

La historia de "El Día de los Muertos"



El Día de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead, is a traditional Mexican holiday honoring the dead; it has been celebrated in Mexico, as in other Latin countries. This is a very special and beautiful ritual, since it is the day in which Mexicans remember their loved relatives. The celebration is called *Los Días de los Muertos* because two important days are recognized. November 1st, "All Saints' Day", is devoted to *los angelitos*, and November 2nd, "All Souls' Day", to the adults.

relatives in the cemetery, and end on November 2nd.

At home members of the family decorate an "*Altar de la Ofrenda*" in honor of deceased families and friends, adorning it with *papel picado*, candles, flowers of the dead "*Cempasúchil*", "*copal*", an incense from a fragrant resin grown in a tree found in Mexico photos of the deceased ancestors, fruits, drinks, foods, and candies.

The Spanish conquerors succumbed to the pre-Hispanic civilizations and they imposed their customs, their language and their Catholic religion. The natives accepted these new cultural elements but they adapted to their own culture and added influences from the Aztec people of Mexico.

Skeletons and skulls are found everywhere. The skull masks are used to honor the dead. Handmade skeleton figurines, called "*calacas*", are especially popular because they show the meaning of the dead for everyone. Mexican artist José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) is a famous symbol of the Day of the Dead with his skeletal woman called "La Catrina", dressed in a fancifully floral bonnet.



"La Catrina" by José Guadalupe Posada

El Día de los Muertos is celebrated by decorating windows, cleaning the graves of their loved ones, decorating the cemetery with colorful flowers, bread, fruits and candles. Some families spend the entire night in the cemetery playing the guitar, singing songs or listening to the radio; creating special paper flowers, making small and large figurines featuring the *calaveras* and by installing *tianguis*, an open air market to sell the items for the *ofrendas*, cooking special meals such as *Buñuelos*, *Tamales*, *Flan*, *Mole*, *Pan de Muerto*, and *Calaveras de Azúcar*. The preparation for this important celebration begins on October 31st when everybody is ready for a great feast after a visit to friends and

During *El Día de los Muertos*, Mexico is literally covered with *papel picado*; it is the

mexican art of cut paper, made especially for the Day of the Dead to decorate homes, altars, and different places. Designs can portray animals, flowers, and skeletal figures. Individual banners are strung together to create colorful decorations for the celebration.

