

Notting Hill Carnival

Each August *Notting Hill* becomes the protagonist of one of the most particular and famous Carnivals in Europe. The members of the West Indian community, particularly the Trinidadian and Tobagonian British population, who have lived in the area since the 1950s, are the real actors of this event which attracts up to 2 million people.

History

Two main events led to the creation of this Carnival. In January 1959, in St Pancras Town Hall, Claudia Jones from Trinidad organized a Carnival as a response to the serious racial problems of that moment. The previous year the West Indians community had been attacked by the UK police forces: the riots were just the clear demonstration of the difficult relationships between people from the colonies and their colonizers. The Carnival took place inside the houses, however it was really successful.

In August 1966 the Carnival moved outdoors when it joined another great parade, the "hippie" London Free School festival which was organized by Rhaune Laslett.

Little by little the celebration improved with the addition of steel bands, costumes and dances. By 1976, the event had become definitely Caribbean, and was attended by 150,000 people.

At first riots and fights ruined the joyful atmosphere of the Carnival. Caribbean youths fought with the UK police, and the newspapers tried to cover the disorders. It was also thought to forbid this manifestation and stop these turmoils. Fortunately Prince Charles supported the event which now is generally considered very positively by the authorities as a demonstration of London's multi-cultural diversity.

[The Carnival now](#)

The Carnival mainly takes place on the narrow streets of Notting Hill, but recently it has grown so big that some areas have had to be added, for example the Savannah in Hyde Park.

The Notting Hill Carnival usually starts on Saturday with the steel band competition. Sunday is Kids' Day, and the events that take place are adapt for families with children.

On Sunday there is also the costume competition, when the best costumes are awarded with prizes.

But it is on Bank Holiday Monday that the main parade takes place.

It is very colourful and lively; very active dancers go along a parade route that is 3 miles long.

Music plays the greatest role.

[The Bands](#)

The Carnival consists mainly of four categories of bands: the first is formed by the Masquerade bands, the second by steel bands blowing along the streets, the third by the calypso dancers and the fourth is based on the sound of the SOCA, a mixture of Caribbean and Africa music.

The most attractive, or, as it is commonly said, the backbone of the Carnival parades are the Costume or 'mas' Bands. Mas is short for Masquerade. At first, during the slavery period, black people were forbidden to play musical instruments or wear costumes, except for six weeks before Easter, at the time of the European Carnival. The black slaves quickly developed the art of making elaborate and fantastic costume, satirising their situation as Africans enslaved in the Caribbean. It has been estimated that about one million hours go into the creation of these fantastic and colourful costumes.

As to the steel bands, Britain first fell in love with the contagious sounds of Steelband when the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra came to celebrate the Festival of Britain in 1951.

Steelband, as a twentieth century art-form, grew in popularity together with Calypso. The Best Steel-band on the Road are decided at the judging point at Great Western Road.

In the evening, the various participants leave the streets in procession, but people continue to celebrate their Carnival in indoor parties.