

Day of the Dead

A Celebration of Life and Death



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Facts™

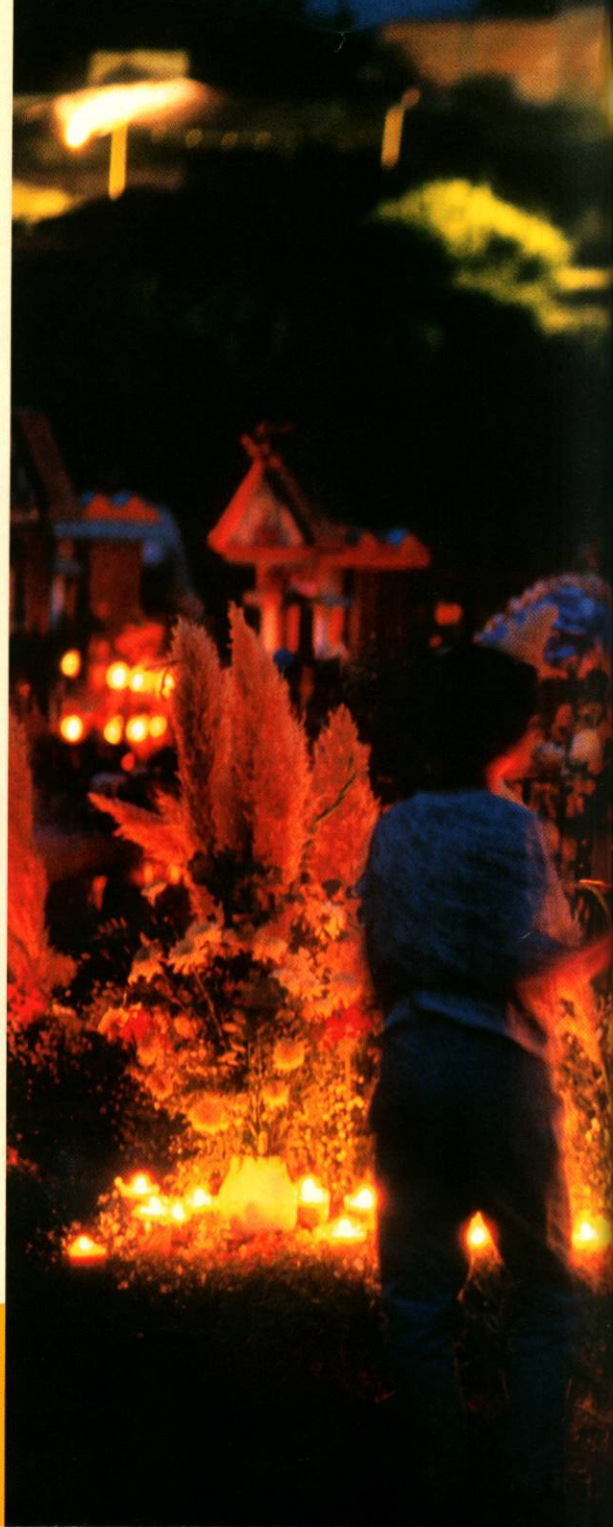
by Amanda Doering

Celebrating Day of the Dead

In the flickering candlelight, a Mexican family prays for the **spirits** of relatives. They smile as they remember stories about loved ones who have died. The family is celebrating Day of the Dead.

Fact!

Some families have mariachi bands play music at the cemetery.



