

**QuickStudy****HISTORY****CINCO de Mayo****Overview**

- The holiday of Cinco de Mayo, “The 5th Of May,” commemorates the victory of the Mexican militia over the French army at the Battle of Puebla in 1862. It is not, as many people think, Mexico's Independence Day, which is actually September 16.
- Cinco de Mayo is primarily a regional holiday celebrated in the Mexican state city of Puebla, with some recognition in other parts of Mexico, and especially in U.S. cities with a significant Mexican population. In these areas, the holiday is a celebration of food, music, beverages and customs unique to Mexico.
- However, some Mexicans in the United States and in Mexico reject all celebration of Cinco de Mayo, regarding it as essentially a North American commercial contrivance rather than an authentically Mexican event.

**Background**

- On the morning of May 5, 1862, 4,000 Mexican soldiers defeated the French and a traitor Mexican army of 8,000 at Puebla, Mexico.
- The French had landed in Mexico (along with Spanish and English troops) five months earlier on the pretext of collecting Mexican debts from the newly elected government of Democratic President (and Indian) Benito Juarez. The English and Spanish quickly made deals and left.
- Under Emperor Napoleon III, who detested the United States, the French came to stay. They brought a Hapsburg prince, named Maximilian, with them to rule the new Mexican empire.
- Napoleon's French army had not been defeated in 50 years, and it invaded Mexico with the finest modern equipment and with a newly reconstituted Foreign Legion.
- The French army left the port of Vera Cruz to attack Mexico City to the west, as the French assumed that the Mexicans would give up should their capital fall to the enemy—as European countries traditionally did.
- Under the command of Texas-born General Zaragoza (and the cavalry under the command of Colonel Porfirio Diaz, later to be Mexico's president and dictator), the Mexicans waited.
- When the battle was over, many French were killed or wounded and their cavalry was being chased by Diaz's superb horsemen miles away.
- The Mexicans had won a great victory that kept Napoleon III from supplying the Confederate Rebels for another year, allowing the United States to build the greatest army the world had ever seen. This grand army smashed the Confederates at Gettysburg just 14 months after the battle of Puebla, essentially ending the Civil War.

**Cinco de Mayo in the Peñon de los Baños**

- In the Peñón de los Baños, a small barrio, or neighborhood, in Mexico City, the people organize a very popular play based on the Cinco de Mayo battle. This play is a tradition that the people of the Peñón have kept alive for many years.
- Some of the inhabitants play the French invaders and some play the Mexican army; they even have fights with real gunpowder rifles. In some representations, the Mexican soldiers carry machetes and the French soldiers carry bags with wine bottles sticking out.
- Women wear the clothing of the soldaderos, the women who cooked for and looked after the soldiers in wartime.
- In other reenactments, fruit is used as ammunition, so the worst injury possible is an apple to the head.
- Each city has a Zócalo, where celebrations take place and people of all ages enjoy themselves. Families with young children are the first to arrive; later, the young people fill up the place.
- A few days before the big event, hundreds of stalls start aligning on the streets near the Zócalo of all the towns.
- Restaurants all over offer the most representative of Mexican cuisine, such as Mole Poblano, a thick, spicy sauce that comes from blending more than 40 ingredients and is spread on top of turkey or chicken and Mexican-style red rice.
- There are usually shows in the squares where there are dancing and music with the popular mariachi bands. In most towns, there are fairs set near the squares where people enjoy the rides and play games.
- The celebration ends with the traditional shouts of “¡Viva Mexico!”

