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MARDI GRAS FUN FACTS

Top Mardi Gras Must-Haves (Besides the Beads!)

You'll have friends and family come marching in from everywhere when you host a Mardi Gras celebration of your own. For a festive party at home, follow these quick tips and tricks to help plan and capture the spirit of the Big Easy – whether you're in New Orleans or New York City.

Eat, Drink and Be Merry.

The centerpiece of a Mardi Gras celebration should be the menu. Zatarain's offers authentic New Orleans-Style foods, like jambalaya, gumbo, dirty rice and red beans and rice, that will make Mardi Gras menu planning fun and easy. Depending on your guests' preferences, customize these one-pot Big Easy favorites with chicken, ham, shrimp or the quintessential New Orleans-Style sausage, andouille. Consider serving a signature Mardi Gras cocktail – the Hurricane is one of the most popular, but classic cocktails like the Sazerac are making a comeback, too.

Incorporate Traditional Colors and Cake.

Set a festive mood with shiny Mardi Gras beads in the traditional colors of purple, green and gold, representing justice (purple), faith (green) and power (gold). No celebration is complete without a traditional King Cake. Decorated with sugar sprinkles in traditional Mardi Gras colors, the dessert is baked with a tiny trinket, usually a plastic baby, inside. The person who receives the piece of cake with the baby is considered the king or queen of the party and is expected to host next year's Mardi Gras festivities.

All That Jazz (and more).

New Orleans is considered the birthplace of jazz, so be sure to play music from native son Louis Armstrong and other musical legends who hail from the Crescent City. Whether you hire a local band for a full-on performance or play CDs for background music, New Orleans has a sound all its own. Mix up the soundtrack by including Cajun and Zydeco music. A good play-list might include: jazz music by Earl King and "Mardi Gras Mambo" by the Hawketts, along with Cajun and Zydeco (Creole) music as well.

Who Was that Masked Man?

Encourage guests to wear costumes like most Mardi Gras revelers do in New Orleans. Jesters, queens and kings are favorites. Complete your guests' festive attire with wild Mardi Gras masks. Though it's technically illegal to wear a mask out in New Orleans, that law is lifted from dawn to dusk on Mardi Gras.

Fun for the Whole Family.

Mardi Gras events extend beyond the French Quarter parties and into neighborhoods across New Orleans, where families and children participate in the celebration. Decorate wagons and strollers to hold your own parade around the neighborhood and have the kids throw beads and small candy to their friends. Also, visit www.zatarains.com to download fun games, learn to make your own floats and masks and, of course, gather recipes for authentic New Orleans-Style cuisine to round out the party.

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