

Mardi Gras Glossary

Fat Tuesday Terms

A Glossary of Mardi Gras Terms

BALL :: The annual, formal dance held by a Mardi Gras organization. The dress code is usually black tie and ball gowns for those holding invitations, and traditional costume for participating Krewe members. The function of the ball is to announce the members of the royal court and the theme for a given year. Also called a bal masque or tableau ball.

BOEUF GRAS :: French for "fatted bull". It is symbolic of the last meat eaten before the Lenten season by Catholics. The Rex parade permanently features a float paying homage to this tradition.

CAPTAIN :: The actual leader of a Krewe. Kings and queens are usually voted or appointed every year, and generally perform ceremonial duties.

CALL-OUT :: A type of invitation handed out to attendees at a Carnival Ball by a masked member of the Krewe who is requesting participation in the first round of the formal dancing.

CARNIVAL :: The festive and celebratory period of time between 12th Night (January 6th) and Lent (begins Ash Wednesday).

COURT :: The collective members of a Krewe with royal titles. They are the King, Queen, Maids, Dukes, and Pages.

DEN :: A large, open building, usually a warehouse that serves as a storage and fabrication facility for Mardi Gras floats. Some Krewes may use this location for making and storing costumes and decorations. The space can also serve as a venue for parties.

DOUBLOON :: An aluminum coin, 1.5 inches in diameter thrown to the crowds during parades. They are usually "minted" every year by each Carnival organization, with the Krewe's logo on one side and the theme for that year on the other side. Silver, gold, purple and green are the most common colors, but pink, red, blue and black can be found.

FAVOR :: A souvenir handed out at a Mardi Gras ball by Krewe members. These special items usually bear the Krewe's logo and the year issued. Examples of ball favors include gold or silver jewelry, doubloons and decorative boxes.

FLAMBEAUX :: Lighted torch held at the end of a long pole, traditionally used to illuminate night parades. Today, flambeaux carriers fulfill a ceremonial role, where parade watchers throw spare change to them as they dance in the street.

FLOAT :: The decorated vehicle, trailer or boat carrying riders in the parade.

GO-CUP :: In New Orleans, and especially during Mardi Gras, open containers of alcohol in public are tolerated, provided the drinks are held in a plastic or paper cup.

KING CAKE :: A large oval shaped pastry, similar to a coffee cake or cinnamon roll, decorated with purple, green, and gold sugar. It usually contains a small plastic baby doll hidden inside. The recipient of the piece with the baby has to bring the next king cake to the next social function.

KREWE :: A social Carnival organization whose members plan and coordinate festivities related to Mardi Gras. Some of these clubs parade in public and host formal balls, while others do not.

LUNDI GRAS :: French for Fat Monday, it precedes Fat Tuesday. It is the traditional day for the Kings of Rex and Zulu to "arrive" in New Orleans by riverboat.

MARDI GRAS INDIANS :: African-American men who carry out deep rooted and ceremonial traditions by wearing hand-made costumes of feathers and beads while parading in their neighborhood.

MASKERS :: Anyone wearing a costume, but generally referring to a costumed Krewe member who may also be a rider on a float.

NEUTRAL GROUND :: Local term for a median on divided roads. Parade goes section off an area on this grassy area with blankets, viewing ladders or ropes to claim their spot. Float riders use it to describe their location on a Mardi Gras float; they are either on the "sidewalk side" or the "neutral ground side".

SECOND LINE :: Refers to a traditional style of uninhibited street dancing following a procession with a brass band. The band is the first line, and its followers form the second line.

THROWS :: The items tossed from floats to the crowds by riders in a parade. Typical throws include beads, doubloons, plastic cups, panties, spears, and stuffed animals.

"THROW ME SOMETHING, MISTER!" :: A phrase yelled by parade spectators to the float riders in order to catch throws.