



## SPORT IN MEXICO

**Charrería** is the national sport of Mexico, dating back to the 16th century. It is a competitive event which tests the speed and skill of cowboys and cowgirls (known as 'charros' in Spanish). There are individual and team events. Charrería teams are often made up of family members, whose families have been taking part in the event for generations. In total there are nine events for men, and one event for women, which all involve horses and cattle. These include demonstrating the skill of controlling the horse, catching horses or bulls with a lariat (looped rope) and bull riding. The most dangerous



A charro riding a bucking horse



A professional game of Basque pelota

event is **El Paso de la Muerte** (The Pass of Death), which involves a charro leaping from his moving horse onto the back of another loose horse that is running around the arena.

**Basque pelota** is the name for a group of sports played on a court, using hands, rackets, bats or wooden baskets to hit a ball against a wall. Alternate versions include two teams facing each other separated by a line on the ground. The World Championships of Basque pelota are held every four years. 2006 was Mexico's best performance, when they won six gold medals. In a game of Basque pelota, **Jo!** or **Ba!** is shouted, meaning 'the game is on!'

**Lucha libre** (meaning 'free fight') is a type of professional wrestling that is popular in Mexico. The wrestlers, known as 'luchadores', are very agile, and perform a series of impressive manoeuvres. Many of the wrestlers each have their own colourful mask to wear, the design of which represents various animals, gods or heroes. The biggest wrestling matches involve two luchadores betting their masks - at the end of the fight the loser has to take off their mask and reveal their identity. The longer a luchadore successfully defends his mask over his career, the more respected a wrestler they become.



A colourful array of masks worn by luchadores





## MUSIC & DANCE IN MEXICO

Traditional folk music is popular in Mexico. Mariachi groups are made up of singers and musicians who typically play instruments such as the guitar, violin and trumpet, and often know by heart hundreds of different songs. One of the best known examples of Mexican music is the song 'La Cucaracha', (meaning 'the cockroach'). In Mexico City, many mariachi musicians can be found in Garibaldi Plaza. They play individual songs for passers-by, and many people come here to listen and choose a group to hire to play at events like weddings and baptisms.



A traditional mariachi band with their instruments



A couple performing the famous dance, Jarabe Tapatio

Jarabe is the most popular type of traditional dance in Mexico. The Jarabe Tapatio, otherwise known as the Mexican Hat Dance, tells the story of the meeting of a man and woman. In some versions, the woman dances around the sombrero (type of Mexican hat) that the man throws on the floor. The women wear colourful and elaborately decorated dresses with full, long skirts, and men wear the outfit of a charro (cowboy).

Here are some other popular instruments that are used to play traditional Mexican music:

**Marimba** - this is a percussion instrument with wooden bars that are hit with mallets to produce different notes. A concert marimba can be up to three metres long, with several musicians playing it!



Above: the marimba

Below: the ocarina

**Ocarina** - this is a wind instrument which has between four and twelve finger holes and a mouthpiece to blow through. They are traditionally made from clay.

