

History of a Quinceañera

The transition from childhood to womanhood is an important event in almost any culture. Hispanics, however, mark this memorable occasion with the celebration of a *Quinceañera* or *Sweet 15*. The *Quinceañera tradition* is believed to have started many years ago when the Spanish conquerors brought the tradition to Mexico and others say the tradition originated with the Aztecs. Regardless, a *Quinceañera* celebration is a Hispanic tradition associated with Mexican, central and South American cultures. Through the different ceremonies that take place today, the young *Quinceañera* is formally introduced to society and it is a day to give thanks for having reached this age.

The coordination of the entire *Quinceañera* event is a teamwork effort of family, friends and relatives. Very strong family ties come into play. It is customary that all these family, friends and relatives will volunteer to be padrinos or sponsors. Each sponsor takes financial and/or moral responsibility over what they have been assigned including the cake, invitations, doll, bible, rosary, etc.

It is customary that the *Quinceañera* will wear a ball gown usually with a [petticoat](#) or crinolina underneath to make the dress look extra puffy, and a [crown](#) or [tiara](#) along with her gloves. In the United States the dress is most commonly of white color, while in other countries such as Mexico the traditional dress color is pink and now it is very common to see the *Quinceañera* wear a pastel color dress or even red, royal blue, burgundy or hot pink.

Quinceañera accessories usually include:

- a [Quinceañera doll](#) (her last doll)
- a special [Quinceañera kneeling pillow](#)
- [Quinceañera bible](#) and **rosary**
- a [Quinceañera tiara](#) or **crown**
- a matching [photo album](#) and [quest signature book](#)
- specially decorated [Quinceañera toasting glasses](#) and matching [cake knives](#)

Traditionally, the celebration will usually consist of have fourteen young girls called *damas* and fourteen young men called *chambelanes*, in addition to the *Quinceañera* s own *chambelan de honor*. Nowadays, *Quinceañeras* will sometimes choose to have only seven *damas* and seven *chambelanes*. *Quinceañeras* can also choose to have only all *damas* or all *chambelanes*. Typically the *damas* will all wear the same color and style gowns to coordinate with the *Quinceañera gown* and the boys wear coordinating tuxedos.

The actual *Quinceañera celebration* consists of several parts. It is traditional to have a special thanksgiving mass or ceremony, followed by the reception and the banquet, and not to forget the famous *quinceañera waltz* or *el bals*.

After months of practice for the waltz, the moment finally comes during the reception. It is assumed that the *Quinceañera* prior to this date has not been able to dance with anyone before. It is at this time that the *Quinceañera* will dance the waltz with her *chambelan* and accompanied by her *damas* and other *chambelanes*. This is a major highlight of the celebration. Other important highlights will follow such as the toast and the cutting of the cake.

Without a doubt the *Quinceañera celebration* is a major Hispanic tradition where family, friends and relatives will go thru every effort to attend and participate in this celebration.

The entire festivity is full of spiritual and emotional moments, and composed of several events that take place, where God, thanksgiving, food, music and dance are the mix of ingredients for a joyous culmination after months of planning.

La Quinceañera

What is a Quinceañera? A *Quinceañera* or Sweet 15 is a major milestone in a Hispanic girl's life. It signifies her entrance to womanhood and the acceptance of new responsibilities this brings. The history of the *Quinceañera* dates back to the 1500's, however the *Quinceañera* tradition is still popular today in Mexico, the United States, South America, and many other Spanish speaking countries.

What is the Purpose of a Quinceañera? This special celebration marks the beginning of womanhood. Tradition places new responsibilities on the young woman such as household duties, work, and family needs. While a great deal of attention is placed on the celebration, the main purpose of a *Quinceañera* is for the young woman to live a life of faith, good morals and principles, devotion to her community, and live a decent lifestyle.

Where does a Quinceañera take place? Usually a church mass is celebrated first. Then, the dinner and dance celebration can be held at the church hall, reception/banquet hall, or many other unique possibilities.

