

Flores de Mayo & Santacruzán festival



Queen of Filipino Festivals

Filipinos like fiestas. They are celebrated all-year round. All over the country, especially in the summer months, May is the merriest and the most beautiful month of the year. It is the season of colorful festivals and Flores de Mayo or Santacruzán is one such festival. Stop and smell the roses. During the month of May, in the tropical islands of the Philippines, we don't have to stop -- the fragrance of flowers floats in the air. When the rains begin to pour after a long dry spell, flowers magically bloom overnight. And being predominantly Catholic, the Filipinos celebrate the beneficial rains by giving praise to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The townfolk gather the colorful flowers to decorate the Parish Church altars and aisles. They bundle the blooms in exotic arrangements for the many different festivities all together referred to as the "Flores De Mayo" (Flowers of May). Many towns celebrate Flores De Mayo with the community congregating in the afternoons to pray the rosary, offer flowers to the Virgin Mary, and share homemade delicacies and snacks. Children and adults wearing their Sunday best sing and dance to welcome the rains that will water the new crops.

Santacruzán is held annually in the warm month of May and is considered to be the "Queen of Filipino Festivals". Beautiful town belles are selected to participate in this colorful pageant parade. The stars are selected not for their looks alone, but for their embodiment of traditional feminine qualities. It is a week-long street pageant in almost every town; from the dirt road barrio to the metropolis honoring beautiful Philippine maidens and their handsome escorts under the hand-carried bamboo arc's decorated by fragrant native flowers.

May is also the month dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of Christ. Filipinos turn each of the 31 days in May into a charming honor to the virginal virtues in Flores de Mayo, the flowers of May fiesta. Spiritual virtue searches to reach even the young. Every day in May, children, with cut flowers and baskets of petals in hand, march down the church center aisle. As the children march down the aisle they sprinkle the fragrant petals for Mama Mary. This custom is called alay sa Birhen. In Filipino, because it is an offering (alay) to the virgin (birhen), at the main altar, the youngsters sing hymns to Lady Immaculate, and leave their bouquet of flowers loose and dethroned.

Flore de Mayo History



Flores, from Spanish flores or "flowers," also known as Flores de Mayo (flowers of May), Flores de Maria (flowers of Mary) or alay (offering), may refer to the whole Flower Festival celebrated in the month of May in tribute to the Virgin Mary . The Santacruzian was a novena procession remembering St. Helena's mythical finding of the cross. St. Helena was the mother of Constantine the Great. According to legends, 300 years after the death of Christ, at the age of 75, she went to Calvary to conduct a search for the Cross. After some archeological diggings at the site of the Crucifixion, she unearthed three crosses. She tested each one by making a sick servant lie on all three. The cross where the servant recovered was identified as Christ's. St. Helena's feast day falls on August 8 but the anniversary of the finding of the Cross is on May 3rd, in the Philippines, this celebration took the form of the Mexican Santa Cruz de Mayo.

As another legend puts it, Constantine the Great, facing a battle against the Mighty Roman Emperor, Maxentius in the year 312 A.D. turned hopeless to the new Christian God for help. Constantine cast his eyes heavenwards and saw in the night sky a glowing sign of the cross with the words "In hoc signa vincit", meaning "By this sign thou shalt conquer". He adopted the Cross as his battle insignia with the words and forthwith went to defeat the Roman Army and entered Rome a victory, pledging his faith in Christianity.

In the Tagalog region, this custom and celebration started after the declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 and after the publication circa 1867 of Mariano Sevilla's translation of the devotional Flores de Maria or Mariquit na Bulacnac na sa Pagninilaynilay sa Buong Buan nang Mayo ay Inihahandog nang manga Devoto cay Maria Santisima (The Flowers of Mary or the Beautiful Flowers that in the Meditations During the Whole Month of May are Offered by Devotees to Mary the Holiest). A Santacruznan is a religious-historical beauty pageant held in many cities, towns and even small villages throughout the Philippines during the month of May. One of the most colorful May-time festivals in the Philippines which represent the finding of the Holy Cross by Queen Helena, mother of Constantine the Great. Many movie and television personalities participate in the events and are featured as major sagalas and escorts. The festivity celebrates the search of the Holy Cross by Queen Helena (Reina Elena) and her son, the newly converted emperor Constantine. After the Holy Cross was found in Jerusalem and brought back to Rome, there was an enjoyable celebration for thanksgiving.

Nine days of prayer (a novena) in respect of the Holy Cross lead the Flores de Mayo or Santacruznan. This festival was introduced by the Spaniards in the Philippines and has since become part of Filipino traditions recognized with youth, love and romance.



