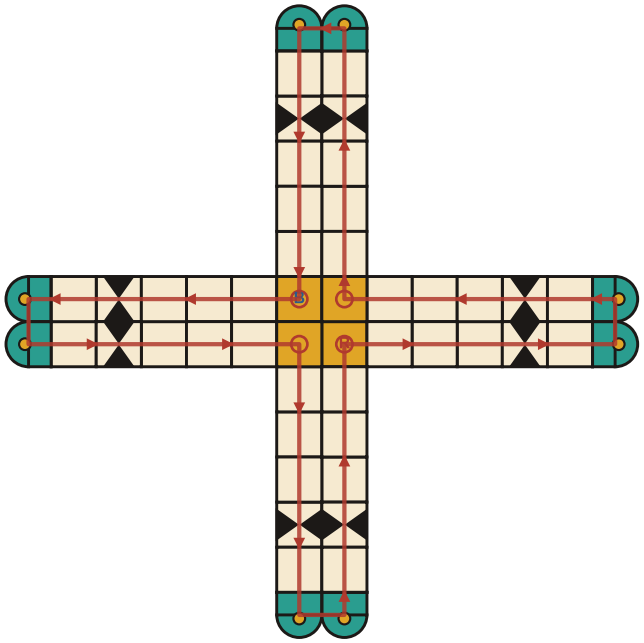
Patolli: How to Play

2 players · about 30 minutes · ages 8 and up



Red's path

Red starts on the R square in the center, goes out along the right arm, across the rounded end and back, through the center into the top arm, and so on around all four arms, until it reaches R again: home.

Blue starts on B and goes the same way round, starting with the left arm.

One lap is 52 squares.

1. **Set up**
   One player is Red and one is Blue. Each takes 3 stones (6 for the long game) and 10 cacao beans of treasure. You also need the 5 throwing beans, kept apart from the treasure. All stones start off the board. Both throw the beans: the higher throw goes first (tie: throw again).
2. **Throw**
   Throw the 5 beans and count the dots facing up: 1 to 4 means move that many squares. All 5 dots up means move 10. No dots up means your turn is over.
3. **Move**
   Bring a new stone onto the board (a throw of 1 puts it on your start square, a 3 puts it 2 squares past it), or move a stone already on the board. All stones go the same way around the whole cross, as the arrows show. You may jump over any stone. If you can move, you must.
4. **Landing**
   You may not land on your own stone. Outside the center you may not land on your opponent's stone either. In the 4 center squares you can: their stone goes back off the board to start again.
5. **Special squares**
   Land on a rounded end square and you throw again. Land on a square with black wedges and you pay 2 beans to your opponent.
6. **Home**
   A stone that goes all the way around and reaches its start square again is home: take it off. It does not need an exact throw. Each time a stone gets home, your opponent pays you 1 bean.
7. **Win**
   The first player to get all their stones home wins. If a player has to pay and cannot pay all of it, the other player wins at once.

About these rules: The Spanish banned patolli after 1521 and nobody wrote down the full rules. These rules are a reconstruction, based on descriptions by Spanish friars such as Diego Duran. Aztec players bet real treasure. We play for paper beans.