The Mexican holiday of Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, takes place during the first two days of November. While the holiday’s observances include spending time in cemeteries, making shrines to the dead, and displaying skull and skeleton decorations, the occasion is joyful, rather than scary. Death isn’t seen as the end of one’s life, but as a natural part of the life cycle. During Día de los Muertos, it is said that the spirits of the dead come back to visit the living.

First those who died as babies come home, then the older children, and finally those who died as adults. Families set up altars or ofrendas in their homes. They decorate them festively with bright colors and have photographs, things that the dead people enjoyed, and items representing the four elements: fire (candles), water (drinks), earth (fruit), and wind (fluttering tissue-paper decorations.) In some areas, families go to the graveyard to celebrate through the night.

Decorating with happy and cheerful calaveras (skulls) and calacas (skeletons) and eating pan de muerto (bread of the dead, made in honor of the holiday) is part of the Día de los Muertos celebration. Sugar coated skull and skeleton candy are also a Day of the Dead treat.