

Brazil: Closed for Partying for 5 Days

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One of the world's largest parties, Carnival, is in full swing in Brazil. Close to one million revelers - and spectators - have descended on Rio de Janeiro, the heart of Carnival festivities from across the country and from all over the world.

Carnival is a joyful time celebrated in many predominantly Roman Catholic countries that precedes Lent, the somber Christian observance leading up to Easter.

The sounds of samba drums and street parades have filled the streets of several Brazilian cities since Carnival officially opened Friday.

The largest parades come Tuesday, when dozens of the country's top parade groups send elaborately costumed - or virtually naked - dancers and musicians to perform at Rio's Sambódromo (Sambadrome).

Organized by Brazil's Samba schools, the groups spend all year preparing and rehearsing for Carnival.

Officials in Rio de Janeiro also spend all year organizing the celebration, which ends in the early hours of Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent.

This year's Carnival is expected to draw about 770,000 people. In the United States, New Orleans' Mardi Gras celebration, which draws thousands every year, is very sedate in comparison to Rio's celebration.

VOA