

LATIN AMERICAN WEDDING TRADITIONS

Does a Latin American wedding style exist? Yes it does! Here is some interesting information about Latin American wedding styles and customs.

▪ THE WEDDING GOWN

Latin American brides adore gorgeous white wedding gowns just like many do here in the Caribbean. However, it is not unusual for wedding outfits to have touches of red and black, which really gives it a Latin American look! And since it is the Bride's day to shine, in Columbia they wear glamorous wedding dresses featuring golden accessories and trimmings. Latin American brides however, with more recent and closer links to Spain wear black gowns and black lacy veils to express their devotion to the groom until death.

For a true Latin-American look, the bridal gown can be a slim dress with a bolero jacket. The bolero is a very short jacket worn open in the front. Alternately, the bride can don a wonderful flamenco styled dress. Flamenco dresses are long gowns that have several ruffles on the skirt and sleeves. The Internet is a great place to see examples of flamenco dresses.

The Latin American bride may also wear a mantilla veil. These are triangular shaped veils with exquisite lace edgings. They may be short, falling just over the shoulders or quite long, caressing the floor as the bride walks. The bride usually wears an elaborate comb in her hair over which the mantilla is draped.

The groom may wear an outfit styled like those worn by matadors. The Matador suit is the costume traditionally worn by bullfighters/*toreadors*. It consists of a bolero jacket with ornate epaulets and a vest with gold trimmings. Beneath the vest and jacket a high-collared lacy white shirt is worn. The distinctive black velvet *montero* hat of the matadors completes the outfit.

▪ THE BOUQUET

The bouquet will be filled with colourful and exotic tropical flowers such as orchids. It should be noted that in Latin America yellow and purple flowers are associated with mournful events. Purple is the liturgical colour used during Easter. Yellow is associated with marigolds which was the Aztec flower of the dead. The scent and colour of marigolds was supposed to help guide departed souls home and during the Mexican Day of the Dead (Nov. 2nd), relatives of the deceased still line pathways with yellow petals.

Orange blossoms are also traditionally used in Latin American weddings. The orange tree can bear both flowers and fruit at the same time and thus came to represent fulfillment and happiness.

Instead of carrying a bouquet of flowers, the Spanish bride may instead carry a flamenco fan. These are fans made of wood and fabric which may be plain in colour or painted with lovely designs and landscapes. Better yet of course, the flamenco fan can be included in the floral arrangement.

- **CEREMONIAL CUSTOMS**

In many places in Latin America, it is traditional for the groom to present the bride with thirteen gold coins (*arras*). This act is supposed to symbolize the groom's trust and the fact that his new wife is now the mistress of all his worldly goods!

The tying together of the clothing of the bride and groom was an ancient Aztec wedding custom. Modern day weddings in Central America and Mexico feature the draping of a *lasso* (cord) or a large double-loop rosary over the couple. It is wound in the figure of an eight around the shoulders or waists of the bride and groom. The loop is symbolic of their eternal love and the equal sharing of responsibility in their married life. The cord may be silver or white rope and may be entwined with orange blossoms, which is said to be quite beautiful.

- **THE RECEPTION**

In some Latin American nations such as Puerto Rico, a bride doll is displayed at the head or the center of the reception table. This is a doll dressed in a gown similar to the bride's own. *Capias* or favours are usually attached to it by thin silky ribbons. These *capias* may be feathers or looped ribbons for pinning. The *capias* will also include the names of couple and the date of the wedding.

Before the dancing really begins, guests gather around the newly-weds in a heart shaped ring for the couple's first dance. Many Latin American wedding receptions also include a traditional 'money dance' where for the privilege of dancing with the bride guests pin money to her dress.

The reception will of course feature Latin American music such as the samba, flamenco, mambo, salsa and the famous tango. Check out local CD stores for samples of Latin American music.

The Spanish speaking countries in our hemisphere have developed their own fascinating cultural styles which in the twentieth century have inspired people all over the world. Often Latin American trends in music, fashion and art have filtered into Trinidad and Tobago from North American and European sources because of the language barriers between Latin America and us. Here at the Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (SIS) we invite you to explore the myriad facets of Latin American culture and will thus leave you with a few vocabulary words related to this article:

Wedding	Matrimonio
Bride	Novia
Groom	Novio
Bouquet	Bouquet
Wedding dress	Vertido de novia
Wedding Ring	Anillo de matrimonio

For more information on the Spanish As the First Foreign Language (SAFFL) initiative, please contact the Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (A Division of the Ministry of Trade and Industry) at 624-8329/

