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NATIONAL SYMBOLS

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How are you?
¿Cómo está usted?
(How are you?)

Buenos días
Good morning

Buenas tardes
Good afternoon, Good evening

Buenas noches
Good night

Spanish (Latin American) - Greetings

¿Cómo está usted?
(How are you?)

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China

National Cuisine

Overview

Chinese cuisine is popular throughout the world, but its roots and varieties are more diverse and complex than one might think from sampling the standard dishes exported and modified for international palates. The traditional fare of the average Chinese person is very simple, with rice and noodles as staples augmented by small amounts of stir-fried meat and vegetables. In the North, wheat and millet are more prevalent, and noodles and steamed buns are more common. However, beyond this simple base, there is a staggering range of complex formal dishes and a seemingly infinite variety of snacks, soups, stir-fries, and main courses made from a wide range of meats, vegetables, and seasonings. Ingredients (vegetables, meat, tofu) are typically prepared in bite-sized pieces (cubes, strips, slices) because it is faster to cook food that way and easier to eat with chopsticks. Fish, however, is almost always served whole, with the head on. Soups are also very popular (eaten with spoons), but they are traditionally served after a cold appetizer and a hot main course. The bowl of rice, served with the entrée in overseas restaurants, comes at the end of the meal in China.

The Taoist philosophical principle of balancing yin and yang (different yet complementary elements like male and female and light and dark) is fundamental to Chinese cuisine. Many dishes attempt to achieve this balance by combining different tastes (sweet, salty, bitter, and sour), colors, and textures (soft, crisp, chewy, raw) in just the right proportions. Presentation is extremely important in formal meals and it is common to have vegetables carved into the shapes of flowers and animals.

Some rare ingredients like frog's stomachs, snake's gall bladders, and shark's fins are attributed with medicinal or aphrodisiac benefits and held in high regard. Preserved foods like dried sausages, thousand-year-old eggs (preserved for 10 weeks), and dried seafood (fish, squid, shrimp, jellyfish) are another unique feature of Chinese cooking.

Regional differences are pronounced and generally categorized under the "Eight Great Traditions" ("Ten Great Traditions" if you add Beijing and Shanghai styles): Anhui, Cantonese, Fujian, Hunan, Jiangsu, Shandong, Sichuan, and Zhejiang. In the North, stir-fried dishes like beef and onion are common.

At a seafood market in southern China

A tea ceremony in Chengyang

A hot spring in the Great Wall in Shanghai

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Mexico

Gift Giving

Personal Gifts

Personal gifts are given and exchanged in Mexico on a wide range of special occasions including birthdays, weddings, graduations, and welcome-home parties. Mother's Day is an especially important gift-giving occasion in Mexico. People present their mothers with flowers and gifts, and even stores and supermarkets give small gifts to all the mothers who pass through their retail sites. Although Christmas is celebrated with enthusiasm throughout the predominantly Catholic country, most gift giving is done on January 6th, the Día de Los Reyes (Day of the Three Wise Men). This day celebrates the three wise men or kings who came bearing gifts like gold, frankincense, and myrrh for the baby Jesus.

In Mexico, where long engagements are common, a prospective bridegroom sometimes gives his girlfriend a ring of commitment a year before giving her an engagement ring. The traditional wedding gift from groom to bride is thirteen gold coins, which he presents to her one at a time, symbolizing his promise to support her and their children. It's also customary for the wedding couple to receive a Christian Bible, often embossed with their names and the date of their marriage. Traditional gifts from wedding guests also include wine glasses for the wedding toasts, a wedding rosary, a prayer book, and embroidered pillows for the couple to kneel on during the ceremony. Wedding favors for guests include wedding cookies, Spanish fans, or small pottery items. Money is traditionally given to the bride and groom after the wedding ceremony by pinning it to their clothing or slipping it into their pockets during their first waltz.