How can I plan a Quinceañera? You will need a touch of protocol and much when it comes to the intricate planning of a *Quinceañera*. There are many websites and event planners whose goal is to help you in the planning of this special event! Here you will find a *Quinceañera* planning timeline, information on the *Quinceañera* order of events, *Quinceañera* theme ideas, *Quinceañera* songs suggestions and much, much more!

Quinceañera Themes

This section contains different *Quinceañera* themes for the special *Quinceañera* celebration. Girls may select a theme for their party and decorate the hall and backgrounds with the art & décor of the theme. Songs are selected by theme, too.

Beauty and the Beast	Little Mermaid	Garden
Victorian	Moons and Stars	Hawaiian
Renaissance	Romeo and Juliet	Beach
Cinderella	Wizard of Oz	Mardi Gras
Moulin Rouge	Snow White	Carnival
Butterflies	Precious Moments	Oldies
Las Vegas	Disco	Brazilian
Sleeping Beauty	Sun Flowers	Black and White Party
Fairies	Princess	Tango
Angels	Cinderella	Rodeo/Western
Winter Wonderland	Hearts	80's
Mariachi	Viva Mexico!	Teddy Bears
Roses	Salsa	Rich Girl
Marines	Sun Flowers	Tinker Bell
Carousel	Under the Sea	Arabian Nights
Grease	Wishes Coming True	Shining Under the Stars

Quinceañera Traditions

Many of the traditional gifts for the Quinceañera have a special meaning. Their honored significance relates to the Quinceañeras coming of age. These gifts are special signs of loyalty and commitment to God, family, and the community. The significance of several Quinceañera accessories is listed below.

The Quinceañera Doll:

The last doll serves as a symbol that a Quinceañera is no longer a child but a young woman. It serves as a symbol of maturity and it represents the last doll the young woman will receive. Traditionally, the parents or godparents are chosen to give this important gift.

The doll is typically made out of porcelain and can vary greatly in height. Many Quinceañeras choose a more traditional doll that is approximately two to three feet in height. Smaller Quinceañera dolls, however, are becoming increasingly popular as Quinceañeras opt to go with a smaller doll that is only one to two feet in height. Regardless of the height, the doll's dress should resemble the Quinceañeras gown and share the same colors.

During the reception, a special time is set apart to present the Quinceañera with her last doll. The godparents or parents are called up to the center of the dance floor to present this very special doll. Most Quinceañeras conserve this doll in their room as decoration for a long time. It also serves as a reminder of the wonderful and spectacular Quinceañera celebration she had.

This special tradition has been passed down from generation to generation. However, the last doll still remains a memorable gift today as it has been during previous generations. The presentation of a Quinceañeras last doll is an important part of the Quinceañera celebration that marks the end of childhood and the entrance to womanhood.

The Quinceañera Zapatillas:

The Quinceañera celebration is a traditional ritual that marks the transition of a child to a young woman. The tradition of changing the shoes of the Quinceañera is yet another way to symbolize this change.

Prior to the day of the Quinceañera, it is expected that the Quinceañera has not been able to wear heel shoes. Therefore, during the church ceremony, the Quinceañera traditionally wears flat shoes without any heels symbolizing her child status.

The flat shoes are then changed for heeled shoes or zapatillas at the reception during a special presentation. The changing of shoes is usually done following the presentation of the last doll and the shoes are changed either by the father or older brother of the Quinceañera.

After the shoes are changed, the Quinceañera is now ready to take the first

dance of the evening as a young lady. This special tradition of changing the Quinceañeras shoes to her zapatillas is another important part of the Quinceañera celebration and other way to show that the Quinceañera is no longer a girl but a young woman.

Significance of Other Important Quinceañera Accessories:

The Quinceañera's Tiara - Denotes a "princess" before God and the world. Also signifies a triumph over childhood and the ability to face the challenges ahead.

The Quinceañera's Scepter - An symbol of authority and responsibility now being given to the Quinceañera.