This colorful pageant parade is arranged in this order:

1. Methuselah - he is bearded, curved with age, riding a cart looking preoccupied with toasting some grains of sand in a pan over a fire. This is a reminder that all that glitters will end up as dust like what he is toasting.
 2. Reyna Banderada - a young lady dressed in a long red gown carrying a yellow triangular flag. She represents the coming of Christianity.
 3. Aetas - represent the state of the country before the coming of Christianity. These are the unconverted Filipino pagans.
 4. Reyna Mora - represents the dominant religion before Christianity (feminine of Moro from the Moslem religion).
 5. Reyna Fe - symbolizes the virtue of faith - the first of the theological virtues. She carries a cross.
 6. Reyna Esperanza - symbolizes the virtue of hope - the second theological virtue. She carries an anchor.
 7. Reyna Caridad - symbolizes the virtue of charity - the third theological virtue. She carries a red heart.
 8. Reyna Abogada - the defender of the poor and the oppressed. She wears a black graduation cap (toga) and gown and she carries a big book.
 9. Reyna Sentenciada - has her slim hands bound by a rope. She is the symbol of the innocents who have been convicted. She is escorted by two Roman soldiers.
 10. Reyna Justicia - an image of the "mirror of justice". She carries a weighing scale and a sword.
 11. Reyna Judith - representing Judith of Pethulia who saved her city from the Assyrians after she beheaded the cruel holoferns. She carries the head of the beheaded man on one hand and a sword on the other.
 12. Reyna Sheba - who visited the famous King Solomon and was overwhelmed by his wisdom, power and riches, she carries a jewelry box.
 13. Reyna Esther - the biblical Jewish who secured her countrymen from death and destruction through timely intervention with the King Xerxes. She carries a scepter.
 14. Samaritana - the woman who Christ spoke to at the well. She carries a jug on her shoulder.
 15. Veronica - the woman who wiped the face of Jesus. She carries a bandana printed with the three faces of Jesus.
 16. Tres Marias
 - a. Mary of Magdala - she carries a bottle of perfume;
 - b. Mary, Mother of Christ - she carries a handkerchief;
 - c. Mary, mother of James - she carries a bottle of oil.
 17. Marian - celebrating the many titles of the Virgin Mary.
- A-v-e--M-a-r-i-a -- represented by eight (8) girls all Wearing long white dresses with wings to make them look like angels. Each one carries a letter to complete the word "AVE MARIA."

- a . **Divina pastora** (Divine Shepherdess) - she carries a shepherdess' staff.
- b . **Reyna de las Estrellas** (Queen of Stars) - she carries a wand with a star.
- c . **Rosa Mystica** - she carries a bouquet of roses.
- d . **Reyna Paz** (queen of peace) - she carries the symbol of peace.
- e . **Reyna de las Propetas** - she carries an hour glass.
- f . **Reyna del Cielo** (Queen of Heaven) - she carries a flower. She has two (2) angels.
- g . **Reyna de las Virgines** - she carries a rosary and is surrounded by two (2) little angels.
- h . **Reyna de las Flores** (Queen of Flowers) - she carries a bouquet of flowers.

18. **Reyna Elena (Queen Helena)** - She is the highlight of the procession, the legendary founder of the true Cross, represented by the small cross she carries. She is escorted by her son, Constantine, under a huge canopy of May flowers. Immediately behind her is a float carrying the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, followed by a brass band that lends the festive sounds to the procession.



The procession is followed by the steady beat of rondalla, playing and singing "Dios Te Salve". The devotees walking with the procession hold lighted candles in their hands and singing the prayer.

Dios Te Salve (Hail Mary) Dios te salve Maria

Llena eres de gracia

El señor es contigo

Bendita tu eres

Entre todas las mujeres

Y bendito es el fruto

Y bendito es el fruto

De tu vientre Jesus.

Santa Maria Madre de Dios

Ruega por nosotros

Pecadores ahora

Y en la hora

De nuestra muerte amen. Jesus.

As the pageant moves along the streets, devotees holding lit candles follow, and join in the rosary, novena, and songs of praise. Oftentimes, after the evening Mass, the town Mayor hosts a dinner party to cap the celebrations. After the procession there is a pabitin that serves as a culminating activity for all the children to enjoy. Pabitin is a square trellis where goodies (candies, fruits, etc.) are hung by strings. This trellis in turn is tied to a rope and is suspended on a strong branch or pole. The children gather under the trellis and they jump as high as they can to try to pick the goodies as the trellis gets lowered to them while someone pulls it up and down repeatedly until the goodies are gone. For the Santacruzán to be more electrifying, the chosen Reina Elena is kept a secret until the day of the parade to surprise the people. It is requested that male members attending the Santacruzán wear Barong Tagalog and the women wear any Filipino costumes, if available.

This Filipino tradition ("The Queen of May Festivities"), introduced by the Spanish conquerors, is more than 100 years old and lives on even in Europe and America. Filipino Communities and Associations all over the world rejoice the Santacruzán with the same pageantry and glamour as the townsfolk in their homeland. Filipino-Americans in New Orleans uphold the tradition courtesy of The Franzuela Family. In Europe, the Euro-Santacruzán is hosted by The Filipino Community in Belgium. In the month of May, Filipinos don't need to stop to smell the flowers. The smell and scent of sampaguitas (Philippines' National Flower), kalachuchis, roses and other blooms, floats in the air.

Ref.: http://www.philippinecountry.com/philippine_festivals/santacruzán.html

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