



THE HISTORY OF THE VENETIAN CARNIVAL

(il Carnevale di Venezia)

The Venice Carnival is the most internationally known festival celebrated in Venice, Italy, as well as being one of the oldest. This congregation of masked people, called Venice Carnival, began in the 15th century, but the tradition can be traced back to the beginning of the 14th Century. Officially however, Carnival started in the year 1162 to celebrate a victory of the Serenissima republic in the war against Ulrico, Patriarch of Aquileia. To celebrate this victory dances take place in San Marco square.

The annual start date was December 26th and to this present day, it closes on Shrove Tuesday, which is the day before Ash Wednesday which this year falls on March 1st.

The Tradition of Wearing Masks During Carnival

Carnival masks are the hallmark of il Carnevale di Venezia. Venice's Carnival began in the 11th Century, and the wearing of masks and costumes was well established by 1436, when maskmakers or mascareri were officially recognized with their own guild.

Historically, masquerading was shared practice among Venetians, regardless of whether they were wealthy or destitute. The Venice environment, because of its crowded city conditions, didn't really allow for much seclusion or solitude; individual anonymity or privacy was difficult to come by. Thus, the "mask" became an outlet for many to depart from the mainstream life they were leading. Masks were a way of making everyone equal to each other, without regard to social status. The average citizen found that by wearing a mask they could act like a stranger, revealing their real person, which they normally kept to themselves to avoid being judged by others.

As the tradition continues today, the beautiful city of Venice serves as the gathering place for Venetians and many other visitors from around the world to take part in this exceptional event of uninhibited celebration.