

FESTIVALS OF

Latin America



los festivales
de
Latinoamérica

Patron Saint's Day

Since every town is associated with a particular saint ,festivals occur all year long. The duration of the festival can last from 1 to 10 days, depending on the saint and the town.

Celebrated in a high-spirited way. Street parties, processions, huge dances in town's central plaza, masked figures, traveling fairs, food, alcohol, gambling, music, bullfighting, fireworks, rodeos, in some places soccer tournaments, cockfights, horse races, beauty contests. People may visit the beach all day. Indigenous peoples dress in native costumes and show traditional dances and music such as the Mayans in Guatemala.



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City and Village Festivals

Haiti – Harvest festivals exemplify the influence of voodoo on daily life

Costa Rica has fiestas civicas which are noisy events, the whole town contributes. Turnos / street fairs – to raise money for churches or other causes (includes fireworks, soccer, beauty contest, music, food, dancing, bingo, rides, lotteries, raffles, bullfighting).

Honduras has some traditional dances done at these types of festivals: guancasco and garrobo.

Guatemala – Mayan influence: Ceremony of the Eight Monkeys = New Year based on a calendar of 260 days.

Belize – kite contests, bicycle races, regattas, horse races

Mexico – Despite centuries of effort by the Spanish settlers to eradicate pagan rituals and replace them with Christian feasts, many are still celebrated. As a result, on any day of the year, a fiesta is held in at least one town in Mexico.

Peru – Has traditional Inca celebrations, such as the 'Inti Raymi' (Adoration to the Sun). People evoke sad memories of the Spanish invasion, such as the death of Inca Athualpa and of Tupac Amaru, a revolutionary during the colonial times. But there are others, such as the 'Corrida de Toros' (bull fighting) and 'Carrera de Caballos' (horse racing) that show the strong Spanish influence in the country.

City and Village Festivals

Argentina local beer and wine festivals & Nordestinos – Northeasterners celebrate with jineteados (rodeos) and folk music festivals.

Colombia – Festival of Flowers is held in August in the “City of Eternal Spring”, Medellin, with floats, parades, and music. Dancers are weighted down with baskets of orchids, carnations, roses, and many other flowers.

Paraguay – People gather for a traditional beef barbecue with dancing, music, and informal bullfighting in rural areas

Peru – festivals are a blend of Inca and Spanish culture. In mid-July the Fiesta del Carmen has replaced the old festival of “cleaning the fields of impurities”.

CHRISTMAS

Begins with celebrations at *La Misa Del Gallo* or the Mass of the Rooster when thousands go to church, even those that do not normally attend. Common is the nativity scene (nacimiento or presebre) that are often life-size. Money dictates amount of decorations and gifts. Most countries have Christmas trees.

Beginning sometime between November 26 to December 16 depending on the country: church members and villagers practice posados or “inns” taking statues of the Virgin Mary and Joseph from house to house every night being rejected until a door is finally opened.

December 15 / St. Nicholas Day

December 23, sing, pray, and eat together at every house. Sing villancicos (carols) together. Asaltos – surprise visits by groups of friends going from one house to another, calling to friends to join the party, lots of noise and drinking. Children ask for aguinaldo (or small gift) .

December 24 / “La noche buena”: everyone attends Mass. Drink, dance, open presents, eat foods tamales and turkey. Children receive their gifts Nino Dios.

midnight



CHRISTMAS

Dominicans – Christmas trees are actually branches painted green or white that are decorated. A huge at home party on Christmas Eve until the early morning. Some children receive gifts from el Nino Jesus others from Santa Claus.

Honduras – Christmas Eve everyone visits relatives until midnight when everyone goes outside to wish their neighbors Merry Christmas. Their Christmas tree has gifts under it made by one another especially for children.

Nicaragua – Poor children may not receive a gift from their parents or “the God Child” but will receive a gift from their godparents even if the godparents are not able to provide a gift for their own children.

Guatemala – Less important than Semana Santa due to Mayan fertility rites during the spring. The only reenactment of the birth of Christ is looking for las posadas (lodging) over a span of 9 evenings leading up to December 25. Not commercialized, not many gifts, they are too poor.



