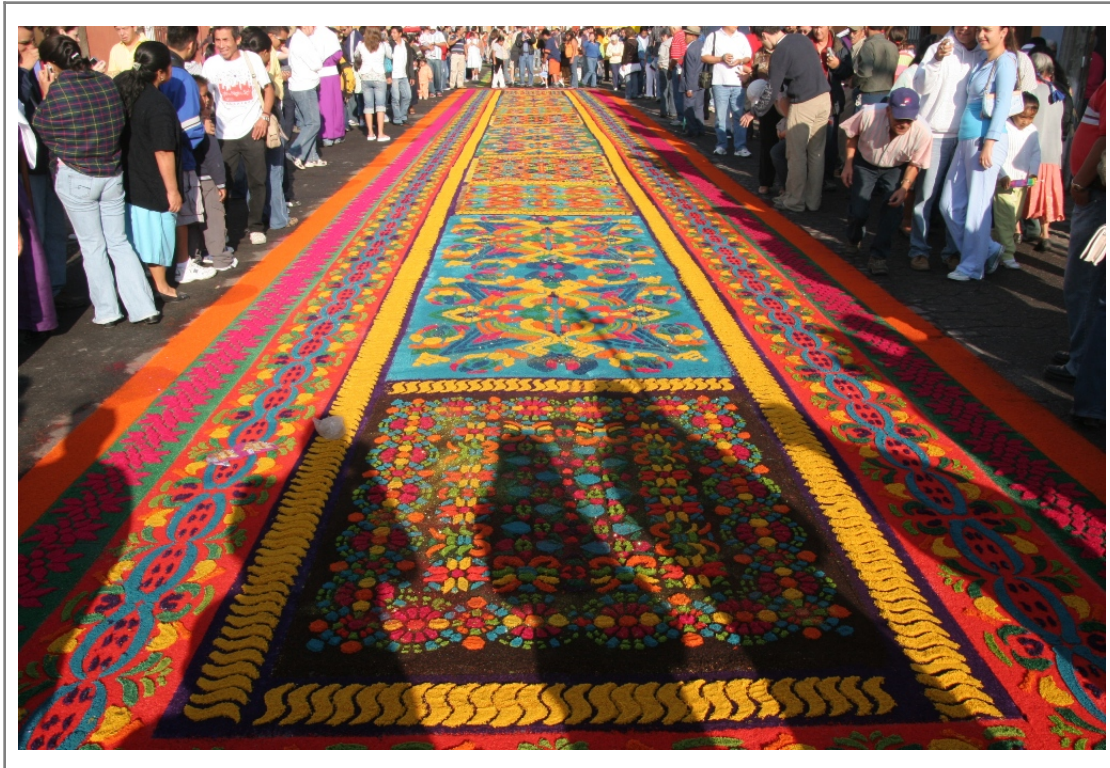


The Holy Carpets of Antigua

Posted At : March 19, 2013 3:34 PM | Posted By : Yessenia Soto

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All over the world, Catholics are preparing to celebrate Holy Week. This holiday involves prayer, fasting, devotion, and, in many countries, traditional parades. It is a great time of year for travelers in Latin America and other regions to enjoy an authentic cultural tourism experience!

A "procession" is an organized religious parade of people on a journey, usually as an offering to God, the Virgin, or the saints. The processions are inspired by biblical passages, so participants are dressed in costumes from the Roman era, and they carry images of Jesus and the Virgin, among others. During the journey they may go quietly, sing hymns, or chant prayers.

The processions can begin during Lent and be held every Sunday until Easter. Starting on Palm Sunday, there are sometimes daily processions, but the largest and most elaborate parades are from Holy Thursday until Easter Sunday.

Spain, Argentina, Peru, and Guatemala are world renowned for their colorful and moving processions. However, the processions of Guatemala are said to be the best of America, especially those of the colonial city of Antigua.

During Holy Week, the narrow cobblestone streets of



Antigua are filled with domestic and foreign tourists who travel there just to appreciate these acts of devotion. But there is another element that makes them unique in the world: the beautiful carpets of sawdust the Guatemalan Catholics carefully produce to decorate the route the processions will pass.



The carpets display impressive Maya and Roman designs and others inspired by nature, which are made using colored sawdust, flowers, fruits, vegetables, pine and other materials. Families, neighborhoods, and entire guilds organize themselves to decorate the streets outside their homes and churches, combining their talent and effort and pooling money to buy the materials and molds needed to create the carpets.

Depending on their length and difficulty, the preparation of a carpet can take a few hours or even full nights and days. Some carpets in Antigua may be nearly a kilometer in length.

Seeing Antigua converted into an artists' studio is a visual feast for visitors who wander through the streets capturing the images of the creative process and the final works. The life of a carpet is short, making it even more special.



The start of the procession marks the carpets' greatest moment of splendor, but also their end. The crowded streets fill with white incense, followed by the group of people with special clothing and prayers or chants, while the strongest carry very heavy litters bearing the precious images. Everyone marches slowly on the beautiful carpets that have patiently awaited this moment. Within minutes, only remnants of the colorful tapestries remain, and a cleaning crew sweeps up the waste to leave the streets clean again.

In a few hours on another street of Antigua, the process is repeated again and again until Holy Week ends.