



# With costumes, beads, music, New Orleans marks Fat Tuesday



**D**ressed in elaborate costumes, dancing to the beat of brass bands and clamoring for beads from passing floats, thousands of people gathered in the streets of New Orleans to mark the culmination of the famous Mardi Gras celebration Tuesday. The last day of parades rolled along St Charles Avenue and Canal Street, float riders throwing beads to bystanders as revelers in other parts of the city like the French Quarter and the Marigny partied in the streets in elaborate costumes. Fat Tuesday is the last day of the Carnival season before Lent, a period of spiritual renewal and penance, begins today. "It's fun. You see all the people. You see everybody dressed up, and you have a good time. I love New Orleans," said Barbara Tate, who came down from Maryland for the holiday.



#### The costumes

When it comes to Mardi Gras, anything goes for costumes. Caroline Thomas, from New Orleans, spent weeks creating her elaborate costume featuring a massive feathered headdress so striking that bystanders wanted to take photos with her. "I'm not anything specific because I think the beauty of Mardi Gras is that you don't have to be a thing. You just have to look cool," she said. "I just wanted to be my own Mardi Gras priestess." Others costumes included an man wearing a Steve Harvey mask standing with two women wearing beauty queen sashes that read "Miss Colombia" and "Miss Philippines," in homage to Harvey's blunder at the Miss Universe contest. One woman dressed as a jellyfish while others dressed as dragons.



#### The parades

The Krewe of Zulu parade is put on by the Zulu Social Aid & Pleasure Club, a historically black organization in New Orleans. Their parade dates back to roughly 1910, and is followed by the Rex Organization's parade, which dates back to 1872. Rex's history is closely tied with Mardi Gras traditions. For example, Rex's colors - purple, green and gold - have become the symbolic colors of Mardi Gras as well. The two truck parades that follow Rex mark the end of the major parades in the city until 2017.

After the parades, the street party generally moves to the French Quarter, where revelers pack Bourbon Street and the celebration gets a bit more risqué. The festivities come to an end at the stroke of midnight when a wedge of mounted police officers rides down Bourbon to clear it of revelers and declare the party over.

#### The 'throws'

Riders on the floats generally wear masks and throw beads or other specially made trinkets to people along the parade route. One especially prized "throw" is the coconuts given out by members of Zulu. The coconuts have been hollowed out, and the outside hair is removed; they're then decorated with glitter or elaborate designs. Riders in the Zulu parade also threw out small stuffed animals, specially decorated beads and hats with the words "Zulu" emblazoned in yellow.

#### The morning

Before sunrise Tuesday, about 100 people turned out at the Backstreet Cultural Museum to see the North Side Skull & Bone Gang come out. The gang is a longtime Mardi Gras tradition. Members wear costumes resembling skeletons with papier-mache masks covering their heads. They go through the neighborhood waking people up on Fat Tuesday. Dabne Whitmore came to the door in her white bathrobe after hearing the gang and its drums coming from down the street: "I was laying in my bed upstairs in the back, and I heard the drums coming and I knew it was time. ... They come and wake me up every morning for 15 years."

#### The weather

Cold. Winds gusting up to 30 mph made mid-40s temperatures feel lower. People along the parade route wore thick jackets and hats, and wrapped themselves under layers of blankets as they watched the floats roll by. Tate, from Maryland, said it was fun but a little chilly. "I was hoping it would be a bit warmer. I didn't know I needed to bring long underwear." — AP



#### The family

Despite Mardi Gras' reputation as being a raucous, adults-only party, much of the celebration is actually family-friendly. Families lined up early along the side of the streets or on the median - called the neutral ground in New Orleans - to get a good seat, often bringing ladders with specially designed seats on top for kids to sit in and catch beads or throws. Naomi Shows, from Covington, Louisiana, came to the French Quarter with her three children, their black-and-white faces painted like skeletons inspired by Dia de los Muertos, the Mexican Day of the Dead: "It's been a tradition here for so long. They grow up with it, and they love it."



Zulu rolls down St Charles Avenue toward Canal Street in the New Orleans CBD. — AP photos