CHRISTMAS

Belize – Garifuna perform the John Canoe Dance. It has specific roles for the male dancers. There is a king who mimics the arrogant walk of a European slave-owner to make people laugh, a clown, & several boys dressed as pregnant women. Drummers & female singers accompany the dancers, who wear masks with mustaches, costumes, & decorative headdresses in mimicry of the finery of the colonial European masters. The dancers move from house to house for gifts of candy, rum, & money.

Mexico – combination of Spanish and U.S. traditions and customs. Some people give gifts on Christmas Day like the U.S. tradition. For Christmas parties, a special doughnut-shaped cake is baked with a small doll inside. The guest who receives the slice of cake containing the doll must give a feast on February 2nd.

Argentina - During the month of December they drink iced beverages and stay in air-conditioned spaces to help keep cool. In some homes evergreen trees are decorated with cotton to simulate the snow found on the trees in the forests of the Northern Hemisphere. Fireworks after midnight.

Costa Ricans have a fondness for all the commercial glitz and glitter. In Costa Rica children believe their gifts are sent through the the Christ Child's messenger, Santa Claus. Adults in Costa Rica buy tickets in a lottery called the *gordo*.



CHRISTMAS

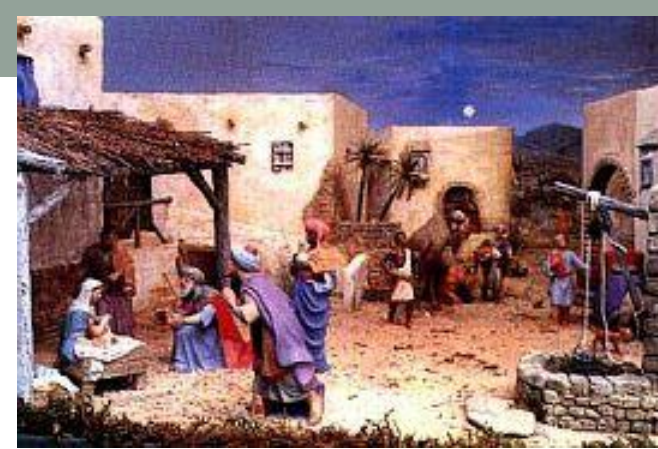
Chile's gift-bringer is called **Viejo Pascuero**, or Old Man Christmas. In some areas, he strongly resembles Santa Claus in a red and white outfit and likewise comes in a sleigh drawn by reindeer. However, as chimneys are less than roomy in this warm climate, he contents himself with climbing in a window. In other areas, Viejo Pascuero is seen as a local rancher and is often in the company of a llama. Prior to Christmas, Catholics observe a novena or nine day period of prayer and spiritual preparation. **Pan de Pasqua**, a Christmas bread filled with candied fruit is served. After the meal, presents are exchanged and the children are put to bed while the adults continue to celebrate.



Colombia - Starts on December 7th when families light candles in honor of the Virgin Mary. It is celebrated with a display of lights as each home will light approximately 100 candles on the curb and sidewalk area. City streets and parks are illuminated with large Christmas lights as well. The Christmas tree is decorated with lights and bowls. Everyone waits until midnight to wish each other Merry Christmas and to exchange gifts, which is the more traditional time than Jan 6th.

CHRISTMAS

Ecuador - Colorful processions take place on Christmas Day as the people who live in the mountains dress in their finest clothes and ride brightly arrayed llamas down to the ranches of their employers. The ranch will have a presebre (manger scene) and the guests will bring gifts of fruit and produce to lay before the image of the Christ Child. Children often make speeches to the Holy Infant, asking for blessings upon their family and their livestock. A huge outdoor fiesta will take place (it's summertime in December in Ecuador) with much singing and dancing. The ranch owners will distribute Christmas gifts to all the employees and their families.



