

Celebrating in Spanish

Holidays and Special observances in the Spanish-speaking World

On Sunday June 17, 2007, Trinidad and Tobago, like many other countries, will celebrate Father's Day. It is often taken for granted that special days like these are simultaneously celebrated in Spanish-speaking countries. However, this is not always true! For example, this coming Sunday will be just an ordinary day in Bolivia, Honduras and Spain, since they celebrate Father's Day on March 19, the feast day of St. Joseph in the Catholic calendar. Some Spanish-speaking countries that will also celebrate Father's Day with us this Sunday include Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru.

Similarly Mother's Day is celebrated at different times throughout the year. While most Spanish-speaking nations observe this special day at some time in May, there are some like Argentina, Costa Rica and Panama which celebrate it in October, August and December, respectively.

With respect to saint's days, while they hold very little importance to the average Trinbagonian, they play a very important part in the lives of most Spanish-speakers, the majority of whom are Roman Catholic. In fact, in some countries, the official saint's day of the Catholic saint a person was named after is given even more importance than that person's birthday. For instance, in Spain, it is customary for the person whose 'santo' it is to receive gifts, cards, well wishes and phone calls from family and friends on this day. However, on their birthday, they are the ones who normally share sweets, chocolates and other goodies with their loved ones, expecting nothing in return.

While the familiar 'Cumpleaños feliz' is often sung at birthday celebrations in the Spanish-speaking world, there are many different versions of this song and some countries also have other common birthday songs. For example, in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, the song 'Ay Que Noche Tan Preciosa' is often sung to the birthday person while in Mexico, a song called 'Las Mañanitas' is the traditional birthday song.

Another significant difference in celebrations between the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking world is that of the 'quince'. While we consider the 16th, 18th and 21st

birthdays as special times in a person's life, in Latin America, it is a girl's 15th birthday that is often celebrated in grand style. The celebrations of the 'quinceañera' are usually so elaborate that they resemble a mini-wedding. In Mexico for example, there is a religious ceremony to start the celebrations, and like a wedding, a reception follows. At the reception, there is a toast of champagne to the birthday girl, food, dancing and of course, tokens for the guests to take to remember the occasion. The 'quinceañera' wears a ball gown and tiara and often has a court of fourteen (14) individuals, which including her would total fifteen (15). Other countries where the 'quince' tradition is very strong include Argentina, Cuba and Puerto Rico.

An official holiday that is celebrated in the majority of Spanish-speaking countries that is not celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago is the 'Día de la Hispanidad'. Also referred to as 'Día de la Raza' (Day of the Race) or 'Columbus Day', this day commemorates the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the New World, when he landed on an island in the Bahamas, in 1492, thinking he had reached India. In Uruguay, they refer to it as 'Día de las Américas' and in Bolivia and Venezuela as 'Día de la Resistencia Indígena'. It is celebrated on October 12 every year.

While some holidays, whether official or unofficial, do not even resemble any special day on our 'calendars', there are others that are celebrated similarly but on different days with different names. For example, what we refer to as April Fool's Day can be likened to the 'Día de los Inocentes' or 'Día de los Santos Inocentes' in the Spanish-speaking world. However, this day of practical jokes is not celebrated on April 1 but rather on December 28 to commemorate all children below the age of three (3) who were murdered following the decree by King Herod. In Spain, there are even entire flea markets set up to sell masks, wigs, costumes and other items necessary to carry out the day's pranks.

Meanwhile, Valentine's Day is celebrated in most Spanish-speaking countries on February 14 but is referred to as 'Día de San Valentín', 'Día de los Enamorados' (Day of Lovers) or 'Día del Amor y la Amistad' (Day of Love and Friendship). However, in Colombia it is celebrated in September. Furthermore, although Trinidad and Tobago will be celebrating Labour Day on June 19, it is celebrated in all Spanish-speaking countries on May 1.

Although it is not a holiday, since we are speaking of significant days in the calendar it is interesting to note also that ‘black Friday 13’ holds no special significance to Spanish speakers, as in the Spanish-speaking world, ‘martes 13’ (or Tuesday 13) is considered to be a day of bad luck.

Nevertheless, there are some holidays and traditions that are observed at the same time in both the Spanish-speaking world and Trinidad and Tobago, though their celebrations vary greatly from country to country. Holidays like this include Easter, Christmas Day and New Year’s. However, there is no such thing as Boxing Day in the Spanish-speaking world and while we usually exchange presents on Christmas Day, it is more customary for presents to be exchanged on January 06, the Epiphany or ‘Día de los Reyes’, in Spanish-speaking countries. Similarly, Independence Days are usually celebrated on the day commemorating the respective country’s independence from another country’s rule in the past.

Naturally, there are many holidays and observances that are peculiar to a particular country, like the recently celebrated Indian Arrival Day in Trinidad and Tobago, or ‘Cinco de Mayo’ in Mexico.

The Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (SIS) takes this opportunity to wish all fathers across the nation a wonderful Father’s Day, or as they say in Spanish, *¡Feliz Día del Padre!*

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For more information about the Spanish As the First Foreign Language (SAFFL) initiative, please contact the Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (A Division of the Ministry of Trade and Industry) at 623-2931 ext 2123, 2019 or fax us at 627-0002.