



The Lakeside Guide to  
**Holiday & Festivals**  
in Ajijic, Mexico  
2019 EDITION  
[www.lakesideguide.mx](http://www.lakesideguide.mx)





Ajijic and Lake Chapala get a lot of attention from foreign retirees for its temperate climate and an inexpensive lifestyle.

It's also a place where Mexico's rich traditions and culture co-exist with an ever-modernizing country.

These 22 holidays, festivals and events cover the full range of the major religious and secular fiestas that happen each year in Ajijic, including a couple in nearby Chapala. The national holidays which are included occur in all the nearby towns, including San Juan Cosalá, Jocotepec and Ixtlahucán de los Membrillos.

Be sure to check out these important days of tradition, family and friends that go on throughout the year, whether you're visiting here or live here full-time.

-Dane Strom

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**Be sure to visit the  
Holidays & Fiestas page at  
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in case times or dates are  
changed for these events**

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All photos in this eBook by Dane Strom

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New Year's Day

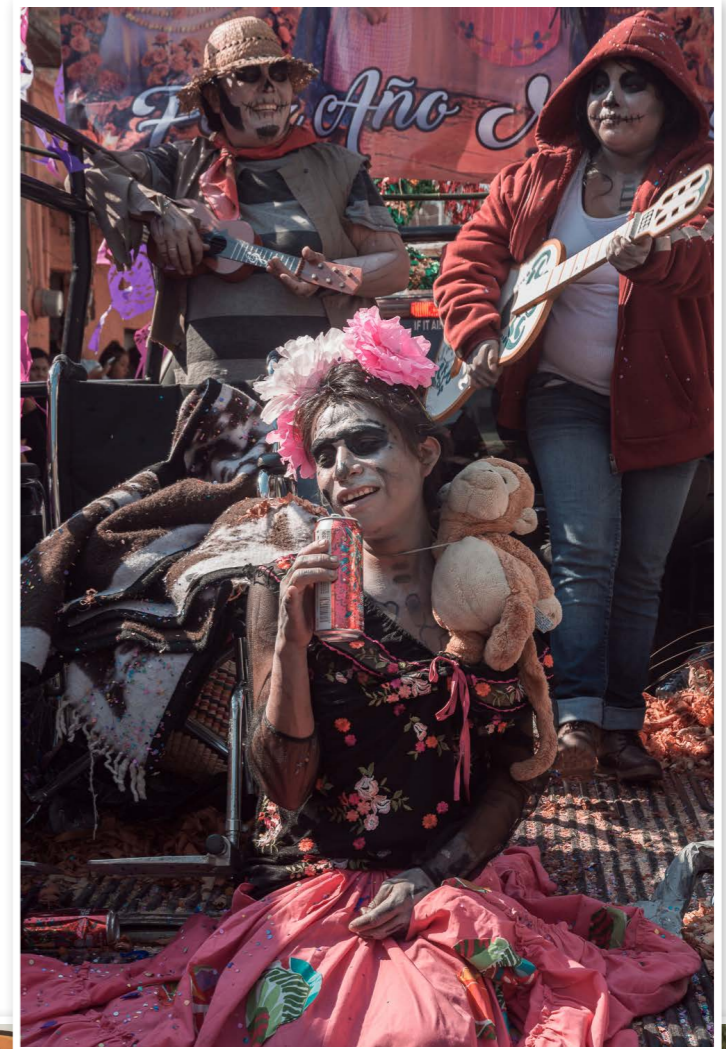
JANUARY 1



Ajijic kicks off the new year with a parade of wacky floats and themes that ends in a friendly football competition between two neighboring streets in the west part of town.

The parade starts at 1 p.m. **at Seís Esquinas in Ajijic** and ends at the Tecoluta soccer field. At 9 p.m. there you can see a traditional *torito*, which is a bull-shaped fireworks display. People hold it over their heads and run around as it sends out sparks, a popular nighttime tradition during some fiestas in Mexico.

The New Year's Day parade is a relatively new addition to Ajijic's many traditions, starting in 2000 as an initiative by the Seís Esquinas neighborhood.



Parade starts at 1 p.m.

