

Cultural News

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Christmas in Mexico

In Mexico, Christmas is celebrated from December 12th to January 6th.

From December 16th to Christmas Eve, children often perform the 'Posada' processions or Posadas. Posada is Spanish for Inn or Lodging. There are nine Posadas. These celebrate the part of the Christmas story where Joseph and Mary looked for somewhere to stay. For the Posadas, the outside of houses are decorated with evergreens, moss and paper lanterns.

In each Posada, children are given candles and a board, with painted clay figures of Mary riding on a donkey and Joseph, to process round the streets with. They call at the houses of friends and neighbors and sing a song at each home. The song they sing is about Joseph and Mary asking for a room in the house. But the children are told that there is no room in the house and that they must go away. Eventually they are told there is room and are welcomed in! When the children go into the house they say prayers of thanks and then they have a party with food, games and fireworks.

Each night a different house holds the Posada party. At the final Posada, on Christmas Eve, a manger and figures of shepherds are put on to the board. When the Posada house has been found, a baby Jesus is put into the manger and then families go to a midnight Church service. After the Church service there are more fireworks to celebrate the start of Christmas.

One game that is often played at Posada parties is piñata. A piñata is a decorated clay or papier-mâché jar filled with sweets and hung from the ceiling or tree branch. The piñata is often decorated something like a ball with seven peaks around it. The peaks or spikes represent the 'seven deadly sins'. Piñata's can also be in the form of an animal or bird (such as a donkey). To play the game, children are blind-folded and take it in turns to hit the piñata with a stick until it splits open and the sweets pour out. Then the children rush to pick up as many sweets as they can!

As well as the posada's, another type of

Christmas play known as Pastorelas (The Shepherds). These tell the story of the shepherds going to find the baby Jesus and are often very funny. The devil tries to stop them by tempting them along the way. But the shepherds always get there in the end, often with the help of the Archangel Michael, who comes and beats the devil.

Nativity scenes, known as the 'nacimiento', are very popular in Mexico. They are often very large, with the figures being life size. Sometimes a whole room in a house is used for the nacimiento, although this is less common now. The figures are often made of clay and are traditionally passed down through families. As well as the normal figures of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the Shepherds and Three Kings, there are often lots of other figures of different people, including women making tortillas, people selling food and different animals and birds, like flamingos. The figures can be bought from markets in cities all over Mexico. The figure of baby Jesus is normally added to the scene during the evening of Christmas Eve. The Three Kings are added at Epiphany.

Christmas Trees are becoming more popular in Mexico, but the main/most important decoration is still the nacimiento.

Christmas Eve is known as 'Noche Buena' and is a family day. People often take part in the final Posada and then in the evening have the main Christmas meal. At midnight, many people go to a Midnight Mass service, known as the 'Misa de Gallo' (Mass of the Rooster). There are lots of fireworks to celebrate Christmas Day.

Poinsettia flowers are known as 'nochebuena' (Christmas Eve) flowers in Mexico.

People in Mexico also celebrate 'los santos inocentes' or 'Day of the Innocent Saints' on December 28th and it's very like April Fools Day in the UK and USA.

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DECEMBER 2017 CALENDAR

AIDS AWARENESS MONTH

UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS MONTH

WORLDWIDE FOOD SERVICE SAFETY MONTH

- 1- Mawlid an Nabi (Islam)
- 2- Special Education Day (US)
- 3-24- Advent (Christian)
- 4- World Wildlife Conservation Day (ALL)
- 6- Saint Nicholas Day (Christian)
- 8- Bodhi Day (Buddhist)
- 9- Gingerbread Decoratin Day (US)
- 10- Human Rights Day (US)
- 12- Poinsettia Day (US)
- 13-20- Hanukkah (Jewish)
- 15- Bill of Rights Day (US)
- 16-25 Posadas Navidenas (Hispanic Christian)
- 18- Arabic Language Day (US)
- 25- Christmas Day (Western Christianity)
- 28- Pledge of Allegiance Day (US)
- 31- Holy Family (Catholic Christian)

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28th December is when people remember the babies that were killed on the orders of King Herod when he was trying to kill baby Jesus.

