**Sikhism Festival**

This content provides information about the Sikh festival of Vaisakhi, also spelled Baisakhi, which marks the creation of the Khalsa.

**Vaisakhi and the Khalsa**

[**Find this year's date in the multifaith calendar**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/faith.shtml?sikh)

Vaisakhi, also spelled Baisakhi, is one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar. It is the Sikh New Year festival and is celebrated on April 13 or 14. It also commemorates 1699, the year Sikhism was born as a collective faith.

Leicester Sikhs celebrate Vaisakhi [**©**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/copyright.shtml)

**History**

Vaisakhi is a long established harvest festival in the Punjab. It had been celebrated long before it gained an added dimension for Sikhs.

In 1699 the tenth guru, [**Guru Gobind Singh**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/people/gobindsingh.shtml), chose Vaisakhi as the occasion to transform the Sikhs into a family of soldier saints, known as the Khalsa Panth.

Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa in front of thousands at Anandpur Sahib.

During the Vaisakhi festival Guru Gobind Singh came out of a tent carrying a sword. He challenged any Sikh who was prepared to give his life to come into the tent. The Guru returned alone with his sword covered in blood. He then requested another volunteer and repeated the same action four times until five men disappeared into the tent. The crowd was very concerned until they saw five men return wearing turbans with the Guru.

These five men became known as the *Panj Piare*, or 'Beloved Five'.

The men were then baptised into the Khalsa by the Guru. He sprinkled them with *Amrit* ('immortalising nectar': the Sikh term for holy water) and said prayers. This is the basis of the [**Sikh baptism ceremony**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/ritesrituals/amrit.shtml).

**Celebrations**

Vaisakhi is celebrated in much the same way as **[Gurpurbs](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/holydays/gurpurbs.shtml)**. **[Gudwaras](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/ritesrituals/gurdwara_1.shtml)** are decorated and visited. Parades, dancing and singing happen throughout the day. Many Sikhs choose to be baptised into the Khalsa brotherhood on this day.

The Guru Granth Sahib is carried reverentially into the gurdwara [**©**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/copyright.shtml)

**Nagar Kirtans**

The festival is marked with *nagar kirtan* processions: processions through the streets (*nagar*means "town") which form an important part of Sikh culture and religious celebrations.

*Kirtan* is a term meaning the singing of hymns from the Guru Grath Sahib, the Sikh holy book. Celebrations always include music, singing and chanting scriptures and hymns.

The processions are led by traditionally dressed Panj Piaras.

The Guru Granth Sahib will be carried in the procession in a place of honour.