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Fiesta de San Sebastián

JANUARY 20



The fiesta for San Sebastián is a celebration for the patron saint of one of Ajijic's six barrios or neighborhoods, San Sebastián.

Each January 20, several families in the neighborhood sponsor the fiesta, which includes a procession, music, a confetti egg fight, and the first appearance in the calendar year of **Ajijic's masked sayacas**.

The pocession starts at 4:30 p.m. at **the intersection of Marcos Castellanos and Emiliano Zapata Streets** and goes to the plaza for a short church service before returning to where the procession started. Then people throw confetti-filled eggs at each other before the night settles into music and dancing outside.

This tradition was started about 30 years ago.



Procession starts at 4:30 p.m.

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Carnival

FEB 10 - MAR 5

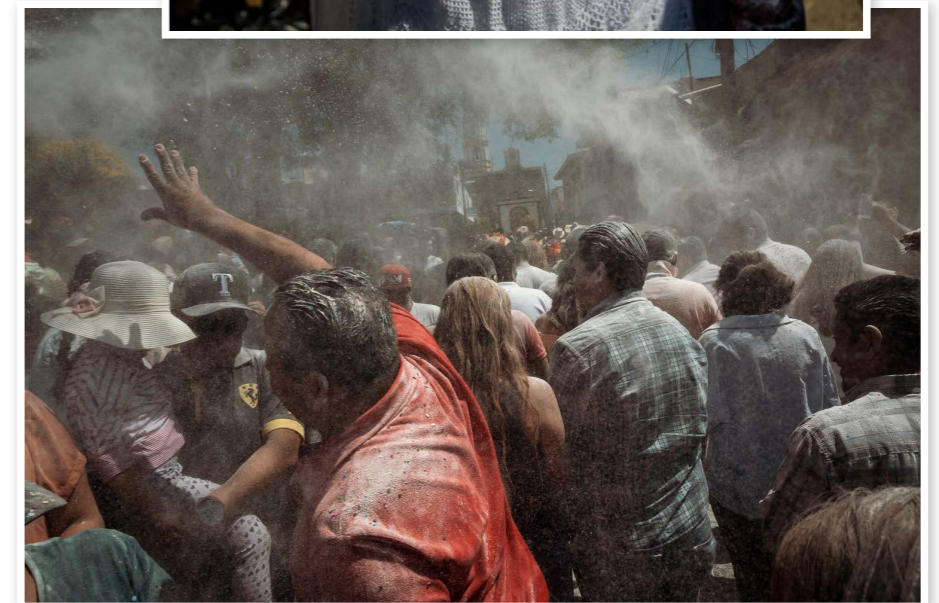


Ajijic's biggest and most outrageous parade happens on Carnival, a.k.a. Mardi Gras.

Dozens of elaborate floats roll down **the parade route** and everyone throws flour at each other, thanks to the **masked sayacas**, who are central figures in Ajijic's carnival celebrations.

The real fun, however, begins two weeks earlier on Sunday, February 10, when the first of six pre-Carnival parades begin. The sayacas, who don masks and dress in clothes of the opposite sex, chase kids through the streets, tackling them and throwing flour at the crowds.

**Check out one of these pre-Carnival parades** to see the masked sayacas of Ajijic at their finest. They tend to be overshadowed on Carnival day by all the other spectacles.



Main parade is March 5 at 11 a.m.

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Mexican National Chili Cookoff

