

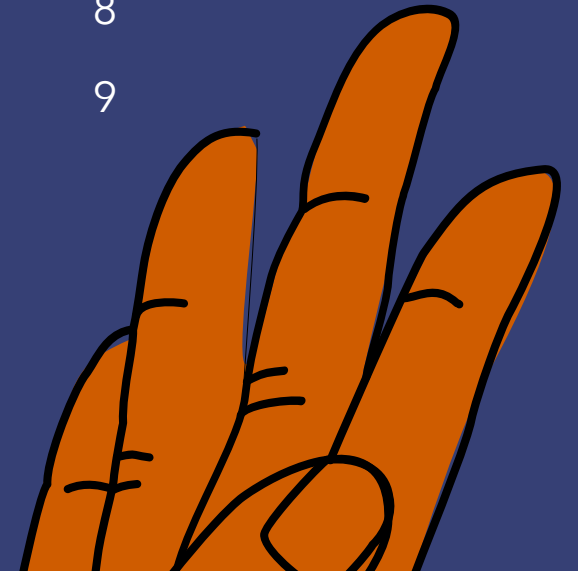


Happy Diwali

A quick guide to understanding what
Diwali is and how it's celebrated.

What's in this guide?

What's Diwali and how is it celebrated?	3
The five days of Diwali	4
The spiritual significance of Diwali	5
Different faiths celebrating Diwali	6
My Diwali experience by Pam Dhamu	7
Leicester's Golden Mile	8
Diwali recipes	9



What's Diwali and how is it celebrated?

This year, the popular Hindu festival of lights, Diwali (or Deepavali as it's known in South India), falls on Monday 24 October.

The five-day celebrations begin with religious rituals, fireworks, exchanging gifts, sharing of traditional stories and delicious food together with family and friends.

Every region in India has distinctive traditions, but whatever the customs, Diwali represents hope, positivity and happiness. The lighting of diyas (oil lamps) and rows of lanterns signify the victory of light over darkness, good over evil and knowledge over ignorance within the Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities.

This is linked to the ancient legend of Lord Rama, who was deprived of his kingdom and sent into exile for 14 years.

Diwali celebrates Rama's eventual defeat of the evil spirit Ravana, and his triumphant return to his home with his wife Sita and brother Lakshman.

Whatever your faith, everyone can join in the Diwali festivities.

The weeks leading up to Diwali are traditionally a time for redecorating the home, buying new clothes and jewellery, and exchanging gifts such as sweetmeats, dried fruits and nuts.

It is the season for dinner parties, outdoor food festivals and craft fairs, all of which help build up excitement ahead of the main Diwali celebration.

It starts with cleaning your house and business premises thoroughly before the first day of Diwali. A spring cleaning of sorts, to rid yourself of any unnecessary elements in your environment. Making Rangolis, hanging flower garlands, drawing small footprints over your home and making preparations in anticipation of the arrival of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.



The five days of Diwali



1

Dhanteras (Day of Fortune)

Two days before the main Diwali festival, simply go shopping! It's considered good luck to buy something made out of metal, it can be a kitchen utensils, home appliances or gold jewellery.

2

Chotti Diwali (or little Diwali)

Traditionally, it was a day for getting ready for the big day, but now it gives you an opportunity for last-minute errands and gift exchanges. It's also a time when intricate floral and geometrical designs, known as Rangoli, are created on floors using coloured powders, rice flour and flower petals.

3

Diwali celebrations (day of knowledge and light)

As the evening approaches, families get together to offer prayers to Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth and Ganesh, the God of Prosperity. After prayers, families will eat together and then get together with their neighbours for fireworks.

4

Annakut (New Year)

Hindus celebrate their New Year. Celebrations will vary across different regions. In north India, for example, the morning is dedicated to worshipping the tools of work. Chefs will pay homage to their kitchen implements, businessmen will revere their ledgers, and artists will offer appreciation for their paints and palettes.

5

Bhai Duj (day of siblings love)

A celebration of sibling bond between brothers and sisters. Sisters pray for their brother's well-being and brothers in return give gifts to their sisters and pledge their love and to always protect them from evil.

The spiritual significance of Diwali



Beyond the lights and fireworks and fun, Diwali is also a time to reflect on life and make changes for the upcoming years.

Give and forgive - forget and forgive the wrongs done by others.

Rise and shine - wake up early, it is believed that the early morning air is pure and therapeutic for a healthy body.

Unite and unify - It's a time for people to mingle in joy and embrace one another, softening even the hardest of hearts.

Prosper and progress - pray for success and prosperity during the coming year.

Illuminate your inner self - it is believed that the light of lights is the one that shines steadily in the chamber of the heart and by fixing the mind on this supermen.

Different faiths celebrating Diwali

Sikhism

The festival of Diwali is celebrated as Bandi Chhor Divas but it also signifies three key events in Sikh history:

1. In 1577, the 4th Guru Ram Dass founded the city of Amritsar, where the most sacred shrine of Sikhs, Golden Temple is situated.
2. In 1619, the 6th Guru Hargobind was released from prison by Mughal ruler Jahangir along with 52 other princes.
3. This day is also celebrated as remembrance of the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh, who in 1737, was ordered to death for his refusal to convert to Islam by the Governor of Lahore, Zakaria Khan.

Golden Temple or Harmandir Sahib is all lit up with lights on the day, devotees from early hours start coming to do darshan of the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book compiling the teachings of 10 Gurus.

