

Ritos y celebraciones tradicionales de Yucatán

Let the Festivities Begin.

Traditional Rites and Celebrations of Yucatán











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Traditional Rites and Celebrations of Yucatan

Festivities play an important role in Mexican culture, either to celebrate deities and patron saints or to honor the dead and commemorate the heroes of the nation. Festive days are abundant in the Mexican calendar forming annual cycles that highlight special moments in the life of the inhabitants of the cities and towns in all the country.

Yucatan is one of the states in the country with the greatest number of traditional festivities, with over 160 set dates throughout the year. In spite of sharing some general characteristics, it can be said that each celebration is unique having its own customs, traditions, dances, legends and individual artisanal practices.

With the exhibition *Let the Festivities Begin. Traditional Rites and Celebrations of Yucatan* the Government of Yucatan, through the Ministry of Culture and Arts and the *Gran Museo del Mundo Maya de Merida* along with the federal program *Apoyo a Instituciones Estatales de Cultura* (AIEC) 2023, seeks to showcase a small sample of the rites and festivities as an important part of Yucatecan identity, while acknowledging and celebrating the communities that contribute in keeping Yucatan's rich cultural heritage alive.



The *ch'a chaak*Xocén, Valladolid, Yucatán Christian H. Rasmussen 1999 Full Color Photography



Ch'a'acháak.

It is one of the most complex agricultural rituals. During its celebration the *jmeen* summons the intervention of the Mayan and Christian deities to request the arrival of rains, which are crucial for the *milpas* to thrive and yield bountiful harvests. Today, this ancestral tradition is in danger of disappearing due to the abandonment of the *milpas*, among other things.



Rituals and Dances



For hundreds of years the Yucatecan Maya people have generated and transmitted knowledge to interpret the cycles and indicators of the surrounding nature. It is a collection of ancestral knowledge including agricultural ceremonies through which reverence is paid to the Lords of the sky, winds and hills, to ask for the necessary rains for the cultivation of the *milpas*, give thanks for the obtained harvest and entrust the care of the bees and solares. Despite the many attempts of Spanish conquerors to eradicate these religious practices, the rituals remained alive and were enrichened by the new cultural elements resulting in ceremonial rites and dances which gave a new interpretation to both Mayan and Christian religious myths and beliefs. Over time, many of these artistic and religious expressions were lost, while others still take place today, especially in communities in the eastern part of the state.



Dance of the *Señores*Chikindzonot, Yucatán
Leobardo Cox Tec
2023
Digital Photography



Dance of the Señores.

Also known as dance of Issaac and Abraham, is a scenic representation that originates in the 16th century. It takes place during the Christmas and Epiphany celebrations in some communities of the east of the state and is considered the only Yucatecan dance in which masks are worn.



Dance of the Kotskaltso'

Dzitás, Yucatán Gran Museo del Mundo Maya de Mérida Archive 2020 Digital Photography



Dance of Kotskaltso'.

The origin of this dance dates back to the prehispanic period and is even referenced on the Dresden Codex. Today, it has a strong Mayan Christian syncretic character and is held during the festivities in honor of Santa Inés, Patron Saint of Dzitás. During the dance, the participating couples, dance in circles carrying ritually-slain turkeys, which is interpreted as a recreation of the beheading or martyrdom suffered by the patron saint.



Dance of The Ramillete de la Estrella

Yaxcabá, Yucatán Leobardo Cox Tec 2022 Digital Photography



Dance of The Ramillete de la Estrella.

It is part of the Christmas celebrations that take place in Yaxcabá. The star-shaped bouquet handcrafted with beeswax flowers and multicolored paper represents the star of Bethlehem and guides the dancers to the nativity scene where they present their offerings to baby Jesus.



Dance of *Báalche*'
Dzitás, Yucatán
Leobardo Cox Tec
2022
Digital Photography



Dance of the Báalche'.

