Have You Ever Wondered...?

* Do people in Mexico celebrate Cinco de Mayo?
* What was important about the Battle of Puebla?
* How do Mexican-Americans celebrate Cinco de Mayo?

People in the United States celebrate their country’s Independence Day on the 4th of July. Many people believe Cinco de Mayo (“5th of May" in Spanish) is a celebration of Mexico's [Independence](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) Day.

But they're wrong! Mexico's [Independence](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) Day is actually September 16.

So what is Cinco de Mayo? Cinco de Mayo is a holiday that recognizes the victory of the Mexican [army](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) over the French [army](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) on May 5, 1862, at the Battle of Puebla. Led by General Ignacio Zaragoza Seguín, the poorly equipped Mexican [army](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) made a stand against French forces near the forts of Loreto and Guadalupe.

The Mexican [victory](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) provided [encouragement](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) to the Mexican [army](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) and became a source of [pride](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) for the Mexican people. Despite being outnumbered by the French, who had about 8,000 men to the Mexicans' 4,000, the Mexican [army](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) destroyed a French [army](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) that was considered the best in the world at the time and had not been defeated in nearly 50 years.

Although the [victory](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) was short-lived — the French would capture Mexico City and take over the country within a year — it represented a moral victory for the Mexican [government](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo). It came to [symbolize](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) [unity](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) and pride in the unexpected [victory](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) of a clear [underdog](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo).

Today, Cinco de Mayo is not that important in Mexico and mainly celebrated only in the state of Puebla. In Mexico, the [Independence](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) Day celebrations of September 16 represent that nation's most important national holiday.

In the United States, though, Cinco de Mayo has become a significant annual celebration of Mexican [culture](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) and heritage. In areas of the country with large Mexican-American populations, such as Portland, Denver and Chicago, large festivals are held. People of all backgrounds celebrate the holiday with parades, parties, and traditional Mexican music, dancing, and foods.

Researchers estimate that more than 150 locations in the United States have official Cinco de Mayo celebrations each year. Cinco de Mayo banners and traditional Mexican symbols, such as the [Virgin of Guadalupe](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2c/Virgen_de_guadalupe1.jpg), are prominently displayed during events.

If you get the chance to check out a Cinco de Mayo celebration, be sure to try out some traditional Mexican foods. Also keep an eye out for Mexican dancers and [mariachi](http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/do-people-in-mexico-celebrate-cinco-de-mayo) bands!

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