FEBRUARY 15-17

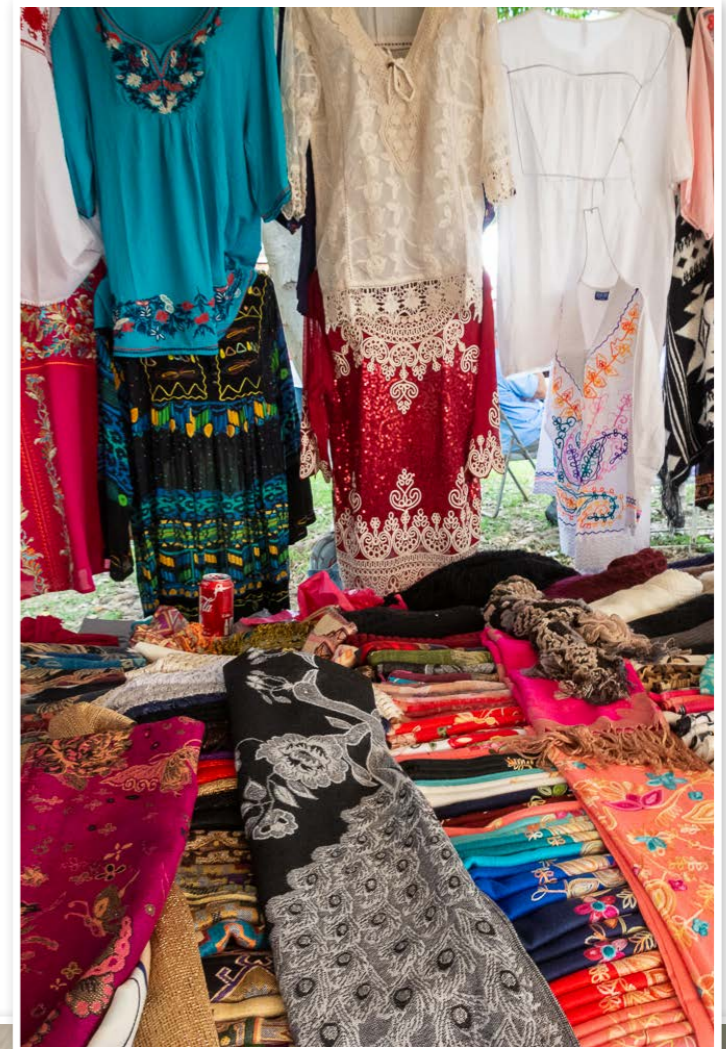


**This national-level chili festival has been a part of this small town, believe it or not, for 41 years now.**

**The main draw is each day's competition where local restaurants and home chefs serve samples of their best bowls of chili.**

**Dozens of artisans, artists and vendors come from all over Jalisco and other parts of Mexico to sell their goods here all weekend. Lots of food, besides chili, is also served. And a roster of musicians and dancers, such as traditional balet folclórico, round out the entertainment. Go and just watch, or enter the competition yourself.**

**There is a small entry fee for the event and a separate fee if you want to enter the tasting or compete. The competition is a fundraiser for local charities that raised around \$300,000 pesos in 2017.**



**Friday-Saturday 11 a.m-5:15 p.m.**

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Festival Cultural Sangre Viva