In some states in Mexico children expect Santa Claus to come on December 24th. In the south of Mexico children expect presents on January 6th at Epiphany, which is known as 'el Dia de los Reyes'.

On el Dia de los Reyes the presents are left by the Three Kings (or Magi). If you've had a visit from Santa on Christmas Eve, you might also get some candy on el Dia de los Reyes!

It's traditional to eat a special cake called 'Rosca de Reyes' (Three Kings Cake) on Epiphany. A figure of Baby Jesus is hidden inside the cake. Whoever gets baby Jesus in their piece of cake is the 'Godparent' of Jesus for that year.

Another important day is Candelaria (also known as Candlemas) on the 2nd February and it marks the end of the Mexican Christmas celebrations. Lots of Mexicans have a party for Candelaria.

In Mexico, presents might also be brought by 'El Niño Dios' (baby Jesus) & Santo Clós (Santa Claus).

In Mexico most people speak Spanish (Español), so Happy/Merry Christmas is 'Feliz Navidad'. In the Nahuatl (spoken in some parts of central Mexico) it's 'Cualli netlācatilizpan' and in the Yucatec Maya language (spoken in some parts of the Yucatán Peninsula) it's 'Ki'imak "navidad"'.

The largest ever Angel Ornament was made in Mexico. It was made in January 2001 by Sergio Rodriguez in the town of Nuevo León. The angel was 18' 3" high and had wing span of 11' 9"! Perhaps the most amazing thing about the angel was that it was completely made out of old beer bottles, 2946 of them!

Source: <https://www.whychristmas.com/cultures/mexico.shtml>

Bodhi Day

Bodhi Day is the Buddhist celebration of the Buddha's awakening or enlightenment. It is celebrated on the 8th day of the 12th lunar month, Rohatsu in Japanese, it is observed on December 8 in Japan

History of Bodhi Day

The young Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama, 2500 years ago, sat beneath a fig tree with the purpose of finding enlightenment, he said that even though his flesh would fall from his bones and his bones crack, he would not get up until perfect enlightenment was achieved by him. He then began an inner journey that led him to face his demons, to tame temptations and distractions of restlessness, anger, doubt or greed.

He first achieved a state of calm awareness, his mind was like a clear and still pool reflecting his inner thoughts and feelings. He started to reflect on his past, thoughts, words and actions. In the middle of the night he reflected on all living animals and humans, life and death. As dawn approached he understood cause and effect, that everything and everyone are connected, and that each one's action creates their own destinies.

He understood how ignorance of truth is the cause of greed and selfishness, and ultimately suffering. As a morning star appeared in sky, Siddhartha then contemplated the Wonderful Dharma and he became the Buddha, the awakened one. Bodhi Day is a celebration of Siddhartha's efforts to attain Dharma, and his generosity and compassion to all as he shared the gift he received under the fig tree, 2500 years ago.

Bodhi Day Traditions, Customs and Activities

For Buddhists all over the world Bodhi Day is a day to remember Siddhartha and to meditate following his example. It is common to decorate houses with pictures or little statues of the Buddha under a fig tree to remember the day of his awakening. The decorations are full of colors, signifying that enlightenment has many ways to be attained.

Candles and lights are lit on this day and kept burning, or turned on, for the next 30 days to symbolize enlightenment. Buddhists' homes have a small ficus tree that is decorated with colored lights and beads united with a string, this is to symbolize that all things are united. There are also three hanging ornaments that are to represent the Three Jewels of Buddhism: Buddha, Dharma and Shanga.

It is traditional to eat one meal of rice and milk, this was the same meal that the Buddha ate after his awakening, offered by a girl named Sujata. The most common activity is for Buddhists to gather and stay in prayer during the night, as Siddhartha did and reflect as he did in the cycle of rebirth, the Eightfold path and the four Noble Truths.



Source: <http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/bodhi-day-buddhist/>