The Quinceañera (female coming-of-age celebration), happens on the 15th birthday of Mexican girls and is a lavish event in which no expense is spared by family and friends. It is quite common for girls to receive gifts like international vacations or new cars on this day. Mexicans celebrate birthdays with gusto and it is common for even relatively poor families to hold huge celebrations that feature live musicians, a culinary feast, and revelry that lasts late into the night.

Business Gifts

Gifts are a common and welcome, yet non-obligatory, part of doing business in Mexico, but care should be taken in terms of appropriateness. While high quality business items like pens, stationery, planners, and other professional and office supplies are appropriate items, gifts that are too luxurious or personal may be taken as displays of wealth, or even bribes. When a member of an office team, like a secretary, helps with travel plans or provides assistance, it is customary to thank them with a small gift. A man giving a gift to a female secretary often says that the gift is from his wife to avoid unintended connotations.

Items featuring a corporate logo are generally well-received in Mexico. Candles, a souvenir or local crafts from a foreign country, or an illustrated book about the visitor's city of origin also serve as appropriate gifts. Business gifts are presented at the end of completed deals or formal meetings, and are opened at once. An unreserved and friendly people, even in corporate situations, Mexicans often react strongly to favorable gifts with enthusiasm and thanks.

Mother's Day is an especially important gift-giving occasion in Mexico.

The Quinceañera, a Mexican girl's coming-of-age celebration, is a lavish event in which no expense is spared by family and friends.

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South Africa

Women in Culture

General

The traditional cultures of South Africa have always considered women inferior to men and have confined women to household activities. South Africa's recent political and economic developments have offered women new opportunities as well as new impediments in their societal status.

The incorporation of new Constitutional reforms and the establishment of the Commission on Gender Equality in 1997 led to an improvement of the social and economic position of South African women. The Commission works with several government agencies to resolve gender-related complaints from the public and takes necessary steps to ensure gender equality. Despite new policies and reforms, however, women still suffer from persistent social and economic discrimination.

Women's participation in the South African government ranks eighth in the world. As of the 2009 elections, women held 44 percent of National Assembly seats, and 41 percent of Cabinet ministerial positions. In addition, there is significant female representation in medicine, law, and business. Women are still, however, under-represented in decision-making positions. A 2001 study showed that women occupied only 11 percent of management roles and 18 percent of senior management roles.

Rural women (a majority of the country's population) have limited access to education, healthcare, and the legal system, and many are confined to subsistence activities. They sometimes also have to take the full burden of family responsibilities because of male labor migration to cities and mining areas.

The perception of women's roles varies with the different sub-cultures of the nation. Women in the more affluent white and Asian minority communities generally have more education, personal freedom, and opportunities.

There are no dress code restrictions for women in South Africa. Women usually wear formal and European style clothing.

Legal Rights

The South African Constitution guarantees women equal rights in all spheres of life alongside men. South Africa granted the right to vote and contest elections to white women in 1930, Indian and "colored" women in 1964, and black women in 1994.

The right to inheritance differs among women in South Africa. White, Indian, and "colored" women inherit bilaterally; either the children receive all the property or the deceased's siblings of both sexes inherit. In the majority black community, the eldest son inherits all property and is responsible for his mother, younger siblings, and the other wives and children of his father.

The retirement age is 65 for men and 60 for women. Maternity benefits require employers to pay 45 percent of a woman's weekly earnings for up to 26 weeks.

In South Africa, abortion can be performed by a registered or government practitioner, usually with the consent of two other doctors.

Both women and men are legally entitled to initiate divorces. Although both parents have equal rights to child custody, women are usually given preference.

Education

South Africa provides women equal access to educational opportunities.

Drummers playing traditional songs in Johannesburg.

A woman wearing a headscarf in Johannesburg.

Traditionally, men are the heads of the family and decision-making powers, and women are held responsible for the family and household duties.

An already Chinese teacher in a computer class.



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