Paraguay – deeply religious

Uruguay - Besides the Christmas tree, Santa Claus, the decorations, the gift-giving and the traditional food, the sense of togetherness and community is present. Dinner starts late so as to finish at around midnight when everybody toasts with champagne, wishing one another "Feliz Navidad", Merry Christmas. Most people make place at their dinner table for someone who may not be as fortunate to be with his family. We consider the spirit of Christmas to be about sharing and love. Also, on Christmas Eve, at midnight, people do fireworks to celebrate the beginning of Christmas. On Christmas Day, families get together for lunch and believers go to church.

CHRISTMAS

Brazil - a mix of people from many parts of the world, and as a former Portuguese colony, they have many Christmas customs which originate from this heritage. Papai Noel (Father Noel) is the gift-bringer. According to legend, he lives in Greenland. The idea of this Santa-type character was imported from North America in the 50's. It only become popular due to the commercial appeal in the late 60's and 70's. There is no explanation or longer tradition about him. When Papai Noel arrives in Brazil, he usually wears silk clothing due to the summer heat. There is a very common tradition among friends and families, called *amigo secreto* (secret friend). At the beginning of December, participants in the game write their name on a piece of paper. Each participant takes a paper (but does not reveal the name of the person on it). During the month there are exchanges of correspondence among the participants who use *apelidos* (fake names). On Christmas, family and friends gather to reveal their secret friends and offer them a special gift. Decorations include fresh flowers picked from the garden. Huge Christmas "trees" of electric lights can be seen against the night skies in major cities throughout the season. Fireworks displays go off to welcome the new year. Like Brazil's other Christmas traditions, the music associated with Christmas is mostly imported.



CHRISTMAS

Haiti – children believe if they have been bad Pere Fouettard will leave a whip that their parents will use to beat them. Months before Christmas, children work on their fanal. Cardboard strips are glued together in the shape of a house or a church. A design is drawn in pencil on the cardboard and then it is punched out with a nail. Colored paper is pasted on the inside, a lighted candle or lamp is put inside. On Christmas Eve the children carry their fanal in a procession around the streets of the town. At home the children place the fanal in the window for all to see. Only rich families have Christmas trees. A common sight is the decorated tonnelle in rural areas. People hang gourds and strips of colored paper on the tonnelle to give it a festive atmosphere.

Ecuador – Pase del Niño: The indigenous group the Saragureños have a statue of the Christ child in every community. The people carry the statue in a procession from the main church to the house of the “godparent”. Musicians with violins and drums lead the procession, and dancers dress as devils, bears, and fierce Native people whose job it is to guard the Christ child. Once in the home, the statue is placed on an altar decorated with flowers and vegetables. Everyone then takes part in a huge Christmas meal.

Día de LOS Reyes

Three Kings Day / Epiphany (January 6) - Traditional time for giving gifts. Children fill small boxes with grass for the King's horses and parents replace the grass with gifts. Also parents exchange gifts with people with whom they have a compadrazgo relationship. Decorations are taken down.

Dominicans – children sometimes receive more gifts from visiting relatives

Honduras – Act out the story of Jesus when he was 12 years old and went to Jerusalem alone.

Mexico – Mexican boys play the part of the three kings and wear fake beards, crowns, and long robes and sit in the plazas of towns where children go to have their pictures taken.

Argentina - On the eve of January 6th, children in Argentina place their shoes underneath the Christmas tree or beside their beds. They leave hay and water outside the house so the horses of the Magi who bring them their gifts will have a meal as they journey toward the Christ Child in Bethlehem.



Día de LOS Reyes

Three Kings Day / Epiphany

Venezuela - In the Andean region of Táchira, Mérida and Trujillo, the celebration called *La Paradura del Niño* is focused on Jesus as a child. It is celebrated around the 6th of January. It is a procession in which the baby in the manger is placed on a large handkerchief and each corner is held by a person who hold a candle in his hands. The baby is paraded around the town from house to house, and a drink is offered to the people who carry him. The people in the *niño's* (baby's) procession pray for him and for themselves.

New Year's Day

New Year's Day Catholics attend mass. Parades, piñatas.

Costa Rica - Week long celebration between Christmas and New Year's Day.
*Horse shows and bullfights. A huge party on New Year's eve with eating, drinking and dancing.

