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COUNTRY CULTURE



HISTORY



LANGUAGE



EDUCATION



NATIONAL SYMBOLS

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**Video Dictionary**

INTERFACE LANGUAGE: English (American)

LANGUAGE OF STUDY: Spanish (Latin American)

**GLOSSARIES**

**TERMS**

Hola  
Hello

¿Cómo está usted?  
How are you?

Buenos días  
Good morning

Buenas tardes  
Good afternoon, Good evening

Buenas noches  
Good night

**Spanish (Latin American) - Greetings**

¿Cómo está usted?  
(How are you?)

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**National Cuisine**

**Overview**

Chinese cuisine is popular throughout the world, but its roots and varieties are more diverse and complex than one might think from sampling the standard dishes exported and modified for international palates. The traditional fare of the average Chinese person is very simple, with rice and noodles as staples augmented by small amounts of stir-fried meat and vegetables. In the North, wheat and millet are more prevalent, and noodles and steamed buns are more common. However, beyond this simple base, there is a staggering range of complex formal dishes and a seemingly infinite variety of snacks, soups, stir-fries, and main courses made from a wide range of meats, vegetables, and seasonings. Ingredients (vegetables, meat, tofu) are typically prepared in bite-sized pieces (cubes, strips, slices) because it is faster to cook food that way and easier to eat it with chopsticks. Fish, however, is almost always served whole, with the head on. Soups are also very popular (eaten with spoons), but they are traditionally served after a cold appetizer and a hot main course. The bowl of rice, served with the entrée in overseas restaurants, comes at the end of the meal in China.

The Taoist philosophical principle of balancing yin and yang (different yet complementary elements like male and female and light and dark) is fundamental to Chinese cuisine. Many dishes attempt to achieve this balance by combining different tastes (sweet, salty, bitter, and sour), colors, and textures (soft, crisp, chewy, raw) in just the right proportions. Presentation is extremely important in formal meals and it is common to have vegetables carved into the shapes of flowers and animals.

Some rare ingredients like frog's stomachs, snake's gall bladders, and shark's fins are attributed with medicinal or aphrodisiac benefits and held in high regard. Preserved foods like dried sausages, thousand-year-old eggs (preserved for 10 weeks), and dried seafood (fish, squid, shrimp, jellyfish) are another unique feature of Chinese cooking.

Regional differences are pronounced and generally categorized under the "Eight Great

*As a seafood market in southern China*

*A tea ceremony in Chongqing*

*A man cooks in his street wok in Shanghai*

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**Gift Giving**

**Personal Gifts**

Personal gifts are given and exchanged in Mexico on a wide range of special occasions including birthdays, weddings, graduations, and welcome-home parties. Mother's Day is an especially important gift-giving occasion in Mexico. People present their mothers with flowers and gifts, and even stores and supermarkets give small gifts to all the mothers who pass through their retail sites. Although Christmas is celebrated with enthusiasm throughout the predominantly Catholic country, most gift giving is done on January 6th, the Día de Los Reyes (Day of the Three Wise Men). This day celebrates the three wise men or kings who came bearing gifts like gold, frankincense, and myrrh for the baby Jesus.

In Mexico, where long engagements are common, a prospective bridegroom sometimes gives his girlfriend a ring of commitment a year before giving her an engagement ring. The traditional wedding gift from groom to bride is thirteen gold coins, which he presents to her one at a time, symbolizing his promise to support her and their children. It's also customary for the wedding couple to receive a Christian Bible, often embossed with their names and the date of their marriage. Traditional gifts from wedding guests also include wine glasses for the wedding toasts, a wedding rosary, a prayer book, and embroidered pillows for the couple to kneel on during the ceremony. Wedding favors for guests include wedding cookies, Spanish fans, or small pottery items. Money is traditionally given to the bride and groom after the wedding ceremony by pinning it to their clothing or slipping it into their pockets during their first walk.

The Quinceañera (female coming-out celebration), happens on the 15th birthday of Mexican girls and is a lavish event in which no expense is spared by family and friends. It is quite common for girls to receive gifts like international vacations or new cars on this day. Mexicans celebrate birthdays with gusto and it is common for even relatively poor families to hold huge celebrations that feature live musicians, a culinary feast, and revelry that lasts late into the night.

**Business Gifts**

Gifts are a common and welcome, yet non-obligatory, part of doing business in Mexico, but care should be taken in terms of appropriateness. While high quality business items like pens, stationery, planners, and other professional and office supplies are appropriate items, gifts that are too luxurious or personal may be taken as displays of wealth, or even bribes. When a member of an office team, like a secretary, helps with travel plans or provides assistance, it is customary to thank them with a small gift. A man giving a gift to a female secretary often says that the gift is from his wife to avoid unintended connotations.

Items featuring a corporate logo are generally well-received in Mexico. Candles, a souvenir or local crafts from a foreign country, or an illustrated book about the visitor's

*Mother's Day is an especially important gift-giving occasion in Mexico.*

*The Quinceañera, a Mexican girl's coming-of-age celebration, is a lavish event in which no expense is spared by family and friends.*

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## South Africa

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**Birth**

South Africa's diverse multicultural society earns it the nickname of the "Rainbow Nation." Life stages, including birth practices, vary greatly depending on a person's ethnic group. Many South Africans today follow age-old cultural practices. Birth is an occasion for loud and joyous celebration among South Africans. If all is well with the baby and mother, celebrations usually begin with the slaughter of a sheep or two to provide a lavish feast for the entire community.

Parents and grandparents minutely scrutinize the newborn to discern any resemblance to an ancestor. The family holds prolonged discussions before deciding on a name for the newborn. The chosen name may reflect a festival or seasonal change at the time of birth or the child's likeness to a particular ancestor.

Naming-day ceremonies are special occasions held seven to ten days after birth, with relatives, friends, and members of the community arriving with gifts to bless the baby. At the ceremony, a grandmother or elderly aunt whispers the name in the baby's ear while holy water is sprinkled around the newborn.

In rural South Africa, traditional birth attendants and midwives once delivered most babies. Although years of delivering babies gave them an expertise in this field, mortality rates were high, especially in complicated pregnancies. In recent times, health education and a focus on rural health has helped motivate many expectant mothers to turn to hospitals for births. At present, 92 percent of all births in South Africa take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. Although the training of local people to provide primary and auxiliary medical care has shifted the focus toward better healthcare awareness, traditional midwives continue to wield power and influence among many South African ethnic groups today.

Most of South Africa's ethnic groups have not traditionally celebrated birthdays, although sometimes a special meal would honor the month or season of the child's birth. Education and modernization has led to the adoption of some new cultural practices, so most urban South Africans today celebrate birthdays with Western-style parties. Afrikaners have always considered birthdays to be important events, and friends and family celebrate with special meals, gifts, and parties.

Until late 1996, South Africa's Abortion Act legalized abortions only in pregnancies where the outcome posed a life-threatening risk to the mother or in cases where the mother was a victim of rape. Under post-1996 laws, women and girls are entitled to state-financed abortions on demand during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

*More expectant mothers are turning to hospitals for births.*

Culture

Language

Life Cycles

Food and Recipes



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