

# FESTIVALS OF INDIA

By

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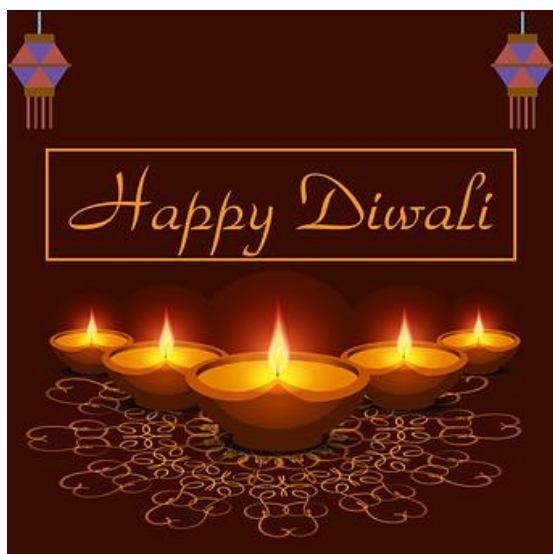
“The British historian Michael Woods, in the introduction to his BBC special, “Story of India”, described India this way: “India is the oldest, the most colorful and the most influential civilization in the world”. It is also probably the most multi-racial, multi-cultural, multilingual, and multi-religious country in the world. It is thus not surprising that many a colorful festival also sprang up in India. In this essay, the author Dr.Venugopal Menon has tried to group the festivals according to their importance to the various religious groups, as well as those celebrations that are of particular importance to the states and regions of India. We have provided an interactive map of India, with the intent of taking a visitor through a virtual tour of India to experience the various festivals of the different regions and states. Just come with us by clicking on a state and enjoy learning about India’s colorful festivals! We, the editorial staff of indiancentury.com truly appreciate the Herculean efforts of Dr.Venugopal in constructing this pearl for our website ”

Editor’s note

Considering the enormity of the information of relevance to this manuscript, it is felt prudent to first consider the more significant and popular festivals that are celebrated by many parts of the country throughout the year, some being regional to selected states or religious denominations and others justifying national appeal and observance.

## **Diwali (Deepavali):**

**October/ November**



Perhaps the most major festival of all, Deepavali, the Festival of Lights (deepam=lamp or light), Diwali, as it is popularly called, is celebrated during Karthik falling during October or November, after the conclusion of the harvest, during new moon that is deemed the darkest night in Hindu calendar. It is one festival that is observed throughout India, each state having its significance and patterns of festivities. As one could expect, in the various regions of the country, there are many legends

relating to Diwali.

The overall symbolic significance of Diwali is the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil. It is one celebration and affection, of family gatherings, exchange of gifts, of joy and merriment.

Regional traditions relate Diwali to Goddess Lakshmi, Lord Rama, Vishnu, Kali, Durga, Ganesha, Hanuman, and other deities, based on legends and local beliefs. In preparation for the festivities, there would be renovations, cleaning, decorations, observed equally by Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and some Buddhists, but essentially it is one of an overall sense of goodness, camaraderie, and affection.

In Eastern India, people keep their doors open with lighted lamps, welcoming Goddess Lakshmi into their homes. In Bengal, it is overnight Kali puja, with a grand celebration at Kalighat and Dakshineswar temple in Kolkata, while in Odisha, people worship the ancestors, burning jute sticks, seeking their blessings.

In Western India, Diwali is a grand event, with a display of Diyas, lamps, and firecrackers. In Maharashtra, the festivities span for 4-5 days, with traditional treats of food 'Faral', a wide array of snacks prepared at home being offered to guests, neighbors, and even strangers. In Gujarat, Dhanteras or Diyas are lit in honor of Lakshmi and Dhanvantari, and buying gold and silver is considered auspicious during the time. In Northern India, people observe Diwali as the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya, after his exile for fourteen years and killing the demon Ravana. Welcoming Rama, Sita, and brother Lakshmana, people light lamps in every household. In the state of Punjab, the Sikhs celebrate at their Gurudwaras, while the Hindus worship Goddess Lakshmi. In Uttar Pradesh, celebrations take place on the banks of the holy river Ganga, floating lighted earthen lamps on the water, while the priests chant prayers. In Southern India, it is celebrated as 'Naraka Chaturdasi', the victory of Sri Krishna over demon Narakasura. People bathe in oil, eat sweets and display lamps, and visit the temples. In Karnataka, the event often lasts two days, as Krishna Chaturdasi and Bali Padyami, reciting stories of King Bali. In Tamil Nadu, people wake up early, take oil baths infused with betel leaves, and fragrant pepper, and consume Deepavali Lehyam before they feast. In Andhra, people chant prayers and seek blessings from Satyabhama, and celebrate with family gatherings.

