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9 May 2025

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Venezuela's National Flower: The Orchid, A Symbol of Beauty and Identity

On May 23, 1951, the orchid was officially declared Venezuela's National Flower, with more than 500 varieties found across the country. Though native to the Cordillera de la Costa, this delicate plant thrives in other regions as well, particularly in the Waraira Repano National Park, located north of Caracas.

Commonly known as the Flor de Mayo (May Flower), the orchid earned its popular name in the 19th century when locals used it to decorate crosses during religious celebrations in May. The flower is especially notable for its unique blooming process, which involves a 180-degree rotation before opening, positioning its labellum prominently for pollinators.



Its fruit is a capsule filled with numerous tiny seeds, allowing the species to spread easily throughout Venezuelan territory.

The selection of the orchid as a national symbol involved criteria such as native origin, longevity, popular recognition, and international familiarity. Blooming primarily between April and May, the orchid is seen as a representation of femininity and beauty.

The flower can grow between 20 to 35 centimeters, producing a single leaf and petals that range in color from purple to lilac and pink. Among these, the purple variant is the most emblematic and widely recognized as Venezuela's national flower.

Since its designation, the orchid has become one of Venezuela's most treasured national symbols, deeply rooted in cultural pride and natural heritage.

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The Galápagos Islands: Ecuador's Treasure of Biodiversity and Evolution

The Galápagos Islands, located in the Pacific Ocean about 1,000 kilometers from Ecuador, are a volcanic archipelago known for their extraordinary biodiversity and historical significance in Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

This group of islands is home to unique species not found anywhere else in the world, such as the famous giant tortoises and Darwin's finches, which played a crucial role in the development of evolutionary theory.



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The diversity of ecosystems in the Galápagos is astounding, ranging from dry deserts to humid forests, allowing for the coexistence of a rich variety of flora and fauna.

This phenomenon is largely due to their geographical isolation, which has enabled species to evolve independently, adapting to their specific environments.

Additionally, volcanic activity on the islands contributes to the creation of new habitats and unique landscapes. However, despite their natural beauty and scientific value, the Galápagos face significant challenges due to tourism and the introduction of invasive species.

For this reason, the archipelago has been designated as a National Park and a Biosphere Reserve, ensuring its protection under Ecuadorian and international laws. Sustainable tourism is promoted to minimize environmental impact, allowing visitors to experience the uniqueness of the islands while supporting conservation efforts.

The Galápagos Islands are undoubtedly an invaluable treasure that continues to fascinate scientists and travelers alike.

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Iguazu Falls: A Key Tourist and Geographical Destination in South America

Located on the border between Argentina and Brazil, Iguazu Falls has established itself as one of the main tourist destinations in the region. Comprising 275 waterfalls along nearly three kilometers, 80% of them are situated on the Argentine side. The most impressive is the Devil's Throat, with an 80-meter drop, accessible via walkways from the Puerto Canoas area, using an ecological train.



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Both Iguazu National Park (Argentina) and Iguaçu National Park (Brazil) offer trails and viewpoints to observe the falls from different perspectives.

The Argentine side provides a more immersive experience, while the Brazilian side offers panoramic views. Nearby, the Bird Park in Foz do Iguaçu serves as an additional attraction, featuring over 1,500 animals from 140 species.

The region boasts great biodiversity: more than 2,000 plant species and around 400 bird species. Jaguars, monkeys, and coatis also inhabit the area, making it a key spot for ecotourism.

The months from May to October, during the dry season, are ideal for visiting, although during the rainy season, the water flow is greater.

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From Argentina, entrance to Iguazu National Park costs approximately $26 for foreigners, while on the Brazilian side, the fee is around $18.

Recommended activities include hiking, boat rides, wildlife watching, and moonlit night visits. Puerto Iguazú and Foz do Iguaçu offer a wide range of accommodations and restaurants, making it an accessible experience for tourists from around the world.

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The Quechua People – A Living Culture of the Andes

The Quechuas are one of the largest Indigenous groups in South America, living in the Andes Mountains and Amazonian regions of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia. Their shared language is Quechua, also known as Runasimi, meaning “language of the people.”

The earliest Quechua groups settled in northern Chile around 8000 BC. They were hunter-gatherers who used local natural resources to survive. Later, they became farmers and herders, raising llamas and alpacas, and growing potatoes, corn, and quinoa, staple foods in their diet.



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In the 15th century, the Inca Empire helped spread the Quechua language, which became the official language of the Tahuantinsuyo (Inca territory). Even today, different regions speak their own Quechua dialects.

Quechua people lived in communities called ayllu, where families shared land and helped one another through ayni, a traditional system of reciprocal labor. Each community was led by a curaca, who organized festivals and ceremonies.

The Quechuas believe in Pachamama, the Mother Earth, whom they honor through rituals using smoke, coca leaves, and drinks. Their cosmic worldview is divided into three levels:

- **Hanan Pacha** – the upper world of the Sun (Inti) and Moon (Killa)
- **Kay Pacha** – the living world of nature and humans
- **Ukhu Pacha** – the inner world of the dead and natural forces

The Inti Raymi is their most important festival, celebrating the return of the Sun during the winter solstice in June.

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Today, over 10 million people speak Quechua, which is recognized as an official language in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador. Quechua is not just a language, but a whole language family with many local varieties.

Quechua clothing is colorful and handmade from cotton, alpaca, llama, or sheep wool. Each community has unique patterns and styles, often dyed with natural plant and mineral colors.

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Valledupar: Cradle of Vallenato and Host of Colombia's Legendary Music Festival

Nestled between the majestic Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and the Serranía del Perijá, Valledupar, capital of the Cesar Department, is one of Colombia's premier cultural hubs. It is best known as thebirthplace of vallenato, a musical genre declared Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO.



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At the heart of its cultural calendar is the Festival de la Leyenda Vallenata, held every April since 1968. It is the country's most important celebration of vallenato, attracting thousands of visitors from across Colombia and abroad. The festival's highlights include the crowning of the Rey Vallenato (Vallenato King) and the vibrant piquerías — spirited duels of verses between performers.

The Origins of Vallenato

Vallenato originated in Valledupar, once home to Chimila and Tupe indigenous tribes led by the legendary Cacique Upar, from whom the city gets its name. "Vallenato" literally means "born in the valley."

This music was born of traveling farmers and cowhands who spread news and tales across rural communities, inspired by Spanish, African, and Indigenous musical traditions. The blending of instruments — the accordion from Europe, the guacharaca from indigenous cultures, and the caja from Africa — gave vallenato its unique identity.

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Instruments of Vallenato

Traditional vallenato is performed using three main instruments:

- The caja vallenata, a small drum played with bare hands, introduced by enslaved Africans.
- The guacharaca, a grooved wooden instrument originally used in hunting rituals.
- The accordion, imported from Germany.

Together, these instruments reflect a rich multicultural legacy.

From Rural Song to National Symbol

Once considered lowbrow music of farmers and gossipmongers, vallenato gained prominence when upper classes began inviting performers to elite social clubs. In 1968, then-Governor Alfonso López, journalist Consuelo Araujo, and composer Rafael Escalona created the Festival de la Leyenda Vallenata, elevating the genre to a national stage.

Vallenato features four distinct rhythms or “aires”: son, paseo, puya, and merengue, each with a unique mood and lyrical structure, often dictated by the lead accordionist.