

## POSADAS AND PIÑATAS: The Soul of Christmas in Mexico

Probably the most important part of Christmas in Mexico is the *posadas*, which are celebrated during the nine days of December 16 to 24th. The word *posada* refers to lodging and represents both Mary's nine month pregnancy and Mary and Joseph's request for shelter in Bethlehem. Each night people in various neighborhoods agree to host celebrations where people carrying candles and religious figures and singing carols or hymns stop at various homes and ask for shelter. They are refused until they reach the home of the family that has volunteered to be the host, where they are admitted. Prayers are offered around nativity scenes, more carols and hymns are sung, children break a piñata, and there is a banquet featuring simple but delicious foods and drinks. *Posadas* are also held in various part of the U.S. southwest. If you are ever fortunate enough to be in Santa Fe during that time, you will find the experience to be magical.

If you cannot be in Mexico or a place like Santa Fe at Christmas, you can still capture some of the mood of the event in your own home and share it with friends and family. Piñatas can now be found in most U.S. cities, and you can certainly prepare traditional food and drinks. The items served can include almost anything, but some of the most popular items are tamales, quesadillas, tostadas, and gorditas. Both cookies and the fritters called buñuelos make great dessert items. Nearly always the meals are accompanied with fruit *ponches* (punches) traditionally made with fruits like tecojotes, guava, apples, and raisins.

Regarding piñatas, like anything else an understanding of the history and symbolism behind it can make the experience more interesting and entertaining. In his book, *Tradiciones Mexicanas*, writer and historian, Sebastián Verti, gives the following description of what lies behind the piñata tradition. "The clay pot, colorfully decorated, represents Satan or the spirit of evil, who with his appearance attracts humanity. The sweets symbolized the unknown pleasure which he offers mankind to attract him to his kingdom. The blindfolded person is like faith, which must be blind, and will be in charge of destroying the evil spirit. This is the struggle which man must sustain, availing himself of faith to destroy evil." During the *posadas*, there are often two piñatas, one for children and one for adults.

Whether you include a *posada* and/or a piñata or not, please consider having your own Mexican-style Christmas party. Some of the dishes that your family and guests will appreciate include [TURCO](#) [TAMALES](#), [TURCO QUESADILLAS](#), and the [GUACAMOLE-NACHO COMBO](#). Because tropical fruits are often difficult to find and expensive at Christmas, I suggest our simple but delicious [SANGRIA](#), served either hot or cold. For a sweet, the [BISCOCHITOS](#) are terrific!