



A local national tussles with a bull during a street bullfight. (File photo)

Street bullfight season underway

The street bullfight season on Terceira Island began May 1 and will continue through Oct. 15.

This type of bullfighting is a very old local tradition. Though its exact origin is unknown, some historians believe it began with the tournaments and jousts noblemen held during special occasions.

Street bullfights have become a well-liked cultural event and an important part of the summer festivals around the island. It's still an event that manages to attract hundreds, sometimes thousands of people to a single village.

The bulls, usually four, are transported in boxes from ranches in the center of the island to the village where the bullfights will be held. A motorcade of villagers who travel to the ranch to observe the selection of the bulls usually precedes the truck carrying the bulls.

When it's time for the bullfight to begin, usually at 6 or 6:30 p.m., a blast that sounds like fireworks lets everybody know that it's time for the first bull to be released. It also warns those who don't want to

play matador that they should look for a safe place behind wooden barriers, high walls or balconies along the streets where the bullfight is to be held.

After the bull is released, eight men dressed in white shirts and grey pants - known as "pastores" - control the distance the bull can travel by holding on to a rope attached to his neck as he pursues those who dare to harass him or stand in his way.

After the men in the crowd provoke the bull for about 30 minutes, the rope handlers pull the bull back into his box for a well-deserved rest - both for the bull and the men. Two blasts are then used to let everybody know it's safe to walk or drive down the street again, but only for about 10 minutes, which is how long it takes the pastores to place the rope around the next bull's neck. This routine continues until all four bulls are released into the street and the bullfight ends.

The street bullfights also feature another old tradition related with the island's culture which are the food stands called "tascas." In these portable stands people can find some of the island's best-



known local wines, beers, sodas, as well as seafood and pork sandwiches called "bifanas."

I highly encourage all Americans to witness a bullfight while they are stationed at Lajes Field, though it is important to remember that **U.S. Forces Azores regulations prohibit U.S. military members, civilians and dependents from actively participating in any type of bullfighting on the island.** This includes people

here on temporary duty status or passing through.

It is certainly a tradition worth seeing, but not without keeping safety in mind. Bullfights can be dangerous if spectators don't take proper precautions. Always make sure to watch the bullfights from a safe place, a high place at least five or six feet from the ground.

Every year a few careless spectators and participants are gored or hit by the bulls, or burned by the rope, and end up in the hospital with serious injuries. There have even been some fatalities in the past because people misjudged the bulls.

To better your chances of finding a safe place from which to view street bullfights it is good to arrive early. More importantly, be careful and use common sense while the bullfights are ongoing.

The next bullfights is 6:30 p.m. Saturday at Rua Professor Augusto Monjardino in Angra and 6:30 p.m. Monday at Canada de Belem, Terra Chã. To find out more about the bullfight schedule, call the Public Affairs Office at 2-3413.