

MARDI GRAS IN NEW ORLEANS

16 Dos and Don'ts Every First-Timer Should Know



Mardi Gras in New Orleans looks wild on social media—but for locals, it's a carefully balanced mix of tradition, joy, safety, and neighborhood pride. The better you understand the how and why, the better your experience will be. Here's a longer, more local-minded guide to doing Mardi Gras right.



1. **DO** understand what Mardi Gras means to locals

To locals, Mardi Gras isn't a single day—it's a season. It's school kids waving from ladders, grandparents holding the same parade spot for decades, and friends riding floats together year after year. Treat it like a living tradition, not just an event you consume and leave behind.

2. **DON'T** assume it's just a giant street party

Yes, there's partying—but Mardi Gras is also deeply organized and family-oriented. Many parades happen during the day, and whole neighborhoods turn out with kids, dogs, and folding chairs. Acting like you're at a music festival can clash hard with local expectations.

3. **DO** earn your beads

Beads and throws aren't souvenirs—they're gifts. Locals catch them by cheering, dancing, making eye contact, and showing genuine excitement. Riders notice enthusiasm, creativity, and good vibes far more than shouting or grabbing.

4. **DON'T** buy beads (especially your first year)

Buying beads skips the heart of the tradition and adds to the city's plastic problem. Most visitors are shocked by how many throws they catch without buying anything. Let the parade provide.

5. DO arrive early and settle in

A great parade spot often requires commitment. Locals show up early, claim space politely, and stay put. Bring snacks, drinks, and patience—it's all part of the rhythm of the day.

6. DON'T expect locals to move because you arrived late

There's an unspoken rule: early arrival earns priority. Walking up five minutes before a parade and asking for the best view won't go over well. If you're late, accept a farther-back view—it's still fun.

7. DO respect barricades and parade staff

Barricades aren't suggestions. They're there to keep you safe from floats, horses, and trucks. Parade staff and police are focused on safety first—listen to them.

8. DON'T run through parades

This is one of the most dangerous mistakes visitors make. Floats are massive, drivers have blind spots, and throws distract riders. Serious injuries happen every year because someone thought they could "make it across."



9. DO bring a strong, reusable bag

Between beads, cups, plush toys, and specialty throws, your haul adds up fast. A bag keeps your hands free and your treasures from breaking or getting lost.

10. DON'T rely on pockets or flimsy purses

Beads are heavy, crowds are tight, and things fall easily. A weak bag won't survive long in Mardi Gras conditions.

11. DO plan bathroom breaks responsibly

Bathrooms are a shared resource during Mardi Gras. Bars, restaurants, and portable toilets are the acceptable options. Buying a drink or snack is the polite way to say thanks.

12. DON'T pee in public

This is one of the quickest ways to upset locals and get fined. Streets are people's neighborhoods, front yards, and workplaces—not bathrooms.

13. DO dress for comfort first
You'll walk, stand, dance, and possibly get stepped on. Closed-toe shoes, breathable layers, and weather-ready clothing matter more than fashion.

14. DON'T bring glass, valuables, or irreplaceable items
Glass is often banned, valuables get lost, and crowds are unpredictable. If you'd be devastated to lose it, leave it at home.

15. DO use plastic cups or reusable tumblers

Reusable cups are safer, lighter, and often required along parade routes. Many locals bring insulated tumblers they've used for years.

16. DON'T bring cans or bottles
Cans and bottles can injure people if dropped or thrown, and many areas prohibit them entirely. Use cups—it's safer for everyone.

Mardi Gras isn't about doing everything perfectly—it's about showing respect while joining the joy. Follow these dos and don'ts, and you won't just see Mardi Gras. You'll feel why New Orleans protects it so fiercely, celebrates it so loudly, and invites you to be part of it—just not at the expense of the city itself.