(The extensive, epigraphic, historic, astrological, and religious details of Diwali are beyond the scope of this article)

### **Holi: (End of February to early March)**



A national ceremonial event, perhaps as popular as Diwali, is Holi, the Festival of Colors, also known as the Festival of Love, and the Festival of Spring. In contrast to Diwali, Holi falls on a full moon day in the month of Phalgun, towards the end of February to the beginning of March, as the winter gives way to spring and the harvest season. Holi is a cheerful and

euphoric celebration, an exuberant ritual when people smear and drench each other

with bright colors, promoting harmony between different groups and social classes, in an expression of unity and fellowship. Traditionally, the colors are washable, plant-derived products, but lately commercial pigments have been used. There is a joyous and festive atmosphere of meeting one another, of blossoming love, of play and laugh, ‘forget and forgive’, and repairing broken relationships.

Holi has Hindu mythological mentions as a celebration of the victory of Lord Vishnu over demon Hiranyakashipu, who had gained boon that no human or animal can kill him, during day or night, inside or outside of any building. His pious son Prahalad, a devotee of Vishnu challenged his father, who threatened to kill him, when God Vishnu incarnated as Narasimha, a human-lion form from inside a metallic pillar, during the twilight hours between day and night and killed the demon on the steps of the entryway, quelling his boon. In some parts, Holi is also a symbolic observance of the eternal, divine love of Krishna and Radha, the celestial couple. Another legend is about Shiva burning into ashes the god of love Kāma.

Originating in India, the event has spread beyond its borders with religious connotations, to many countries around the world, and is enjoyed as a colorful and gleeful version along with the sentiments of western Valentine’s Day. It is even mentioned during the Mughal times and was participated in by all castes, throwing the colors at the Emperor. Holi is also very popular with Sikhs, Jains, and some Buddhists. Anyone and everyone, friends and strangers, man, woman or child, rich and poor, engage in frolic and fun, singing, laughing, dancing on the streets and parks, sharing delicacies, food, and drinks.

As vast and varied a country that India is, with its diverse spread of cultural characteristics, Holi also assumes different regional styles, but with the ‘commonality of colors’. In Assam, it is Phakuwa or Doult Jatra, with burning clay huts and singing devotional bhajans of Lord Krishna. In Bihar, they light bonfires, the eldest member taking the initiative. In Goa, it is called Ukkuli in Konkani; in Gujarat, the two-day festival has people offering coconut and corn to the fire, and the color-sprinkling termed ‘Dhuleti’; in Karnataka, children collect wood prior to the day and burn it on ‘Kamadahana’ night; in Maharashtra, it is ‘Shimga’, lasting almost a week, burning fire, eating the delicacy of Puran Boli, symbolically eliminating the evil; in Manipur Holi merges with the festival of ‘Yaosang’, with folk dance wearing white and yellow turbans, and culminating in cultural activities at the Krishna temple; in Odisha, it is ‘Dola’, where icons of ‘Jagannath’ replace



Krishna and Radha; in Punjab, the eight days preceding Holi are known as ‘Luhatak’, the Lubana community heaping cow dung cakes and burning fire; in Telengana Holi is called ‘Kama Purnima’ and other names, the festival lasting for up to ten days; while Uttar Pradesh, a rather conservative state, celebrates it on a major scale with youth mingling freely with colors, food, dancing around bonfires, even using Bhang (cannabis) in Laddoos adding to the revelry.



Holi was described by some foreigner as if a massive color palette fell on earth from the hand of the Almighty, the atmosphere is painted with red, pink, yellow, blue, and green, and people soaked in colored water, running around, laughing loudly, shouting, and throwing mud on each other. It is a war where a water gun is your weapon, colored water is your bullet, and colored powder is your smokescreen. If you are a foreigner, locals tell you not to go out on this day. If you are unable to control your curiosity, they will have no mercy on you.

### **Navaratri, Durga Pooja, Dussehra:**

**(September/October)**

Perhaps no other country in the world can claim the distinction of an adjective, ‘Differences are our Similarity’, like India. As much as we have an assortment of diverse terrains, climates, languages, religions, cultures, and customs, they are like pearls on a necklace, distinct yet connected, savoring similar sentiments through adapted sensations.

The different manifestations of Goddess have symbolic representations of their functionality, the masculine aspect representing the matter, and the feminine aspect the energy. Saraswathi is considered the consort of Brahma, Lakshmi of Vishnu, and Parvathi that of Shiva, each complimenting their roles, wisdom and knowledge with creation, wealth with protection and preservation, and energy with creative destruction, respectively. The Goddess is Durga for her followers.



