

## How do Ladies choose the right type of Latin dance shoe?



Dancing has been around a lot longer than dance shoes. In the old days people went out dancing in whatever shoes they owned. There is a difference however between social dancing in a bar or social club and dancing in a formal dance studio.

If you are taking classes in a formal dance studio, they may well have an expensive sprung dance floor on which they won't allow anything but dance shoes.

Many social dancers get along just fine with ordinary shoes, but you also need to consider protecting your feet. By dancing in a normal street shoe, you could find it harder to move your foot properly and thus cause long lasting damage.

Dance shoes have softer, flexible soles to aid your foot placement whilst dancing

Choosing a dance shoe that is right for the style of dance that you are doing is key. Each style of dance has a particular way in which dancers move their feet, and each requires a different type of shoe to allow the foot to move in that particular way. For now, lets look at Latin dancing and Latin dance shoes.

### **Social Dance v Competitive Dance v Practice Sessions**

We are going to assume that you are looking at Latin dance shoes for some kind of social or competitive dancing, as well as your practice sessions. The bad news is you probably need at least 1 pair of shoes for each.

When you first start Latin dancing, you are unlikely to have the strength or muscle development or flexibility in your foot that you will have years later down the line. For a lady to be expected to dance in a 3 inch or 3.5-inch heel from day 1 is not realistic. Instead we need to train our feet to move in the correct way of Latin dance and develop foot and ankle muscles to support us while we dance. Eventually a Male Latin Dancer will use around a 1.5" heel height and a lady anything from 2.75" to 3.75".

We will also need to think about whether we are mostly dancing social dances such as Salsa, Bachata & Kizomba or International Latin such as Cha Cha, Rumba, Samba, Jive and Paso Doble. Again, each dance has very different techniques and requires our feet and legs to be in some very strange positions!

### Let's start with the mathematics

We're going to go back to maths class now. Let's think about a Right-angled triangle and trigonometry. The side opposite the right angle is the hypotenuse, think of this as the upper part of your foot, the whole foot length. Your heel is where the right angle is, and your sole is going along the bottom in contact with the floor to your toes.

Diagram 1 illustrates a flat foot standing on the floor.

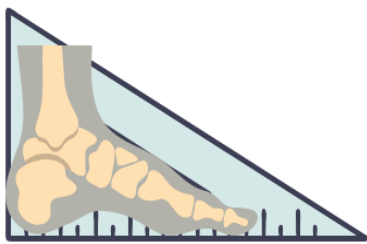
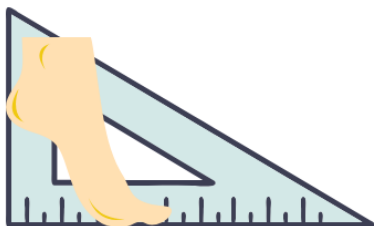


Diagram 2 illustrates a foot where the heel is lifted and standing on the ball of the foot.



It is easy to see that the angle of elevation of the hypotenuse (top of foot) has increased. Now if the sole of the foot was made longer but the heel height kept the same then the angle of elevation actually reduces, if the sole of the foot was made shorter then the angle of the elevation increases.

This means that someone with a size 36 foot needs a lower height heel of shoe to create the same angle of elevation as someone with a size 42 foot. Therefore, the dancer with the bigger size foot actually needs a higher heel. This is a common misconception around taller dancers that they should actually wear a lower heel. It's

not relative to height itself but to the length of your foot (it does seem that taller dancers tend to have larger feet, and therefore would be able to wear the highest heels)

## **Salsa**

There are several styles of Salsa dance, each with different motion for the feet and some require you to dance more flat footed (Cuban) whilst LA Style lengthens the leg and settles the hip and New York style is with bent legs and has more multiples turns and spins, Cali style has fast feet and lots of lifts which you need to land safely.

Each style also requires the dancers' thighs and knees to be in different stages from bent to straight at different points in the movement. An LA Style & New York Style dancer would never put weight down into the heel of their foot unless breaking a spin, whereas the Cuban dance is likely to dance flatter footed and the Cali style dancer will land jumps and tricks.

