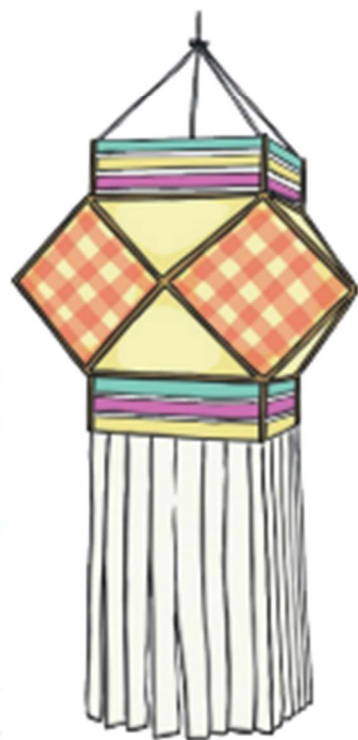


# Diwali

Diwali is a festival that is celebrated by Hindu people all around the world. The word Diwali means 'rows of lighted lamps'. It is often referred to as 'the festival of light' because of the tradition of oil lamps that people use to light homes, shops and public places. Diwali marks the beginning of the new year.

This colourful celebration takes place over three to five days depending on where you are in the world. During the festivities, there is a focus on bringing friends and family together, as well as encouraging each other to be kind to those of other faiths and races.

Nobody is quite sure how Diwali began but it can be dated back to ancient times. The date changes each year however it usually falls at the end of October or the beginning of November. The festival happens at the time of the new moon, which is where the moon is not visible in the night sky. Hindu people use the lunisolar calendar to work out when this will happen.



Dhanteras is the first day of Diwali and a time for cleaning and decorating homes and shops with rangoli patterns. These vibrant patterns are created using coloured flour or flower petals. Many believe this day to be Lakshmi's birthday – the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Dhanvantari's birthday, the god of health and healing, is also celebrated by many Hindu people on this day. Diyas (lamps) are kept burning in their honour.

The second day is known as Naraka Chaturdashi – this is another day for preparations. Henna is painted on hands and food is prepared for the third day.

# Diwali



The third day is the day of Diwali – the main festival. Best clothes and jewellery are worn, lamps are lit and prayers are said to Lakshmi. Hindu people believe that Lakshmi walks the earth on Diwali night so people will put lamps outside and open their doors and windows to welcome her inside their homes. On this special day, mothers are honoured and given gifts to show appreciation for all they do throughout the year. Relatives and friends visit each other, exchange gifts and enjoy food together. Firework displays also take place.

Diwali is a festival to celebrate the victory of good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance. The legends that go with the festival differ depending on where you are in the world. In northern India, Diwali commemorates Rama and Sita's return from exile. In the story, Rama and his wife are banished to the forest by his father and cruel stepmother. Whilst in the forest, Ravana the demon king captured Sita. Rama's friend, Hanuman the monkey king, found Sita who had been imprisoned on an island. Rama killed Ravana with a magic arrow and rescued Sita. Rama and his wife returned home to their land. People lit lamps and put them in their windows to guide and welcome the couple home again.

## Diwali Facts:

- In Nepal, Diwali honours the victory of Lord Krishna over the demon king Narakasura and in Bengal, it is associated with a goddess named Kali.
- During Diwali, another tradition is the worship of cattle by farmers. This is because these animals are their source of wealth.
- This festival is also celebrated by some Sikh people. Their festival marks the release of the sixth guru, Guru Hargobind, and 52 princes from prison in 1619.
- Diwali is also celebrated by some Hindu, Jain and Newar Buddhist people.