The nine-day festival of Navaratri is celebrating and honoring goddess Saraswathi in most parts of the country, while in some others, it is the triumph of Rama and his ardent monkey devotee Hanuman over Ravana, as eastern India observes it as the victory of Durga over demon Mahishasura. The

nine representations of the goddess are described as Shailaputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skandamata, Katyayani, Kaalratri, Mahagauri, and Siddhidhatri. The festival is celebrated in the bright half of the Hindu calendar month Ashvin, which typically falls in the Gregorian months of September and October.

Dussehra is another version of the same festival in the Kulu valley of Himachal Pradesh, Mysore in Karnataka, Kota in Rajasthan, Bastar in Chhatisgarh, and Almora in Uttarkhand.

The devotees who follow Goddess Saraswathi dedicate the nine days for learning, for re-energizing the knowledge, for initiating children to education at her 'Sannidhi' (altar) on the ninth day. The eighth day is Durgashtami, praying to Durga, the ninth is Mahanavami and the tenth day is Vijaya Dashami, also Dussehra for those who observe it.



Those who follow the tradition of Saraswathi Pooja, ask the children to submit their books and learning materials in the prayer room in front of Saraswathi, Goddess of knowledge, for the last three days and be engaged in prayers to her than studying (children love these days) and get Her blessings on the tenth day, rejuvenating their prowess for another year. For the students of arts or music or dance, this is also the time for re-initiating and emphasizing their commitment to the respective art forms. Coincidentally for the warrior class engaged in martial arts or weaponry, Navaratri is the time for Ayudha pooja, sanctifying their ‘weapons’.

Extensive music performances and dance recitals are conducted throughout the nine days, usually in the temple premises, as teachers bring in their students and engage in offering their talents to get divine blessings for the artists.

Dussehra or Vijayadashami signifies the victory of good over evil, Rama over Ravana or Durga over Mahishasura. In some places, huge effigies of the demon Ravana are burned, parades are organized and various folk-arts are performed.



And as with any festival, there is feasting following the poojas, with various customs and varieties of foods are prepared in different parts of the country.

A fascinating and proud reality of the ancient Indian tradition is the nation’s culture of assigning a Goddess in charge of education, of learning, of expertise, of



scholarship, of arts whether it is fine arts or martial arts, and fundamental philosophy of establishing knowledge as a priority, as the foundation of a people, of a culture. UNESCO has inscribed this Hindu tradition of festive performance arts as one of the "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" in 2008.

## **Ganesh Chathurthi (Ganesh Festival):**

**(August/September)**



Most of the festivals of India can be traced to its ancient civilization and linkage to its Hindu traditions, except for the few specific ones that are observed by the other faiths. Essentially being a tolerant society, almost all the traditional festivals are mutually shared by people of other faiths, and celebrated as

social events, except for their intimate religious observations.

Ganesh or Vinayaka Chathurthi is an auspicious, popular festival, celebrating the birth of the beloved elephant-headed god, Lord Ganesha. Some people consider the event as the arrival of Lord Ganesha to earth from Kailash, the abode of God Siva and Parvathi, the parents of Ganesha. It is believed that praying to Ganesha enables the devotees to fulfil their wishes and as a penance setting them free of sins, and leading them on the path to knowledge and wisdom. The celebration is for ten days, in the Bhadra month of the Hindu calendar, that falls during August-September. Ganesha is considered the God of knowledge, wisdom, sciences, and prosperity. And almost every Hindu function commences with prayers to Lord Ganesha for His benevolence in blessing the event, removing any obstacles, preventing mishaps, and allowing successful completion. Hindus all over the world celebrate Ganesh Chathurthi, but it is most popular in Maharashtra, along with Goa, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu.



Historically, the festival is believed to be initiated during the time of king Shivaji in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but Shri Bal Gangadhar Tilak, popularly known as Lokmanya Tilak from Pune in Maharashtra, changed it from a private celebration to a grand public event in 1893. This was during India's freedom struggle with the British, when people from all sections of the society and castes came together, championing it as a means to circumvent the colonial British government's ban on Hindu gatherings in 1892.



Clay idols of different poses and sizes of Ganesha are made and installed in 'pandals' at home, temples, or specially created venues, decorated with flower garlands and illuminations. Participants are engaged in chanting Vedic hymns and prayers, reading texts, fasting, and offering prasad (God's food). Ganesha's

favorite item is Modakam, made with rice flour, jaggery, coconut, ghee, and some condiments, while several other delicacies like Pooran Boli and Karanji are prepared for friends and relatives.

