



Latin American Birthday Traditions

Latin Americans may serve traditional food at a birthday party. Depending on their country's culture, relatives may make pulled pork, roasted or grilled meats and vegetables, tamales wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves, chile con queso and regional or local foods like menudo, a hominy-chili soup. These traditional foods are often served alongside contemporary American picnic foods like hot dogs, hamburgers, steak and chicken.

Families take part in a number of American and Latin traditional activities and games. Younger children play pin the tail on the donkey, sack races or balloon tosses. Most birthday party activities culminate in hitting the piñata, a colorful papier-mache animal or character filled with candies, goodies and sometimes money. Kids line up, and each takes a turn getting blindfolded and turned around three times before s/he tries to hit the piñata strung up between two trees. A relative sometimes pulls on the string to swing the piñata to make it more challenging for older kids.

The traditional Mexican birthday song is called, **Las Mañanitas**. This song has spread to different Latin American countries, particularly in Central America where it has become widely popular. The song is usually sung in the morning and sometimes as a serenade (serenata).

Here's an excerpt of the song **Las Mañanitas** in Spanish, with an English translation in the box:

*Estas son las mañanitas, que cantaba el Rey David,
Hoy por ser día de tu santo*, te las cantamos a ti,
Despierta, mi bien**, despierta, mira que ya
amaneció,
Ya los pajarillos cantan, la luna ya se metió.*

*Que linda está la mañana en que vengo a saludarte,
Venimos todos con gusto y placer a felicitarte,
El día en que tu naciste nacieron todas las flores,
En la pila del bautismo, cantaron los ruiseñores,
Ya viene amaneciendo, ya la luz del día nos dió,
Levántate de mañana, mira que ya amaneció.*

English Translation:

*This is the morning song that King David sang,
Because today is your saint's day* we're singing it
for you,
Wake up, my dear**, wake up, look it is already
dawn,
The birds are already singing and the moon has set,

How lovely is the morning in which I come to greet
you,
We all came with joy and pleasure to congratulate
you,
The day you were born all the flowers were born,
On the baptismal font the nightingales sang,
The morning is coming now, the sun is giving us its
light,
Get up in the morning, look it is already dawn.*

Notes: * This verse can also be replaced by "a las muchachas bonitas"

** This term is usually replaced with the name of the birthday person