

Diwali – The Festival of Lights

Adapted from [Kids Britannica](#)

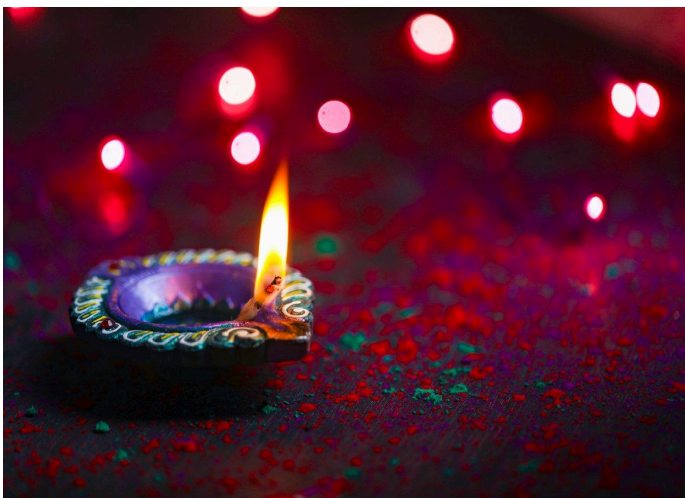
Introduction

The Hindu religious holiday called Diwali (also spelled Divali) celebrates the new year. Diwali is a major holiday in India, but it is celebrated by people living outside of India as well. The name Diwali comes from a Sanskrit word that means “row of lights.” The holiday is often called the Festival of Lights.



The festivities last for five days. The fourth day marks the start of the new year on the Hindu calendar. On our calendars, Diwali falls in late October or early November.

People in other countries where Hinduism is practiced also celebrate Diwali, as do people of South Asian ancestry around the world. Other religious groups—including Jains and Sikhs—observe their own versions of the holiday.



How Diwali Is Celebrated

Small lamps (see left) filled with oil light up houses and temples during this time. Some lamps are set out to drift in rivers and streams. Many Hindus believe that the lights welcome the presence of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and good luck. People set off fireworks and firecrackers as well. Houses and

temples are brightly decorated, and religious ceremonies are held. Rangoli (see right) is a popular folk art that sees people make colourful designs on the floor in their house, to serve as a welcoming gesture to the gods and bring good luck. The design is created using coloured rangoli powders, ground rice powder, flowers and diyas.





People often visit friends and family during Diwali. They give each other gifts and eat their favorite foods, especially sweets. New clothes are worn as a symbol of the new year. The holiday also marks the time when many merchants open new account books, the start of a new financial year.

Games of luck are traditional activities during Diwali. It is supposed to ensure good luck in the new year. These games are also in memory of the dice games played between divine couples—for example, between the god Shiva and his wife Parvati, or between the god Krishna and his companion Radha.

Diwali is a time to reflect upon our lives. We are encouraged to get rid of harmful behaviors, such as laziness and jealousy, and to try to see the good in people, even those they do not like.

Origins

Diwali dates back to ancient times in India. It may have begun as a festival of the harvest. The holiday also is linked to ancient Hindu stories. Many Hindus view it as a celebration of the marriage of the goddess Lakshmi to the god Vishnu. Many also believe that Diwali honors the return of the hero Rama and his wife Sita from exile. This is a very famous, epic story in Indian history called the “Ramayana” Hindus in the historical Bengal region associate Diwali with the goddess Kali.