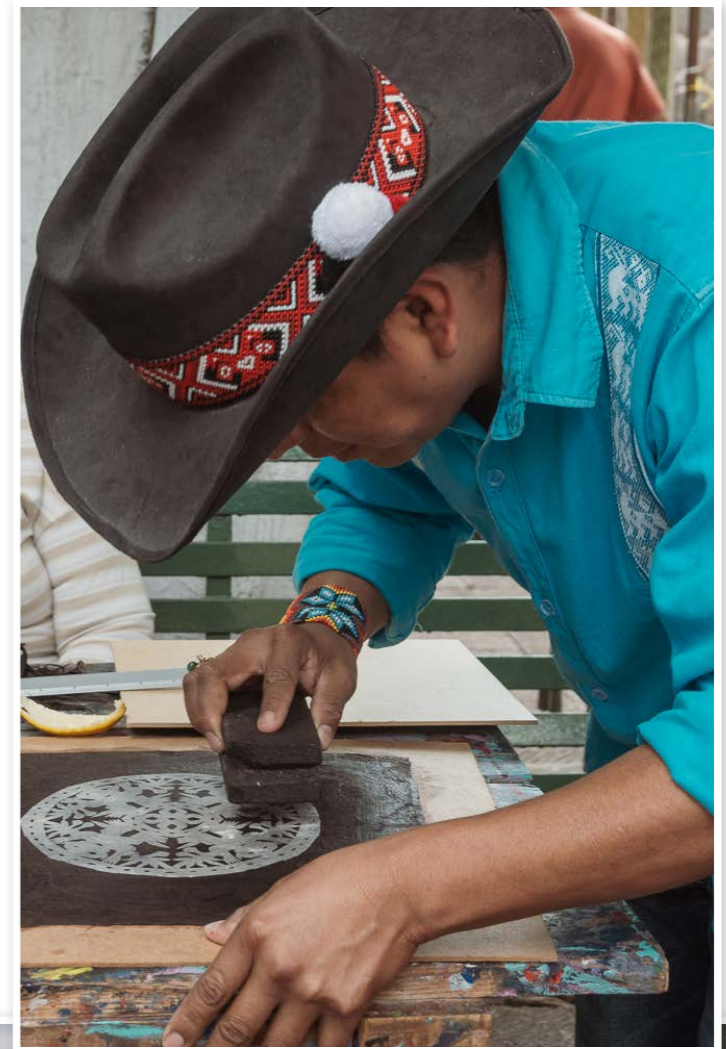
MARCH 29-31



This three-day festival promotes Mexico's indigenous roots which, as with most of the world's indigenous groups, are in danger of being yanked out by national and international corporate greed.

The lineup for the three-day festival includes **music and dance** performances, **workshops** and conferences, with **art and handicrafts** for sale throughout the weekend.

Activities take place in Ajijic's main plaza and inside the **Centro Cultural Ajijic** as well as the lake shore, where you can take part in a **traditional sweat lodge ceremony** called a temazcal.



Events all weekend

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Capirotada Contest

APRIL 6



**Capirotada, which is similar to bread pudding, is served on Fridays during Lent in Mexico.**

**Now in its fifth year, Ajijic's Feria de Capirotada is your chance to try out more than 20 varieties of the stuff, from the traditional recipe to more modern approaches.**

**Have a favorite or two? Purchase a token for ten pesos and drop it in a jar at the table of your choice to vote for who you think makes the best capirotadas.**

**All the proceeds support this relatively new tradition in Ajijic and prizes are given to the top three winners. Many local businesses contribute gift certificates and other products which the crowd buys to help out. Last year, the feria was held on the malecón in Ajijic for the first time, instead of the plaza.**



**Saturday April 6, 3-8 p.m.**

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Easter Week

APRIL 14-21

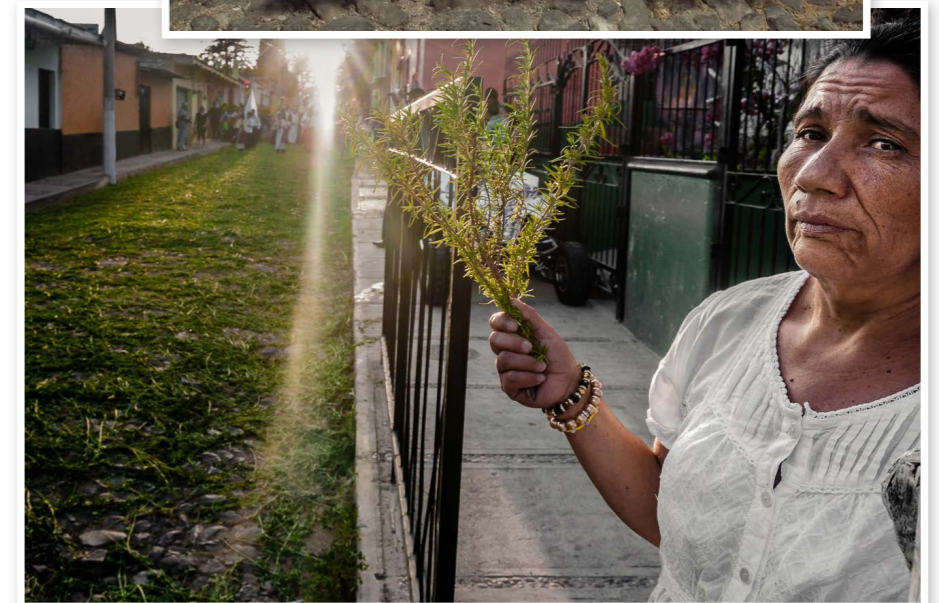


Easter week in Ajijic is dominated by the Passion Play, a tradition now in its 40th year in 2019.

