

Madness and Poetry on the Riviera

By Kevin Bonnaud



Nice is as popular as Rio and Venice with its 140 plus year old carnival. The most popular winter event of the French Riviera attracts up to 1 million visitors in a two week period. A spectacular show with its own traditions.

Every February, locals and tourists walk the streets of Nice wearing costumes, dancing, throwing confetti and poking fun at celebrities and politicians. That's the spirit of the Carnival here, a pagan and Christian tradition which became popular in Europe in the Middle Ages. "This was the time of year when people could do and say whatever they wanted about their leaders, as they were wearing masks and costumes," Denis Zanon of the Nice tourism bureau told hiEurope.

The Carnival Parades

Since 1873, beautifully decorated floats have paraded night and day through the city. Designer Jean-Pierre Provigna, who created seven of this year's 17 floats always likes to watch the two hour show standing among the crowd. "I listen to the people around me to hear their reactions as the floats pass by", he says.

The corso, as locals called the parade, will take place on Massena square and around the Promenade du Pailon green pathway. The King, the Queen, and the Prince of the Carnival always lead the cortege, followed by the eagle and the ratapignata (bat), two symbols of the city.

The floats, which can reach a height of 17 meters, all tell a story. This year many themes are energy. One float has leaders pumping all the energy of the world, making a giant earth melt like a candle. The Trump float shows the new US President sitting on an oil well powering hair dryers. Another wagon makes fun of French politicians

ahead of the presidential election in France later this year.

Most floats are made out of cardboard and polyester, and the carnivaliers try to be as creative as possible in order to surprise the public. "We use fluorescent paint so the king float looks brighter. Then we have water reserves to spray into the crowd, and we make smoking chimneys", Provigna told hiEurope. It's a know-how that was passed down from generation to generation, he adds.

Big heads (puppets) and animated characters are also part of the parade. Inflatable planets will fly around the king's float, and in between the wagons, there are circus people, acrobats, street artists and dancers. Last year, a Chinese troupe played drunken men wearing traditional costumes.

Bataille des Fleurs

Massena Square is also where the flower parades known as Bataille des Fleurs will be taking place. A poetic procession of sixteen floats decorated with 3000 flowers thrown at the crowd by a group of young women, including the Carnival Queen. During each of the five parades, the young

models also toss four tons of mimosa, the emblematic flower of the French Riviera, into the crowds.

Caroline Roux creates the costumes for the models. "We choose materials that reflect the daylight, and decorate them with rhinestone, sequins and even horsehair", she told hiEurope. As a costume designer, she is never short of ideas. There are costumes made with fishing lines and shades of blue, a black and red skirt made of leather to look like oil, black orchids looking like coal flowers, a yellow costume with power outlets and a hat topped with a large light bulb.

Over the years, the carnival of Nice has earned international recognition. This spring the Chinese city of Xiamen may organize its own 'Carnival of Nice'. If these plans are carried out, the floats will be disassembled, transported in containers and reassembled in China.



TIPS

Carnaval of Nice

From February 11 to February 25

www.nicecarnaval.com