

La Semana Santa



The Spanish word for 'Easter' is Pascua. The fasting period of forty days that leads up to Easter is called Lent.

Lent is called **la Cuaresma** in Spanish and it represents the forty (*cuarenta*) days that Jesus spent praying and fasting in the desert after his baptism. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday - **el Miércoles de Ceniza**.

The seven days leading up to Easter Day are called Holy Week, or **la Semana Santa** in Spanish. All over Spain, it is a week of spectacular street processions - **procesiones**.

The first day of *la Semana Santa* is Palm Sunday. In Spanish, it is **el Domingo de Ramos**. The word *ramos* means 'bouquets' and 'branches.'

On the morning of *el Domingo de Ramos*, Spanish people go to church - **la iglesia** - to celebrate the day when Jesús rode into Jerusalén and was welcomed by the people laying palm leaves **on the ground in front of him**.

In Spain, when you go to church on Palm Sunday you carry a palm branch or an olive branch. The branches are then blessed by the priest.

During **la Semana Santa**, Spanish towns have street parades every day. In the processions, people carry and follow floats, known as **pasos**. On the floats, there are statues of **Jesús** and **la Virgen María**. The floats are

beautifully decorated with flowers, gold, silver, candles and fine fabrics.

The heavy floats are carried by men called **costaleros**. These men have the very difficult job of carrying the extremely heavy weight of the float. The **costaleros** practise for months so that the rhythm and speed of how they walk is perfect for the processions of Holy Week.

Los costaleros must carry the weight of the float on their shoulders and neck. In order to do this, their heads and shoulders are protected by a cushioned head scarf called *un costal*.

Los costaleros are hidden underneath the float, making *el paso* seem to glide along the road!



The person in charge of the float is called **el capataz**. It is his job to guide the float along its route. The men underneath cannot see where they are going so they must always listen to the commands and signals given by *el capataz*.

The floats (*los pasos*) are followed and surrounded by people known as **los nazarenos**. Another name for them is **los penitentes**. *Los nazarenos* (or *penitentes*) are men, women and children who wear long robes. These people are unrecognisable because they wear veils to cover their faces. The veil is called **un antifaz** and it is usually draped over a tall, cone shaped hat known as **un capirote**.



Whilst watching the processions, everyone thinks about the suffering of Jesús and the events leading up to the Crucifixion - **la Crucifixión**.

Sometimes, **los nazarenos** will be barefoot or have chains attached to their ankles. This discomfort helps them to think about the suffering of Jesus at the time of his death.

During the processions, often you will hear someone singing a special Easter song called **una saeta**. It is sung without music and it has a very special sound. It is sung in the open air by an individual singer to a statue in a procession. The singer's voice seems to be thrown or projected like an arrow or dart. It really does seem that the statue is alive and has stopped to listen. The sound of la saeta fills the whole area of the procession, for everyone to hear. The word **saeta** literally means 'dart.'

On Holy Thursday (**el Jueves Santo**) all the church bells are tied so that they remain silent. They do not ring again until Easter Day. This is to show respect and to think about the suffering and death of Jesús.

It is on **el Jueves Santo** that the Last Supper of Jesús with **los doce discípulos** is commemorated. In Spanish it is called **la Última Cena**.

On **el Jueves Santo**, in the town of Verges, in Cataluña, there is a very famous event every year. It is a skeleton dance! It is called **La Danza de la Muerte**. A skeleton

family of two adults and three children dress up in costumes and dance to a drum beat. On the scythe of a skeleton is written **Nemini Parco** - the Latin words for 'Nobody is spared.'

On **el Viernes Santo**, (Good Friday), meat is not eaten. On this day, the Crucifixion of Jesus is commemorated and meat is associated with the body of Jesus, therefore it is considered inappropriate to eat meat on this day. Instead, meals are made with fish and vegetables.

In Spain, Holy Week is a time of solemn but impressive processions, attending church, and commemorating the events leading up to and including the Crucifixion of Jesus.

However, on Easter Day (**el Domingo de Resurrección**) and Easter Monday - **el Lunes de Pascua** - it is a time of happiness! On Easter Day, after three days of solemn silence, the church bells ring happily in order to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus (**la Resurrección de Jesús**).

On Easter Day in Spain, it is the tradition to eat **el cordero** - lamb.

The most exciting place to visit during la Semana Santa is probably the city of **Sevilla** in the south of Spain. Its processions are the most impressive and famous, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors. As a result, the city becomes overcrowded, but it is a very exciting and interesting time to visit!