Since its inception, Lalo Molina has directed and organized the play, which includes scenes of Jesus arriving in Nazareth (on Palm Sunday), the Last Supper, Jesus' apprehension and Sanhedrin trial (both on Maundy Thursday), and the trial before Pilate followed by the Via Crucis (on Good Friday).

One of the highlights **is on Palm Sunday** when families and businesses cover Hidalgo Street with fresh alfalfa for five blocks from the church to Seís Esquinas for the 6 p.m. procession.

The dramatic Via Crucis **through the streets of Ajijic** is at 1 p.m. on Good Friday after the trial of Jesus, which takes place in the atrium of Church San Andrés at 11 a.m.



# Passion Play all week long

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Children's Day

APRIL 30



Mexico has a deep love for children that borders sometimes on reverence.

Children's Day is observed in many countries on various dates. In Mexico, it's officially April 30, but Ajijic often celebrates it on a different day. Check [The Lakeside Guide](#) as this day nears for an update.

In Ajijic, families gather [in the town's lienzo charro](#) at 5 p.m. for an evening of classic kids games like musical chairs, sack jumping – and bull riding.

Kids also spend the day at school doing special celebrations.



Event starts at 5 p.m.

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Mother's Day

MAY 11

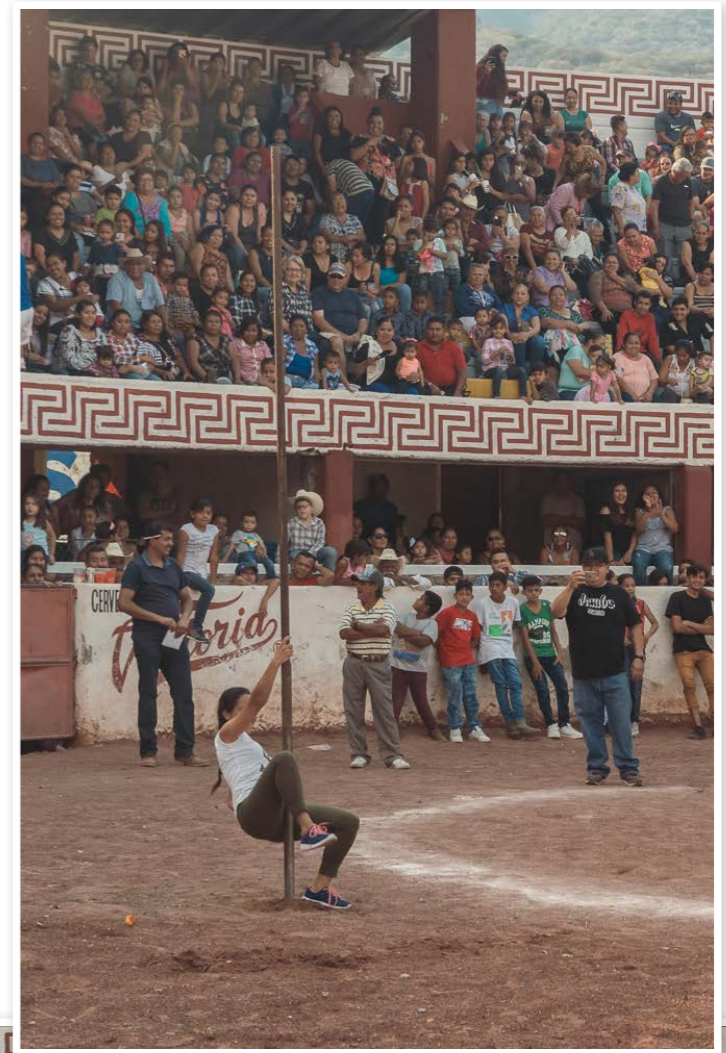


Mother's Day, unsurprisingly, is one of the biggest celebrations of the year in Ajijic, Mexico.

Easily 1,000 people show up to the Mother's Day event **in the town's lienzo charro** for a fun-filled, family afternoon that includes moms wrestling heifers, competing in drinking games and pole dancing.

Cash and other prizes are given out, so the competition between moms during the heifer wrestling is real: the object is for a team to restrain the animal long enough to take off a bandanna that's wrapped around its head.

