

All You Need to Know About Cinco de Mayo

Many in the United States assume that Cinco de Mayo (May 5th) refers to Mexico's Independence Day. That is incorrect. Independence Day is celebrated on September 16th. So what is Cinco de Mayo, and why is it such a big deal?

In 1861 the French decided to use the fact that Mexico had declared a moratorium on its debts as an excuse to invade. In 1862 an outgunned Mexican army won a surprising lopsided victory over the French near the city of Puebla, about an hour's drive east of Mexico City. The holiday of Cinco de Mayo commemorates that victory. Unfortunately, about a year later the French attacked again and defeated the Mexicans, installing Maximilian of Hapsburg as Emperor, where he remained until he was executed in 1867.

In Mexico, except around Puebla itself, Cinco de Mayo is not considered a particularly important holiday. People are happy for the time off but that's about it. It certainly does not generate nearly the hype that it does in this country, where it has been mercilessly promoted as a celebration of Mexico and its people by the Mexican food, drink, and restaurant industry. Frankly I don't see anything wrong with this. Mexico and Mexicans certainly deserve to be celebrated, and, for those who need an excuse, the fifth of May is as good a time as any. So let's do as we're told and have a few Mexican beers or tequila drinks and eat some Mexican food!