



Altars are an important part of the celebration of Día de los Muertos, a holiday that blends traditions from pre-Hispanic religions of the New World and Catholicism. The altars found in the park reflect the historic time period it is set in, as well as having altars which reflect modern traditions. The historic altars can be found in La Casa de Estudillo, La Casa de Machado y Stewart, and La Casa de Machado y Silvas museums. Some modern examples of altars are displayed in the Fiesta de Reyes courtyard at the Fiesta de Reyes' Welcome Wagon, Temecula Olive Oil, Javier's Hand Crafts, Goldman's Jewelry, Fiesta Cocina, Rose's Tasting Room, Casita Verde, Del Cobre, Tienda de Reyes, and Silver Lily, among others.

Each altar will reflect the specific region and economic standing of the family it was constructed by, however, there are many traditional elements that remain the same. The altar is usually three tiers and covered in *papel picado* (decorative cut tissue paper). The first level of the altar has four candles

placed at the Cardinal points (north, south, east, and west) to call spirits from all points. Two other small votive candles represent faith and hope. The three skulls on the second level represent the Holy Trinity. On the top tier of the altar will be photographs, paintings, or sketches of the person or people it is dedicated to.

On the third level, a large picture of our Lady Guadalupe, the mother of the Giver of Life, and the basic needs of life are displayed:

- Water:** To quench thirst and for purification
- Salt:** To season food and for purification
- Bread:** To represent the food needed for survival

Legend

1. McCoy Museum
2. Robinson-Rose Visitor Information Center
3. La Casa de Machado y Wrightington
4. San Diego House
5. U.S. House (Tinsmith)
6. La Casa de Machado y Silvas (Museum)
7. La Casa de Rodriquez (Racine & Laramie™ Tobacconist)
8. Colorado House (Wells Fargo History Museum)
9. San Diego Courthouse
10. The Schoolhouse
11. La Casa de Machado y Stewart (Museum)
12. Cousin's Candy
13. Threads of the Past
14. La Casa de Estudillo
15. Casa de Pedrorena y Altamirano (Miner's Gem)
16. San Diego Union Bldg. (Museum)
17. Dodson Law Office (Gum Saan)
18. Wallach & Goldman Square
19. Trimmer Dodson Bldg. (Proper Wellness Emporium)
20. Seeley Stables (Museum)
21. Blackhawk Livery Stables (Blacksmith)
22. Cosmopolitan Restaurant & Hotel
23. Johnson House
24. Rust General Store
25. Fiesta de Reyes Shops & Restaurants
26. Barra Barra Saloon
27. The Plaza (Washington Square)

 Dia de los Muertos Altars
R Restrooms

The colors used in the altars symbolize ideas about life and death.

- Black:** Pre-Hispanic religions and the land of the dead
- Purple:** Pain, suffering, grief, and mourning
- Pink:** Celebration
- White:** Purity and hope
- Yellow/Orange:** Marigold, sun, and light
- Red:** Christianity, the blood of Jesus, indigenous people, and the life blood of humans and animals.

Also displayed are favorite foods, sweets, drinks, and harvest fruits for each family spirit along with personal items

of the deceased; these can include toys, household saints, serapes, and gourds for carrying water. Fresh cut flowers placed on the altar symbolize the brevity of life.



TRADITIONS OF DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS.

Día de los Muertos is a holiday with a complex history and fusion of old traditions. This view of death started with Meso-American cultures more than 3,000 years ago. Meso-Americans believed that during this time of the year, the boundaries that separate the living and the dead weaken and that the deceased can visit the living. The natives viewed the next world as the continuation of life, as a cycle. To them, life was a dream and only in death did they become truly awake.

The holiday is traditionally celebrated on November 1st and 2nd. The observance varies by region and also by degree of urbanization. In the small towns of Mexico, a candlelight procession to the cemetery is held by most of the families on the eve of the celebration. At the gravesites, family members spruce up the gravesite, decorate it with flowers, and enjoy a picnic. Offerings are brought to the graves and include the favorite foods, beverages,

toys, and personal belongings of the departed so that they might enjoy them again. Family members spend the night at the cemetery and share the memory of their dearly deceased by telling stories about them.

A TIME OF MANY REMEMBRANCES.

October 31st and November 1st & 2nd are important times of remembrance for many cultures. In Celtic countries, October 31st was New Year's Eve, called *Samhain*, a time for honoring departed heroes, family, and friends and greeting the New Year with the sunrise on November 1st. So widespread was this custom that Christians adopted the celebration as the Feast of All Saints. Día de los Muertos retains the ancient celebration of the continuance of life and love for those who have gone before us. Only much later did this prehistoric celebration become the Halloween of jack-o-lanterns, scary horrors, and trick-or-treating.



Thank you for your interest in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, part of the California State Parks system. Inquire at the Robinson-Rose Visitor Information Center or visit our website to find additional ways to experience California's history. Feel free to share you State Park adventures with us on Facebook and Twitter. #inventyouradventure

4002 Wallace St.
San Diego, CA 92110
619-220-5422



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OLD TOWN SAN DIEGO STATE HISTORIC PARK.

DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS.

