

CATEGORY: PERU: NOW

CONCEPTS: HOLIDAYS, games, food, family, religion, life style

ACTIVITY: A DESCRIPTION OF HOLIDAYS IN PERU. A university student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Zoila Sevillano from Peru, wrote this description of yearly holiday time activities in Peru. It is a delightful description of what students in Peru look forward to during the year.

OBJECTIVES: Students will get a glimpse of the many enjoyable activities and meaningful festivities to be found in Peru.

MATERIALS: Photocopies of the following reading.

PROCEDURE: Students should read the essay and then discuss what they found surprising or interesting. This exercise is not intended for "heavy thinking" but rather to provide a general appreciation of life in another culture.

LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES

Source: Gibbs, Virginia G. *Latin America: Curriculum Materials for the Middle Grades*. Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. 1985. 1989.



Holidays in Peru
by Zoila Sevillano

Almost every city and town in Peru holds an annual festival, called "feria," to honor its patron saint. "Ferias" include colorful religious processions, feasting, dancing, and games. I will mention, month by month, the activities that people do on official holidays and on weekends to celebrate traditional rites and festivities.

JANUARY

Students are on summer vacation from January to March. Beaches along the coast are crowded especially on weekends all summer long, which on the coast of Perú falls during the months of January, February, and March. Many children go to summer school to learn to speak another language, how to play musical instruments, to swim, etc.

"Noche Vieja" or New Year's Eve is celebrated throughout the country. Fireworks and firecrackers start at twelve midnight. Everybody embraces and wishes each other a Happy New Year. Many traditions are common at the New Year. As the clock is striking twelve most people eat twelve grapes, mentally asking for twelve wishes to come true. Then everybody drinks champagne and eats the New Year's dinner consisting of stuffed turkey, fruit and vegetables. Then the music, singing, and dancing goes on till dawn. At about seven in the morning, many people have breakfast on the beach consisting of chicken soup, chicharrones (pork cooked and fried in a special way), black coffee and other typical food. Many people visit their relatives, usually parents and grandparents, to wish them a Happy New Year.

Another tradition that people practice is wearing yellow underwear because it brings good luck. Other people take out all the old things, clothes, furniture, etc., and burn them in the middle of the street at midnight on New Year's Eve; they say they are burning the old year. Others walk around the block in their neighborhood with a suitcase if they want to travel during the next year.

Most of the children go to bed early, but the older ones stay up until midnight of New Year's Eve to see the fireworks.

The sixth of January is Epiphany or "Los Reyes Magos," (Three Kings Day). There are dinner parties where people come to adore Baby Jesus and bring him gifts in the form of money placed near the manger in the nativity display. People eat, sing, drink and dance merrily. After this party, the nativity, which has been on display since Christmas, is put away and another family is chosen to give the "Reyes Magos" party for the next year. This festivity is not celebrated in Lima anymore, but it is still practiced in small towns. In the old times this date was the day to give and receive Christmas presents as it still is in Spain. The only remembrance of "Reyes Magos" in Lima is the "rosca de Reyes" which looks like a wreath and is a big round bread or cake with a hole in the middle and a surprise gift inside. Bakeries

sell "rosca de Reyes" on the sixth of January. This festivity is not an official holiday in Perú anymore, but it is still an official holiday in Spain.

The eighteenth of January is the anniversary of the founding of Lima. "Limeños" celebrate it in the main square or "Plaza de Armas" on the eve of that date. The best musicians, singers, poets, etc. perform that evening in what is called the "serenade." The anniversary of other cities and towns is celebrated in a similar way.

FEBRUARY

The whole month of February is devoted to Carnival. Carnival is a time of merry-making before the beginning of Lent, with its fasting and somber mood. On weekends, children's friends and relatives get together and play carnival. They fill balloons with water and throw them at each other. They also use buckets, sprinklers, etc., for water fights. Also, they paint each other with red, white, black, or green paint. In the evening they cover each other with white powder.

On the last weekend of February some people and children make a large carnival man out of pieces of wood and cloth. It is called "ñio Carnavalón" and it is burned on the last Sunday of February. That symbolizes the end of carnival time.

