

Las Posadas

The Lodgings Festival

This Mexican celebration is the commencement of the Christmas Season, followed by *Navidad* (Birth) and *Reyes Magos* (Wise King's Visit).

The word *Posadas* means lodgings. In Mexico Las Posadas herald the start of Christmas celebrations. Commencing on December 16th and lasting for nine nights, villagers search for the Holy Stable and the Holy Babe with a series of processions. These processions end on Christmas Eve (December 24th). Homes are decorated with the distinctive red poinsettias. Many candles and tin lanterns are used to light the way.

Re-enactments to find the Holy Stable occur each night with the party of child actors who carry clay statues of the characters from the Holy story. As the procession progresses the actors are turned away from finding suitable lodgings. The other villagers follow each procession witnessing the story. They carry lighted candles and tin lanterns. Hospitable homes, (pre-selected) welcome the travellers with a party (*fiesta*). There are refreshments, music and dancing with the highlight of the evening being the breaking of a clay jar (*pinata*) that is decorated either as an animal or bird. Pinatas contain sweets and toys for children. A game is played where children are blindfolded and have to find the pinata that hangs from a tree. The pinata is smashed open with a stick and children help themselves to the contents. At the end of the evening the *Reyes Magos* (Wise Kings) leave small gifts only for the host family.

Eventually after nine nights the Christ Child is born and one huge fiesta takes place with special celebration food, music, games, entertainment, bell ringing, whistle blowing and fireworks to announce the arrival.

The Christmas Gift Bearers, known to the *Reyes Magos* (Wise Kings) visit all children's homes on January 6th, the feast of the Ephifony

Activities could include

- Making Poinsettias (the flower of Christmas Eve)
- Read 'The story of Poinsettia'
- Make Limonado to drink at your fiesta
- Make a Pinata
- Listen and dance to Mexican music
- Make Tin lanterns for the procession
- Make *Ensalada de Noche Buena* and *Natilla* (fruit salad and caramel sauce)
- Try Empanadas (available in most supermarkets in frozen foods section)
- Make and eat Mexican foods
- Drink Hot chocolate
- Make a Tree of Life candlestick
- Make Confetti eggs
- Set up the Nativity scene
- Wear Mexican Dress
- Play Mexican games
- Paper cut-outs (*Papel picardos*)
- Hold a Fiesta and enjoy life

Source: Berg, E. 1997. *Festivals of the world*. Times, Singapore

1997. *Mexico : A portrait of the country through its festivals and traditions (Fiesta series)* Moondrake Reed, Vic.

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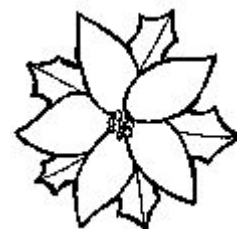
POINSETTIA

Los Posada begins the Christmas celebrations in Mexico each year. A procession is held prior to Christmas day which re-enacts the search for shelter by Mary and Joseph before the birth of Jesus.

The poinsettia is used as a decoration during this time and legend tells of a girl who went to visit the Nativity at her church. As she had no gift to bring, she picked some green leaves and as she entered the church, the leaves turned red and were then known as the poinsettia. Following is an activity where you can make your own poinsettias.

You Will Need

- Templates provided (enlarge by 50%)
- Red and green card
- Hole punch, scissors, paper fasteners, gold marker pen



What To Do

- Trace and cut 5 green leaf shapes and 5 red leaf shapes from templates
- Punch 1 hole in each leaf
- Stack all the green leavers and then the red leaves on top of each other
- Push a paper fastener through all the holes and fasten securely
- Fan the leaves to form a leaf and flower shape
- Decorate with the gold marker

Other activities you can include in your program to celebrate a Mexican Christmas include:

- Making pinatas
- Wearing somberos and serapes
- Listening and dancing to Mexican music and make maracas
- Making and eating Mexican food and drinks
- Learn some Spanish words

