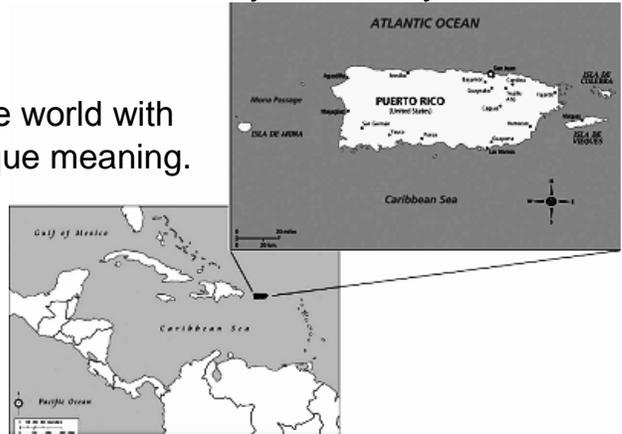


## Ponce Carnival

Carnivals have been part of different cultures for thousands of years. They have celebrated different types of events.

When the term “carnival” is used in parts of the world with a strong Roman Catholic Church, it has a unique meaning. It refers to the last days before the beginning of Lent. Lent is the forty days before Easter.

The idea of Carnival was brought to Puerto Rico by the Spanish invaders and settlers. But many of Puerto Rico’s carnival customs are unique to Puerto Rico. They celebrate the whole month of February with parades, music, and special events. Many masks and costumes come from the carnival in Ponce, a town in southern Puerto Rico where they have been celebrating Carnival for over 250 years.



The popular use of frightening masks during Carnival is probably related to the ancient idea of the fight between good and evil. However, the masks are not made to look realistic. They are made of papier-mâché, have many horns, but are painted bright colors. The costumes worn with the masks are also bright and seem a lot like clown clothing.

Yellow and red, the colors of the Spanish flag, and black and red, the colors of the town of Ponce, are most common. A person in full costume is called a *vejigante* (bay-he-GAHN-tay). His role is to annoy or even frighten people by swatting them with a *vejiga* (bay-HE-gah), which looks like an inflated balloon. Originally they made these by drying and then inflating large cow bladders. In modern times, people use real balloons with tiny stones inside so the balloons rattle when shaken.

Carnival celebrations featuring performers dressed as devils are found across Puerto Rico and the rest Latin America. The presence of these characters during Carnival is understood by many as an ancient reference to the contest between good and evil.



Carnival in Ponce is loud. The parades have marching bands, dancers and floats. The traditional music, *bomba y plena*, is heavy on drumming. The music is loud and so are the crowds of people. There are many people selling food and drinks.

### Calendar of events for the annual Ponce Carnival:

- Wednesday night - *Vejigantes* street party (**Festival de Las Máscaras**) in front of the Ponce City Hall.
- Thursday night - Parade marking the entrance of the mysterious bigheaded carnival King, known as **Rey Momo**.
- Friday night - Crowning parade and celebration of the **child carnival Queen**.
- Saturday night - Crowning parade and celebration of the **adult carnival Queen**.
- Sunday afternoon - Climatic **main parade**, complete with marching bands, spectacular floats, the carnival's honorary Marshall and President, loud revelers and boisterous crowds.
- Monday night - **Gran Baile del Carnaval**, the traditional ball at the Ponce City Hall.
- Tuesday night – **Entierro de Las Sardinas** or the “Burial of the Sardines,” which is not what it sounds like. There is no fish and no burial. This is a mock funeral which centers around a coffin with a dummy laid inside of it. The casket ends up being burned. There are lots of crazy “mourners” and more music and dancing. So he can rise again.



The Carnival in Ponce is Puerto Rico's biggest party with about 100,000 visitors each year.