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# The Role of Dia De Los Muertos in Mexican Culture

## Dia de los Muertos - Day of the Dead

Day of the Dead is celebrated in central and southern Mexico during November 1st and 2nd. This holiday is a festive celebration for remembering and honoring loved ones who have passed. Día de los Muertos is one of Mexico's most important holidays, which means they invest a lot of time and money into celebrations. Dia de los Muertos began centuries ago in Mexico, but it is still widely celebrated today. Now, the holiday is a blend of indigenous beliefs and Catholic traditions. Many other countries around the world participate in the Day of the Dead, where they celebrate the holiday according to their own local customs. Celebrations tend to happen in areas with high Mexican population, like California, Texas, and Arizona. Most people celebrate out of love to their loved ones, but some people celebrate this holiday out of fear that if a spirit returns to find that no one has built an altar for them, they will seek vengeance on those who have forgotten them.

Some beliefs which surround the celebration and festivities include that the gates of heaven are opened at midnight on October 31st. Throughout November 1st the spirits of deceased children are allowed to reunite with their families. The next day, November 2nd, the spirits of the adults come down to enjoy everything which is prepared for them. Another belief is that happy spirits will provide protection, good luck and wisdom to their families. In most areas, beautiful altars ( also known as ofrendas ) are made in each home. These are covered and decorated with candles, flowers, stacks of tortillas, and breads called pan de muerto. The altar needs to have lots of food, bottles of soda, and water for weary spirits who have traveled a long way to return home. Day of the Dead customs in Mexico vary from town to town, and is usually a combination of rituals that bring on happiness and memories of the past life. Folk art including weavings and sugar skulls provide the final touches to these grand and important altars of Dia de Muertos.

Sugar skulls are one of the many important folk art pieces that are used in celebrations for the dead. They represent the department of a soul, and have icing decorations on them to spirits find their ways back to their families. The personalization of these skulls include having the name written on the forehead and being placed on the ofrenda/gravestone to honor the return of that particular spirit. Sugar skull art reflects the folk art style and incorporates the use of big happy smiles, colorful icing, and sparkly tin. Sugar skulls are so important and labor intensive that they are made in small batches in the homes of specific creators.

Despite being a Mexican national holiday, Dia de los Muertos extends well beyond Mexico and is celebrated in Guatemala, Brazil, Spain, and more. In Guatemala, Día de los Difuntos celebrations are highlighted by the construction and flying of kites and the visitation of gravesites. Another famous event in Guatemala is the eating of Fiambre, which is a traditional food made only for this day during the entire year. In Brazil, celebrations are, of course, marginally different. The Brazilian celebration of Finados is held on November 2nd each year. On this day, people go to cemeteries and churches, with offers of flowers, candles, and prayers. The celebration is similar to Dia de los Muertos because it is meant to be positive and commemorate those who are deceased.