**Hindu Festival**

[India](https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/asia/indian-political-geography/india) is a land of bewildering diversity, a unique and colorful mosaic of people of various faiths. There is a festival for every reason and for every season. Many festivals celebrate various harvests, commemorate great historical figures and events, or express devotion to the deities. Every celebration centers around the rituals of prayer and seeking of blessings, and involves the decoration of homes, wearing of new clothes, music, dancing, and feasting. Festivals are an expression of the spirit of celebration. They are observed with enthusiasm and gaiety and are occasions when the greater family and friends come together. They also present women with an opportunity to socialize. Many of these festivals are associated with special foods.

Among the most important Hindu festivals are Makar Sankranti, Shivratri, Holi, Onam, Ganesh Chaturthi, Dussehra, and Diwali. They are celebrated throughout the country in various forms.

Makar Sankranti

Also referred to as Lohri in the North and as Pongal in parts of [the South](https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/united-states-and-canada/miscellaneous-us-geography/south), Makar Sankranti is a celebration of the "ascent" of the sun to the North. The festival marks the coldest day of the winter (14 January), after which the biting cold begins to taper off. In the North, the festival is marked by the lighting of bonfires, into which sweets, rice, and popcorn are thrown as offerings. In [the South](https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/united-states-and-canada/miscellaneous-us-geography/south), prayers are offered to the sun god, because without the sun, there would be no harvest. During the festival, the most commonly eaten foods are sesame seeds and jaggery sweets, rice cooked with milk, jaggery (called *pongal* ), and sugar drops. Jaggery is a dark crude sugar made from palms.

Shivratri

Shivrati literally means the night of [Shiva](https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/eastern-religions/hinduism/shiva). It is celebrated in February and March. Devotees of Shiva abstain from eating food throughout the day and only break their fast the following morning after a night of worship. The offerings of food to the deity comprise "cooling" foods, because Shiva was said to be hot-tempered. These include milk, water, honey, and the leaves of the wood apple tree (*aegle marmelos* ), which are said to be cooling. Another food popular at this festival is *thandai,* a drink made with milk, almonds, and hemp seed. Hemp seed is said to have been dear to Shiva and is thus imbibed as part of the festivities.

Holi

Celebrated essentially in northern India, this boisterous festival heralds the onset of spring (in mid-March). It is a festival of color, and people smear each other with colored powder and spray each other with colored water. Singing and dancing add to the gaiety of the occasion. It is variously associated with [Krishna](https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/eastern-religions/hinduism/krishna) (as is evident in the particularly extensive celebrations at Vrindavan and Mathura, the two places associated with Krishna) and Shiva. Legend has it that the celebration of Holi is actually a recreation of the marriage procession of Shiva. The delicacies eaten during this festival include *malpua*(fresh bread soaked in a sugar syrup), *puranpoli* (unleavened wheat bread stuffed with lentils and jaggery and baked on a griddle), and *gujjiyas*(flour patties stuffed with milk solids, sugar, almonds, and raisins and then deep-fried).

Onam

Onam, the harvest festival, is traditionally celebrated in Kerala (in August–September). The harvest has been reaped and the granaries are full; therefore it is time to rejoice.

Ganesh Chaturthi

Celebrated essentially in Maharashtra, this festival celebrates the birthday of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god who is the son of Shiva and Parvati. Ganesha is the remover of all obstacles and difficulties; he is the one who will grant success in all human endeavors. Therefore, no new venture is started without first praying to Ganesha. His image is installed in individual homes for a period of hours or days leading up to the festival, at which point those same images are displayed in a procession with much singing and dancing, and then immersed in running water. Ganesha's favorite food *modak*(a wheat flour pastry stuffed with coconut and jaggery and baked on a griddle) is offered to the deity and served throughout the festival's duration.

Dussehra

Celebrated in October, Dussehra commemorates the victory of good over evil, and culminates in the burning in effigy of Ravana and the triumph of Rama. It is celebrated in various ways throughout the country, often with much music and dancing, and lasts for ten days. During this time, there are public performances of the Ramlila (the story of the Hindu epic, the Ramayana). On the day of Dussehra, new accounts are opened, and new ventures started.

Diwali

Celebrated twenty-one days after Dussehra, this festival commemorates Rama's return to his hometown, Ayodhya, after having been in exile for fourteen years. While Dussehra celebrates Rama's victory over Ravana, Diwali celebrates his return. Thousands of oil lamps are lit to welcome him home, making it a night of enchantment. Homes are decorated, and sweets are exchanged between family and friends. Fireworks and festivities are part of the celebrations. On this day, the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, is worshipped.