



Celebrate Mardi Gras with Family-Friendly Events on the Louisiana Coast

Parades, costumes, and king cake are just a few elements that mark the Mardi Gras season in Louisiana. Though New Orleans typically comes to mind as the Mardi Gras capital, parishes all across the Louisiana coast celebrate carnival season with an array of special events. But what sets Mardi Gras in coastal Louisiana apart from the New Orleans version is that the coastal celebrations radiate a truly family-friendly atmosphere, ensuring that participants of all ages can enjoy this special time of year.

Lake Charles in **Calcasieu Parish** boasts the second largest Mardi Gras in the state, with more than 60 krewes and at least 20 family-friendly events. (Each krewe represents a social club that sponsors parades as part of the Mardi Gras festivities.) Featuring the largest Mardi Gras costume display in the world, the Mardi Gras Museum of Imperial Calcasieu celebrates Southwest Louisiana traditions and showcases nearly 300 costumes from past seasons. During the Mardi Gras Children's Day, kids and families can learn about old-time Louisiana culture, participate in arts and crafts, and experience Mardi Gras music and magic. The annual Iowa Chicken Run is a highlight of the Mardi Gras celebration in the parish, as participants go around the town of Iowa collecting ingredients for a Mardi Gras gumbo. At stops along the way, activities include dancing, Zydeco music and a live chicken release. Once the ingredient event takes place on "Fat Tuesday."

Jefferson Parish, next-door neighbor to New Orleans, hosts its annual Family Gras, a three-day celebration that includes parades, costumes and free concerts. The festival, which is centered around family festivities and entertainment, features the additional highlights of a kids' activity area, a rock climbing wall, face painting, an art market and a wide variety of food vendors.

Another parade that's well known for its family atmosphere is the Grand Marais Mardi Gras Parade in **Iberia Parish**. Held on Fat Tuesday in the town of Jeanerette, the parade features floats, bands, dance groups, Mardi Gras royalty and – of course – beads. However, unlike most Mardi Gras parades, this celebration has no theme, so participants are encouraged to go with the flow. Beginning on the Friday before Mardi Gras, intense costume competitions are held each night of the five-day Grand Marais Mardi Gras. Men and women arrive decked out from head to toe and compete in such categories as ugliest, most original, and prettiest male and

female costumes. On the last night of the costume competition, the reigning king and queen are selected to ride in the parade on Fat Tuesday.

Two particularly unique Mardi Gras festivities in **St. Tammany Parish**, the northern neighbor of New Orleans, include a floating parade and a red carpet full of canines. The Krewe of Tchefuncte is a boats-only parade that cruises the Tchefuncte River in Madisonville; it's open to all boaters (registration required) and celebrates maritime life on the historic river. In the Mystic Krewe of Mardi Paws event, dogs sashay in costume along Covington's lakefront in a fun parade that supports three of the Northshore's non-profits aimed at helping kids and dogs alike.

For a full list of Mardi Gras events taking place in Louisiana's coastal parishes, visit www.visitlouisianacoast.com/mardi-gras.