



Fiesta: Days of the Dead & Other Mexican Festivals

Chloë Sayer

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Mexico has a vast range of annual festivals; several commemorate national events, but most are religious or spiritual in inspiration. After the Spanish Conquest of 1521, Roman Catholic teachings fused with the beliefs of native civilizations, so that even today the popular arts and crafts draw upon the Church as a rich source of imagery and a catalyst for creativity. Fiestas are often lavish and extremely costly. With extensive preparations, they commemorate local saints' days and religious holidays such as Christmas, Carnival, and Holy Week.

Many festivals are dominated by masked dances, with the devil, death, angels, and the deadly sins doing battle at fiesta time in countless village squares. During the Days of the Dead (All Saints' and All Souls' days, November 1 and 2), the deceased are thought to visit friends and relatives on earth. Families welcome the returning souls with flowers, incense, candles, and feasting. On December 12, Mexicans everywhere honor Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico and an important symbol of national unity.

Drawing on her extensive travels in Mexico and the wide-ranging collections of the British Museum, Chloë Sayer gives a contemporary context to these colorful annual celebrations and shows how these festivities are uniquely Mexican. Vivid full-color images of an amazing array of objects, plus photos of people making and using them to celebrate an intriguing variety of local festivities, illustrate the text.

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