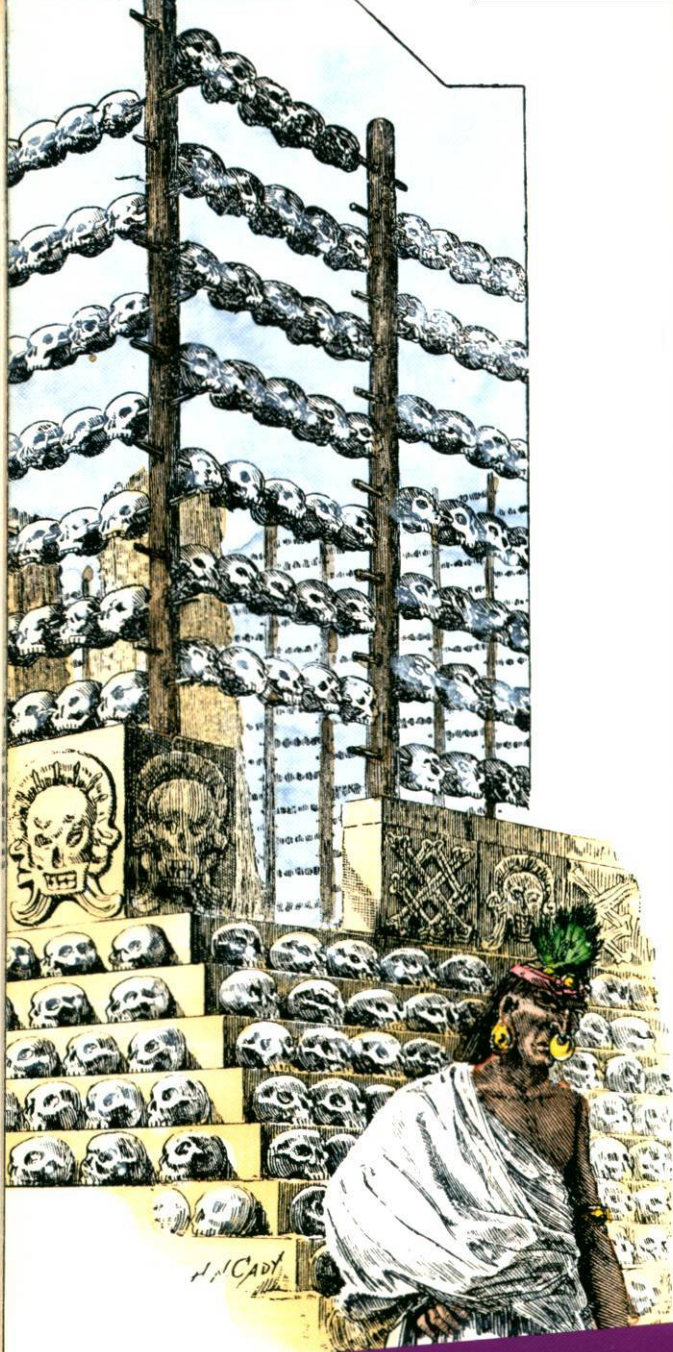




What Is Day of the Dead?

Each year on November 1 and 2, Mexican families celebrate Day of the Dead. This holiday is a time to remember people who have died.

Day of the Dead isn't a scary holiday. In Mexican **culture**, death is a part of life. **Customs** of the holiday help families honor the dead.



An Aztec Beginning

Thousands of years ago, the **Aztecs** lived in Mexico. They believed people weren't gone forever when they died. They felt that spirits of the dead came back to visit once a year. They built walls of human skulls as a reminder that death was part of life.



Spanish settlers came to Mexico in the 1500s. They wanted the Aztecs to be **Christians**. But the Aztecs wanted to keep their own traditions.

Preparing the Altar

Today, Day of the Dead is a mix of Christian and Aztec customs. Many Mexicans still believe spirits of the dead come back once a year.

To welcome the spirits home, families build **altars**. Candles, food, and flowers decorate tables and shelves. Pictures of loved ones and Christian saints are proudly displayed among the decorations.

Fact!

Day of the Dead is celebrated at the same time as the Christian holiday All Saints' Day.







Mexican Americans

Many people think Day of the Dead is the Mexican Halloween, but that is not true. This holiday is a special time to honor people who have died.

In some communities, Mexican Americans build altars on sidewalks, so everyone can share this Mexican tradition. Many of the altars honor American soldiers or people who died in accidents.



