

Once upon a time, there was a **tiny little city** where every year for Carnival they hung a donkey from the bell tower...

SOLSONA CARNIVAL

This is one of the most popular celebrations in Solsona, and it has contributed the most to projecting the town's national image. The Carnival was declared a feast day of national tourist interest, and it is distinctive because of its originality. Traditional fancy dress outfits have been replaced by aprons in a myriad of colours, and "mad giants", who along with the hanging of the fake donkey and the satirical speech, are the most singular elements of the Solsona carnival celebrations.



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HISTORY

Carnival in Solsona was recovered in 1971 after several decades of inactivity. The reason for this inactivity being the situation Spain found itself in after the Civil War.

The aim of this celebration was to take ourselves less seriously and to mock the status quo. Politicians, the police, Church... or basically anyone holding a position of power was the aim of all kinds of jokes and puns.

Over the course of the years, more elements and activities were added to the original celebration. Below are some of our Carnival's most important features:

GIANTS

We can't talk about our carnival without talking about Giants. They are peculiar human-like figures (they're between 8 and 10 feet tall) that dance to the sound of *El Bufi*, which could be considered the anthem of the Solsona Carnival.

The carnival giants were made with the goal of mocking the Festa Major giants, which have been around since medieval times. For instance, the Dragon is one of the 3 oldest in Catalunya. With the Festa Major being such a solemn celebration, carnival became the perfect opportunity to joke about its seriousness.

The carnival giants' most famous feature are flexible arms, which they use to hit people (don't worry they're not going to hurt you) as they dance along the streets. It's worth mentioning that each of them has their own song and their own dance.

Most of them bear the hallmark of the Folklore giant artist Manel Casserras. After his unfortunate death, this tradition was carried on by his son first, and his granddaughter later.

Thanks to such artists, Solsona became one of the towns with the most giants per square meter. In fact, there are more than 25 not counting the Festa Major giants.

COMPARSESES

One of the main features of the Solsona Carnival are the *Comparses*. They are groups of people that wear the same uniform, which we call *Bata*. Each *Comparsa* has its own name and wears its own colors.

It is important to mention that they are an essential part of the carnival, as they help organize and participate in the vast majority of activities that take place during carnival.

People in Solsona only wear costumes to the parade and costume party. It's worth noting that they wear their *Bata* during the whole duration of the carnival.

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THE DONKEY

People from Solsona are called *matarrucs* (donkey killers). The legend tells that a hungry donkey was once hoisted with a rope tied around its neck to the top of the bell tower so it would eat the grass that was growing there. As you would imagine, the result was not what locals expected.

Having said that, if you love donkeys don't get too upset, as this is only a legend and it's not believed to be true.

Nowadays, a fake donkey is hoisted to the top of the bell tower every year. This is one of the most emblematic activities that takes place in Solsona during carnival.

PARADE

During carnival, a parade is thrown in Solsona. But make no mistake, this is no like any other parade you might see out there. The *Comparses* dress up and march for everyone to see, but its true purpose is the arrival of the *Carnestoltes* (king of carnival). In Solsona, we have a different *Carnestoltes* each year, and they happen to be a well-known person in our town.

CHILDREN'S CARNIVAL

If you have children, you don't want to miss this. In Solsona we don't forget about the youngest ones. Every year, there's one day that's fully devoted to the children. It features small versions of the *Giants*, a small version of the donkey and activities for kids.

FOOD

Although it is during the winter, people eat a lot of meals on the streets. There are even a couple of occasions where tables are set up on Major Square and people eat together. Whether it's the typical *Callos amb seques* (tripe with white beans) or just a rice dish, you will be able to sit down and enjoy the company of the locals.

Also, there are many places where you can buy takeaway food so you can continue to enjoy your carnival experience without missing a thing.

ASH WEDNESDAY

Dimecres de cendra (Ash Wednesday) is the last day of carnival. It's the day we bid farewell to our beloved *Carnestoltes*. There is a firework display and after that the Giants dance until midnight.

After seven days of celebration the carnival is over, it is now time to get some sleep and start counting down the days until next year's.

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THE PROGRAM

The week before carnival there are already some activities to get warmed up. On Saturday, we have the *Put on your bata* at midnight in Major Square. At this point I bet you're wondering what a *bata* is, am I right? Well we could say they are the official gear of the Solsona carnival. They come in all colors and designs. In fact, there are as many different *bates* as there are *comparses*, perhaps even more...

What is a *comparsa* you ask? Well, they're groups of people who hang out together during carnival and who wear the same *bata*. They are the foundation of our carnival, and they help to organize events and also participate in those they do not organize. We certainly could not understand carnival without them.

Where was I? Oh, yes, *Put on your bata*, which consists of basically putting on your *bata*. Quite the surprise huh? Next up we're going to the concert hall where the Rehearsal Night will take place. This is your first chance to see the carnival *giants*. They are human-like figures (they're between 8 and 10 feet tall) with flexible arms which they use to hit people as they dance (don't worry they don't hurt... a lot). After the rehearsal, there will be a DJs night for those who enjoy the occasional party.

The next morning, people from Solsona get up early in order to decorate the streets. Before 10 am everybody is up and ready to start decorating. The themes and motifs change from year to year and are usually an opportunity to make fun of current issues.