Baálche' is a ceremonial mayan drink made from the bark of the báalche' tree and honey. This dancing manifestation from the people of Dzitás takes place during Holy Week. The preparations begin on Maundy Thursday and end on Holy Saturday. This ritual, independent of civil and ecclesiastical authorities, aims to celebrate the election of new members of the organizing committee for the traditional festivities in January, in honor to the town's patron saint, Santa Inés.



Dance of Cabeza de Cochino

Francisco Rivas Cetina
Fiestas de los pueblos mayas de
Yucatán Project,
CIESAS Peninsular
2011
Digital Photography



Dance of the Pig Head.

With some variations, this dance is performed throughout the entire year in various localities of Yucatan. It is a Mayan Christian syncretic ritual, through which the annual celebration of the town's patron saint festivities is guaranteed, for at the end of the dance a pig head, cooked and adorned with gifts, is presented to the person who takes on the responsibility to organize the festivities of the year to come.



Patron Saint Festivities



The cult of patron saints in Yucatan hails back to the 16th century, as a strategy implemented by Franciscan friars in the process of evangelizing the maya population. Today, patron saints represent the center around which the religious practices of a large part of the Yucatecan population revolve. The annual celebrations held in their honor constitute the greatest expression of their cult and hold a strong sense of community given the fact that their organization and expenses are all taken on by local residents, usually organized in groups called *gremios*.

The festivity does not only honor the saint to whom it is dedicated, but also serves as a way to give thanks or ask for either communal, familial or individual favors. On the other hand, patron saint festivities, involve both religious practices and recreational activities, combining various deeply rooted artistic expressions.



Gremios of Santa Inés

Dzitás, Yucatán Alejandro Salazar Chay 2020 Digital Photography



Gremios of Santa Inés.

The patron saint festivities of Dzitás are held from January 12 to 22, in honor of the virgin *Santa Inés*. The *gremios* are the associations in charge of taking turns to celebrate each one of the days of the festivity. The entrance of the members of the *gremio* to the parish church, marks the start of the religious acts in honor of the patron saint whose image is caried in a colorful procession through the streets of the town.



The Santos Reyes of Sahcatzín Cansahcab, Yucatán Luis Méndez Jiménez 2023



Patron Saint Festivities of the Santos Reyes.

Digital Photography

In Cansahcab they venerate the Santos Reyes Magos of Sahcatzín who, according to local tradition, were found in a bank of materials or sascabera. The devotion of the believers to the sacred images is manifested with material signs such as anointing them with fragrant herbs and the gift of the so-called kexitos, through which an offering is exchanged to ask for miracles or special favors to the saints.



Procession of The *Virgen de Tetiz* Ángel Cab Cuitún 2022 Digital Photography



Procession of The Virgin of Tetiz.

Festive cycles and pilgrimage routes have emerged surrounding some of the most venerated patron saints within the Yucatecan population. Such is the case of the *Virgen de la Asunción de Tetiz*, a Marian image that inspires great devotion and is moved throughout the year through the communities of Hunucmá, Kinchil, Sisal, Celestún and Samahil for the celebration of their patron saint festivities.



Ruedo Tradicional

Tekit, Yucatán
Francisco Rivas Cetina
Fiestas de los pueblos mayas
de Yucatán Project,
CIESAS Peninsular
2011
Digital Photography



Ruedo Tradicional.

One of the key components in the celebration of the patron saint festivities is bull fighting. In Yucatan the inception of these practices came with the Spanish and the introduction of cattle raising in the 16th century. From then on, the celebration would go on to acquire particular characteristics in which local and European traditions, customs and uses are merged. The *ruedos* or *tablados* are a fine example of this syncretism for they are built using traditional Mayan materials and techniques.



The Vaquería Ángel Cab Cuitún 2022 Digital Photography



The Vaquería.

Its origins can be traced back to the 18th century in the context of old cattle raising haciendas. Today, vaquerías are part of the patron saint festivities in essentially every municipality in Yucatan. The vaquería represents a convengergence of diverse cultural expressions such as music, dance, handicraft production and gastronomy. It is one of the greatest expressions of the festive tradition and cultural heritage of Yucatan.

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