On the tenth and final day, the idol is carried in a public procession, with joyous celebration, music, group chanting, and dancing, to a nearby river or lake or sea and the idol is immersed in the water, in the ceremony if 'Visarjan'. Symbolically it signifies the cycle of birth and death and epitomizes the reality that nothing is permanent, reverting to the elements. The ocean or body of water represents the infinite (God), and the idol is seeking salvation, thus conveying the Hindu concept of the immortal soul leaving the mortal body to surrender and blend with the Absolute.

## Janmashtami

Another extensively observed event covering many states of India is the celebration of the birth of Lord Krishna, perhaps the most favorite of Hindu Gods.

He was born on the star Ashtami (the eighth day) of the dark fortnight of the month of Bhadrapada (August-September), and hence in some areas, it is Ashtami Rohini, while Sri Krishna being raised in the place Gokulam, the name Gokulashtami has also been used.



The legend of Sri Krishna, as the ‘Avatar’ or incarnation of Lord Vishnu, is perhaps the most acclaimed by the Hindus, especially the ones following the Vaishnava tradition. The circumstances of his birth, his interesting childhood escapades, the miracles surrounding his life, his role in the epic Mahabharatha, and eventually his spiritual discourse guiding the completely bewildered Arjuna, the ‘Bhagavad Gita’ (song of God) convey many aspects of the essence of Hindu philosophy. Sri Krishna’s arrival was to free the earth from despair from tyranny and evil happenings. His tyrant uncle Kamsa held his parents caged and was killing all their newborn babies since the prophecy had predicted his death by his nephew. As the divine baby was born, his father was miraculously allowed to shift the baby to the nearby village of Gokulam. That divine birth is what is being celebrated as Janmashtami.

Lord Krishna is revered for his love, compassion, playfulness, and wisdom and his exhortations on how to live based on dutiful principles. The flute-playing, cowherd God is associated with arts, music, and dance. The essence of his teaching to Arjuna through the most revered text of Hinduism, the ‘Bhagavad Gita’, is to fulfil one’s duty, upholding moral righteousness, concentrating on it as an ethical commitment to God and not on its fruits. The philosophical tenets of Bhagavad Gita, profoundly dictate elaborate guidance on every aspect of virtuous living with integrity and goodness, with the ultimate objective of upholding ‘Dharma’.



The main festival is celebrated in Mathura, where Krishna was born, and in Vrindavan where he grew up, as Hindus all over the world participate in huge celebrations, reliving and rejoicing Krishna's birth. As in every Hindu religious observation, there is fasting, singing praying together, doing poojas, and dancing to bhajans in praise of God. The festivities are continued through the night, as Krishna was born at midnight, and celebrations follow through the next day. Major Krishna temples organize recitation of 'Bhagavatha Purana' and 'Bhagavad Gita', and dance dramas or Rasa Leela, especially popular in the Northern states of India, like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Manipur, and Assam, even though the event is very popular all over India. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) celebrates the event on a grand scale all over the world where they have units.

Parents dress up children as Krishna and Gopis, and let them participate in singing and dancing and playing scenes from Krishna's childhood. Dahi Handi festival is one such that involves hanging an earthen pot filled with dahi (yogurt) or any milk-based delicacy, favorites of Krishna, at a convenient height slightly beyond reach, and teams of boys and girls compete to break the pot and drink the contents. Stealing butter from neighboring homes was Krishna's favorite frolic, which earned him a pet name, 'butter thief', 'Makhan-chor' or translated in the local languages of the various states.

## Mahasivaratri

(February/March)

Mahasivaratri is in honor of God Siva, as Janmashtami is for Krishna. The day is of most significance to those following Shaivism tradition. According to Sadguru, it is a significant annual event especially for people on a spiritual pursuit. To those who are in family situations, it is the anniversary of Siva and Parvathy's wedding, and for those with worldly ambitions, it is one to pray for fulfilling their such desires. For the ascetics, it is a day to be like Mount Kailash, to become still and stoic. In the yogic traditions, Lord Shiva is not worshipped as a God, but the primordial Guru, from where the wisdom of yoga originated. After many millennia of meditation, one day he became still, all the movements came to a stop, and the night of that enormous stillness became Mahasivaratri.



But legends apart, in the yogic traditions, Sivaratri offers possibilities to the spiritual seeker. Modern science has come to an understanding that all we know as life, as matter and existence, like cosmos and galaxies, are all manifestations of one

energy. This is the same experiential reality of a realized yogi. It is believed that Mahasivaratri is the one night that offers a person the experience of that reality.

Shivaratri is the darkest day of every month, and celebrating Mahasivaratri is 'celebrating darkness'. The word 'Shiva' means 'that which is not, but 'that which is, being existence and creation. Based on one's vision, one may see the little things of creation or may experience the vast emptiness as the biggest presence of existence. The reality that the millions of galaxies are just a speck in comparison to the unbounded emptiness, the enormous vastness that is being referred to as 'Siva' or 'Shiva', the 'Mahadeva.' HE is the omnipresent, all-pervading, darkness or emptiness, the nothingness, the Absolute Reality.