Mother's Day in Mexico is officially May 10. However, Ajijic always holds its event on anearby weekend, which is May 11 in 2019.



Starts May 11 at 5 p.m.

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Virgin of Zapopan in Chapala

JULY 14



## The Virgin of Zapopan is one of Mexico's most revered religious icons.

The original statue, said to date to the 16th century, never strays from its home at the basilica in Zapopan. Four replicas travel all over Mexico and one of them makes an annual pilgrimage to Chapala, where she is recognized as *la Reina del Lago*, the Queen of the Lake.

The procession takes place **in downtown Chapala** on the second Sunday in July. Hundreds of dancers from various traditions accompany the image, along with music groups and floats. It's followed by an outdoor mass near the malecón.

The next day the image of the Virgin of Zapopan is ferried to Scorpion Island, accompanied by dozens of boats with people who hold a mass for her on the island.



Parade starts at 11 a.m.

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Regata de Globos

SEPTEMBER 14



The Regata de Globos is everyone's favorite late-summer event to spend with friends, family and exploding hot air balloons.

Since the 1960s, families and local businesses have gathered every September for this annual paper hot air balloon festival.

The dozens of teams take weeks to create elaborate balloons that can reach 30 feet tall or more. Crews with propane tanks spend the afternoon **at the football field** going from balloon to balloon as the teams set them up, pumping them with hot air that sends successful balloons kilometers away...

...Or directly onto the crowd below. The fun is not knowing which is going to happen.



Balloons launched 3-9 p.m.

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Day of the Charro

SEPTEMBER 15



This national holiday honors the participants of Mexico's hundreds-year-old sport-art of horsemanship, *la charrería*.

The day starts at noon when the *charros* (basically cowboys, but more) and *escaramuzas* (basically cowgirls, but more) arrive at the atrium **outside San Andrés Church**.

After a special Día del Charro-themed mass, a parade leaves for Seís Esquinas and ends, usually, at the charro ring near the Wednesday *tianguis* market.

After the charros eat lunch (anyone is invited) you'll usually get to see a demonstration of techniques the charros use to rope unbroken horses and steer; or a performance by a team of *escaramuzas* doing coordinated horse riding.

El Día del Charro is officially September 14, but Ajijic always observes it on a nearby Sunday, which in 2019 is likely September 15.



Parade starts at 1 p.m.

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Independence Day

SEPTEMBER 16



Independence Day is one of Mexico's biggest and most-proud-to-be-Mexican of holidays.

Celebrating the 1821 independence of Mexico from Spanish rule, Ajijic's *fiestas patrias* can last for up to a week, encompassing the **Regata de Globos** the weekend before, plus events on days before and after the September 16 holiday.

Be sure to **visit the Ajijic plaza after 10 p.m.** on September 15 for the recital of *El Grito de Dolores* by the town's *delegado* (the closest thing to a mayor that the town has). This recital occurs all over Mexico at the same time on Independence Day Eve: delegados, mayors and even the president reciting the famous battle cry that Hidalgo gave in 1810, which stirred the people into battle and eventually led to the independence of a nation.



El Grito on Sept 15 after 10 p.m.

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Fiestas Patronales de Chapala

SEPT 26 - OCT 4



Just like most of Mexico, each town at Lake Chapala has its own patron saint and patroness.

Each usually gets its own traditional nine-day novenario, which includes a daily procession with Aztec dancers, music, fireworks, and carnival rides.

Chapala's patron saint is Saint Francis, whose novenario starts on September 26 and lasts until October 4. Each day is sponsored by a different group of people in the town, such as gardeners, carpenters, bricklayers or garbage workers.

The procession each evening starts at 6:30 **near the 7-11 on Francisco Madero**, except for the last night when it begins at 6:00 and starts **in front of Church San Francisco** at the malecón.



Daily processions at 6:30 p.m.

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Fiesta de San Miguel

SEPTEMBER 30



Not only do towns have a patron saint, but many neighborhoods in these towns also have their own patrón or patrona, too.

The neighborhood of San Miguel is one of Ajijic's six barrios, but about 200 years ago, the annual fiesta for its eponymous saint disappeared from the town's traditions. It's been revived by those who live in the neighborhood today and is now in its fourth year.

