

# Understanding the Culture: Hispanics

## Latino/Hispanic/Spanish

Latino is commonly used to describe Hispanics. However, Latino people come from Latin America. Spanish people are from Spain. Hispanic people descend from countries where Spanish is spoken.

## US Hispanic Population

Hispanics comprise approximately 15% of the US population. Mexican is the largest ethnic subdivision of Hispanics in the US comprising about 63.3%, Central and South America 14.4%, Puerto Rico 10.6%, Cuban 4.2%.

## Largest Population

In 1990 Hispanic became the largest foreign-born population in the United States. By the year 2000, Mexican immigrants alone outnumber the combined Asian, African and Middle Eastern immigrants. Mexicans comprise over two-thirds of the Hispanic population.



Traditional Salutation:

**“Buenos días! Cómo te va?”**

**“Good day! How’s it going?”**

Reply:

**“Muy bien, gracias!”**

**“Very well, thank you!”**

Hispanic is not considered a race but a people of various races and ethnic origin (European, African and Native American). In most Latin cultures, skin color is variable. Within the same family one sibling could be considered white and another black.

Hispanic families are a very close, important social unit. Family is a source of support and pride, but also the primary means of economic and social stability. The family usually includes extended family.

A firm handshake is common as a greeting and for leaving. A hug and light kiss on a cheek are common

- ❖ Physical contact is important
- ❖ Personal space is close
- ❖ Loyal to those they trust
- ❖ Family is highest priority
- ❖ Children are part of overall society rather than the property of a set of parents
- ❖ Patriarchal, male-dominate in most cases
- ❖ Emphasis on present tense
- ❖ Tend to not make plans to far in the future
- ❖ Time is usually flexible
- ❖ Prefer to conform to the group than stand out
- ❖ Trust is earned but respect should be given to everyone
- ❖ Sense of formality
- ❖ Predominantly Roman Catholic

between close friends and family. Informal conversations are usually loud and full of animated gestures and body language. Physical distance when holding a conversation is relatively close.

Information is passed mostly by word of mouth, so grocery stores, churches and the post office are good places to advertise programs. But remember, Hispanic culture values attention to present companions over punctuality in appointments.

**University of Idaho**  
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## Dates of Note

### ❖ JANUARY

1: Año Nuevo – New Year's Day

6: Día de los Reyes Magos or Día de los Santos Reyes; Epiphany. Traditionally people exchange gifts on this day rather than on Christmas; children put out their shoes for the Magi to leave the presents inside.

### ❖ MARCH

5: Carnaval. A five day celebration before the Catholic lent. Beginning the weekend before Lent, it is celebrated with parades, floats and dancing in the streets.

31: Cesar Chavez Holiday. This holiday honors the Mexican-American labor and civil rights activist and leader of the United Farm Workers in the 1960s. This is a state holiday in California, Arizona and Texas.

### ❖ APRIL

First week: La Semana Santa or Easter and the Holy Week. The week leading up to Easter, one of the highest holy days, involves processions, prayer and mass. Cascarones, originally from Mexico, are hollowed eggshells filled with confetti. Having one broken over your head is said to bring good luck.

### ❖ MAY

1: Primero de Mayo or Día del Trabajo or Día del Trabajador; a national holiday celebrated in most Spanish-speaking countries, equivalent to the U.S. Labor Day.

5: Cinco de Mayo. Commemorates victory of Mexican forces over the French army at the Battle of Puebla in 1862.

10: Día de las Madres, or Day of the Mothers.

### ❖ JUNE

24: Feast of San Juan Bautista or el Día de San Pedro. St. John the Baptist, patron saint of Puerto Rico's capital.

### ❖ JUNE (continued)

29: St Peter & St Paul - San Pedro y San Pablo.

### ❖ AUGUST

15: Feast of the Assumption. Celebrates the belief in Mary's ascending to heaven.

### ❖ SEPTEMBER

15: Hispanic Heritage Month begins. This date also reflects the independence of five Latin American countries – Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Mexico declared independence on September 16 and Chile on September 18.

### ❖ OCTOBER

12: Spanish National Day – Día de la Hispanidad or Día de la Raza or Columbus Day.

### ❖ NOVEMBER

1&2: Día de los Muertos or Day of the Dead. Spirits of the dead (almas) come back. Many set up altars (ofrendas) or decorate cemetery plots with flowers, candles and food.

2: All Souls' Day – Día de Todos los Santos. In memory of all early martyrs and saints.

### ❖ DECEMBER

8: Immaculate Conception

12: Virgin de Guadalupe – Our Lady of Guadalupe. Mexico's most beloved religious and cultural image.

16-24: Las Posadas or La Novena.

Commemorates the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.

24&25: La Nochebuena y la Navidad – Christmas Eve & Christmas

31: New Year's Eve. 12 grapes are eaten with every toll of the clock to bring good luck for the next 12 months of the New Year.



### Legend of the Poinsettia

This beautiful flower, native to Mexico and Central America, laid its fame to the Christmas celebration rooted in Hispanic culture. As the legend is told Pepita, a poor Mexican girl had no gift to present the Christ Child at Christmas Eve. Her brother, Pedro, told her that even the most humble give, if given in love, will be acceptable in His eyes. Pepita knelt down and gathered a handful of common weeds into a small bouquet. Once the bouquet was laid at the foot of the nativity, the weeds burst into blooms of brilliant red which was considered to be a miracle. From that day on the bright red flowers were known as the Flores de Noche Buena, Flowers of the Holy Night.