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Three Hot Carnival Celebrations To Hit In February (Besides Rio's)

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Every year, cities around the world mark the days leading up to the 40-day period of Lent by holding riotous and rowdy Mardi Gras celebrations—and there's no bigger party than Rio de Janeiro's Carnival. This year, the five-day-long bash starts with an opening ceremony on Friday, Feb. 17, and ends with a roaring, all-out party on Tuesday, Feb. 21 (known as Fat Tuesday). Millions will flock to Rio's streets for band processions and parades, including the legendary Samba Parade, where Rio's acclaimed samba schools compete against each other in a fierce battle. If you can't make it all the way to Rio this year, you can still get a taste of carnival revelry (without the crowds). Check out three other Mardi Gras celebrations that are closer to home:



Carnival in Trinidad brings out colorful costumes.
Photo courtesy iStock, Roger McClean

The Caribbean. Starting on Monday, Feb. 20, crowds of partygoers will descend on southern Caribbean islands Trinidad and Tobago for a massive two-day street parade. Calypso music will fill the air as participants compete in limbo, stick-fighting and costume contests (think colorful feathers, sequins and elaborate headdresses). But the most serious competition is for the title of Calypso Monarch: hundreds of drum, clave and steel-pan musicians will vie for what is considered one of the country's greatest honors. (The contest is so popular, it's aired on television and the winners are often presented with endorsement deals, in addition to a cash prize, a car and an enormous trophy.) For a more low-key island affair, head to Jumby Bay, A Rosewood Resort, which rests on a private island off the coast of Antigua. The plush resort is hosting a Mardi Gras weekend Feb. 19-21. It kicks off with a beach party and culminates with a Caribbean-style Fat Tuesday of dinner, dancing and a live steel band on a white sand beach.



Mazatlan's International Carnival starts on Feb. 16.
Photo courtesy Mazatlan Tourism Board.

Mexico. While locals will hold Mardi Gras festivals across the country from Feb 15-21, one of the biggest parties (it's the third largest in the world behind Rio de Janeiro's and New Orleans' festivities) happens in Mazatlan, located on the Pacific Coast across from the southern tip of Baja. Starting on Feb. 16, Mazatlan's International Carnival will host more than 300,000 revelers for festivals, parades, theatrical performances and concerts, as well as the coronation of the Queen of Carnival. You can take a break from the action on the streets by heading to the alluring Casa Lucila, a boutique hotel near the downtown festivities. And if you're in town on Saturday, Feb. 18, you can watch a blowout fireworks display—a commemoration of the naval battle between the French Navy and the Mexican militia in the mid-19th century—from Casa Lucila's seaside restaurant.

New Orleans. The epicenter of New Orleans' fete is the city's infamous Bourbon Street in the French Quarter, where the bead throwing and debauchery will kick into high gear on Monday, Feb. 20, and continue until the wee hours of the morning on Wednesday, Feb. 22. You'll want to book a room now if you're planning to spend Fat Tuesday in the Big Easy. Forbes Travel Guide Four-Star **Windsor Court Hotel** offers guests a clear view of the Feb. 20 Orpheus parade, one of the city's largest. The hotel also has a new cocktail bar in the lobby (be sure to test the potent Krewe du Vieux Preflight Punch, a mix of brandy, rum, lemon, black tea and cardamom syrup). And if you think you'll need an escape from the parade route, head to the French Quarter's modern W New Orleans. And while the hotel will likely still have a party atmosphere, it's location two blocks from the all the action on Bourbon Street may just be a welcome retreat.



A float from Mazatlan's International Carnival. Photo courtesy Mazatlan Tourism Board.

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