



Rhythm of the Spirits



CELEBRATE MEXICO'S MESMERIZING DAY OF THE DEAD THIS FALL

TO THE LIVING, MAY THE DEAD COME ALIVE. Every November, Mexico revels in the splendor of “Día de Muertos,” the Day of the Dead. Part memorial and part carnival, the Day of the Dead is a feast for the senses, a riot of color and sound that blends Catholic ritual and pre-colonial tradition to create a distinctively Mexican celebration. It’s the world’s liveliest party given for the dead.

Photo: Daniel Bibb, As We Saw It.

 *Metropolitan Cathedral, Mexico City*

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A Celebration of Life

In Mexican tradition, death is a part of life, as natural as birth, childhood, or adulthood. Día de Muertos, or the Day of the Dead, celebrated from October 31 to November 2, honors those who have gone before us with music, laughter, food, and joy. Everyone is invited to the party, including the dead.


The Day of the Dead is unique. A distinctly Mexican fusion of **Aztec rituals** and **Catholicism**, its traditions and rites are recognized by UNESCO as part of the world's intangible cultural heritage.

In late October and early November, families gather by gravesides and altars to pray and to leave offerings for friends and relatives who have died. Tradition holds that the dead return to the world of the living at this time, and the offerings are a way to welcome them. Relatives offer **pan de muertos** (bread of the dead), **mezcal**, and **calaveras** (sugar skulls), as well as fruit, to nourish the dead; water, to quench their thirst; shredded paper, which drifts lightly through the breeze, just as spirits move through the air; and candles, with one lit for every soul being remembered.

Alongside more solemn memorials, the Day of the Dead is also celebrated with an array of parades, festivals, and parties. Many people dress in costumes evoking **La Calavera Catrina**: an engraving of a female skeleton in fine clothes that has become synonymous with the holiday. And parks and town squares are full of **outdoor performances**, including plays, music, and dance.

The Day of the Dead is a celebration of both continuity and change. For in the midst of life, we are in death.



 Traditional Day of the Dead celebrations include beautiful costumes, brightly colored skulls, and altars decorated with offerings for the dead.

Photos courtesy Mexico Tourism Board; Skull, ©Studio One-One.



Dance with the Dead

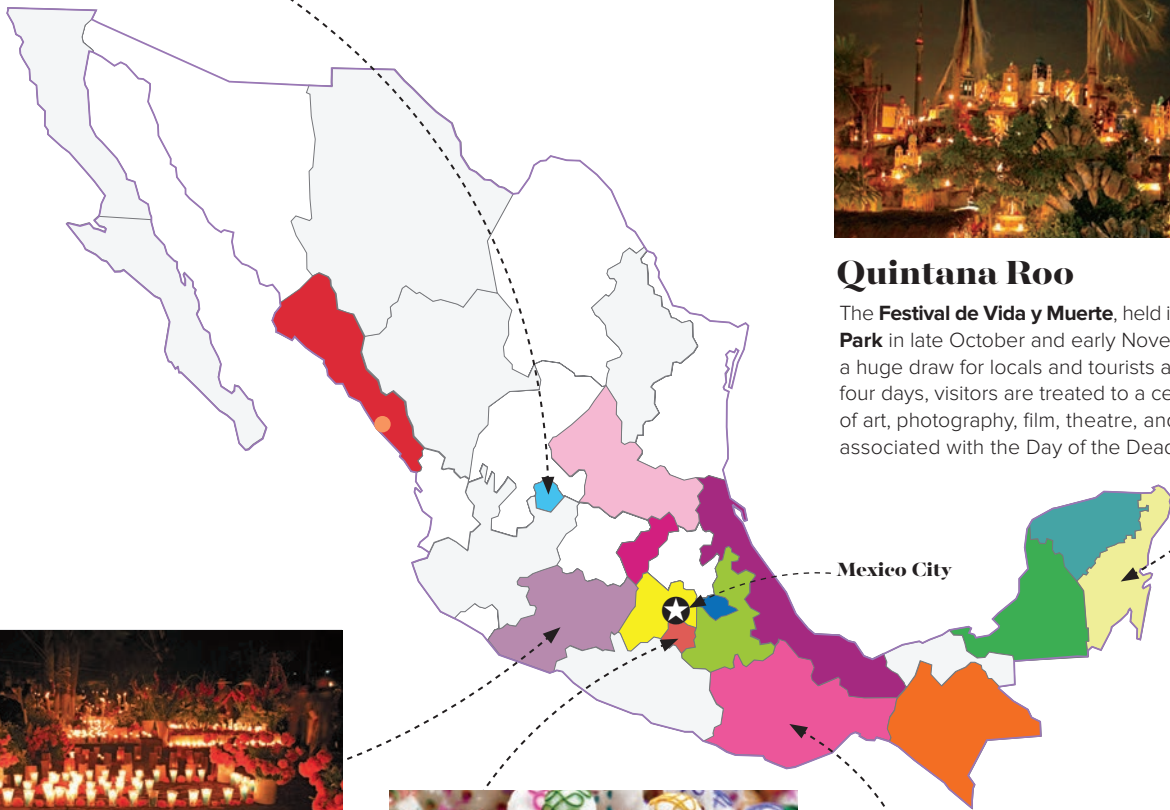
Día de Muertos Across Mexico



Aguascalientes

The birthplace of engraver **José Guadalupe Posada**—creator of the iconic **La Catrina**—hosts the **Festival de las Calaveras** (the Festival of Skulls) every year in his honor. See artists compete in the engraving contest and look out for the skeletons' street parade.

