



A FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE

# FESTIVALS OF INDIA

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*A season-by-season guide to the celebrations, stories, and  
meaning behind India's festivals — across every region and  
faith.*

MEANING · ORIGIN · HOW IT'S CELEBRATED



## FESTIVALS OF INDIA

India celebrates more festivals than almost any nation on Earth — a calendar shaped by a dozen faiths, hundreds of regional traditions, and thousands of years of continuous celebration.

This guide walks through the year season by season, explaining the meaning behind each festival and how it's actually celebrated today.

A NOTE TO READERS

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

"All" of India's festivals would fill a library — nearly every village and community keeps its own local observances. This guide instead covers the major festivals celebrated widely across India, organized by season, so you can see how the year unfolds.

Dates for lunar and lunisolar festivals shift each year against the Gregorian calendar — the months given here are the usual range, not a fixed date.

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SEASON ONE

# SPRING FESTIVALS

*As winter fades, India erupts in color, harvest songs, and new-year celebrations across a dozen calendars at once.*



FEBRUARY – APRIL



## HOLI

HINDU · PAN-INDIA · PHALGUNA (FEB–MAR)

Holi marks the arrival of spring and the triumph of good over evil, recalling the legend of Prahlad, whose faith protected him from the flames his aunt Holika could not survive. The night before, communities light bonfires — Holika Dahan — burning away the old year's negativity.

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### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

The next morning erupts into color: people throw gulal and drench each other with water, old grudges are set aside, and the streets fill with music, dance, and sweets like gujiya.



## UGADI & GUDI PADWA

HINDU · ANDHRA, KARNATAKA, MAHARASHTRA · CHAITRA (MAR–APR)

Known as Ugadi in the Deccan and Gudi Padwa in Maharashtra, this festival marks the lunisolar new year and, by tradition, the day Brahma began creating the universe. It is a day for new beginnings — homes are cleaned, doorways decorated, and the year ahead welcomed with intention.

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### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Families eat ugadi pachadi, a dish blending sweet, sour, bitter, and spicy flavors as a reminder that life holds all of them together — while in Maharashtra, households raise a gudi, a bright cloth banner, outside their homes.



### BAISAKHI

SIKH & PUNJABI HARVEST · PUNJAB · APRIL

Baisakhi marks both the Punjabi solar new year and the spring harvest of rabi crops, but it carries special weight for Sikhs — it commemorates the day in 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa, formalizing a community bound by faith and courage.

#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Fields of golden wheat are harvested amid folk songs, while gurdwaras hold processions and kirtan. In Punjab's villages, the energetic bhangra and giddha dances fill the air late into the night.



### RAM NAVAMI

HINDU · PAN-INDIA · CHAITRA (MAR-APR)

Ram Navami celebrates the birth of Lord Rama, the seventh avatar of Vishnu and the hero of the Ramayana — revered as the ideal of duty, righteousness, and devotion. The festival falls on the ninth day of Chaitra Navratri, closing out that nine-day observance.

#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Devotees fast, visit temples, and read or recite the Ramayana. In Ayodhya, believed to be Rama's birthplace, the day draws vast crowds for prayer and celebration.

SEASON TWO

# SUMMER FESTIVALS

*In the heat before the rains, devotion turns inward — teachers  
are honoured, chariots roll, and vows are kept.*



MAY – JULY



### RATH YATRA

HINDU · ODISHA & PAN-INDIA · ASHADHA (JUN-JUL)

The Rath Yatra, or Chariot Festival, centres on Lord Jagannath, an incarnation of Vishnu worshipped principally in Puri, Odisha. Once a year, Jagannath, his brother Balabhadra, and sister Subhadra leave the sanctum of their temple to journey to a neighbouring shrine — a rare moment when a deity travels out among the people.

#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Three towering, hand-built wooden chariots are pulled through Puri's streets by thousands of devotees, in one of the largest and oldest chariot processions in the world.



### GURU PURNIMA

HINDU, BUDDHIST & JAIN · PAN-INDIA · ASHADHA (JUL)

Guru Purnima is dedicated to teachers — spiritual and academic alike. The day is traditionally linked to the sage Vyasa, believed to have compiled the Vedas and authored the Mahabharata, and it is also honoured by Buddhists as the day the Buddha gave his first sermon.

#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Students visit or offer thanks to their teachers and mentors, and many spiritual communities hold discourses, meditation, and readings in honour of the guru-disciple relationship.



## HARIYALI TEEJ

HINDU · NORTH INDIA · SHRAVANA (JUL–AUG)

Hariyali Teej — meaning 'green Teej' — welcomes the monsoon and celebrates the reunion of Shiva and Parvati, marking the day Parvati was reunited with Shiva after long penance. It is observed mainly by married and unmarried women praying for marital happiness and wellbeing.