The procession starts at 11 a.m. at the top of Tempisque Street. **There at the foot of the hills** is a small cave where the image of San Miguel is kept throughout the year. The procession accompanies the image through town and then returns the saint back to the hills, where the fiesta continues all afternoon and into the night with food, music, a *torito* and other activities.



Parade starts after 11 a.m.

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Fiesta of the Virgin of the Rosary

OCTOBER 31



The Fiesta de la Virgen del Rosario is a month-long celebration for Ajijic's patroness.

The image of the virgin stays year-round in her chapel on the Ajijic plaza. But every 29th of September she is taken out and **marched to the church near Seís Esquinas** in West Ajijic. The next day, **another procession takes her** to Church San Andrés, where she stays for the month of October. Every morning of the month, a procession takes place before sunrise, called *las mañanitas* or little mornings, before mass.

Then on October 31 at 5 p.m., **a huge procession accompanies her** again through the streets of Ajijic, with Aztec dancers, floats, bandas and marching bands. It ends at the plaza for an outdoor mass on the Church San Andrés atrium. She's returned to her chapel on the plaza in the evening.



Main parade Oct 31 at 5 p.m.

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Day of the Dead

NOVEMBER 1-3

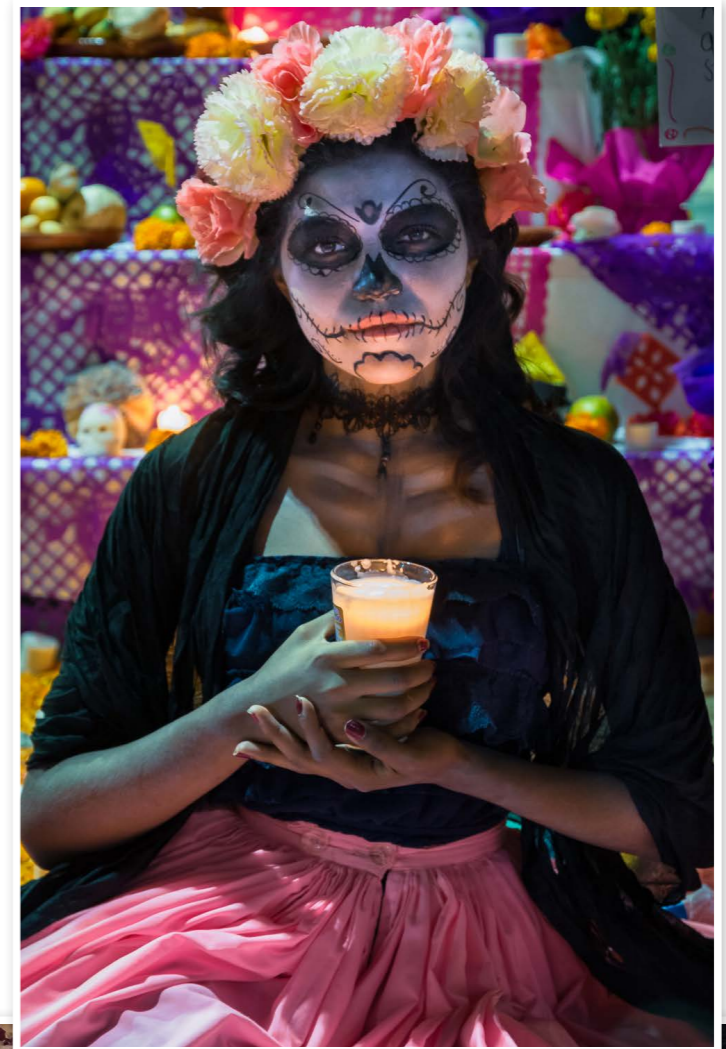


Mexico's most famous holiday has now been exported to the world as a major 2017 animated Disney movie.

But the real thing goes on full tilt in Ajijic and the surrounding towns at Lake Chapala every Day of the Dead, which officially lasts three days from October 31 to November 2.

The main events take place on November 1 and 2 as families decorate the graveyards and set up altars to welcome back the dead. November 1, known as the **Day of the Little Angels**, welcomes the return of children who have died. The rest of the family, who don't run back as eagerly and quickly as a child, return the night of **November 2**.