**Cinco de Mayo in the United States**

- Much like St. Patrick's Day, Cinco de Mayo is observed by many Americans in the United States, regardless of ethnic origins.
- As U.S. demographic shifts begin to reflect a growing Latino presence—with greater political and economic clout than ever before—Americans have become increasingly familiar with many Latin cultural imports, particularly Latin music and food.
- The popularity of Latin traditions in general, and Mexican ones in particular, has helped to transform Cinco de Mayo festivities in the United States into a celebration of all things Mexican.
- The largest of these celebrations are found in big cities along the Mexico border, such as Denver, Colorado; Los Angeles, California; Dallas, Texas; San Antonio, Texas; Houston, Texas; and Salt Lake City, Utah.
- In St. Paul, Minnesota, the festivities include a “Lowrider Hydraulic Showdown”; in Austin, Texas, there is a jalapeño-eating contest; and in San Marcos, Texas, the winner of the Miss Cinco de Mayo pageant receives a \$1,000 scholarship.
- Many cities display Cinco de Mayo banners while school districts hold special events to educate students about its historical significance, especially in the Spanish-language classes; children learn Spanish words such as “amigo,” meaning “friend,” and they may learn the words to traditional Mexican folk songs such as “La Cucaracha” or play the game “Lasso the Bull.”
- Typical Mexican fare — salsa, guacamole, empanadas, enchiladas, tamales, burritos, fajitas — tops the menu at U.S.-held festivities.
- Commercial interests in the United States have capitalized on the celebration with advertising for products and services, with an emphasis on foods, beverages, and music.



**Cinco de Mayo in the United States** (continued)

- To balance that, however, many multi-ethnic communities hold special events and celebrations which highlight the Mexican culture, especially in its music and regional dancing.
- An example of this would be the ballet folklórico and mariachi demonstrations held annually at the Plaza del Pueblo de Los Angeles near Olvera Street.
- To many celebrants, Cinco de Mayo is also a warm expression of friendship between Mexico and the United States. In Los Angeles, for instance, Mexican dignitaries are invariably guests of honor, and the mayor of Los Angeles addresses the crowd in Spanish.
- As Mexican influence continues to be felt throughout U.S. society, Cinco de Mayo celebrations are likely to spread even further, just as the holidays of other immigrant groups have been adopted by Americans.

**Alcohol, Marketing & Cinco de Mayo**

- Cinco de Mayo has become a marketing opportunity for corporate America—from the onslaught of beer commercials to the all-you-can-drink happy-hour promotions.
- It remains a sizable marketing opportunity for Mexican beer importers and retailers. Industry sources say the holiday season contributes between five and ten percent of annual sales volume for Mexican brands.
- In the 1980s, the major breweries latched onto the holiday and transformed it into the commercial success it is today.
- Coors declared the 1980s to be “The Decade of the Hispanic,” and Anheuser-Busch created a separate marketing division to target its promotions to Hispanics.
- Several examples of campaigns promoting over-indulgence include Tecate’s “Let’s Party” theme and Coors Light’s slogan of “Sabemos como celebrar” (“We know how to celebrate”). Corona used a party parrot, adorned in a Mexican sombrero, sunglasses and a multi-colored serape, holding a bottle of Corona Extra and Corona Light in each claw with the slogan, “Drinko for Cinco.”
- While the alcohol industry still plays up the party angle in connection with the Cinco de Mayo holiday, marketers appear to be exercising more restraint in their campaigns.



**U.S. & Mexico Differ ON Cinco de Mayo**

- Most Mexicans claim that Americans celebrate Cinco de Mayo with more fervor than they do.
- Not only do Mexicans believe that Mexico’s Independence Day is a more important day to celebrate patriotism, but they attribute commercialization for exploiting Cinco de Mayo in the U.S.
- One theory behind Cinco de Mayo being celebrated on a much larger scale in the United States than it is in Mexico is that the holiday, first brought to the U.S. by Mexican immigrants during the 1920s, grew in importance when the 1960s Chicano movement adopted it as an avenue for generating ethnic pride.
- Cinco de Mayo’s political purpose gradually diminished, thereby opening the holiday up to a wider Mexican-American population, and finally to mainstream America via advertising.

**Mexico’s Impact ON the United States\***

- People of Mexican origin now make up nearly one-third of the residents of California and Texas alone, and U.S. trade with Mexico was valued at \$290.2 billion in 2005.
- Mexico ranks as the United States’ second-leading trading partner after Canada.
- With prominent Mexican-Americans now serving as Attorney General of the United States, in the U.S. Congress, and in other positions of authority, this fast-growing demographic group likely will continue making significant contributions to the United States—in policy circles, in the professions, and in popular culture.
- In the United States, the success of Cinco de Mayo is another manifestation of the vitality of a large and restless country that was built by the hard work, talent and imagination of its immigrants, from the time of its founding in 1776 to the present day.

\* From <http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/Archive/2006/May/04-718291.html>

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