



# DIA DE LOS MUERTOS CELEBRATION

## Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos)

is a Mexican celebration when families gather to honor the memory of deceased loved ones on November 1 and 2. Spirits are guided home to enjoy offerings left for them on meticulously crafted altars. Its roots are a fusion of traditions found in Europe and Mesoamerica, particularly the ancient Aztec empire.

The altar is a complex creation with incredible symbolism as each element carries specific meaning. Here are the most important elements and what they mean.



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### Levels

"Ofrendas" can be made up of two, three or seven levels.

#### 2 LEVELS

represents the division between the earth and the sky.

#### 3 LEVELS

represents the sky, the earth and the underworld.

#### 7 LEVELS

are the most common and relate to the seven levels that a soul must traverse before reaching their final destination.



### Fire

Fire in the form of candles and torches are symbols of our love for our deceased relatives and guiding lights for their spirits.

### Paper

"Ofrendas" usually have "papel picado" or tissue paper, typically in yellow and purple, made into intricate designs. The movement of the tissue with the wind represents the movement of life.

### Incense

A chalice with incense or copal (an aromatic tree resin used in indigenous ceremonies) is placed on the altar. It is a way to purify the souls of the dead and ward off evil spirits.

### Flowers

Flowers are not just a beautiful visual addition to the altar.

**YELLOW FLOWERS**, or cempazuchitl, are a guide for the spirits into the mortal world.

**WHITE FLOWERS** represent the sky, while **PURPLE FLOWERS**

are the traditional color of mourning in Mexico.

### Water

A glass of water is often placed on the altar to quench the thirst of the deceased and strengthen them for their return journey.

### Salt

Salt is usually placed on a plate and stops the souls of the deceased from being corrupted by earthly temptations.

### Banquet

To celebrate the arrival of your deceased loved ones, a banquet of their favorite food and drink items is placed as an offering.

### Typical Food

As well as the deceased's favorite food items, altars usually contain traditional Day of the Dead food items such as Pan de Muerto, rice, mole, pumpkin, sugar cane, jicama and oranges - the fruits of the season.

### Calaveras:

"Calaveras" or skulls are representations of deceased relatives. Made of sugar or chocolate and often consumed by kids after the celebration, they are an example of the Mexican ability to celebrate, mock and play with death.

**Pan de Muerto:** Mexican pastry bread traditional to the holiday made with decorative cross-bones design.