Honduras – everyone makes new clothes for New Year's Day and wears them to Mass on New Year's Eve. At midnight anyone awake goes outside to wish all their neighbors a happy new year.

Puerto Rico - It can be melancholy filled with hugging and crying as people ask pardon of their loved ones for the sins of the past year and promise to behave better in the coming year.

Mexico – Past: it was similar to the U.S. Thanksgiving day (quiet family affairs).
Present: like New Year's celebrations in the U.S. with parties and festivities.

Uruguay - Families get together for dinner and at midnight people toast with champagne and all wish one another "Feliz Año Nuevo". There are fireworks. After midnight, people go out in the street and say hi to all the neighbors, wishing them a good year. It is summer in Uruguay, people celebrate outdoors. Many people go out and party at friends' houses or dance in the discos until the early morning hours. Many discos even serve breakfast!

New Year's Day

Haiti – also their Independence Day. Everyone in the family puts on a new set of clothes and children receive gifts from their godparents.

Brazil – Every New Year's Eve hundreds of followers of the Afro-Brazilian religions flock to Copacabana Beach to celebrate the Festival of Yemanjá, goddess of the sea. As the sun sets, women and men dressed in pale clothes, the women with full-skirted dresses, gather around bonfires and sand altars lit with many candles to sing and dance to the beat of drums. The climax comes at midnight when they rush to the water's edge to throw gifts of flowers, mirrors, combs, and jewelry into the sea in honor of the goddess, hoping that she will bless them with a good year to come. If the gifts are returned to the water's edge, the people know they have been rejected, but if the gifts float out to sea, all will be well.

Maypole

Held along the Caribbean Coast it was brought from Nicaragua.

Participants decorate a tree with gifts, candies, sweets, and a bottle of alcohol. Everyone dances around the tree, boys climb the tree and take down the items. Everyone enjoys the gifts.

Participants decorate a slender post, attach ribbons to the top, someone takes the end of each ribbon. Then they dance around the pole in a special way, braiding the ribbons as they go.

A pole is covered with a greasy substance, this is a challenge for people to try to climb it to reach the prize money at the top. Then singing and dancing.

CARNAVAL

Originated in medieval Europe as the final celebration of feasting and merrymaking before Lent.

Spanish and West African traditions merged – West African slaves took advantage of the 4-day Spanish holiday to revel in their freedom and turned it into an elaborate celebration.

Starts 4 days before Ash Wednesday and is a lot like Mardi-Gras

A time to drink, eat, and party in excess in anticipation of Lent. Men wear a papier-mache mask of several colors, a black vest over a white shirt, black pants with ribbons tied in a criss-cross fashion around the calf, an orange or red sash draped across the torso, and a colorful, full skirt made of strips of fabric resembling a man's tie. Women wear pollera de gala or deluxe pollera, complete with elaborate headpieces and jewelry made of gold and pearls.

Dominicans – African influences embellish the celebration with masks and costumes. A character, diablo cojuelo, lashes out at bystanders with inflated cow bladders to purge them of their sins, this devil has been traced back to medieval Europe. A huge parade. The day coincides with their Independence Day.