Mahasivaratri, literally meaning ‘the great night of Shiva’, falls on the lunar month’s 13<sup>th</sup> night/14<sup>th</sup> day of Krishna Paksha, during February/March. It is observed by fasting, praying to Lord Shiva, chanting mantras, meditating on ethics and virtues, engaging in charities, and offering forgiveness. Most devotees visit temples and participate in offering ‘abhishekam’ by pouring sanctified water or milk on the Shiva Lingam, and some continue praying and singing through the night, chanting ‘Om Namah Shivaya’, or reciting Rudram or Shiva Chalisa. According to Shaivism legends, this is the night Lord Shiva performs the Cosmic dance of creation, preservation, and destruction.

Mahasivaratri is celebrated on a huge scale in Tamil Nadu, Varanasi in UP, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Kashmir, Kerala, Central India, Punjab West Bengal, Odisha, and throughout other parts of the country. In Nepal, it is widely celebrated in temples, especially in the Pasupathinath temple. They celebrate Mahasivaratri as the Nepali Army Day, amid a spectacular ceremony held at the Army Pavilion, Tundikhel, and declare it as a national holiday. The Hindus in Pakistan, celebrate it as a three-day festival in their Umarmkot Shiva temple, attended by about 250,000 people and the expenses borne by the Pakistan Hindu Panchayat.

Also need to mention about ‘Pradosha’, a bimonthly occasion on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of every fortnight, worshipping Lord Shiva with Abhishekam and Naivedyam, devotees wearing Rudraksha and observing ‘vrata’ or fasting.

All said about Mahasivaratri, whether it is a ‘festival’ by definition or purely a religious event, is for the enquirers to decide.

## Ram Navami

(March/April)

Ram Navami is the day when Sri Rama, the seventh Avatar (incarnation) of Vishnu was born. The day is celebrated extensively in most places of India and abroad, by people who are devotees of Sri Rama. He was the son of King Dasharatha of Ayodhya and his queen Kausalya, born on Navami, the ninth day of the lunar cycle, in the month of Chaitra, (March – April) during Thretha Yuga, as per the Hindu calculations, perhaps ten thousand years ago by Georgian calendars. The legend of Ramayana is one of the most celebrated epic stories of Sri Rama's life, narrated by the sage Valmiki, along with Sri Krishna's life as depicted in the other epic Mahabharatha, by sage Vyasa, both texts belonging to the Smriti lines of Hindu scriptures.



As every Avatar is believed to happen when there is a moral decline in the universe, and the Almighty sends His agents to correct the decadence and re-establish righteousness and virtues on earth, the story of Sri Rama is praised and revered as a model of perfect human living. The main objective of Rama's life was to kill the demon king Ravana of Sri Lanka. Sri Rama was sent on exile to the forest for fourteen years accompanied by his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana, from where Ravana in disguise, abducts Sita, and Rama with the help of the monkey army and its leader Hanuman defeats and kills Ravana and returns to Ayodhya where he rules for several years.

Like Janmashtami, Sri Rama Navami is also observed by praying to God, arranging several kinds of festivities in the temples and homes, celebrating His life, reading Ramayana and enacting his stories, singing compositions of poet Thyagaraja and Bhadrachala Ramdas praising Sri Rama, feasting and being engaged in charitable offerings. The major celebrations are in his birthplace Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, which is declared as Ram Janmabhumi, a most revered place for Hindus. For political reference, this is the disputed place where the Muslims had erected their mosque Babri Masjid after demolishing the old temple, and recently the Supreme Court ordered the land to be given back to build a Hindu temple.



In Karnataka, Ramanavami is celebrated all over by distributing free food and panaka (a drink of Jaggery and melon), organizing classical music festivals. In the eastern states of Odisha, West Bengal, and Jharkhand, the Jagannath temples celebrate the event,

especially by the Vaishnava communities. Similar festivities are conducted in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, and Indian descendants in various countries like South Africa, Caribbean Islands, and Fiji, follow the traditions.

## **Makar Sankranthi**

**(January 14 or 15)**

Makar Sankranthi, or 'Uttarayan', is celebrated every year in January (14 or 15) to mark the winter solstice, signifying the northward movement of the sun, entering the zodiac sign of Capricorn, as the winter ends and days begin to get longer. The practice was supposed to have been established during the time of Aryabhata. The day is dedicated to the god sun, Surya, the significance traceable to the Vedic texts, especially referring to Gayathri Mantra, perhaps the most sacred



hymn for Hindus, found in Rigveda, the holy scripture, that is chanted daily by many people. The Mantra is believed to keep our intellects sharp, help in education and bring on overall well-being. The meaning of the Gayatri mantra is as follows: "We contemplate the glory of the light that illuminates the three worlds: dense, subtle and causal, of that life-giving power, love, radiant enlightenment, and the divine grace of universal intelligence. We pray for that divine light to illuminate our minds."



