

THE SAN CRISTOBAL FORGED-IRON CROSS

The Chiapas iron cross is a traditional artisan craft of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas. Since Colonial times, people in San Cristobal placed hand forged iron crosses on their roofs as a blessing and for magical protection against earthquakes and other natural disasters. Cloudforest Initiatives ornamental iron cross is a Maya and Christian symbol of peace, justice and hope.

According to Maya symbolism a cross is the center of everything, the heart of the earth, the union of male and female in the universe. The San Cristobal cross is a foliated iron cross, decorated as if it had flowers hanging from it or branches growing from its ends. This is because the cross is a tree of life: it is the *ceiba* tree, sacred tree of the Maya. In the center of the iron cross there is a *ceiba* flower, symbol of the Heart of the Sky/Heart of the Earth. The Christian symbolism in the iron cross is a depiction of the Passion of Christ, and therefore, a symbol for hope and resurrection.

The following images are placed over the cross: A sword and a heart indicate how Jesus was pierced. The ladder is the one used to remove Jesus from the cross. The rooster reminds us that the cock crowed three times after Peter's three denials of Jesus. The sun indicates that Jesus died during the day and the moon that Jesus rose in the night. The dove, the symbol for peace, is also the bird that brought the word of Christ's resurrection to the world, a symbol for hope and rebirth. The scale is the symbol for justice.

Most crosses have all of the following items, however, depending on the artisan and the size of the cross some of the symbols may be absent. No 2 crosses are the same.

- * The dove at the top of the cross, which represents peace and the Holy Spirit
- * Pliers, used to remove the nails from Christ's hands and feet after his death
- * The moon, representing the darkness that fell as Christ died
- * The sun, representing the passage of the day and its events
- * The rooster, which crowed after Peter denied Christ for the third time
- * The crown, representing divine light
- * The ladder, used to lower Christ's body from the cross
- * The butterfly, representing both Eve and the hope of the Resurrection
- * The snake, symbol of evil and seduction
- * The heart, symbol of Christ's love, pity, and virtue
- * The spear used to pierce Christ's body
- * Palm fronds, remembering Palm Sunday
- * The scales of justice, representing the Last Judgment.