CARNIVAL

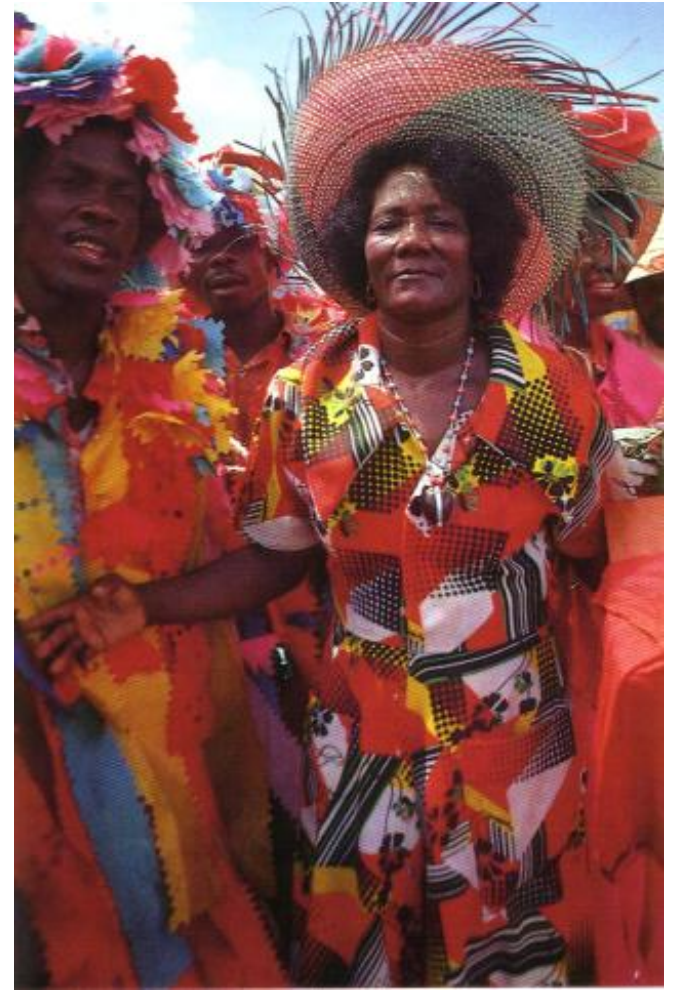
Nicaragua – Festival of Disguises: People dress up in elaborate costumes to attend balls, banquets, and parades, and to listen to speeches. It is a chance for people who do not agree with popular ideas and values to speak out about their beliefs, to dress and act as they please, and to break social rules without getting into trouble.

Venezuela - Existed in Venezuela since the colonial period. It is taken more seriously in the coastal towns and other provinces. It is known for its "devils." Masks are worn by these "devils" who are very impulsive during the festivities.

Haiti – Mardi Gras, begins on January 6 and ends on Mardi Gras (Shrove Tuesday). Masks! Every Sunday between Jan 6 and Lent there are procession in the streets with bands and singing. Closer to Lent there are parades, wealthy families have fancy dress balls. Some towns elect a King and Queen of the Carnival. Young boys run around in masks and costumes, blowing whistles, they stop passers-by and offer them a look inside their lamayote (a box containing a pet animal or “monster” usually a lizard, a mouse, or a bug) for a few cents. Traditionally costumes were burnt on the last day of Carnival, now only the rich may do so.

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CARNAVAL

Belize – Celebrated with games in which people throw flour and talc on one another and paint each other with lipstick or paint. It is becoming more organized, with competing groups of musicians and dancers, similar to the famous ones in Brazil, Trinidad, and Tobago.



CARNAVAL

Bolivia – Carnaval is celebrated most voraciously in the mining town of Oruro. It features the diablada, or “devils’ dance,” performed in honor of the Virgin of the Socavon, the patroness of miners. In the pageant, Lucifer and his devils are dressed in costumes with grotesque masks with protruding eyes and horns intertwined with serpents. Lucifer’s woman and her companions wear bright red masks, wigs, and dresses, while bears and condors which are hug Andean vultures, are made of feather and fur. At one time only miners took part in the festivities but today dancers arrive from all over the country. Brass bands accompany each group of dancers. The procession makes its way through the streets for many hours until it reaches the shrine of the Virgin, where a mass is held in her honor.

Brazil, Rio de Janeiro – World renowned! Spectacular processions, main parade involves thousands of dancers and an audience of almost 200,000 in the Carnaval stadium (Passarela do Samba). Everyone from all backgrounds take part. The parade is a spectacle and a competition between various samba schools and clubs.

Colombia – people begin preparations just after Christmas to perfect the ritual dances, make costumes, masks, and fancy outfits. The carnabal lasts for four days, with parades, floats, and beauty contests

Lent

It is observed for 40 days before Easter Sunday. During this time people remember the sacrifice through crucifixion of Jesus through fasting and penitence. They give up eating meat and other favorite foods and beverages.

Bolivia: people gather to celebrate the fiesta of Copacabana, a small village on the shore of Lake Titicaca, on Good Friday thousands of people climb the Hill of Calvary above the village.

