

# INTI RAYMI



Inti Raymi (Sun Dance Festival) pronounced *In-tea-ray-me* is a New Year celebration of the Peruvian Indian people. It is held at the commencement of the Winter Solstice (the Sun is farthest from Earth) and when the longest night of the year occurs.

The Ancient Peruvians (called *Incas*) believed that they were the Sun's descendants and were concerned that the Sun's power and strength was waning and weakening. A special sacrificial ceremony was required to boost back the Sun's energy.

With the Spanish invasion of Peru and the introduction of the Roman Catholic faith, this celebration was forbidden and became known as Saint John the Baptist's Day. In the last 50 years the Peruvians have insisted that this festival be reintroduced for cultural and heritage reasons, with reenactments of the old rituals.

Today the festival occurs commencing with huge bonfires being lit on the longest night of the year. Old clothes are thrown onto the bonfire and new ones worn to celebrate the New Year. The fires burn during the night with plenty of fuel added to keep up the heat and the light.

With the coming of Dawn, people sit and wait for the Sun's coming, which is greeted and welcomed with much loud cheering. Offerings are made to the Sun of potatoes and sweet corn. A reenactment occurs of the Old Life (about 3 hours duration) but without the blood sacrifices, with people dressed in costume as Ancient Incas.

To complete the special occasion, a person is elected as the King for the day, with his warriors dressed with helmets and loyal subjects with masks. Everyone is encouraged to take part. Music is played and the dancing begins.

Sun dancers and musicians playing flutes and drums entertain the spectators.

The celebrations continue over the week with parties, dancing, foods and colourful crafts. People from all over the world come to witness this very special Sun Festival.