It is traditional to take a dip in the sarover (small lake surrounding the temple) with the belief that it will wash their sins away. They light candles around the sarover. The hymns are constantly being played to create that peaceful ambiance.

Jainism

In Jainism, Diwali marks the anniversary of Nirvana (final release) or Moksha (liberation) of Mahavira's soul. Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara of this era, revitalised Jain Dharma.

According to tradition, the chief disciple of Mahavira, Ganadhara Gautam Swami also attained omniscience i.e. absolute or complete knowledge on this day, thus making Diwali one of the most important Jain festivals.

On Diwali morning, Nirvan Ladoo is offered after praying to Lord Mahavira

in all Jain temples across the world. The most important principle of Jains is Ahinsa or non violence, thus they tend to avoid firecrackers during Diwali as they cause harm to living organisms.

Diwali is celebrated in atmosphere of austerity, simplicity, serenity. Jain temples, homes, offices, shops are decorated with lights and diyas. Relatives distribute sweets to each other. The lights are symbolic of knowledge or removal of ignorance.

Buddhism

For Buddhists, especially Newar Buddhists, Diwali is celebrated as the day when Emperor Ashoka converted to Buddhism, hence the day is observed as Ashok Vijayadashami. On this day the monasteries and temples are decorated and Buddha is worshipped.

My Diwali experience

Pam Dhamu, Funeral Administrator

My parents, devout Sikhs came from Nairobi to England in 1970. Not having our own home we lived in Putney in London with my mum's sister, known as Masi. As you can imagine, Britain in the 1970s was not really geared up for celebrating Diwali, so our celebrations were limited to a relative's sitting room.

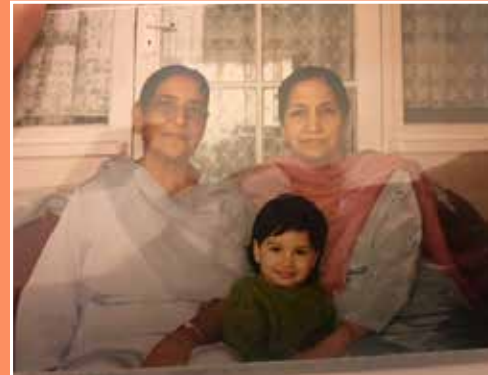
I'm Pam, Funeral Administrator at our Asian Funeral Home in Leicester and over the years I've seen such a change in the way Diwali is celebrated in Britain.

Diwali is an amazing festival and I can still remember back in London in the 1970s, when we'd all get together as a family. The smell of different aromas would stream from the kitchen, with samosas frying and Indian sweets galore. That was the only time my parents allowed us to indulge and not worry about our teeth. It was also the only time I could ask for new toys. There were candles lit and placed purposefully all over the house.

Diwali is celebrated by many different religions and is as important for Sikhs as it is for Hindus. The overriding meaning of Diwali is the victory of light over darkness and that's why homes are illuminated with lights; candles, tea lights, lanterns any form of light to welcome back their heroes. Food is another important way Diwali is celebrated between family and friends.

As well as homes, temples are filled with lights, food and people. This is a time for thanksgiving prayers and the priests are at their busiest.

I live in Leicester now and it's wonderful to see how the city has embraced our culture by participating in the fun and joy. It's made it feel so much more like home, especially for my parents. Having the pleasure to work on Melton Road, which is known locally as the Golden Mile or 'Little India', it's always illuminated by a vision of colourful displays of Divas and all the shops are colourfully decorated with fairy lights.



Leicester's Golden Mile

One of the world's biggest Diwali celebrations outside of India takes place within our own trading area - Leicester. And this year looks to be extra special as families and friends come together at the Diwali Village on Cossington Recreation Ground for the first time since the pandemic in 2020. The event usually attracts as many as 40,000 from all across the country and celebrates with a wide variety of activities running from 9 - 24 October.

Leicester's Golden Mile

A Diwali 'village' which includes a giant 110-foot Ferris wheel as well as funfair rides, food stalls and performances opened on 9 October to mark the start of Diwali. The area, known as 'Leicester's Golden Mile' is lit by more than 6,000 beautiful lamps and the long anticipated switch-on was followed by a fantastic aerial firework display.

Festival of Light

Diwali is known as the Festival of Lights so it's no surprise these celebrations include all things bright and beautiful. This year has included a two metre-tall fire installation called The Fire Head and also a trio of fire performers giving several breath-taking shows.

For those that enjoy a show, there's also been a Bollywood dance extravaganza and a giant puppet show. The puppet show re-enacted the

battle between good and evil which is part of the story Diwali is centred around and includes puppets representing Hanuman (Hindu god) and also Ravana (the demon-king).

Other events have taken place which include the Diwali Mela Bazaar (which has included arts, crafts Indian food and more entertainment), the Rangoli exhibition and waterside celebrations.

Diwali Day Celebrations

The celebrations conclude with more magnificent fireworks and entertainment on 24 October.

Professor Nishan Canagarajah, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester, who supported this year's festival, said:

"In bringing people together, this vibrant festival rejoices in our diversity and provides a platform to look to the future with hope."



Diwali Recipes

Why not have a go at these recipes:



Payasam

🕒 Ready in 15 minutes

Gluten-free

Vegetarian



Masala mathri crackers

🕒 Ready in 25 minutes

Vegetarian



Masala chai

🕒 Ready in 20 minutes

Vegetarian



