

Hindu Festivals & Holy Days

Baisakhi (Vaisakhi): first day of the Hindu new year is marked by Baisakhi, primarily a harvest festival. Greetings that wish good life in coming days are exchanged.

Diwali /Divali / Deepavali: perhaps the most well-known of the Indian festivals: it is celebrated throughout India. It usually takes place eighteen days after Dusshera and is colloquially known as the "festival of lights", for the common practice is to light small oil lamps (called *divas*) and place them around the home. The celebration of the festival is invariably accompanied by the exchange of sweets and the explosion of fireworks. As with other Indian festivals, Diwali signifies many different things to people across the country. In north India, Diwali celebrates Rama's homecoming, which is his return to Ayodhya after the defeat of Ravana and his coronation as king; in Gujarat, the festival honours Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth; and in Bengal, it is associated with goddess Kali. Everywhere, it signifies the renewal of life, and accordingly it is common to wear new clothes on the day of the festival; similarly, it heralds the approach of winter and the beginning of the sowing season.

Dussehra (Durga Puja): Dussehra (tenth day) is a significant Hindu festival, celebrated with much joy. The occasion marks the triumph of Lord Rama over the demon king, Ravana, the victory of good over evil. The festival is also celebrated with intense fervour in West Bengal in the form of Durga Puja. The festivities last for ten days, of which nine nights are spent in worship, 'Navaratri'. The tenth day is devoted to the worship of goddess Durga.

In Tamil Nadu, the first three days are dedicated to the worship of Lakshmi, Goddess of wealth and prosperity, the next three days to Saraswati, Goddess of learning and arts and the last three days to Shakti (Durga).
<http://www.namasthenri.com/fairsandfestivals/dussera.htm>

Ganesh Chaturthi: festival honouring the god of prosperity, prudence, and success. Images of Ganesha are paraded and worshipped.

Holi: Spring festival dedicated to Krishna. People shower each other with coloured water and smear red and green powder on each other.

Janam Ashtami: celebration of the birth of Krishna. Nightlong prayers are held in the Temples.

Maha Shivratri: festival in honour of Lord Shiva and his marriage to goddess Parvati. Ceremonies involving prayers and hymns take place mostly at night.

Navratri: Festival of the divine mother honouring Durga, wife of Shiva, and seeking her blessings. It is also observed as a celebration recalling the days of Lord Krishna.

Raksha Bandhan: special occasion to celebrate the bond between brothers and sisters of all ages by tying a holy thread around the wrist. Rakhi means 'a bond of protection', and Raksha Bandhan signifies that the strong must protect the weak from all that's evil. Raksha Bandhan tightens the bond of love between the sister and brother.

Shivaratri (Mahashivaratri): Hindu worship of Shiva with flowers. The Month of February signifies the festival of "Maha Shivratri" Devotees keep a fast on Shivratri and observe strict rules. The night of the festival echoes with sacred chants and the ringing of bells. The Motivations for the celebration are mental and physical self control.