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| ■ Aguascalientes | ■ Puebla |
| ■ Campeche | ■ San Luis Potosí |
| ■ Chiapas | ■ Sinaloa |
| ■ Estado de México | ■ Querétaro |
| ■ Mazatlán | ■ Quintana Roo |
| ■ Michoacán | ■ Tlaxcala |
| ■ Morelos | ■ Veracruz |
| ■ Oaxaca | ■ Yucatán |



Quintana Roo

The **Festival de Vida y Muerte**, held in **Xcaret Park** in late October and early November, is a huge draw for locals and tourists alike. For four days, visitors are treated to a celebration of art, photography, film, theatre, and dance associated with the Day of the Dead.



Michoacán

Few sights are as dazzling as the **Lago de Pátzcuaro** in early November, when the people of **Pátzcuaro** light candles and sail out onto the lake to cast large butterfly-like nets into the water. The ceremony is linked to a legend of ghosts, treasure, conquistadors, and the doomed love of a prince and princess.



Morelos

The people of **Ocoteppec**, a small town in Morelos, have an unusual way of honoring their dead: They create a “simulated body,” a mannequin dressed in the deceased’s clothes, with a **sugar skull** for a head. Drop by a home during the Day of the Dead and you might see one.



Oaxaca

In **Tuxtpec**, in Oaxaca, locals decorate altars to the dead with **sawdust carpets**: layers of colored sawdust arranged in floral and religious shapes. Visit the town square to admire carpets created during the annual competition.



Spirits and Splendor in Mexico City

From art to outdoor displays, music to parades, the Day of the Dead comes spectacularly to life in Mexico City. This year's festive centerpiece is “**La Ofrenda de Día de Muertos**,” a five-day celebration in and around the **Zócalo**, the grand square at the heart of Mexico City. From October 29 to November 2, the Zócalo will provide the stunning backdrop to a host of live performances, an intricate **ofrenda** (a traditional altar built in honor of the dead), and a spectacular parade.

The celebrations kick off on October 29 with the opening parade, a dazzling party for the living and the

dead. Hundreds of **catrinas** and **catrines** (wearing costumes inspired by La Catrina) will march from the Monumento a la Independencia to the Zócalo—making their way under arches of **cempasúchil** (Mexican marigolds) to the sound of wind and percussion bands and the **Mexican guitarrón**. The catrinas will be joined by **alebrijes** (folk art sculptures of fantastical creatures), **mojigangas** (larger than life dancing puppets), aerial acrobats, and men and women dressed as figures from Aztec, Nahuatl, and Totonac mythology.

Like the parade, the ofrenda will also be a blend of old and new. Its theme is “canto al agua,” “singing to



the water,” in honor of the lakeside Aztec city of **Tenochtitlan**, whose ancient center rests underneath the modern Zócalo. Renowned artist Betsabeé Romero will direct a display inspired by the Aztecs’ journey from the mountains downriver to Tenochtitlan, culminating in over a hundred decorated **trajineras** (canoes) converging on the Zócalo.

The celebration will continue with a series of outdoor musical performances in the Zócalo, showcasing traditional music alongside contemporary song and dance. Saturday night (October 29) is cabaret night: comedy, satire, and pop. Sunday will honor the voices of Mexican women, especially the three greats of Mexican music: Guadalupe Pineda, Tania Libertad,



and Eugenia León, the “Voice of Mexico.” Other concerts will celebrate music synonymous with Mexico City—salsa, cumbia, and more—with a special day set aside for children and their families.

For pageantry and spectacle during the Day of the Dead, there’s nothing quite like Mexico City.

 *From outdoor parades to candle-lit ceremonies, Mexico City leaps vividly to life during the Day of the Dead.*

Clockwise from top left: Konstantin Kalishko/Alamy Stock Photo; Michael Marquand; EPA/Alex Cruz; Courtesy Mexico Tourism Board; Wendy Connett/Alamy; Sobreira/Alamy Stock Photo.

MAKE MERRY IN MEXICO CITY

What to see and do during the Day of the Dead

Learn how Day of the Dead traditions influenced **Diego Rivera’s** art at the **Museo Diego Rivera Anahuacalli**, in Coyoacán. Also known as the Anahuacalli Museum, the building is home to the nearly 50,000 **pre-Hispanic artifacts** Rivera collected in his lifetime—including funerary urns, masks, and sculpture from the ancient city of **Teotihuacan**—and a gallery of papier-mâché sculptures inspired by the Day of the Dead.

Visit **Ciudad Universitaria** (University City), the main campus of the **National Autonomous University of Mexico**, in Coyoacán and see a selection of **ofrendas**, altars created especially for the Day of the Dead. Students and faculty from across the university put together displays inspired by literature and other themes. Also, don’t miss the **outdoor poetry recitals and music shows** on November 1 and 2.

Join crowds in the historical center of **Coyoacán** for the **Day of the Dead Festival**, a colorful costume parade that blends Halloween with Mexican traditions. If you are looking for **La Catrina**, you are sure to spot her here.

Bask in the scent of the **campesúchil**, or **flor de muertos** (the flower of the dead), garlands that adorn one of the city’s most spectacular **ofrendas**, at the **University of the Cloister of Sor Juana**. Students, staff, artists, and alumni decorate and design the ofrenda, which is popular with locals and tourists alike.

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