The Quinceañera's Bracelet or Ring - Represents the never-ending circle of life. It symbolizes the unending stage of womanhood and the Quinceañeras abilities and future contributions.

The Quinceañera's Earrings - A reminder to listen to the word of God and the world and to always hear and respond to the world around her.

The Quinceañera's Cross or Medal - Signifies faith in God, in herself, and in the world.

The Quinceañera's Bible - Important resources to keep the word of God in the life of the Quinceañera.

Quinceañera Terms

Learn commonly used Quinceañera vocabulary and definitions to important terms regarding the Quinceañera celebration.

The Honor Escort: The honor escort or *chambelan de honor*, is usually a brother, cousin, or even the father of the Quinceañera. The honor escort accompanies the Quinceañera throughout the ceremony and during the reception.

The Court of Honor: Traditionally, the court of honor or *corte de honor*, consists of fourteen *damas* and fourteen *chambelanes*. Today, however, it is more common for the Quinceañera to consist of only seven *damas* and seven *chambelanes*. The court of honor is usually made up of the Quinceañeras closest friends and family. The Quinceañera court of honor may also include *pajes* or flower girls who sprinkle the Quinceañeras path with flower petals.

Sponsors (Padrinos): This tradition is designed to spread the economic burden among the family and close family friends. Each *padrino* donates cash or volunteers to buy a specific item such as the cake, tiara, photo album, or flowers.

Mass: A religious church service or *misa* is usually done in honor of the Quinceañera.

Other Important Quinceañera Terms:

Vestido de Quinceañera	=	Quinceañera Dress
El Ramo	=	Quinceañera Flower Bouquet
La Medalla	=	Medallion/Necklace (Gold)
Los Aretes	=	Earrings (Gold)
El Anillo	=	Ring (Gold)
La Esclava	=	Bracelet (Gold)
Libro de Firmas	=	Guestbook
El Cojin	=	Kneeling Pillow
Las Zapatillas	=	Heel Shoes
Recuerdos	=	Favors/Keepsakes
La Muneca	=	Quinceañera Doll
La Corona	=	Tiara/Crown
El Rosario	=	Rosary
La Biblia	=	Bible

Quinceañera Order of Events

Read through our notes below on how to plan your Quinceañera. You will also find explanations of the traditional events in a Quinceañera including the presentation of the last doll and the first dance.

Religious Celebration: During the Quinceañera religious celebration, the Quinceañera is walked down the aisle accompanied by her parents and her godparents. The Quinceañera is presented to the center of the altar for the mass. After the Quinceañera mass, the Quinceañera can choose to do the crowing, changing of shoes, and the doll presentation. However, it is customary to do these Quinceañera traditions at the reception.

Quinceañera Reception: After the religious ceremony, the festivities can begin with lots of food, drinks, and music. These Quinceañera parties are usually arranged around a particular theme.

Every Quinceañera reception usually includes the following:

The Introduction of the Court of Honor: To begin the festivities, the court of honor is first presented prior to the Quinceañera. Each name of the court of honor is announced as they enter. This announcement is usually done with background Quinceañera music.

The Presentation of the Quinceañera: After the presentation of the court of honor, the Quinceañera is finally introduced. A Quinceañera may choose to walk in on the arm of her escort. A special song is also played for her entrance.

Crowing of the Quinceañera: The crowning of the Quinceañera is traditionally done by the mother of the Quinceañera. The headpiece worn by the Quinceañera is to be replaced with a Quinceañera tiara or crown. A scepter can also be presented to the Quinceañera at the same time.

Presentation of the Last Doll: For details on this Quinceañera tradition, see the Presentation of the Last Doll info page.

Changing of the Shoes: For details on this Quinceañera tradition, see the Changing of the Quinceañera Shoes info page.

The Quinceañera Waltz: The main highlight of the Quinceañera is the waltz or *el vals*. Months of practice are spent for this special dance prior to the day of the Quinceañera. In most cultures, the Quinceañera first dances with her father during a special Quinceañera song. The Quinceañera can then dance with her honor escort and finally the Quinceañera court of honor can join in.