In Sanskrit, Sankranthi means 'transmigration of the Sun from one Rashi, constellation of the zodiac in Indian astrology, to the next. It is one of the most auspicious days for the Hindus, marking the end of the harsh winter and the beginning of the harvest season. The day is regarded as important for spiritual practices, beginning with a dip in the holy rivers like Ganga, Yamuna,

Godavari, Krishna, and Kaveri, believed to result in the absolution of past sins. People pray to the sun for prosperity and success and for sustaining life.





Poojas are done at home using flowers, coconut, lamps, holy water from Ganga, and, betel nuts and leaves, akshata – a mix of turmeric powder and rice powder, and a mix of sesame seeds and jaggery offered as ‘prasadam’ (God’s food). Gifts and delicacies are offered to family, friends, and poor people, symbolically bringing people together and be at peace despite any differences.

Each state of India celebrates the event in its traditions, may even have a different name. In Maharashtra, they fly kites, it is Pedda Panduga in Andhra, Makara Sankranti in Karnataka, and Maharashtra, Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Magh Bihu in Assam, Megha Mela in parts of central and north India, and Makara Vilakku in Kerala.

## Kumbh Mela



*Kumbh Mela*, also called *Kumbha Mela*, is a Hindu religious festival in India, that is celebrated four times over the course of 12 years, the site of the



observance rotating between four pilgrimage places on four sacred rivers—at Haridwar on the Ganges River, at Ujjain on the Shipra, at Nashik on the Godavari, and at Prayagraj, at the confluence of the Ganga, the Jamuna, and the mythical river Sarasvati. Each site’s

celebration is based on a distinct set of astrological positions of the Sun, the Moon, and Jupiter, the holiest time occurring at the exact moment when these positions are fully occupied. The Kumbh Mela at Prayag every 12 years, in particular, attracts millions of pilgrims. In addition, a Great Kumbh Mela festival is held every 144 years at Prayag, most recently in 2001. The Kumbh Mela lasts several weeks and is one of the largest festivals in the world, attracting more than 200 million people in 2019, including 50 million on the festival's most **auspicious** day. (courtesy – Encyclopaedia Britannica)

The latest one in Haridwar, UP, that concluded in April 2021 has been one of great, global scrutiny and controversy, as the government allowed millions of people to congregate during the pandemic Covid-19 crisis, and perhaps causing the rapid spread of the virus, favoring Hindu beliefs over safety.



The festival credits Adi Sankara, the 8th-century saint as its initiator, the observance being a penance or atonement, Prayaschita, that the ritual dip in the sacred waters of Ganges, Ma Ganga, would absolve the seekers of all the sins. It is also a celebration of the community commerce with numerous fairs, education, religious discourses, mass feeding of the monks and the poor, and entertainment.

The event is timed, based on the Hindu lunisolar calendar and the relative positions of the planet, especially Jupiter, the sun, and the moon. Similar events of dipping in sacred rivers around the country have been observed as Magha-Mela or Makar-Mela, each attracting millions of religious pilgrims, and considered as the 'world's largest peaceful gatherings. Kumbh means, clay pot symbolizing the womb, and Mela is for gatherings, the event representing fertility, and generative power of human beings, sustaining life. Many believe that the pilgrimage at the sacred junction of rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati may have originated in the mythology of 'Samudra Manthan', the churning of the oceans, mentioned in Vedic texts. It is also mentioned in the Pali canons of Buddhism, wherein the Buddha states that bathing in rivers cannot wash away one's sins.





One of the key features of Kumbha Mela has been the camping and processions of sadhus or monks from Hindu and Sikh traditions. Many have reported roots in the Naga traditions, the akharas, going to war without clothes. The fair also attracts many loner monks who do not belong to any

akharas.

Organizing such a mammoth assembly of people, providing safe stay, food, water, sanitation, health care, policing, and disaster management, is a very daunting task. The government with Seva volunteers, set up committees, involve several Indian and outside agencies, including US-based CDC, and provide efficient, safe, and convenient arrangements for the millions of attendees. In 2021, because of Covid, the Mela was limited to 30 days instead of the usual 4 months, but apparently, the majority of the attendees were tested positive after the event, because of the reportedly ‘irresponsible and incomprehensible’ attitude of the Ministry of Health and higher up governmental authorities.



