

Mexico's Intangible Cultural Heritage

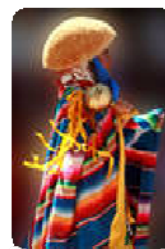
Elements of Mexican Culture Recognized by UNESCO

By Suzanne Barbezat, About.com Guide

The UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), besides maintaining a list of World Heritage Sites, also keeps a list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. These are traditions or living expressions which are passed down through generations in the form of oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, or knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe. These are the aspects of Mexican culture which are considered by the UNESCO to be a part of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity:

Parachicos in the Traditional January Feast of Chiapa de Corzo

The dance of the Parachicos forms an essential part of the Fiestas de Enero (January Festival) in Chiapa de Corza, in the state of Chiapas. These dances are considered a communal offering to the saints celebrated in this traditional festival: Our Lord of Esquipulas, Saint Anthony Abbot, and Saint Sebastian, the latter being particularly honored. The dancers wear carved wooden masks, headdresses and brightly colored serapes. Children take part in the festivities, learning through participation in the dance. According to the UNESCO, "The dance of the Parachicos during the Great Feast embraces all spheres of local life, promoting mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals."



Pirekua, Traditional Song of the P'urhépecha

Pirekua is the name given to the traditional music of the indigenous Purepecha communities of Michoacán state, whose origins date back to the 16th century. This musical style is the result of a blending of the indigenous culture, in particular the language, and the Spanish colonial string and wind instruments. The singers, known as *pireris*, sing in the indigenous language as well as in Spanish, and the lyrics deal with a wide range of themes, from love and courtship, ideas about society and politics, and remembrance of historical events. The songs constitute a medium of dialogue between the groups that sing them, establishing and reinforcing social bonds.



Traditional Mexican Cuisine

Traditional Mexican cuisine is central to the cultural identity of the communities that practice and transmit it from generation to generation. Farming techniques such as the *milpa* and cooking processes like nixtamalization, as well as specialized utensils, ritual practices and community customs all form a part of the comprehensive cultural model that makes up Mexican cuisine. Culinary customs have been passed down through generations and ensure community cohesion as group identity is expressed through food preparation.



Indigenous Festivity Dedicated to the Dead

El Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is a special occasion in which Mexicans remember and honor their family and friends who have passed on. The festivities take place each year from October 31 to November 2. The spirits of the dead are thought to return at this time to visit their relatives and loved ones, who prepare special offerings for them.



Ritual Ceremony of the Voladores

The ceremony of the Voladores ('flying men') is a fertility dance performed by several ethnic groups in Mexico and Central America, but particularly the Totonac people in the state of Veracruz. The ritual involves five men and a very tall pole. The participants dance around the pole, then climb it. Four of the men drop themselves off of the pole and, suspended upside down in the air by ropes which are wound around the pole, they circle to the ground. The purpose of this ritual is to honor the earth, the passage of time and the group's place in the universe.



Places of Memory and Living Traditions of the People of Tolimán

The Otomi speakers of the state of Queretaro consider themselves descendants of the Chichimecas and see themselves as guardians of a sacred territory. They have developed traditions that express a unique relationship with their local topography and ecology, and make annual pilgrimages, venerate their ancestors and celebrate their communal identity. The "Places of memory and living traditions of the Otomí-Chichimecas people of Tolimán: the Peña de Bernal, guardian of a sacred territory" was inscribed on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage in 2009.

