

# Making Cinco de Mayo a Cinch

## **La Dia de la Battalia de Puebla**

This weekend is bound to get crazy. Everybody loves a good reason to celebrate and nobody does it like a San Diegan. Old Town will be packed with young and old alike, prowling the streets and hanging out the windows and balconies of bars looking to get into the Cinco de Mayo spirit. And by spirit you know what I mean; think spirits! Tequila and beer will be guzzled by the gallons. The question is what will you be doing?

Old Town will kick off the celebration on Friday the 3rd. The 30th annual, three day celebration is touted as the biggest "north of the border" and not for nothing. If you've attended in the past, you know what it's like: the press of people, the jovial atmosphere, the balmy air practically trembling with brass horns and guitars playing traditional music and platefuls of spicy foods shuttling from over 20 kitchen to a table near you. But if you don't get to Old Town early you had better walk. Parking is next to nonexistent, unless you're extremely lucky.

If you're looking for more than just an enormous social event that's great too. Old Town will be hosting live music on two separate stages. They promise "sizzling flamenco beats, Norteno flairs and traditional Mariachi music." Additionally, throughout the day there will be a pavilion with free samples of high-end tequila! If you want to find me, that's where I'll be.

## **Origins of the Holiday and How the US Got Cinco de Mayo Fever**

So, what's Cinco de Mayo all about? I mean, aside from a Mexican holiday with boisterous music and young, scantily clad gringas giggling with their friends. Though it's celebrated with relish all over the US, the holiday is only regionally celebrated in Mexico, most particularly in Puebla. Many people assume that it's the Mexican Independence day. This is celebrated on September 16th however. Cinco de Mayo, also known as La Dia de la Battalia de Puebla (isn't that a mouthful?), has its origins

in the French occupation of Mexico in the late 19th century. In the aftermath of the American-Mexican war, President Benito Juarez declared a moratorium on the repayment of foreign debt, hoping to rebuild the then bankrupt Mexican treasury. Britain, Spain and France decided to take action and sent their fleets to demand the monies owed them. Britain and Spain both negotiated with Mexico however and subsequently withdrew. France, ruled then by the despot Napoleon III, not to be confused with the pint-sized tyrant who brought Europe to its knees, took advantage of the situation. Wanting to establish a new Mexican empire, under French rule, Napoleon III ordered an invasion. Things looked grim. How could the recently weakened Mexican forces with few resources and ill-equipped resist the overwhelming might of the elite French army. Long story short, they did. Spectacularly so. At the Battle of Puebla, on the fifth of May, hence Cinco de Mayo, the Mexican general, Zaragoza, crushed the French's 8,000 strong army with barely 4,500 troops. Though not a huge strategic victory, the story inflamed the collective imagination of Mexico, creating a singular sense of unity when the country needed it most. Ultimately, the French returned with an army of 30,000 and took Mexico, installing Emperor Maximilian I in Mexico City. Perhaps the memory of the fifth of May kept the national spirit intact, but whatever the case, the French victory itself was short-lived. Mexico regained its autonomy three years later. And Cinco de Mayo has gone down in Mexican and US history.

But why the US? Now this is strange. The dates of the French aggression coincide with the American Civil War. The US territories to the south, which had just recently been Mexico's still had a large population of ex-pat Mexicans. The common cause of national independence between the Americans of the south and the Mexicans sparked a kind of affinity. This just goes to show what strange bedfellows war can make. Nevertheless, Cinco de Mayo has been as entrenched in US culture as in Mexican culture since its beginnings in the late 19th century.

But never mind all this. Go out there and have a good time. Whether you go to Old Town to whoop it up or you have a private party to go to, eat, drink and dance your cares away. Because come Monday morning you'll have to face your fascist boss again. Boo!

BIBLIOTECA DEL NIÑO MEXICANO



MAUCCI HERMANOS, MÉXICO

[Cover for a children's book about the Battle of Puebla.](#)