There are carnival parties where children and grown-ups wear costumes. The boys cover the girls with confetti and spray them with perfumed water called "columbina." A king and a queen are elected and prizes are given for the best costumes. A committee of neighbors or friends usually organizes these carnival costume parties and buys the prizes with the money contributed by the guests or sponsors.

There are other parties called "Tumbamontes" celebrated in many Indian towns especially in the mountains, though these parties are held in Lima, too, at regional clubs. (In Lima, as in many Latin American cities, people who are originally from another town or region form clubs for socializing with other people from their place of origin and maintain its traditions.) A "mayordomo," elected the year before by the community, is in charge of decorating a tree with ribbons, toys, scarves, bags of candy, and surprise gifts. He or she also provides the music, food and drinks for the party on the last Saturday or any weekend of February. In some towns, there are festivities for two days or a whole week. In other towns there is a parade of musicians and dancers called "negritos" because they wear black masks to resemble black people. These "negritos" perform in the streets. The main party, with the tree, lasts all day. It starts with a Mass, the Roman Catholic service, then all the guests dance around the tree, each one having a go at the tree with a hatchet. After many rounds the person who knocks down the tree with the hatchet becomes the "mayordomo" for the next year. When the tree is on the ground, the guests, especially the children, take the decorations and gifts.

Another custom for carnival is the "condor rachi" practiced in some towns in the Highlands. A condor is tied to the head of a bull and both animals try to get rid of each other, one by attempting to fly and the other by shaking his head. Usually the condor gets loose and flies away after it has made a great effort.

MARCH

Students are still on summer vacation if Easter comes near the end of March. Easter is a religious festivity. Traditionally, families get together for Good Friday lunch which consists of fish cooked in a special way called "bacalao," (cod). Then the children get the Easter eggs (chocolate eggs with a toy inside). The eggs are not decorated but wrapped in shiny, colorful paper. Also, all the churches are full because, following a custom practiced for many years, people make pilgrimages to seven churches on Easter Sunday to say special Easter prayers.

APRIL

April means it is time to return to school. School starts April 1 and ends December 23. Autumn is just starting and the weather is still nice and warm. Children play outside on the playgrounds and in the streets. When children go to school they must wear uniforms which are the same for all the schools whether they are private or public. In the public schools English is the only foreign language taught. English classes begin in high school. In most private schools English is also the only foreign language taught but students start learning it from kindergarten. Some private schools have French or German as the first foreign language.

MAY

The first of May is an official holiday because it is Labor Day. It is picnic day and many families invade the parks and the countryside, which is only fifteen miles from Lima. People who live in rural areas also have picnics by the riverside.

Soccer games are a tradition on Labor Day. One especially popular competition is a game pitting a team of single people against a team of married people.

JUNE

One important religious feast in the month of June is Saint John the Baptist which is commemorated on June 24 and coincides with the festival of the sun, the "Inti Raymi," the biggest event celebrated in Cuzco. On this date the people of Cuzco remember their Inca past. They revive, step by step, the elaborate festivities to honor the god sun, the most popular god, second only in importance to Viracocha, the Creator. The committee in charge of preparing this great festival takes a whole year to organize it with the cooperation of thousands of people, mostly art, folk, dance and music students and volunteers among Cuzco residents.

The festival of "Inti Raymi" was an Inca celebration held at the time of the summer solstice to honor their god, the sun. It took place every year in Coricancha, the temple of the sun which is located in downtown Cuzco. In Coricancha, the front wall in the main room was aligned so as to point towards declination 23°40', which means it faced almost directly towards the June solstice. The direct rays of the sun shone into the tabernacle, which looked like an altar, to be reflected by plates of beaten gold and an array of precious stones, mainly emeralds and turquoise. The Inca sat on the altar when these festivals of the sun were held. It was a seat which the sun illuminated as it rose. The festivities began when all the dignitaries were placed according to their rank in Huacaipata and Cusipata Plazas (downtown Cuzco) where they waited for the rising of the sun, wearing no shoes and squatting. Everybody wore masks and jewels and very rich clothes. Everybody had fasted for three days and no fire could be started in the city. When the sun appeared everybody yelled "Haylli" and adored it with open arms and palms towards the East. Then the Inca raised two gold glasses, the "aquillas," filled with "chicha" (corn drink). He offered the sun the "aquilla" in his right hand while he poured the other into his relatives' glasses. Then everybody went to the Coricancha in procession, the Inca being carried on the royal litter. A llama was sacrificed and the "ajllas" or virgins of the sun, roasted the meat in public and distributed it to all present with pieces of "zancu" (corn bread). After this banquet the Inca offered a drink to the "Curacas" and nobles, and everybody danced, sang, and prayed to the sun. As part of this festival, and for nine days, people visited Huanacauri and other "Huacas" (cave-like residences of an ancestor of a family or community converted into the guardian spirit).

