

- **Place:** Riosucio, Caldas
- **Region:** Café Triangle
- **Date:** January 2 -12, every other year, in odd years
- **Duration:** 10 days.



The Riosucio Carnival /Picture: [Space Monkey!](#) /

Every two years, from January 2 to 12, in odd-numbered years, the Carnaval del Diablo, or Devil's Carnival, is convoked in the town of Riosucio. It is a true specimen of tradition, where the racial mixing of the Colombian people is evident in a great recreational feast where reality is made mock of and becomes transformed by the magic exerted by dances, costumes, words, poetry, and music.

The surprising history of the Riosucio Carnival

Back in colonial times, great enmity arose between two towns: Quiebralomo Real de Minas and La Montaña. The people of the former - one of the richest mining towns of the 16th century and managed by Spaniards in service to their King – were of mixed black and white ancestry; the latter was inhabited by Indians.

After a century of confrontations and thanks to two Catholic priests who threatened the inhabitants of the two towns with eternal damnation if they continued at war, they decided to share their territory and gave rise to the present town of Riosucio.

In 1847, to seal their peace agreement, the Three Magi festivities were celebrated jointly. Soon, they would change their character, because the guardian of peace, who would always be there to remind them of their promise to the priests, was the devil. A mestizo devil who obtained his nourishment from ancestral African dances, Indian ceremonies in honor of the sun and the earth, and the traditions of the Europeans who arrived seeking liberty and found their paradise in America.

The Riosucio Carnival Devil

The Riosucio devil is an example of cultural syncretism that joins elements of the Judeo-Christian devil, but is devoid of evil significance. This devil is only the guardian of the feast. The Carnival's official website describes him very well:

A state of mind inherited from the aboriginal cultural tradition derived from the mixing of races and cultures that took place in the western part of what is today (the department of) Caldas. A spirit that inspires many things like the preparation of the ears for music and of the body for dancing. The spirit that inspires writers and poets to create verses and songs. [...] As a symbol, he is a faithful reflection of the masquerade of life. He is erected as a central figure to be burned later in playful ceremonial acts. [...] His figure changes with the passage of time and he is never an idol. He lives in the kind hearts of each inhabitant of Riosucio to make the carnival possible.

The Republic of Carnival

The Riosucio Carnival: immaterial cultural heritage of Colombia.

A sovereign government composed of a president, a mayor, and several functionaries rules the Carnival. Being an authority, it is in charge of issuing the laws that decree peace, brotherliness, and joy, and must be obeyed by locals and visitors.

Aside from the sovereign government, the Republic of Carnival has other main characters: the *matachín* (the devil's priest), the *decretero* (in charge of reciting the decrees to the public), the *voceador* (the town crier) the *abanderado* (the flag bearer), the *cuadrilleros* (members of carnival groups), and the leaders of the group of children and teens.

The Riosucio Carnival: Colombia's longest carnival



The Riosucio Carnival /Picture: [acme-](#) /

The carnival is the longest feast in Colombia and, perhaps, in the world. It begins in July, when the decree that installs the Republic of Carnival is issued. It ends in January with the *Testament*
o

(testament), the
Entierro del Calabazo
(burial of the gourd), and the
Quema del Diablo
(burning of the devil), which also mark the end of the
guarapo
or
chicha
(sugar cane liquors) spell and the end of the devil's reign until... the next Carnival.

The decrees, the convocation, the devil's entrance, the carnival groups, and the testament are a succession of events that make the Carnival a unique feast for the senses, a meeting of rivers of people that unite to enjoy a highly esthetic cultural expression.

The comparsas

Comparsas are groups of people who dress up in similar fashion or around a common theme to participate in a carnival or feast. The songs of the Riosucio *comparsas* are an important Sunday activity. In contrast to the street *comparsas* of the Rio de Janeiro Carnival, which can include 300 people, these are chamber *comparsas*, limited to 12 people, an appropriate number for a home living room.

The ingenuity, imagination, color, and luxury of the costumes make this a very special artistic act that is the result of two years of preparation in the search for the best way to preserve the traditions of a town that lives and vibrates to the devilish rhythm of its carnival.

For additional information, please visit the [Carnival's official portal](#) .