

# Chapter 40

## People and Customs of Spanish America



### PEOPLE OF SPANISH AMERICA

Most Spanish-American countries have several different racial groups. The four principal groups are:

1. Whites, descendants of Spanish settlers and other European immigrants (from Italy, Germany, England, Ireland, and the Slavic countries).
2. Native Americans, found in great numbers in many Spanish-American countries, especially in Mexico, Central America, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru. Most are descendants of the Aztecs, the Mayas, and the Incas.
3. Blacks, descendants of Africans who were brought to Spanish America for heavy labor. They are most numerous in the Caribbean.
4. Mestizos (people of mixed European and Native-American ancestry), the largest racial group in many Spanish-American countries.
5. Mulattos (people of mixed European and African ancestry), most numerous in the Caribbean.

### NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

1. October 12 (El Día de la Raza), corresponds to Columbus Day and is celebrated throughout the Spanish-speaking world.
2. September 16, the Mexican national holiday that commemorates the beginning of the rebellion against Spain (1810).
3. May 5, commemorates the Mexican freedom struggle against France and Maximilian, the emperor of Mexico.

### RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

1. Christmas (Navidad) is one of the most important religious holidays in Spanish America.
2. Las Posadas (December 16-24) is a Mexican celebration that takes place during the nine days before Christmas. Children break piñatas (colorful figures containing candy, fruit, and toys).
3. Carnival (Carnaval) is a celebration that takes place before Lent.
4. Easter (Pascua Florida) is celebrated throughout Spanish America.

5. All Souls' Day (El Día de los Muertos) is celebrated on November 2 and is observed solemnly throughout the Spanish-speaking world. It is also known as El Día de los Difuntos.

### PICTURESQUE TYPES

1. El charro, the typical Mexican cowboy.
2. La china poblana, the female companion of the charro.
3. El mariachi, a group of Mexican street singers.
4. El gaucho, the cowboy of the Argentine pampas (plains).

### CLOTHING

In the cities, people generally dress as we do in the United States. However, one often sees traditional dress, especially during holiday celebrations.

1. El serape is a bright colored Mexican blanket (serape). It is worn by men and women, slung over the shoulders.
2. El poncho is a cape worn by the Mexicans, gauchos, and other Spanish Americans, as protection from the cold and the rain.
3. El rebozo is a shawl worn by Mexican women.
4. El sombrero de jipijapa (Panama hat) is a high-quality straw hat made in Ecuador, not in Panama.

### SPORTS AND SPECTACLES

1. Soccer (el fútbol) is a very popular game in most Spanish-speaking countries.
2. Jai-alai is a game that originated in the Basque country of Spain. This sport is popular in Spain, Mexico, Venezuela, Cuba, as well as Connecticut and Florida. Jai-alai is somewhat similar to handball.
  - a. El frontón is a three-walled court on which jai-alai is played.
  - b. La cesta is a curved basket strapped to the player's wrist, in which the ball is caught and thrown against the wall.
3. Bullfights (las corridas de toros) are prohibited in some Spanish-American countries, but they are still popular in Mexico, Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela.

**EXERCISE A**

Match the words in column A with their related words in column B. Write the letter in the space provided.

A	B
_____ 1. charro	a. jai-alai
_____ 2. Día de los Muertos	b. Lent
_____ 3. Las Posadas	c. candy
_____ 4. gaucho	d. Argentina
_____ 5. fútbol	e. Christmas
_____ 6. frontón	f. china poblana
_____ 7. sarape	g. soccer
_____ 8. Carnaval	h. Columbus Day
_____ 9. piñata	i. November 2
_____ 10. Día de la Raza	j. blanket

**EXERCISE B**

If the statement is true, write *Sí*; if it's false, correct it by replacing the word(s) in boldface. Write the correct word(s) in the space provided.

1. The **incas** were the dominant Native American culture in Mexico. \_\_\_\_\_
2. El **Día de los Muertos** is celebrated in Mexico. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The cowboy of Argentina is the **charro**. \_\_\_\_\_
4. The gauchos wear **ponchos** as protection from the rain. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Panama hats are made in **Panama**. \_\_\_\_\_
6. El **Día de la Raza** is celebrated in Spanish America and Spain. \_\_\_\_\_
7. **Jai-alai** originated in the Basque country in Spain. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Bullfights are popular in **Mexico**. \_\_\_\_\_
9. *Las Posadas* occur immediately **after** Christmas. \_\_\_\_\_
10. A **corrida** is a Mexican blanket. \_\_\_\_\_



### EXERCISE C

Select the word or expression that correctly completes each sentence.

1. Mexican women wear a shawl called a (*rebozo / poncho / cesta*).
2. In (*Argentina / Bolivia / Uruguay*) most of the inhabitants are Indians.
3. A three-walled court is used for (*bullfighting / jai-alai / soccer*).
4. One of the most important religious holidays in Spanish America is (*Navidad / Día de los Muertos / Carnaval*).
5. The Mexican street singers are called (*charros / gauchos / mariachis*).
6. The Mexican national holiday is (*November 2 / October 12 / September 16*).
7. A person of mixed Native American and European ancestry is called a (*china poblana / mestizo / sarape*).
8. On May 5, Mexicans commemorate the rebellion against (*Maximilian / Bolívar / Martí*).
9. *El Día de la Raza* corresponds to (*All Soul's Day / Easter / Columbus Day*).
10. On November 2, Spanish Americans celebrate (*Christmas / All Soul's Day / Easter*).

### EXERCISE D

Define each of the following.

1. mestizos \_\_\_\_\_
2. Día de la Raza \_\_\_\_\_
3. cesta \_\_\_\_\_
4. sarape \_\_\_\_\_
5. frontón \_\_\_\_\_
6. mariachi \_\_\_\_\_
7. gauchos \_\_\_\_\_
8. piñata \_\_\_\_\_
9. china poblana \_\_\_\_\_
10. poncho \_\_\_\_\_