



# **Fiesta: Days of the Dead and Other Mexican Festivals**

*Chloe Sayer*

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Mexico has a vast range of festivals, several commemorating national events but mostly religious or spiritual in inspiration. After the Spanish Conquest of 1521, Roman Catholic teachings fused with the beliefs of native civilizations, and even today the popular arts and crafts draw upon the Church as a rich source of imagery. Fiestas are often lavish and extremely costly. With extensive preparations, they commemorate local saints days and religious holidays such as Christmas, Carnival and Holy Week. Many festivals are dominated by masked dances, and the Devil, Death, angels and the Deadly Sins still do battle at fiesta time in countless village squares. During the Days of the Dead (All Saints and All Souls days, 1st and 2nd November), the deceased are thought to visit friends and relatives on earth. Families welcome the returning souls with flowers, incense, candles and feasting. On 12th December, Mexicans everywhere honour Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico and an important symbol of national identity. Drawing on her extensive travels in Mexico and the collections she has helped create in the British Museum, Chloe Sayer provides a living context to show what makes these festivities so attractive and also uniquely Mexican.

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