The Toast: The father usually leads the toast for the Quinceañera. The toast can also be done by the master or mistress of ceremony, bandleader, or even the honor escort.

The Thank You: The parents of the Quinceañera give thanks to the Quinceañera for turning out so beautifully and also thank God for bringing her to them. The parents of the Quinceañera also give thanks to God for seeing her through every day up to her Quinceañera. The Quinceañera then gives thanks to her parents for everything they do as well as giving her the party. The Quinceañera also

Quinceañera Planning

*Useful list that will help in the intricate task of planning a Quinceañera!
Planning a Quinceañera requires a great deal of organization!*

1 to 2 Years before Your Quinceañera:

Determine your budget.
Set the date for your Quinceañera.
Book the church. (Don't forget to book a rehearsal so that the Quinceañera, her court of honor and her family can have a walk-through before the big day.)
Book the priest/minister. (if applicable.)
Book the reception site.
Book caterer if reception location does not offer on site catering.
Book the entertainment for the party: DJ, mariachi, and/or band.
Book transportation for the Quinceañera, her court of honor and family, from the church to the reception.
Book photographer and/or videographer. (Make sure and check with the church on their policy about filming in the church.)
Research bakers and select cake for reception.
Determine your party theme or style. (This can be anything from a flower, a recent movie, or based on a hobby of the honoree.)
Choose the main colors.
Put together a preliminary guest list.
Decide on sponsors/padrinos. (Who is paying for what?)
Make a list of potential escort, damas, and chambelanes.

Nine Months before the Quinceañera:

Begin shopping for your Quinceañera dress and accessories.
Decide on your honor escort and court of honor.
Choose and order the damas dresses and accessories.
Choose and order the chambelanes formal wear.
Hire a choreographer or dance instructor to help you with the Quinceañera waltz during the reception.
Book rental services need for the reception such as tent, chairs, tables, etc.
Meet with ceremony officiate to discuss the Quinceañera ceremony and your preferences.

Six Months before the Quinceañera:

Choose and order Quinceañera Invitations.
Purchase decorations for the Quinceañera celebration.
Decide on and order Quinceañera party favors.
Draft ceremony and reception outline.
Reserve hotel rooms for out of state guests.
If needed, find who will do alterations on your Quinceañera dress.

Three Months before the Quinceañera:

Finalize guest list.
Start addressing all Quinceañera invitations.
Touch bases with all vendors such as the photographer, florists, and musicians to go over any details.
If you have not ordered your Quinceañera dress, make sure to do so as soon as possible!

Two Months before the Quinceañera:

Begin mailing Quinceañera invitations.
Make appointments for hair, makeup, and nails.
Start preparing your speech to thank your family and guests.
Choose and prepare programs. (Optional)

One Month before the Quinceañera:

Have a formal Quinceañera picture taken with your Quinceañera dress.
Purchase gifts for court of honor.
Select the music for the main waltz during the reception.
Finish any final alterations needed on the Quinceañera dress.

One Week before the Quinceañera:

Contact guests who have not responded.
Confirm guest total with caterer and review final food and beverage selections.
Prepare reception seating chart and/or place cards.
Give photographer a list of shots you would like included.
Give musicians a list of music for the reception.
Make a list of all the items you need to take to the church. (Candles, gifts, rosary, bible, etc..)

The Day of the Quinceañera:

Decorate ceremony and reception sites. (if necessary)
Have hair, makeup, and nails done.
Prepare reception seating chart and/or place cards.
Make sure to eat a healthy breakfast prior to the ceremony. It might be a while before you eat again at the reception.
Have someone keep an emergency kit with an extra pair of pantyhose, band-aids, makeup, and mini sewing kit.
Get your checklist of items needed for the reception and ceremony and make sure you have everything before you leave.
Relax and Have Fun! It's your Quinceañera!