SEMANA SANTA / HOLY WEEK

Begins the week before Easter with Palm Sunday

Grand celebrations within the Catholic Church

EI

Salvador: All stages of Christ's crucifixion and ascent into heaven are played out with dramatic ritual and elaborate celebration.

Palm Sunday – the day representing Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is celebrated by walking to Mass bearing flowers and palm branches. In some towns the streets are carpeted with flowers and lined with pictures of the Virgin Mary and Jesus.

The Last Supper – observed at Mass when the priest washes the feet of 12 men, just as the Bible says Jesus did of his disciples.

During the last part of the week people symbolically mourn the death of Jesus by giving up some personal comfort or luxury.

Good Friday – The tone of the day is serious. A group of people carry a cross and a life-size image of Jesus through town, while singing songs of his suffering.

When the procession arrives at the church it is met by four more people carrying an image of Jesus nailed to the cross. The image of Jesus is taken down from the cross at three o'clock in the afternoon. People wrap the image in white sheets and keep a candlelight vigil throughout the night at the church. Children are not supposed to run, and generally do not play, because Judas ran after he betrayed Christ. People do not travel out of respect for Jesus' journey to Calvary.

SEMANA SANTA / HOLY WEEK

El Salvador: Easter Saturday –People relax, sleep late, pack a lunch and spend the afternoon at the ocean or nearest river. Evening time they attend Mass. Outside the church, they circle around a bonfire, the priest uses the flames to light a candle, which in turn is used to light all the parishioners' candles. Then they enter the church in a lighted procession, symbolizing Christ before his resurrection from the dead.

Easter Sunday - Known as Pascua. The somber tone of the week ends on this day. People celebrate by marching in a procession, carrying the image of Jesus. They receive a blessing from the priest with holy water.

The Easter season begins on Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent.



SEMANA SANTA / HOLY WEEK

Costa Rica has become secularized and many view it as a time for relaxation and having fun. Less businesses close, fewer people participate in religious processions, many urban residents leave town for a vacation. Small towns and villages still continue to observe the week with elaborate procession and other Ticos travel to such places for the experience. Good Friday is practiced without the solemnity, they play practical jokes. They call it Judas Day and have adopted the tradition from the Miskitu Indians of Nicaragua. A favorite trick is to take an item such as a chair, washtub or chamber pot off someone's veranda, then bring it to the center of town and leave it under an image of Judas. Under much embarrassment victims must retrieve their own items or sometimes pay children to do it.

Honduras – Lots of acting of different stages of the life of Jesus. Stations of the Cross to pray at, and later have actors at the stations.

Nicaragua – their dry season, baseball playoffs are held during this time annually



SEMANA SANTA / HOLY WEEK

Guatemala – mock dramas: Apostles run into the woods and a hunt is organized to go after them and bring them back to town. Judas is a scarecrow that is subjected to mocking and insults before being put on trial and burned for his act of betrayal. Sometimes the scarecrow is dragged through the streets on a rope attached to a donkey.

Belize – On Holy Saturday the Cross Country Classic is held (bicycle race). They have an official four day national holiday around Easter.

Dominicans – Are not nearly as religious in their celebrations as in the past. Before they believed that going to the beach during this time would turn them into a fish. Now they see it as an opportunity to go to the beach for a vacation.

Colombia – actors wear turquoise robes and throw stones, kick and beat at the door of a church until they are let inside



SEMANA SANTA / HOLY WEEK

Chile – a festival called Domingo de Cuasimodo takes place. Originated in the 19th century, when priests & others were being robbed by bandits who still supported the Spanish crown. Huasos the Chilean cowboys, came to the rescue and, in their brightly colored ponchos and silver spurs, accompanied the priests, holding an image of Christ high and daring the thieves to attack. Today these events are celebrated with specially decorated carriages carrying priests, accompanied by horsemen in finest huaso dress and horses draped with beautiful capes like those worn by horse in medieval times.

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Cinco De Mayo

Mexicans and Mexican Americans celebrate the battle that was fought and won by Mexico in Puebla.