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### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Women dress in green, apply henna, sing traditional Teej songs, and gather for swings decorated with flowers hung from trees — a festival closely tied to the fresh green of the newly arrived rains.

SEASON THREE

# MONSOON FESTIVALS

*As the rains green the land, festivals turn toward family bonds,  
new beginnings, and the harvest still to come.*



AUGUST – SEPTEMBER



## RAKSHA BANDHAN

HINDU · PAN-INDIA · SHRAVANA (AUG)

Raksha Bandhan celebrates the bond between brothers and sisters. The word means 'bond of protection' — a sister ties a rakhi, a sacred thread, around her brother's wrist, and he in turn vows to protect and support her throughout life.

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### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Beyond blood siblings, the thread is often tied between close friends and cousins too. The day is marked with sweets, small gifts, and family gatherings across the country.



## KRISHNA JANMASHTAMI

HINDU · PAN-INDIA · BHADRAPADA (AUG–SEP)

Janmashtami marks the birth of Lord Krishna, the eighth avatar of Vishnu, celebrated for his role in the Mahabharata and his teachings in the Bhagavad Gita. Devotees fast through the day and break it at midnight, the hour of Krishna's birth.

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### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Temples are decorated with cradles for the infant Krishna, and in Maharashtra the day is famous for Dahi Handi, where human towers are formed to break a pot of curd hung high above the street, echoing Krishna's childhood mischief.



### ONAM

HINDU & CULTURAL · KERALA · CHINGAM (AUG-SEP)

Onam is Kerala's grandest festival, a ten-day harvest celebration that commemorates the mythical King Mahabali, whose just and prosperous reign is said to have been so beloved that he is welcomed back to earth each year during Onam.

#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Homes are decorated with elaborate pookalam flower carpets, families share the lavish Onasadya feast served on banana leaves, and coastal towns host thrilling snake boat races on the backwaters.



### GANESH CHATURTHI

HINDU · PAN-INDIA, ESPECIALLY MAHARASHTRA ·  
BHADRAPADA (AUG-SEP)

Ganesh Chaturthi celebrates the birth of Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed god of wisdom and new beginnings, remover of obstacles. Elaborate clay idols of Ganesha are installed in homes and elaborately decorated public pandals for anywhere from one to eleven days.

#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

The festival closes with Visarjan, a vibrant procession that carries the idols to a river, lake, or the sea for immersion, accompanied by drumming, dancing, and chants of 'Ganpati Bappa Morya.'

SEASON FOUR

# AUTUMN & HARVEST FESTIVALS

*India's biggest festival season — nine nights of dance, the fall of a  
demon king, and a hundred million diyas lit at once.*



SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER



### NAVRATRI

HINDU · PAN-INDIA · ASHWIN (SEP–OCT)

Navratri means 'nine nights,' and across those nights the Divine Feminine is worshipped in nine forms of Goddess Durga, each representing a different virtue — courage, wisdom, and prosperity among them. Regional traditions vary widely, but devotion to the goddess unites them all.

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#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

In Gujarat, nights come alive with Garba and Dandiya Raas, energetic circular dances performed with sticks. In many northern homes, the nine nights are also observed with fasting and prayer.



### DURGA PUJA

HINDU · WEST BENGAL & EAST INDIA · ASHWIN (SEP–OCT)

Durga Puja, overlapping with Navratri, is Bengal's defining festival — a five-day celebration of Goddess Durga's victory over the buffalo demon Mahishasura. Elaborate, artistically striking pandals are built across cities, each housing a magnificently crafted idol of the goddess.

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#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Crowds move from pandal to pandal admiring the artistry, while the final day, Vijayadashami, sees the idols carried in procession for immersion, often amid tears, as the goddess is bid farewell until next year.



### DUSSEHRA

HINDU · PAN-INDIA · ASHWIN (SEP–OCT)

Dussehra, or Vijayadashami, falls on the tenth day of Navratri and celebrates the victory of Lord Rama over the ten-headed demon king Ravana — the triumphant close of the Ramayana's central conflict, and a broader symbol of good's victory over evil.

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#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Towering effigies of Ravana, often filled with fireworks, are ceremonially burned in public grounds at dusk, drawing huge crowds — a spectacle recreated in cities across the country each year.



### KARVA CHAETH

HINDU · NORTH INDIA · KARTIKA (OCT–NOV)

Karva Chauth is a one-day festival observed mainly by married women in North India, who fast from sunrise to moonrise praying for the safety and long life of their husbands. The origins are woven through several folk legends of devotion and sacrifice.

