

DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

Mexican Day of the Dead is an interesting holiday celebrated in the cities and countryside in central and southern Mexico during the chilly days of November 1 & 2. Even though this coincides with the Catholic holiday called All Soul's & All Saint's Day, the indigenous people have combined this with their own ancient beliefs of honoring their deceased loved ones.

They believe that the gates of heaven are opened at midnight on October 31 and the spirits of all deceased children (*angelitos*) are allowed to reunite with their families. On November 2, the spirits of the adults come down to enjoy the festivities that are prepared for them.

In most Indian villages, beautiful altars (*ofrendas*) are made in each home. They are decorated with candles, flowers (wild marigolds called *cempasuchil* & bright red cock's combs) mounds of fruit, peanuts, plates of turkey mole, stacks of *tortillas* and big loaves of bread called *pan de muerto*. The weary spirits need lots of food, bottles of soda, hot cocoa and water. Toys and candies are left for the *angelitos* and on Nov. 2, cigarettes and shots of *mezcal* are offered to the adult spirits. Little folk art skeletons and sugar skulls, purchased at open-air markets, provide the final touches..

Day of the Dead is a very expensive holiday! Many spend over two month's income to honor their dead relatives. They believe that happy spirits will provide protection, good luck and wisdom to their families.

On the afternoon of Nov. 2, the festivities are taken to the cemetery. People clean tombs, play cards, listen to the village band and reminisce about their loved ones. This tradition keeps the village close. Day of the Dead is becoming very popular in the U.S.~ perhaps because we don't have a way to celebrate and honor our dead, or maybe it's because of our fascination with its mysticism.

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