This means that a Salsa dance shoe needs to be the right height not only for the dancer's foot size but also for the style of Salsa. The amount of heel in contact with the floor (thick Cuban or think stiletto) also affects balance and how much your feet will ache at the end of the night.

## **Bachata**

There has been a shift in recent times for Bachata dancers to where ridiculously high heeled shoes in order to get a high angle of elevation which allows you to force a straighter leg which is used more in the Sensual style of Bachata. A more traditional Dominican style Bachata dancer is likely to leave legs slightly bent for most of the time and has no need to be pitched forward in an unnatural pose. Traditionally Bachata was danced barefoot and there is no real need for a very high heel.

## **Kizomba**

Again, Kizomba would have traditionally been danced barefoot, although there are now many elements of Argentine Tango seen in Kizomba dancing and this has led to dancers taking around a 4" heel height if they are mainly dancing Kizomba. This shouldn't be problematic if you're only dancing Kizomba but if someone grabs you for a Salsa, you're in dangerous ankle breaking territory in a 4" or higher small stiletto

We have seen a lot of dancers who now dance Salsa, Bachata & Kizomba in one night and of course you cannot change your shoes for every dance, so you need to pick an all-round height of shoe that is safe and comfortable for all those dances.

## **International Latin Dancing (Dancesport Rumba, Cha Cha, Paso Doble, Jive, Samba)**

The movement of the foot for a lady dancer in International Latin is totally different to the social dances mentioned above. The foot is continually being pointed and flexed whilst the leg snaps from open to closed. In Rumba especially and Cha Cha somewhat the dancers are trying to achieve 2 straight legs at a type in a wide stance causing a triangle shape drawn between the 2 feet and the hip hinge.

A Latin dance shoe for International Latin needs to allow the dancer this whole range of movement.

Take a look here at Anna Kovalova demonstrating Cha Cha movement for ladies, just look at her feet and the angles she is achieving.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEG5eyoNYXI>

### **Suede or Leather Soles?**

For all Latin dancing except Argentine tango we recommend a suede sole, Tango dancers often go for a leather sole for support. A leather sole would allow you to dance outside, a suede sole wouldn't

### **Open or Closed Toe. Does it matter?**

Yes, it does! Open toed sandals are a must for Ladies Latin dance. They allow you to widen your toes and place all your weight over the toes whilst spreading them correctly, closed toe shoes restrict this and should be limited to lowered heeled ballroom shoes. When Latin Dancing ladies need to point and extend their toes, sometimes pushing them right under into the floor. Yes, there is more chance of someone treading on your toes, but an open toed sandal will feel most comfortable for the positions your feet need to get into.

Here, check out Anna again in a Rumba demonstration

Fast forward to 1.08 mins for a close up of her feet

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXfJcLlin\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXfJcLlin_I)

### **What style of shoe?**

The number of styles of Ladies Latin shoes is eye watering, enough to drive you crazy. But the good thing is that with a little trial and error you will hopefully find a style that suits your foot.

Remember you need enough traction not to slip, enough slip to slide and enough flexibility to point and move your foot whilst staying stable. You need your foot to be really snug inside the shoe so that your foot and shoe are acting as one entity.

If chosen correctly, the Latin dance shoe should make you feel as though your weight is shifted slightly forward towards the ball of the foot. You should aim to have your toes right up to the edge, if not a few mm over the edge of the shoe. Don't forget you use the floor by grounding your movement, using the inside edge of the foot, the big toe and the ball of the foot all at different times, done correctly you achieve the Latin hip action naturally.

So back to style. First make sure the front of the shoe allows your toes to spread properly to work the floor, you don't want a little toe curling under or popping out the side edge of a strappy shoe.

Next, think about the straps that will hold you in. A T-Bar strap might offend a high arch, those with balance issues might find a single ankle strap a bit tricky and might opt for an under arch crossing strap.





Don't forget you are aiming to get to the correct heel height eventually, not at the Beginning, so the shoes you choose when you start dancing might not be what you are wearing in a couple of years' time. You need to develop the feet and ankle strength first.

