

## The Guillatun ritual re-establishing harmony between human beings, nature and the gods



The Mapuche are one of the groups of indigenous inhabitants of Chile and Argentina.

The most sacred Mapuche ceremony is the Guillatun. During this community celebration, human beings come in contact with natural and supernatural forces, thus re-establishing harmony in nature and obtaining well-being (*küme felen*).

The Guillatun ceremony is performed to give thanks and ask for well-being of the community as a whole, making an appeal to the 'earth energy' to provide good years. The ritual takes place in the Mapuche language (*mapuzungun*). It is performed by local indigenous leaders once

every four years in the presence of all members of the Mapuche communities of an area.

However, if the ancestors and spirits are dissatisfied, they might ask for a Guillatun more regularly, making their feelings known to men through dreams or visions.

The ceremony takes place in a large, specially designated location (*guillatuwe*). Each family settles itself in a circle under the protection of a shelter made of branches (*ramada*). The families are arranged according to the lineages participating in the ceremony. In the centre of the circle an altar (*rehue*) of plants is composed.

Depending on the region, plants used for the central altar include Winter's Bark (Canelo, *Drimys winteri*), Monkey-puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*), the evergreen conifer Lleuques (*Prumnopitys andina*), Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) and Maqui (*Aristotelia chilensis*). The site is decorated with blue, white and black flags. The spatial organisation and the activities that take place are subject to the strict rules of the ritual.



A Guillatun lasts two days. Within the *guillatuwe* space, ancient customs are practised, such as ritual dances, prayers, food preparation and animal sacrifices. Animals are sacrificed as an offering to request the favour of the spiritual world; cattle and sheep hearts are used for special rites. All customs are centred around the re-enactment of a strong relationship and communication between human beings, nature and the gods.

