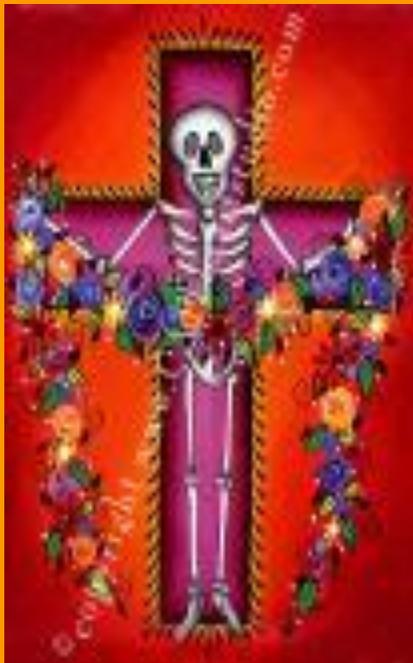




# Día de los Muertos



The Mexican fiesta of *Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead, takes place over the first two days of November.



It is a Catholic Christian ritual intermixed with folk culture and going to mass is an essential aspect of this celebration.

Spanish conquistadors introduced All Saints' Day (*Día de Todos los Santos*) and All Souls' Day (*Día de Todos las almas*) to Mexico.

The conquered Native Americans took the opportunity to incorporate their own traditions for honoring the dead into these two days. The resulting holiday is a unique mixture of the two cultures.



The fiesta includes spending time in cemeteries, making shrines to the dead, and displaying artistic skulls and skeletons.

However, the occasion is festive, rather than morbid. Death isn't seen as the end of one's life in Mexico but as a natural part of the life cycle. The day of the dead fiesta is not only a chance to remember relatives and friends that have died but to celebrate their life and celebrate being alive.

It is about Love not Fear and the fiesta incorporates lots of music, laughter and dancing.

*Día de los Muertos* is not the Mexican version of Halloween. Mexicans have celebrated the Day of the Dead since the year 1800 B.C !

While Day of the Dead and Halloween are both associated with All Saints' and All Souls' Days, their tones couldn't be more different. Halloween's images of skeletons and spirits emphasise the spooky, gruesome, and macabre. On Day of the Dead, the focus isn't on threatening spooks and ghouls, it's on celebrating with one's family—alive and dead—and remembering those who are no longer alive. It's on seeing death as another stage following life, not something to be faced with fear.

It is not a "strange" ritual. It is very similar to going to a grave and leaving flowers or stuffed animals, lighting a candle to remember the deceased.



It is not a sad ritual. It's a day of happiness because they are remembering loved ones.

*Ofrendas* are an essential part of the Day of the Dead celebrations. The word *ofrenda* means offering in Spanish.



The *ofrenda* is set on a table, covered with a fine tablecloth, preferably white. Then the *papel picado*, cut tissue paper, is set over the cloth.



Food is specially prepared for the souls. Their preferred dishes are cooked for them and placed on the altar along with items representing the four elements: candles for fire, drinks for water, fruit for earth, and fluttering tissue-paper decorations for wind.



Sometimes a cross is made with petals of the *cempasúchil* flower

Incense, *Copal*, is burned and is thought to elevate prayers to God.



The major feature of Day of the Dead decorations is skeletons ( *esqueletos* or *calacas*). Skeletons are everywhere, from tissue-paper scenes to tiny plastic toys, from cardboard puppets to ceramic sculptures, from posters to paper mache.



This skeleton theme extends to the day's food and treats. The Day of the Dead feast typically includes a special "bread of the dead, *pan de muerto*. It is often decorated with strips of dough resembling bones.



Also common are skulls and skeletons made of sugar or candy. Some school pupils get sugar skulls made to resemble themselves, or with their names inscribed on them.



# Vocabulario

**Iluminación** The ceremony that takes place in the graveyard, when hundreds of candles are lighted to guide the souls.

**Altar de Muertos** The offering that the family sets for their special relatives.

**Calavera** Sugar skulls prepared for the Day of the Dead celebrations.

**Ofrenda** Offerings set out for the returning souls.

**Pan de Muerto** Sweetbread made for the Festival.

**Cempasúchil** Day of the Dead flower - yellow marigold.

**Papel Picado** Cut tissue paper for decorations.

**Golletes** A doughnut shaped bread, glazed with pink coloured sugar which symbolizes the cycle of life and death.

**Día de Todos los Santos** All Saints' Day.

1. When does Día de los Muertos take place ?
2. Who introduced the catholic rituals of all saints' day and all souls' day to Mexico ?
3. Name three things that take place during the day of the dead festival.
4. What does ofrenda mean in Spanish and what is an ofrenda?
5. What is papel picado and what is it used for ?
6. Name an item used to represent each of the four elements ( water, fire, earth and wind).

7. What is the name of the popular yellow flower and what is it used for?
8. What are calacas and Calaveras?
9. Name three items of food made to celebrate day of the dead.
10. How is day of the dead different from halloween?

## Extension

How do Mexican views on death differ from those in the U.K. ?