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Medellín Flower Fair

In 1957, forty peasants from the village of Santa Elena participated in the first *silletero* (flower carrier) parade in [Medellín](#) during the old Flower Festival. Half a century later, over 500 patient flower growers descend from the magical mountains of that small community near the capital of the department of Antioquia to color the city during the central event of the Flower Fair – a traditional Medellín feast - which usually takes place between the last week of July and the first week of August.

The event, which originated many years ago as an agriculture and trade exhibit of the Santa Elena farmers, gradually became an art that, aside from involving the arduous, persevering labor of the *silletero*, reflects the creative abilities and the ways peasants of Antioquia perceive subjects in their small environment and in current national affairs.

The Silleteros Parade is the central event of the Flower Fair **The Silletas of the Medellín Flower Fair**

The *silletas* - the artifacts that present day mule drivers carry on their backs with an esthetical profusion of flowers – represent yesteryear's tradition of the only means of transportation for carrying their belongings, their families, and naturally, their flowers. In the 19th century, there was no other way of carrying their multicolored harvest from rural mountains to the city. The *silleta* was also the means of carrying heavy loads and, of course, children and sick people.

The epicenter of all that mobilization of workers from rural settlements used to be Cisneros - the old covered town market that also exhibited fruits and vegetables. As soon as the flower carrier arrived, he would set up his exhibit stall. And in spite of the fact that gradually the heavy chores of the countryside were left to mules, the *silleteros* continued to come down to the city with colorful, sweet-smelling flowers on their back.



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Medellín Flower Fair

This was the background on which the city government decided in 1957 to provide the necessary logistics for a popular feast to include evening open-air festivities, a flower exhibit in the atrium of the Cathedral, and a silletero parade. The first parade took off from Parque Bolívar along Carrera Junín and became an outstanding part of the first official edition of the [Flower Fair](#), which according to several celebration records of the time, should have been called “Spring Parade”.

Several old-time silleteros like Aristides Ríos and Graciela Londoño, who participated in the first versions of the event, remain active by their labor and the teachings they pass on to their children and grandchildren. This is how this art has multiplied in the originality of the flowered shapes and the artists who fill the main streets of Medellín every August, the time of year when the independence of the department of Antioquia is celebrated once again.

The Silleteros Parade

All that needs to be done to see this marvelous show of joy, flowers, kind people, and beautiful women is to arrive in Medellín

The importance of the Silleteros Parade lies in the fact that it is the central event and the source of inspiration, color, beauty, and elegance of the Flower Fair. Thus, it is inevitable to talk about the silleteros in each new edition of these important Medellín festivities, where the harmony of the flower growers' work blends with the gushing joy of the inhabitants of Medellín and Antioquia - the paisas, as they are commonly called.

The following exclamation by the announcers of the feast is absolutely true: “When the silleteros pass by, Antioquia is the one passing by.” Because the virtues of a gentle, creative people and the goodness of a land that invites affection are reflected in that heavy chair-like wooden contraption covered with flowers and anecdotes.

There is also a great deal of love in the work of the silletero. “I have a well-preserved silleta that

I love as much as I love by wife and children,” asserts veteran Aristides in an attitude of gratitude; he found in flowers the means for his livelihood and, especially, for his happiness.

The work of the Santa Elena *silleteros* is greatly admired in cities in England, Venezuela, the United States, and several other countries that have been visited by this fusion of natural elements with the inspiration of the men and women who year after year carry the amazing fruits of their labor on their backs..



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Silleteros Parade

How can joy not be expressed in August in Medellín, when this City of Eternal Spring blossoms unlimitedly during the Flower Fair and its complementary events? Horseback riding parades; old and classic cars parade; orchids, birds, and flowers exhibits; mule drivers, mules, and fondas (typical eateries); dancing platforms, orchestras, and minstrels; and runways crowded with pretty women. Here we bend the rules of language to include the streets of Medellín in the meaning of “runway”.

To see this marvelous spectacle of festiveness, flowers, friendly people, and beautiful women it suffices to arrive in Medellín, Colombia's second city. It is connected with the whole country by means of multiple roads, and national and international flights land in the city's two airports.

Do not be alarmed if you cannot make it to the Flower Fair. You will find that the qualities of the land and its people are ever-present. Also, in the Santa Elena district, the peasants are continuously devoted to taking care of their gardens to beautify the countryside and deck their backs to carry this piece of Colombian land and tradition along the streets of the world.

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