19th century Mexico had fought expensive wars and the president Benito Juarez announced that they were unable to pay back the money they had borrowed from France, Spain, and England to fight these wars for two years. He wanted to rebuild the country instead. The countries sent soldiers to get the money back, only France (Napoleon III) continued the fight to make Mexico part of the French Empire.

General Ignacio Zaragoza and a small, poorly trained army defeated the French at the Battle of Puebla, because it rained on May 5, 1862 and the hills became too slippery for the French to climb, their weapons got stuck in the mud, their gunpowder became too wet to fire. Three times the French tried, and the Mexicans fought them off to become the victors. France came back and did takeover Mexico for three years placing Maximilian Hapsburg in power. With help from the U.S. and Abraham Lincoln Mexico and Benito Juarez took the country back on June 5, 1867.

People show their pride by wearing the colors of the flag: red, green and white. Singing, dancing, eating, a parade, reenactments of the battle are all a part of the celebration.

Mariachi BANDS

They play Mexican folk songs (corridos) on instruments such as the guitarron a large bodied six-stringed guitar that plays low notes, a vihuela a small type of guitar that plays high notes, harps, trumpets, violins and guitars.

The band members are called mariachis. They can have from 3 to 12 or more members. An average is 6 to 8 people.

The corridos tell stories of battles, events from history, love, death, war, everyday life, some are funny.

Dress like charros (Mexican cowboys). They wear wide brimmed hats, boots, short jackets, big ties, broad belts, shiny metal buttons down the sides of their dark pants.

Mariachi is a Nahuatl Indian word that means musician.

**Dances:* Each region has a different costume. Dancers from Jalisco wear full, ruffled skirts to look like flowers. Dancers from Guerrero wear white costumes and twirl a white handkerchief when they dance.

ALL SAINTS Day NOV 1 & ALL SOULS Day NOV 2

Day of the Dead

Originated in Europe in the ninth century and was introduced in Mexico by the Spaniards. It is blended with Aztec beliefs concerning death and departed spirits.

People carry flowers to the cemeteries and mausoleums and decorate the graves of their departed family members



ALL SAINTS Day NOV 1 & ALL SOULS Day NOV 2

Day of the Dead

Guatemala – truly celebrated. They construct huge paper kites to be released on Nov 2 as a way of encouraging the release of dead souls suffering in purgatory. The kites may be as big as 20 feet across. Also they have famous horse races.



Day of the Dead

Mexico – important for the religious and Indians. Weeks before the event, markets and bakeries sell special breads baked in human form, skull-shaped sweets, toy coffins, and papier-mâché skeletons. Flower markets sell marigolds, which in Aztec times were offered to the dead. On October 31, villagers await the muertitos chicos (souls of dead children). Toy-shaped cakes, hot chocolate, and honey are offered. Adult souls are believed to return the following night. Families prepare traditional feasts for their arrival. The dead are believed to eat the spirit of the food. Everyone celebrates the next day by eating the offered food. An all-night candlelight vigil is kept in the town cemetery the night the souls are expected to arrive. Families gather on the graves of their departed to keep them company on their annual return. * Bolivia celebrates much the same.



Day of the Dead

Shrines



Haiti



Mexico

NATIONAL & CIVIC HOLIDAYS

Cuba: Since the revolution in 1959 their holidays center around important events in the countries history. Fidel Castro discourages any celebration for Christmas. The Carnival has not been in practice since 1990 because the country is too poor. Three Kings Day is gone and if gifts are given it is now done on July 26 during the 3 days of remembering the National Rebellion. Holy Week and Easter have been renamed Playa Giron Week and focuses on mass voluntary labor.

Other Countries: Independence day generally falls in September. They celebrate with large parades, dancing, singing, eating, and a grand festival. The children



Chile – rodeos, temporary dance halls, bands play military music, booths are stacked with food and chicha, fermented grape juice. All ages are obsessed with flying kites.



NATIONAL & CIVIC HOLIDAYS

Independence Day

Emancipation Day

Constitution Day

Discovery (of the country) Day

Labor Day

Columbus Day



*All photos are of Costa Rica's Independence Day

SUBMITTED BY

Samntha, Brazil