Traditionally on Amavasya or New moon day – the most cherished day – the pilgrims take the dip and join a celebratory procession, with banners, flags, elephants and horses, musicians and monks including many naked ones smearing bhasmam (ashes). There would be spiritual discourses along with celebratory feasts of vegetarian food, while some pilgrims observe fast, and perform various forms of traditional and cultural activities representing different parts of India. The

event is globally covered by mass media from National Geographic to Wall Street and hundreds of others.

## Raksha Bandhan

(August)



Rakshabandhan, a Hindu tradition, is an annual rite of sisters tying a string, an amulet, called Rakhi around the wrist of their brothers, symbolically guarding them, undertaking responsibility, an affectionate bonding, and offering care. The event is observed in August, the last day of the Hindu lunar calendar month of Shraavana. Raksha Bandhan in Sanskrit translates into a 'bond of protection, an intimate and sincere expression of sibling love. The sister-brother festival,

presumably has origins in folk culture, following an old custom of exogamy, especially in northern Indian villages, where parents do not visit daughters in their husbands' homes, and during this annual ceremony of Rakhi tying, these married women visit their parents, brothers, and folks in their homes. Occasionally, the brothers travel to their sisters and bring them to their parents' homes.

The custom is prevalent in northern, central, and western India, Nepal, and scattered overseas communities of Indians. As mentioned in Hindu texts, a similar custom of the priests tying Raksha prevailed in the olden times, as Lord Krishna describes to Yudhishtira about the ritual of a priest tying it on his wrist on a full



moon day. In some modern societies, even non-relatives but friends practice such a tradition across caste and class lines and between Hindus and Muslims. The names and customs also vary between regions. On a specific day, sisters and brothers wear new clothes and observe the ceremony in front of parents and grandparents.

Lamps are lit, prayers are performed for mutual well-being, sisters apply 'tilak' on



brothers' foreheads and tie the string around their wrists. The brother offers gifts to the sister as a gesture of affection and offer of protection.

All the above festivals are connected essentially to Hindu traditions considering the religion's ancient heritage and a substantial majority of the country following the faith. But India is a pluralistic country with the representation of almost all world religions, and since Hinduism respects and accommodates every faith, the festivals of other faiths are equally celebrated throughout the country.

## **Sikh Festivals**

Sikhism is the world's fifth-largest religion, a monotheistic faith founded by Gurus Nanak in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and with about 2.5 million followers. Their doctrines include equality of humans, moral character, generosity, humility, and self-reliance. The sacred book of Sikhs is the Adi Granth, the First Book, also called Granth Sahib, composed of six gurus. One most important name of God for the Sikhs is Waheguru, the Wonderful God, without gender but being addressed as Father. The 5 Ks associated with the Sikhs is Kesh (uncut hair), Kara (a steel bracelet), Kangha (a wooden comb), Kachera (cotton shirts), and Kirpan (steel sword).

Some of the major festivals celebrated by the Sikhs are Baisakhi, Guru Nanak Jayanti, Maghi, and Holla Mohalla.

### **Baisakhi**

**(January 13 or 14)**

The Sikhs celebrate Baisakhi, (also pronounced Vaisakhi) along with the Hindus, on the first day of the month Vaisakham, the Solar new year, usually falling on January 13 or 14. It was initiated as a major Sikh festival by Guru Gobind Singh to commemorate the foundation of the Sikh community in 1699, known as the Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh was coronated as the tenth Sikh after the ninth Guru Teg Bahadur Singh was persecuted and executed by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, for refusing to be converted to Islam.

In 1699, on Baisakhi, Sikhs from all over Punjab gathered together to celebrate the local harvest festival. Amrit Sanskar, the rite of initiation into the

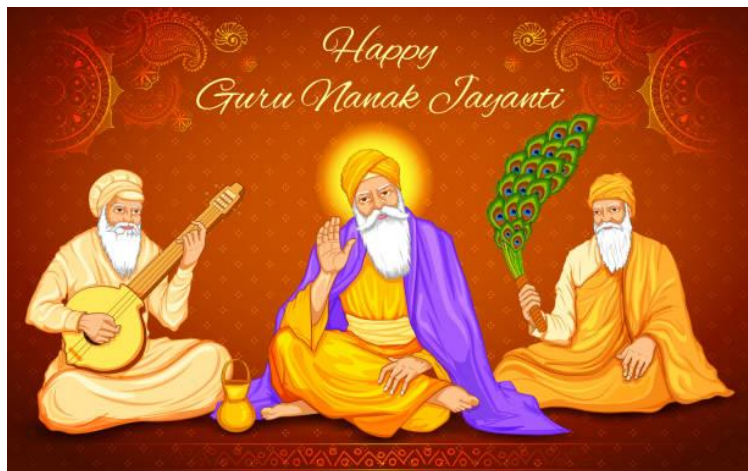
Khalsa, often occurs on Baisakhi, very early in the morning. It involves five men, Panj Piare, 'Five Beloved Ones', initiating the candidates with sweetened water (Amrit) and the candidates commit themselves to observe a daily discipline, along with the pain kakke of five Ks.