Ixtlahuacán de los Membrillos, just north of Chapala, **does a spectacular festival** each year that usually extends one or more days after November 2.



Events from Nov 1-3

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Javier Intzin  
López  
Chiapas

La Feria Maestros del Arte es un evento cultural y artístico que se realiza en Papalotlán, Puebla, México, del 8 al 10 de noviembre de cada año. Este año se realizará del 8 al 10 de noviembre de 2024.

Javier Intzin López y Cecilia Intzin Pérez  
Conocido: Papalotlán, Tenejapa Chiapas  
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Feria Maestros del Arte

NOVEMBER 8-10



Almost 100 of Mexico's top artisans visit Chapala every November for one of Mexico's premier folk art festivals.

For three days artists sell their work, representing dozens of distinct forms of regional art from all areas of the country.

This is your chance to meet well-known artists known by collectors around the world.

You'll find pottery, textiles, clothes, tin art, jewelry, silver, carpets, alebrijes, catrinas, Huichol/ Wixárika art and a lot more.

Located at the **Chapala Yacht Club**, check out the conferences and demonstrations that happen a couple times a day to get a deeper understanding of some of Mexico's important folk art traditions.



Fri & Sat: 9:30-5:30, Sun: 9:30-4:30

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Revolution Day

NOVEMBER 20



Revolution Day commemorates Mexico's ten-year war against wealthy landowners and businessmen which ended with the democratization of Mexico in 1920.

In Ajijic, the parade starts at 9 a.m. on November 20 near **where the Wednesday market** takes place. The main attraction is the kids who dress up as famous heroes of the revolution, such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. Girls dress up as *adelitas*, who were women who fought in the war and took part in other ways as spies, cooks or nurses.

In between all this, other secondary school groups do acrobatic routines, play out scenes related to Mexican history, or drum in marching bands.

The parade ends at the plaza around 11:00.



Parade starts at 9 a.m.

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Fiestas de San Andrés

NOVEMBER 22-30



Ajijic's patron saint is Saint Andrew, who is honored with nine days of fiestas at the end of November.

Each day is sponsored by a different group such as domestic workers or ranchers, who are responsible for raising the money for the night's entertainment, which includes live music and a fireworks castle.

These castles are handmade wooden structures that are assembled each day and ignited after 10:00 p.m. each night **on the Church San Andrés atrium**. They have moving parts like wheels which spin around to create noise and sparks during the shows, which last about 15 minutes. Some of the castles reach four stories tall.

Each night features a band in the plaza and dancing until 2:00 a.m. or later while *terrazas* line the plaza to sell drinks and food.



Fireworks each night after 10 p.m.

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Our Lady of Guadalupe Day

DECEMBER 12



Mexico's most important religious figure is the Virgin of Guadalupe, a Marian apparition that appeared to Juan Diego in December 1531 on a hillside outside Mexico City.

Since then, December 12 in Mexico and many other countries in the Americas is known as the Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe.

In Ajijic, the day's procession **starts at 4 p.m. at the Sanctuary for Our Lady of Guadalupe** near Seís Esquinas. It makes a long trip through town and ends back where it started for mass at the church there. Then, celebrations continue until late into the night. It's the final day of the nine-day fiestas for Guadalupe, who is also the patrona of the neighborhood around Seís Esquinas.



Procession starts at 4 p.m.

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Christmas

DECEMBER 16-25



Christmas in Mexico is about family, friends & traditions like Las Posadas, which are 400 years old.

The posadas happens every evening from December 16-24. They represent the biblical scene when Joseph and Mary seek shelter at the inn in Bethlehem on the eve of Jesus' birth.

Kids and their parents gather **at 5 p.m. in Ajijic's central plaza** and then walk a few blocks to a certain house, which is different each evening. The approaching group asks for lodging and after receiving it, both groups get little gifts and food, and then everyone hits a few piñatas.

The main Christmas celebration happens on Christmas Eve, called *la noche buena*. A few living nativity scenes are held in the atrium of Church San Andrés.



Posadas at 5 p.m. each day

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