholicism. It is also woven in "French celebrations, African music, and the masquerade tradition," Karen Leathem, museum historian for the Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans, **tells USA TODAY**. Everything from eye masks to those colorful beads to the krewes of New Orleans putting on parades all hold this cultural significance.

The history behind Mardi Gras is fascinating but doesn't come without its serious historical context. "Mardi Gras history is long, fascinating, and sometimes ugly. Like so many parts of our past, it's tied up in racism," says Dean. "When I moved here, I read '**Lords of Misrule**' by James Gill, which gets into all of it. It was really eye-opening."

Here's how to celebrate Mardi Gras like a local

Go to a parade



Credit: Getty Images / Jupiterimages

Head to a parade if there's one near you.

When it comes to celebrating Mardi Gras, Dean says it's all about going to the parades. There are plenty of parades that move through New Orleans on Fat Tuesday led by specific krewes, which are organizations that put on parades or other carnival celebrations and are especially associated with Mardi Gras in New Orleans. You can read more details on **NOLA.com** about what parades are coming this week and next.

Even if you aren't based in New Orleans for the holiday, there may be a local parade or celebration that you can attend.

Decorate your home



Credit: Artoid Mode

Make your home more festive with Mardi Gras decor.

No matter if you're based in New Orleans or not, decorating the outside and inside of your home is a fun way to celebrate the occasion.

"I use old beads to decorate the front porch—beads as porch décor is super common," says Dean. "Other people decorate their houses kind of like you might for Christmas, except it's all purple, green, and gold"

If you don't have beads (or, they're sold out near you), you can always use garlands, flags, balloons, banners, flowers, or similar décor in green, gold, and purple colors.



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Bake or order a king cake



Credit: Getty Images / Jenniveve84

Mardi Gras calls for a king cake.

King cake is a delicious dessert associated with the Mardi Gras holiday. The cake itself is made from a blend of coffee cake and cinnamon roll with green, gold, and purple icing to represent the famous Mardi Gras colors. This cake is a staple during Mardi Gras season. "I try to have some king cake around at all times," says Dean.

As for the origin of eating king cake during Mardi Gras, the dessert has an interesting Biblical connection. Also referred to as a three kings cake, the cake's name comes from the Biblical story of three kings who bring gifts to Baby Jesus. In each king cake hides a small, plastic baby, representing Baby Jesus. Whoever gets the slice with the baby is said to have luck and prosperity—and, is tasked with bringing the next cake or throwing a party.

There are plenty of recipes online to try and bake your own king cake at home. If you'd prefer to order an authentic king cake for the celebration, **Goldbelly** will ship local New Orleans king cakes to your door. You can get two king cakes from Gambino's Bakery for \$69 (and, you'll get free shipping, too).

[Shop Goldbelly king cakes](#)

Dress up for the occasion



Credit: Getty Images / Drazen Zigic

Don gold, purple, and green for the occasion.

"One of the first things I was told about doing Mardi Gras as a local was that everyone in New Orleans has a costume closet. That's definitely an exaggeration, but the point is that costuming is a huge part of it, whether you're in a krewe or not," says Dean.

Dean herself is in a krewe—the Krewe of Red Beans, to be exact, where they make bean-decorated suits for the parade. "Think of an intricately beaded costume, but with beans," says Dean.

The background of the bean suits comes from culturally significant traditions of the Mardi Gras Indians. "There's so much to be said about [the Mardi Gras Indians], but the short story is that it's a Black New Orleans tradition rooted in honoring the Native Americans who helped people escape slavery. Their suits are stunning," says Dean.

As for what you can wear in or outside of New Orleans, Dean suggests anything "flashy and fun". Purple, green, and gold are the official colors of Mardi Gras, so you can dress up in a fun ensemble that incorporates these colors. Colorful beads are one way to dress up your look.

Another style option is the classic eye mask, which comes from the European masquerade tradition. This is a fun (and stylish) choice to add to your ensemble.



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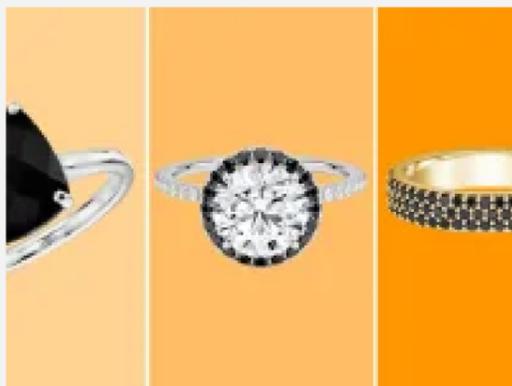
Watch Mardi Gras documentaries

If you're fascinated by the history and cultural significance behind Mardi Gras, Dean recommends watching a documentary or two during Fat Tuesday. She recommends *Buckjumping* and *All On A Mardi Gras Day*, which are available to stream on Amazon Prime and Vimeo, respectively.

To really get into the Mardi Gras spirit, you can watch **NOLA.com's live parade cam** to watch all of the action on New Orleans' most iconic streets.

[Stream Buckjumping](#)

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