### **Practice shoes**

If you intend doing a lot of Latin dancing – say 2 + hours or more per day, then you are probably not going to want to be in high-heeled Latin shoes the whole time. You should look for an all-round practice shoe with a suede sole. Most dancewear suppliers will have these.

They look like this:



### **What material for the shoe itself?**

Suede & Nubuck are softer and will naturally stretch more after wear, Satin would stretch less and most like Leather which tends to soften rather than actually stretch, a patent leather shoe will probably not stretch. After that its down to personal choice and which style you like although most professional dancers wear Satin shoes.

### **Buying online V Buying in store**

With shoes you need to be comfortable with the fit. You will not know this until you try them on. Even if you try them on in the shop or at home first and they feel fine then you may take them dancing for the first time and find a problem with the style.

Make sure you know the returns policy for both your high street store and online store and if you need to return them, how will you get your money back, what happens if you have worn them once?

## Heel shapes and heights

Most shoe manufacturers measure the height of the shoe from the centre point above the heel, not the back of the heel.

### How to MEASURE OUR HEELS



There are also various styles of heels as demonstrated here with this diagram from [International Dance Shoes](http://InternationalDanceShoes.com) the website, they were the first to design a flared heel commonly known as an IDS heel .



The 'Ultra Slim' heel is frequently used by many of the top competing couples throughout the world. Our slimmest heel looks great, and requires the dancer to be experienced and certainly comfortable to balance on the small surface area. These heels are available on our Ladies Sandal shoes.

The 'Slim' heel is one of our original heel designs, and is now used only on shoes within our Ladies Standard, Practice and American Styles. Any orders with a 'Slim' heel on a Ladies Sandal style will be switched to the new, updated version of the 'Slim' heel, which is the 'Elite' heel.



The new 'Elite' heel offers greater support and balance and improves the visuals of your toe points with the heel being centered further down the arch. These three heels are available on Ladies Sandal shoes, and replace the original 'Slim' heel for Sandal shoes.



The IDS heel is our original Flared heel. The most popular, most supportive and balanced heel is widely used across all Ladies Latin & Standard styles.

The 'Ultra Flared' heel is our summer heel option for styles within the Ladies Standard collection



These heels are options for dancers looking for a lower, and more supportive heel. Of the above, the CK heel is only available on the 'CK Line Shoe', and the Heather heel is only available on the 'Heather' style. Children shoes can only be made with a Junior or Cuban heel.



## **The Dance Guru's Advice:**

Most dance professionals will tell you to take a good shoe and pay a bit more for it, but we are talking £80 - £150 on average. You can't afford to make a mistake at that price.

We take a different view. There are many cheaper brands on Amazon & eBay all with varying fits and quality. For over 10 years now The Dance Guru has been using TPS (Terrier Playnet Shop) based in China and recommending this to their students.

At the cheaper, value end of the market we feel that they still offer a good quality Ladies Latin shoe which will last the same time as an expensive Supadance, Freed of London or International Dance Shoes pair. With TPS you will pay around £20 - £32 per pair. At this price you can afford to try different styles and experiment with your foot shape until you are happy you have found a style that suits your foot.

We don't earn any commission or have any affiliation with TPS ourselves, we have just been a returning customer year after year for the last 10 years.

Do note that their sizing is quite generous in the Latin dance shoes, check out their sizing guide where they give you the length in CM for each size shoe, go by this and measure your foot. Our founder here is a Size 43 EU, Size 9 UK normally but she orders a Size 7.5 from TPS. She would typically order the following Style:

D160 Black Satin

TPS have recently started to sell a 3.75" heel which you can ask for as a special order when completing at the checkout, for no additional cost.

### **A note about Argentine Tango shoes**

Argentine Tango dancers create an A frame shape against their partner, ladies' legs are lengthened and straightened to create an elongated leg effect. Tango shoes are normally leather, not suede. They are often a higher heel than other Latin dance shoes, so watch out for this as although you want height, you don't want to be off balance and uncomfortable. Heel shape is most often a thin stiletto for Argentine Tango

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