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A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

16 June 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

Chilean Cueca: A Living Tradition at the Nation's Heart

For generations, the cueca has been more than just a dance for Chile—it is a cultural symbol that embodies history, identity, and emotion. Officially declared the national dance on September 18, 1979, the cueca takes center stage during Chile's Independence celebrations, yet its roots go far deeper than festivity.

In every stomp, twirl, and fluttering handkerchief, a ritual of courtship is performed, inspired by the mating dance of a rooster and a hen—played out by a couple who never touch, but speak through rhythm and gesture.



itself a blend of Spanish fandango, African rhythms, and Arab-Andalusian influences. It became popular across Chile, first in aristocratic salons and later in local taverns known as chinganas, eventually emerging as a true expression of Chilean identity.

Performed in 6/8 or 3/4 time, the cueca is accompanied by guitar, tambourine, accordion, or harp, depending on the region. Its lyrics, often composed in quatrain, seguidilla, and closing couplets, reflect romantic, folkloric, or urban themes and are sung with a spirit that ranges from joyful to mischievous.

There are several regional styles of cueca: the traditional huasa cueca, found in rural central Chile; the fast-paced, instrumental nortina cueca of the north; the slower, vocal-driven chilota cueca from the south; and the brava or chora cueca, which emerged in urban neighborhoods with a more provocative and marginal tone. During the military dictatorship, the powerful “cueca sola” was born—danced alone by women in honor of their disappeared loved ones.

Today, the cueca remains a vibrant part of Chile’s cultural identity. It is taught in schools, celebrated in regional and national championships, and reinvented by younger generations who blend it with rock, pop, and urban folk. From Toronto to Punta Arenas, cueca connects Chileans both at home and abroad.

More than just a dance, the cueca is living memory: of love, resistance, celebration, and tradition. Each step tells a story, and each handkerchief raised in the air is a reminder that Chile’s popular culture continues to beat strong in the heart of its people.

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Guava: Timeless Fruit and Natural Treasure of Latin America

Guava a treasured fruit that embodies the cultural and natural richness of Latin America. This ancient plant, native to tropical America, has been valued for centuries both for its delicious fruit and its medicinal properties.



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An Ancestral Legacy in Every Bite

Guava, a member of the myrtle family, stands as a vital part of Latin America's heritage. With roots that stretch back to pre-Columbian times, this fruit was initially cherished by indigenous cultures not only for its sweet and tangy flavor but also for its healing virtues. Rich in vitamin C—sometimes even surpassing citrus fruits like oranges—guava is also a great source of fiber, antioxidants, and essential nutrients that boost the immune system, aid digestion, and combat cellular aging.

Healing Properties Beyond the Fruit

The value of the guava extends beyond its nutrient-rich fruit. Traditionally, the leaves of the guava tree have been used for their medicinal benefits. In various regions, a simple infusion made from guava leaves is a popular home remedy used to alleviate symptoms such as diarrhea, inflammation, and respiratory ailments. This practice underscores the fruit's enduring role in natural medicine and its versatility in promoting health.

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A Pillar of Culture and Local Economy

Guava is not only celebrated for its nutritional and medicinal qualities—it also plays a significant role in the cultural and economic fabric of the regions where it is grown. Widely featured in local markets and integral to regional culinary traditions, the guava symbolizes the rich biodiversity and natural wealth of Latin America. Its cultivation, which dates back to ancient indigenous peoples who used it as a currency and a sacred object, continues to unite communities and preserve ancestral traditions.

A Timeless Symbol of Natural Wealth

Whether enjoyed fresh, blended into juices, crafted into desserts, or prepared as a natural remedy, guava remains a living testament to Latin America's valuable natural heritage. It not only nourishes the body with essential nutrients and healing properties but also connects current generations with their ancestral roots, reminding us of the importance of protecting and cherishing our natural resources.

Guava is undoubtedly a jewel of nature—a timeless fruit that deserves a special place in our lives and history.

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The History of Cuban Drums: A Legacy of Rhythm and Tradition

The history of Cuban drums dates back to pre-Columbian times, when indigenous peoples used wooden percussion instruments to create rhythmic vibrations. However, it was the arrival of African slaves that transformed Cuban drumming, introducing animal skin drumheads and shaping the distinct sounds that define Cuban percussion today.

The Evolution of Afro-Cuban Drumming

With the need to honor their deities, enslaved Africans developed a variety of drums, each designed for specific rituals. Among the most iconic percussion instruments are the maracas, conga, bongó, and pailas, but one stands out for its rich sound and versatility—the tumbadora.



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The Cuban Tumbadora: A Drum with African Roots

Believed to originate from the Bantu traditions of the Congo, the tumbadora evolved from hollowed-out wooden drums covered with stretched animal skin. Its barrel-like shape, secured with nails, gives it a distinctive resonance that is easily recognizable in Cuban orchestras.