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#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Women dress in bridal finery, apply mehendi, and break their fast only after sighting the moon through a decorative sieve, then looking at their husband's face for the first bite of food.



### DIWALI

HINDU, JAIN & SIKH · PAN-INDIA · KARTIKA (OCT-NOV)

Diwali, the Festival of Lights, is India's most widely celebrated festival, marking the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile and his victory over Ravana. For Jains it also marks Mahavira's spiritual liberation, and for Sikhs, the release of Guru Hargobind from imprisonment.

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#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Homes are illuminated with rows of diyas and fairy lights, rangoli patterns decorate doorways, families exchange sweets and gifts, and the night sky fills with fireworks across the country.



### BHAI DOOJ

HINDU · PAN-INDIA · KARTIKA (OCT-NOV)

Falling two days after Diwali, Bhai Dooj celebrates the sibling bond in a way that mirrors Raksha Bandhan — sisters pray for their brothers' long life and wellbeing, and brothers, in turn, promise to protect and care for their sisters.

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#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Sisters perform a small aarti for their brothers and apply a tilak on the forehead, followed by an exchange of gifts and a shared festive meal that closes out the Diwali season.



## CHHATH PUJA

HINDU · BIHAR, JHARKHAND, EASTERN UP · KARTIKA (OCT-NOV)

Chhath Puja is a rigorous four-day festival dedicated to the Sun God, Surya, and Chhathi Maiya, giving thanks for life and asking for the wellbeing of family. It is known for its demanding rituals, including a 36-hour fast without water.

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### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Devotees wade into rivers or ponds at sunset and again before dawn to offer prayers directly to the sun, standing in the water as it rises and sets — one of Indian festivals' most visually striking rituals.

SEASON FIVE

# WINTER FESTIVALS

*As the sun begins its journey north, bonfires burn, kites fill the sky, and harvests are celebrated by a dozen different names.*



DECEMBER – JANUARY



### LOHRI

PUNJABI · PUNJAB & NORTH INDIA · JANUARY

Lohri marks the end of winter and the harvesting of the rabi crop, particularly sugarcane, celebrated with special enthusiasm in Punjab. It also traditionally honours the sun god and the passing of the winter solstice, welcoming longer days ahead.

#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Families and neighbours gather around bonfires after dark, tossing in sesame seeds, popcorn, and sweets while singing folk songs — including the well-known ballad of Dulla Bhatti — and dancing bhangra and giddha.



### MAKAR SANKRANTI, PONGAL & BIHU

PAN-INDIA HARVEST · REGIONAL NAMES VARY · JANUARY

Celebrated under many names across the country — Makar Sankranti in the north and west, Pongal in Tamil Nadu, and Magh Bihu in Assam — this festival marks the sun's transition into Capricorn and the start of its northward journey, alongside the winter harvest.

#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Skies fill with kites during Makar Sankranti, Tamil households boil the first rice of the season in Pongal's signature dish of the same name, and Assam marks Bihu with community feasts and bonfires.



### REPUBLIC DAY

NATIONAL · PAN-INDIA · 26 JANUARY

Republic Day is not a religious festival but a civic one, commemorating the day in 1950 when the Constitution of India came into effect, transforming the nation from a dominion into a sovereign republic. It stands alongside Independence Day as one of India's most important national observances.

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#### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

A grand parade in New Delhi showcases the country's military strength, cultural diversity, and technological achievements, while flag-hoisting ceremonies take place in schools, offices, and public spaces nationwide.

SECTION SIX

# FESTIVALS ACROSS FAITHS

*India's calendar belongs to no single religion — these celebrations,  
from every faith the land is home to, complete the year.*



ACROSS THE YEAR



## EID-UL-FITR

ISLAMIC · PAN-INDIA · SHAWWAL (DATE VARIES)

Eid-ul-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting, prayer, and reflection. The festival is a celebration of gratitude and community, observed with special congregational prayers held in mosques and open grounds across the country.

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### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Families dress in new clothes, exchange greetings and gifts, and share festive meals featuring dishes like sheer khurma. Charity to those in need, zakat, is an essential part of the celebration.



## EID-UL-ADHA (BAKRID)

ISLAMIC · PAN-INDIA · DHUL HIJJAH (DATE VARIES)

Eid-ul-Adha, or Bakrid, commemorates the willingness of the Prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son in obedience to God, an act ultimately spared by divine intervention. It is observed as a festival of faith, sacrifice, and generosity toward others.

