



**Inti Raymi: A Celebration of Life**

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The Festival of Inti Raymi takes place toward the end of June (21 – 22) each year in the Andean villages of Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and Ecuador, where crowds gather to celebrate and show gratitude for the bounty of the earth with a variety of colorful traditional rituals. Inti Raymi, which means Festival of the Sun or the sun's resurrection is celebrated in the villages of Pedro Moncayo and Cayambe in the Pichincha Province, as well as in Cotacachi, Otavalo, Ibarra and Antonio Ante in the Imbabura Province of Ecuador. In Otavalo, the celebrations last for days and have become a popular tourist attraction.

During Inti Raymi, members of the indigenous communities go to local springs, rivers and waterfalls to undergo ritual spiritual purification, which they believe results in a renewal of energy and a strengthening of their relationship with Mother Nature. In Otavalo, this ritual takes place at midnight in the nearby waterfall that is considered to be sacred.





As part of the celebrations, lively music accompanies dancers who are led by the Aya Uma – a mythological character believed to be the spirit of the mountain. A respected member of the community will play the part of the Aya Uma, by wearing a mask with two faces (representing day and night), and with twelve horns (representing the twelve months of the year).



Stamping their feet to encourage Mother Earth to be rejuvenated for the new agricultural cycle, the dancers go around in circles which represents the two equinoxes and two solstices that take place annually. Musicians in the center of the circling dancers play music which represents the life-giving power of the sun, while the fruit carried by performers is an offering made to Mother Earth in gratitude for the harvest. A variety of mainly maize-based foods and beverages are prepared and enjoyed as part of Inti Raymi – a favorite being the fermented beverage, chicha.