Around the same time, a children playground will be set up and it will include different kinds of bouncy castles and attractions that will make them have the time of their lives.

In the evening head to the concert hall and enjoy the Rehearsal, which is similar to that of the previous night. Here, the events that will take place during carnival are rehearsed. After this, an orchestra will be playing so everybody can enjoy a dance.

FAT THURSDAY

Fat Thursday is the first official day of carnival and that call for a good meal. *Callos amb seques* (tripe with beans) for everybody at Major square, and most importantly, it's free! But before that do not miss out on the **Musical Cart Contest**.

These Musical Carts are made by taking a shopping cart or a similar "vehicle" and adding speakers as well as other decorations. There are all kinds of carts each of them with a different set of features and they all compete for the honor of being the very best cart in the globe.

After all of this, there is a night of concerts ahead of you that will surely keep you dancing until dawn.

FRIDAY

In the evening, we have the **traditional boit descent**. Those of you who have never seen it will probably wonder what on earth am I talking about. Well, they are a sort of handmade non-

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motorized vehicles that are driven down Castell street while dodging obstacles and jumping over hurdles. What a display of speed and engineering, only matched by that of events of a similar nature, such as the Formula 1.

On Friday, a lot of people have dinner together in Major square. Again, there is a free meal, but you can also have your own barbeque and bring your own food. After the eating, comes the dancing, as music will be played for people's amusement. All in all, it's about sharing and socializing.

At night, we have yet another night of concerts and yet again it will last until the sun comes up.

SATURDAY

Saturday is one of the most complete days of carnival in Solsona. **There are activities from the morning until next day in the morning.**

We start off with a *carpet* contest in the morning. They are a kind of drawings made on the floor. Next up is lunch at Major square, which costs 5 euros. Do not miss out on a delicious rice dish!

At 4 pm the carnival market kicks off. We are not talking about your average market, here you will find a series of stands where you will play fun games. If you win you will get a reward, which will usually involve drinking some kind of alcoholic beverage.

At 7 pm we have **the arrival of the Carnestoltes** (king of carnival), which will take place at Torà Road. We throw a parade that is open for all *comparses* to take part in. This is the first occasion where people get dressed up during the Solsona carnival. Afterwards, the giants will escort us to Major Square, where the *Carnestoltes* and the *Matarruc d'honor* will be presented to the public. The latter is normally a person that is famous around Catalunya and who gets the opportunity to visit our carnival and to see it from a privileged perspective. The giants will each perform their own dance and we will witness the *bramada* (a famous person from Solsona comes up on stage and imitates the sound of a donkey).

Then we head to Donkey Square to hang the donkey. Don't get upset! It's not a real donkey. The legend tells that a hungry donkey was once hoisted with a rope tied around its neck to the top of the bell tower so it would eat the grass that was growing there. As you would imagine, the result was not what locals expected. The donkey choked to death and in doing so, it started to piss all over the people of Solsona.

This legend gave the people of Solsona the nickname of *matarrucs* (donkey killers). In order to mock this nickname, we hang a fake donkey by the neck every year while singing a song that talks about the legend. This has become the most emblematic out of all the Solsona Carnival events.

Then it's time to prepare ourselves for a third night of partying. First, we have a rave at Bishop Square, and then on to a third night of concerts that will keep us up until daylight. But if dancing makes you hungry do not worry as there is free soup at 8.30 in the morning at Major Square. For those of you who really enjoy dancing, the music will keep going all through breakfast.

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SUNDAY

On Sunday morning, you get **to see the giants in action** once more, and they will dance to the sound of *El bufi*, which could be considered the anthem of our carnival. At Major Square, you will see each giant doing their dance.

In the afternoon, you get to see the **contradances**, which are a typical dance that requires the participation of the public and which is performed each carnival in Solsona. Afterwards there's a Bingo where you will have the chance to win all kinds of stuff, even a trip.

MONDAY

Monday is **fully devoted to children**. During the day, all the main events of the carnival are repeated, but they are adapted to children. The parade, the donkey... There's even a small version of the giants.

In the morning, there's **the arrival of the young Carnestoltes and the parade**. The giants will take us to Major Square where each of them will do their dance. Then we will move on to Donkey Square to hang the small version of the donkey. In the afternoon, there's a costume contest for children and some **fireworks**.

At night, there are some activities for adults. There is a fun contest called Paris – Cal Dach which consists of a series of activities that will test your physical and mental abilities. As usual, it does involve drinking alcohol. An overall fun event that will take you out of your comfort zone.

Later at night, there is a concert that will feature local bands.

TUESDAY

Second to last day of carnival and you can tell that as tiredness takes over and sadness starts to creep up on people. However, it's time to pick up the pace because this isn't over yet.

At night, a big costume party takes place. For once, we take off our *bata* and we get dressed up to enjoy one of the craziest nights in our carnival.

ASH WEDNESDAY

The last day of carnival is also the most emotional. The people mourn the death of the King of Carnival. There are fireworks to say goodbye to the *Carnestoltes*.

Then, the giants come out one last time before the end of the carnival. We unhang the donkey and the giants dance until midnight.

After seven days of celebration, carnival is over, it is now time to get some sleep and start counting down the days until next year's.

For further information: solsonaturisme.com or carnavalsolsona.com