The tumbadora comes in three sizes, each producing unique tones:

- **Tumbadora (Conga Bajo)** – The largest drum, providing deep bass sounds.
- **Conga** – The mid-sized drum, forming the rhythmic foundation.
- **Quinto** – The smallest drum, favored for improvisation due to its sharp, high-pitched tones.

From Religious Rituals to Popular Music

Initially used in Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies, the tumbadora soon became a staple in street parades (congas) and popular Cuban orchestras. It plays a central role in guaguancó and rumba, often improvised using wooden crates in spontaneous performances across Cuba.

Cuban Percussion Legends

Renowned Cuban percussionists such as Tata Güines, Mongo Santamaría, and José Luis “Changuito” have elevated the tumbadora to international fame, cementing its place at the heart of Cuban music.

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Indigenous Peoples' Film and Communication Festival Returns to Peru After 35 Years

More than 50 films from 12 countries will be screened free of charge at the International Film and Communication Festival of Indigenous Peoples, which will return to Peru after 35 years, according to the Cultural Center of Spain in Lima.

The fifteenth edition of the festival, which will also include master classes and talks with international filmmakers, will be inaugurated on June 20 at the Mario Vargas Llosa auditorium of the National Library of Peru, in the Lima district of San Borja.



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With the slogan ‘Voices and images of our mother earth’, the meeting will take place until June 28 with the screening of films from 12 countries in Latin America, North America and Europe, which can be seen in five venues in Lima.

The screenings of the festival will be offered at the National Library of Peru, the National Major University of San Marcos (UNMSM), the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP), the Antonio Ruiz de Montoya University and the PUCP Cultural Center.

The festival, organized by the Latin American Film and Communication Coordination of Indigenous Peoples (Clacpi) since 1985, will have its next edition in Peru, run by Aidesep, ECA and Chirapaq. The program will include fiction, documentary, animation and other formats from various countries, and will have the participation of fifty indigenous filmmakers who will dialogue with the public.

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The central guest of this edition will be Inuit filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk, considered a leading figure in Canadian Indigenous cinema, who will present his film ‘Uiksaringitara’ (Wrong Husband) and give an open master class on June 23 at the National University of San Marcos.

Other guests will include Brazilian Graciela Guaraní, a Guarani Kaiowá filmmaker; Shaandiin Tome, a Diné filmmaker from the United States; Mexican Zapotec director Yolanda Cruz; and Sami filmmaker and visual artist Marja Helander, from Finland.

San Salvador is consolidating its position as a city that blends its colonial past with a growing urban presence, amid ongoing efforts to improve security and tourism infrastructure.

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Mate: Argentina's Timeless Tradition of Connection and Identity

Mate is more than just a drink in Argentina—it is a symbol of friendship, community, and tradition, deeply embedded in the country's cultural identity.

Origins and Evolution

Mate traces its origins to the Guaraní communities, who discovered its stimulating properties long before European colonizers arrived. Jesuits played a crucial role in spreading its cultivation and commercial production in the 17th century, integrating mate into South American identity.



Over time, its preparation became ritualized. It became a daily practice among Argentine gauchos, who consumed it during their journeys across the Pampa. Intellectuals and revolutionaries also embraced mate—Che Guevara and Juan Domingo Perón were avid mate drinkers, demonstrating its presence across various sectors of society.

How It's Consumed and What It Represents

Mate is prepared with yerba mate and hot water in a container called a mate or porongo, usually made from a dried gourd. It is drunk using a metal straw, or bombilla, which filters the yerba.

The process of "cebado", or mate brewing and sharing, follows certain unwritten rules that reinforce its social value:

- The cebador (mate server) controls the water temperature, ensuring it doesn't boil to avoid burning the yerba.
- Passing the mate gourd among a group symbolizes trust and closeness.
- Avoid moving the bombilla, as this can alter the taste.

In some regions, ingredients like orange peels, honey, herbs such as peperina, or even coffee are added, creating unique local varieties.

International Expansion

Although mate is emblematic in Argentina, several South American countries have strong mate traditions. Uruguay has the highest mate consumption per capita, and in Paraguay, mate is consumed cold as tereré, especially in warm climates. In Brazil, it is often enjoyed sweetened and served in large cups.

Beyond South America, mate has gained popularity in recent years. Celebrities and athletes, including Lionel Messi and Luis Suárez, have popularized mate internationally, bringing it to new corners of the world. In countries like Japan and the United States, its consumption has grown due to its energizing and antioxidant properties.

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Curiosities and Benefits

- Mate contains “mateína”, a compound similar to caffeine but with a smoother, longer-lasting effect.
- It has more antioxidants than green tea, making it beneficial for health.
- Argentina celebrates National Mate Day (November 30) in honor of Andrés Guacurarí, an indigenous leader who promoted yerba mate production in the 19th century.
- Some cities have specialized mate bars, where different varieties are served with unique pairings.

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