

Day of the Dead

All about Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)

Day of the Dead is the English name for the Mexican festival Día de los Muertos. It is a celebration during which the dead are honoured. Surprisingly, it is not a sombre and melancholy time, but a time of rejoicing and memories. It is celebrated in Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala and other areas in Central and South America. Similarly, it is also celebrated in areas of North America, such as California and Texas, where the Mexican/American heritage exists.

The festival lasts for three days from 31st October until 2nd November and it is a fiesta of flowers, food, candles, parades, prayer and fun. People dress up as skeletons and wear elaborate costumes and masks.

The first day is on the same day as Halloween, the 31st October. On this day at midnight, it is believed that the gates of heaven are opened. The second day, the 1st November, is when the spirits of deceased children (angelitos) visit. The third and final day, the 2nd November, is when the spirits of adults visit.



Ofrendas

Ofrenda is the Spanish word for altar, which is an area created at graveyards with items to remember loved ones and where candles are lit to guide their spirits. Altars include: pictures of the deceased person, items that they liked, something to eat, candles, flowers and gifts.

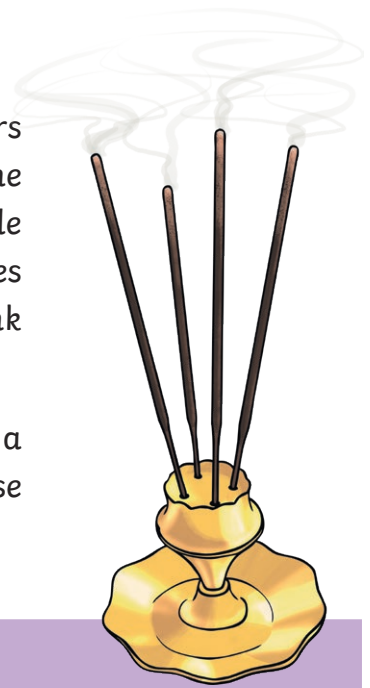


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Soul Attraction

Candles (las velas) are lit during the afternoon at altars and grave sites to burn all evening. The light of the candles guide the way for souls. Sometimes, each candle lit represents a departed soul and certain coloured candles have meanings: purple for pain, white for hope and pink for celebration.

The final thing added to the altars is incense, which is a perfumed, white smoke thought to attract souls of those who have gone.



Pan de Muertos

During the celebrations, special bread called Pan de Muertos (bread of the dead) is eaten. This bread represents the souls of those who have passed on. The loaves are sometimes baked in the shape of skulls or round and decorated with bones. The bread is often decorated with brightly coloured icing or seeds, which represent happiness in some areas of Mexico.

Calacas

Skeletons are a constant emblem during Day of the Dead. Not only are skeletons seen in decorations but also in sweets, chocolates and toys. The toys and dolls are called 'calacas' and are used to introduce children to the idea of death so that they are not afraid of it. Often, the calacas are grinning because they are laughing at death. They are even shown as musicians or on horseback to show a joyful afterlife.

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