The "ajllas" or virgins of the sun were selected from among the most beautiful girls in the empire and lived in seclusion in the "ajllahuasi" or "house for the chosen." They wove the Inca clothes and prepared the "zancu" and the "chicha" for the great sun festivals.

Today, as in the time of the Incas, people from all over the country, and neighboring countries, gather to celebrate this festival. It is a beautiful and colorful sight, a reminder of Cuzco's place in the Inca empire.

JULY

The twenty-eighth of July is Independence Day. Throughout the country students parade with their school bands in the main street of their neighborhoods, towns and cities. All the houses must put out the national flag. In the main streets in Lima there is a big military parade.

Independence Day is a two-day official holiday. Many people from other parts of the country come to Lima to enjoy the activities and festivals that commemorate this anniversary.

July is also circus time. Many international circuses come to Lima and the crowds pack them for the whole month.

AUGUST

The month of August is kite flying time. It is the middle of winter in Lima but the weather is rather mild. Many children make their own kites and enter competitions for the best-looking and the highest flying kites. These competitions are usually held in the neighborhood parks.

The thirtieth of August is the feast of Saint Rose of Lima. Many people visit her shrine on Tacna Avenue in Lima and throw letters with petitions into a well where she used to get water.

SEPTEMBER

It is springtime. Schools and universities hold "Juegos Florales" (Flower Pageants) in which students compete to display their talents in poetry, music, dance, painting, and sports. Spring queens are elected in schools and universities.

OCTOBER

There is a big religious celebration to honor the Lord of Miracles, patron saint of Lima. The city is decorated in purple and there is a fair in downtown Lima where "turrón de Doña Pepa" (a kind of cake similar to nougat), "picarones" (a kind of doughnut), "anticuchos" (beef heart chopped in small pieces and cooked on spits), and other goodies are sold. It is a colorful fair. Big crowds attend the processions and musicians and poets pay their homage to the Lord.

October is also a time for bullfights. The annual bullfighting fair held this month brings to Lima Spain's most famous "toreros" (bullfighters). It is one of the most exciting events of the year.

NOVEMBER

The first of November is "Souls Day." The custom is to go to the cemeteries to take flowers to all the relatives and friends who have passed away. In some towns in the Highlands, some people believe that the spirits will come and visit their houses on that day so they display their deceased relatives' favorite foods and drinks on special altars.

DECEMBER

The eighth of December is the feast of Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ. On this day it is a tradition for Roman Catholics to have the children receive their first communion.

Students start their summer vacation around December 23. December 24 is "Nochebuena" (Christmas Eve). Some children manage to stay up till midnight when the fireworks and firecrackers announce the birth of Jesus Christ. Everybody embraces each other and wishes family and friends a Merry Christmas. It is a custom to go to Midnight Mass.

After mass people eat the Christmas dinner which is usually turkey. Also it is a custom to have "chocolate" and "panetón" (they resemble hot chocolate and a bread like fruit cake).

Then the children must go to bed because Father Christmas will not stop to deliver presents in those houses where children are still awake. Grown-ups exchange presents after the Christmas dinner.

Days before Christmas many decorations are put up on the front door and in the house. The Christmas tree is put up and decorated, too. Many families make a "nativity" by which the event in Bethlehem is recreated: Baby Jesus in the manger in the stable, Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, and the Wise Men adoring him.