

- **Place:** Pasto, Nariño
- **Región:** Pacific
- **Date:** January 2 – 7, every year
- **Duration:** 6 days.



The Carnival of Blacks and Whites in Pasto /Pic. [elroquero](#)

The Carnival of Blacks and Whites, proclaimed National Cultural Heritage in 2002, is celebrated every year between January 4 and 6 in Pasto, an Andean city located in southwestern Colombia, attracting a large number of tourists from all over the country and the world.

Historically, the city of Pasto has been the crossroads and the meeting place for various peoples and colonies.

Considered the single most significant event in the country for cultural expression of different races, the Blacks and Whites Carnival is an unforgettable experience.

This is why the celebration of the carnival is an autochthonous cultural sample that perfectly expresses all the cultural influences that have been in play in the region for centuries: rituals and cultural expressions of Indian, Spanish, and African cultures.

### History of the Carnival

The origin of the carnival dates back to the ancient times of the agrarian Indian cultures of the Pasto and Quillacinga Indians, who held celebrations in honor of their moon goddess as a way of pleading protection for their crops.

Over the course of time, elements from Spanish festivities were added; and later, elements from

African feasts, thus consolidating what we call the Carnival of Blacks and Whites.

Little by little, other elements were added: make-up, talcum powder, and music. And foremost, the floats with gigantic sculptures built by artisans:

We are surrounded by art, in color, in paper and everything else that art encompasses. Returning to the carnival or being in the carnival is an experience. [...] We continue to be children and, as such, we continue playing in the carnival. / [Luces y Sombras del Carnaval](#), Germán Zaruma, in the article entitled Los artesanos de Carlos Riascos Erazo/

### Stages of the Carnival

The carnival is composed of four stages:

**Pre-carnival** It begins on December 28 with the Día del Agua (day of the water). On that day, people of all ages go out on the street to “get wet”. That day, anything goes: carfuls of people with containers filled with water, water-filled balloons, hoses, and even fire hydrants make this a special day whose sole purpose is to get soaked. Pre-carnival continues on December 30 with the famous serenade to Pasto, with the best string trios of the Andean region playing. **El Carnavalito (the little carnival)** This activity is for children between the ages of six and fourteen to show their creativity and the cultural heritage of the region. **The Castañeda Family Parade** This is a big parade and the prelude to the actual carnival that takes place on January 4. It evokes the legend according to which in 1928 a group of Pasto inhabitants invited a special family, later called the Castañeda Family, to the feasts. To commemorate the arrival of this family, a large group of people dress up in early twentieth century attire and parade in an attempt to take spectators back to the beginning of the century. This is the first day in which face paint is used. This makes for a huge party on the city streets. **El Día de los Negros (day of the blacks)** It takes place on January 5. That day, people are willing to have “pinticas” (small marks) of black face paint drawn on their clothes, face, arms, and any uncovered part of the body. Platforms are set up for orchestras to play for members of all races and social classes. **El Día de los Blancos (day of the whites)** On January 6, the rules of the game change. Instead of black or color marks, people throw white talcum powder at each other. The festivity starts with another float parade, this time with enormous figures made by artisans, and becomes a fascinating, joyous display of culture.

For additional information, we invite you to visit the festival’s official website at [www.carnavaldepasto.org](http://www.carnavaldepasto.org)

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