Visiting the Cemetery

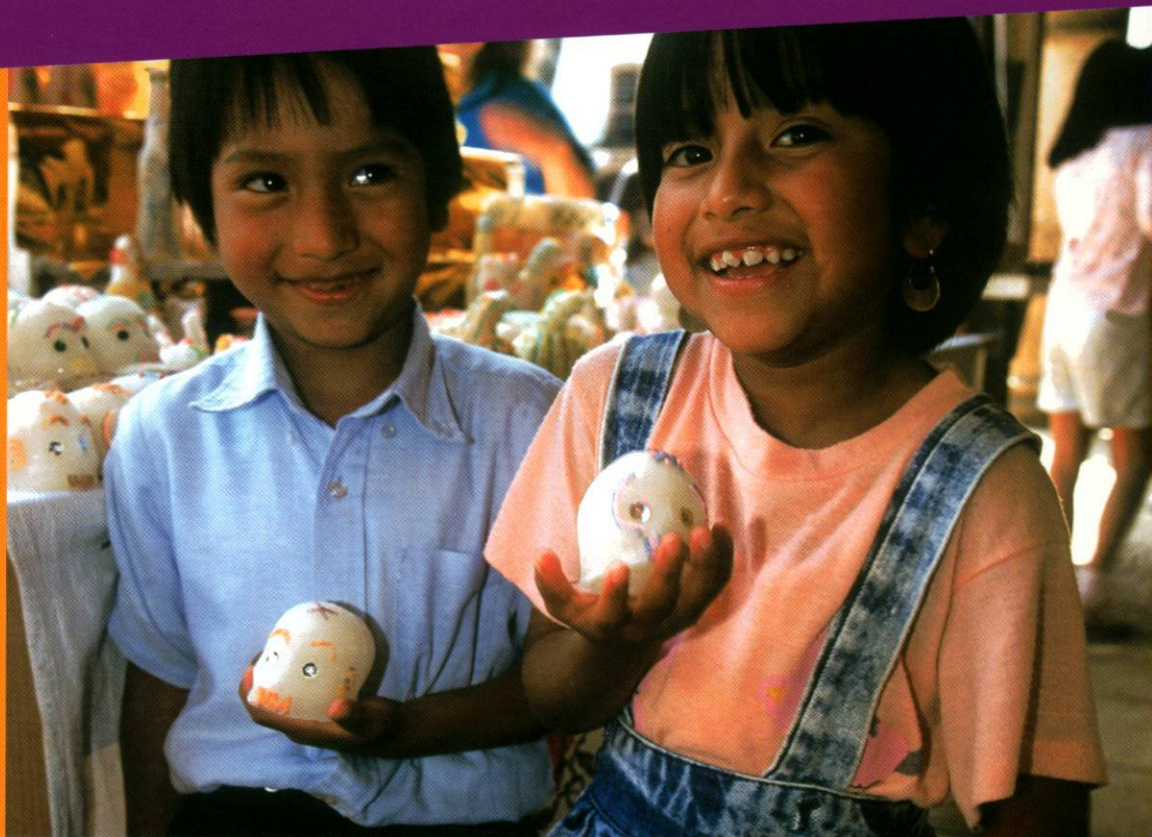
Day of the Dead is a time for families to visit cemeteries. They wash and decorate their relatives' gravestones. Marigold flowers are laid out to lead the spirits home.

Many families stay in the cemeteries all day and night. They sing, eat, and pray to honor the lives of their loved ones.



Skulls and Skeletons

In Mexico, skulls and skeletons stand for life and death. Shops sell candy skulls made of sugar. These fun candies remind people that death isn't a scary part of life.





On Day of the Dead, skeletons are often seen walking down streets. That's because adults, and even children, wear skeleton costumes in parades.

Food

No one wants the spirits to be hungry, so lots of food is made for Day of the Dead. Families make foods their loved ones liked. Some of the food is left out as **offerings** at cemeteries or on altars.

Remembering the dead is an important part of the Mexican way of life. Day of the Dead is a true celebration of people, history, and culture.

