

Mexico

In Mexico, Christmas is celebrated from December 12th until January 6th. Several weeks before Christmas, elaborately decorated market stalls or **puestos** are set up in the plazas of every town and city. Some people travel for days from remote areas to get to these markets. The puestos offer crafts of every kind, foods such as cheese, bananas, nuts, and cookies, and orchids and poinsettias.



The **poinsettia** is native to Mexico and is believed to have first been used in connection with Christmas in the 17th century when Mexican Franciscans included the flowers in their Christmas celebration. There is a legend connected with the flower. A little boy named Pablo was walking to the church in his village to visit the Nativity scene, when he realized he had nothing to offer the Christ Child. He saw some green branches growing along the roadside and

gathered them up. Other children scoffed, but when he laid them by the manger, a brilliant red star-shaped flower appeared on each branch.

The main Christmas celebration in Mexico is called **Las Posadas**, which refers to processions reenacting Joseph and Mary's search for a place to stay in Bethlehem. The processions begin nine days before Christmas because the original journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem took nine days. In each Posada, children are given candles and a board, with painted clay figures of Mary riding on a donkey and Joseph, to process round the streets with.



They call at the houses of friends and neighbours and sing a song at each home. The song they sing is about Joseph and Mary asking for a room in the house. But the children are told that there is no room in the house and that they must go away. Eventually they are told there is room and are welcomed in! When the children go into the house they say prayers of thanks and then they have a party with food, games and fireworks. Punch is made from hot fruits; food and some goodies are served to everyone.

Each night a different house will hold the Posada party. At the final Posada on **Noche Buena** (Christmas Eve), a manger and figures of shepherds are put on to the board.

When the Posada house has been found, a baby Jesus is put into the manger and then families go to a midnight Church service called la **Misa Del Gallo** (or "the rooster's mass") where they sing lullabies to Jesus. After the Church service there are more fireworks to celebrate the start of Christmas.

After Misa Del Gallo, food and drink are served, and then the children are blind-folded and take turns trying to break open a decorated clay **piñata** that dangles and swings at the end of a rope. Once the piñata has been broken, the children clamber to recover the candy that was inside the piñata. Christmas Celebration food consists of tamales, **romeritos with mole** (a typical dish made of romero grass and mole), **bacalao** (a fish dish), and **pozole** (made with corn grains, pork, chicken and beef stew, and red



bacalao



buñuelos

chiles). For dessert Mexican people eat **buñuelos** and drink **champurrado** which is a beverage made of chocolate, cinnamon and corn flour. **Ponche** (fruit punch) is another delicious beverage made only in this season.

Children leave a Christmas wish list to **el Niño Dios** (the Holy Child) on Christmas Eve and those who have been good will receive a gift from the **Reyes Magos** (the Magi) on January 6th. In Mexican, "Merry Christmas" is "**Feliz Navidad.**"

Resources:

Australian Media Pty. Santa's Net. "Christmas in Mexico". <http://www.santas.net/mexicanchristmas.htm>
Krimmel, Celine. Why Christmas? "Christmas in Mexico". <http://whychristmas.com/cultures/mexico.shtml>
Navarette, Wendy. ZuZu. "Las Posadas, Christmas Celebrations in Mexico". <http://www.zuzu.org/mex.html>
The-North-Pole. Christmas Around the World. "Christmas in Mexico". <http://www.the-north-pole.com/around/mexico.html>