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### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

The day begins with special prayers, followed by a ritual sacrifice, with the meat traditionally divided in three — for family, for relatives and friends, and for those in need.



## MUHARRAM

ISLAMIC (SHIA OBSERVANCE) · PAN-INDIA · MUHARRAM (DATE VARIES)

Muharram marks the Islamic new year, but for Shia Muslims it holds deep significance as a period of mourning for the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, at the Battle of Karbala — a story of standing firm for justice against overwhelming odds.

### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Processions, known as Tazia, carry replicas of Hussain's tomb through the streets, accompanied by mourning recitations and, in some communities, ritual expressions of grief central to the observance.



## CHRISTMAS

CHRISTIAN · PAN-INDIA · 25 DECEMBER

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ and is observed by India's Christian communities, particularly strong in states like Kerala, Goa, and the Northeast, though its festive spirit has become widely embraced across the country regardless of faith.

### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Midnight mass draws large congregations, homes and churches are decorated with stars and lights, carols are sung, and festive meals with traditional sweets like kuswar are shared among family and neighbours.



## GURU NANAK JAYANTI

SIKH · PAN-INDIA · KARTIKA (NOV)

Guru Nanak Jayanti, or Gurpurab, celebrates the birth of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, who taught the equality of all people, honest living, and devotion to one God — principles that remain central to Sikh life today.

### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Gurdwaras hold Akhand Path, a continuous 48-hour reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, followed by processions, kirtan, and langar — a free community meal offered to all, regardless of faith or background.



## BUDDHA PURNIMA

BUDDHIST · PAN-INDIA, ESP. BODH GAYA · VAISHAKHA (APR–MAY)

Buddha Purnima commemorates three pivotal events in the Buddha's life believed to have occurred on the same full moon day — his birth, his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, and his death, or Parinirvana — making it the most sacred day in the Buddhist calendar.

### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Devotees visit monasteries and temples, particularly Bodh Gaya where the Buddha attained enlightenment, for prayer, meditation, and the reading of Buddhist scriptures, often observing a day of simplicity and reflection.



## MAHAVIR JAYANTI

JAIN · PAN-INDIA · CHAITRA (MAR-APR)

Mahavir Jayanti celebrates the birth of Lord Mahavira, the twenty-fourth and final Tirthankara of Jainism, whose teachings on non-violence, truth, and self-discipline form the philosophical core of the Jain faith and continue to shape its practice today.

### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Jain temples hold processions carrying Mahavira's idol, along with prayers, charitable giving, and reflections on ahimsa — non-violence toward all living beings, one of Jainism's most defining principles.



## NAVROZ (PARSI NEW YEAR)

ZOROASTRIAN · MUMBAI, GUJARAT · 19 AUGUST (VARIES)

Navroz, meaning 'new day,' marks the Parsi (Zoroastrian) new year, a tradition brought to India by Persian refugees over a thousand years ago. It celebrates renewal, gratitude, and the eternal victory of light over darkness central to Zoroastrian belief.

### HOW IT'S CELEBRATED

Fire temples hold special prayers, homes are cleaned and decorated with chalk designs, and families gather for festive meals — often including the sweet dish ravo — to welcome the new year together.

# THE FESTIVAL CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

|                   |                                                                  |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| JANUARY           | Lohri, Makar Sankranti / Pongal / Bihu, Republic Day (26th)      |
| FEBRUARY–MARCH    | Holi, Mahavir Jayanti (some years)                               |
| MARCH–APRIL       | Ugadi & Gudi Padwa, Ram Navami, Mahavir Jayanti                  |
| APRIL–MAY         | Buddha Purnima                                                   |
| JUNE–JULY         | Rath Yatra                                                       |
| JULY              | Guru Purnima, Hariyali Teej                                      |
| AUGUST            | Raksha Bandhan, Krishna Janmashtami, Navroz                      |
| AUGUST–SEPTEMBER  | Onam, Ganesh Chaturthi                                           |
| SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER | Navratri, Durga Puja, Dussehra                                   |
| OCTOBER–NOVEMBER  | Karva Chauth, Diwali, Bhai Dooj, Chhath Puja, Guru Nanak Jayanti |
| DECEMBER          | Christmas                                                        |
| VARIES (LUNAR)    | Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Adha, Muharram                               |



# A CALENDAR THAT NEVER RESTS

Across twelve months and a dozen faiths, India's festivals share one thread — gratitude, renewal, and the pull of family and community, expressed in a thousand different ways.

This guide is free to keep, print, and share with anyone curious about the celebrations behind the color.



# JAI HIND

This ebook is free — read it, keep it, and share it with anyone who  
loves a good festival.

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