For 48 hours, there occurs continuous reading (Akhand path) of the whole Guru Granth Sahib, followed by a procession remembering courage, unity, and strength of the Sikhs. There would be team sports, Bhangra dancing, fairs, exhibitions, and of course, feasting.

### Guru Nanak Jayanti

Also known as Gurmurab is the most important festival for the followers of the Sikh religion, that celebrates the birth anniversary of their first Guru, Guru Nanak Dev. It is on the day of Karthik Poornima, the fifteenth day of the month Karthik, as per the Hindu calendar, that usually falls in November.



Guru Nanak was born on April 15, 1469, at Rai Bhoi Ki, near Lahore, which is in present-day Pakistan. He is the spiritual leader and founder of the Sikh religion and completed writing 974 hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib. The main verses elaborate that the creator of the universe is one, and preaches

the followers to offer selfless service to humanity, irrespective of the differences, and advocating social justice for all.

The celebrations start in Gurudwaras, two days before the day of Jayanti.

There is a 48 hour non-stop recitation of Guru Granth Sahib, called Akhand path. A procession called Nagakirthan is organized, led by five men, holding the Sikh triangular flag, the Nishan Sahib. The holy book is placed in a palanquin during the procession, people singing hymns in groups, playing musical instruments, and displaying martial arts skills. Langar, originally a Persian word, translated as ‘an alms-house’, a place for the poor and needy, and where free food is provided for all irrespective of their religion, class, or gender, welcoming them all as the Guru’s guests. In recent times, Gurudwaras, provide food and shelter to the needy.

Guru Nanak Jayanti is celebrated as a public holiday in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and West Bengal.

### **Maghi and Lohri**

*(January 13)*

Maghi is the occasion when the Sikhs recall and respect the sacrifice of forty Sikhs, who fought for Guru Gobind Singh. It is on the first day of the month of Magh, usually, January 13, the same as Makar Sankranti that the Hindus celebrate. On the eve of Maghi, is the festival of Lohri when Hindus celebrate with bonfires to greet the birth of sons. For Sikhs, Maghi is the festival of Muktsar, a district town in Punjab, in commemoration of the heroic fight of the Chali Mukte, the Forty Liberated Ones, who laid down their lives warding off an attack by an imperial Mughal army.

The Sikhs recite their holy Guru Granth Sahib and observe the religious rituals in Gurudwaras. The largest congregation is at Mukstar in Punjab, where Mela Maghi fairs are organized and pilgrims take a holy dip in the sacred waters of Sarovar and visit many shrines. A mahala, or big march from the main shrine to Gurudwara Tibbi Sahib, sacred Guru Gobind Singh, concludes the three-day

celebration.



Maghi is celebrated by people eating kheer, an old dish of rice cooked with sugarcane juice, mixed with red-chili mixed yogurt. In some parts, kichdi made with lentils, raw sugarcane, and jaggery is served.

## Hola Mohalla

(March)

Often just known as Hola, this Sikh festival takes place on the first of the lunar month Chet, which is in March. This is a tradition established by Guru Gobind Singh, following the Hindu tradition of Holi, but assuming more of a masculine nature for the Sikhs.

‘Mohalla’ has roots in Arabic, hal meaning ‘alighting or descending’, which in Punjabi, implies an organized procession like an army column. Unlike Holi, the



Sikhs demonstrate their martial arts skills in simulated battles. Hola Mohalla stands for mock fights, in which processions like in the army, accompanied by war drums, standard-bearers proceed to a given



spot or move from one gurudwara to another. Guru Gobind Singh organized the first festival in February 1701.

The historic townships of Anandpur Sahib and Kiratpur Sahib in the Ropa district of Punjab have been where Hola Mohalla has been hosted since 1701. The



military exercise used to be staged on the bed of the river Charan Ganga with the backdrop of the famous Hindu temple of Mata Naina Devi in Shivaliks. Recently the government of India has accorded it the status of a national festival.

During the grand festival, there would be mock battles, displays of weapons, followed by kirtan, singing, and poetry competitions. There would be daring feats, tent pegging, bareback horse-riding, and other shows of bravery. Every Sikh function has the langars preparing traditional meals of wheat flour, rice, vegetables, milk, and sugar, provided by the villagers.

## Jain Festivals

Jainism is one of the world's oldest continuously practiced religions. Its ancient Indian tradition can be traced to twenty-four spiritual leaders or Thirthankaras, the earliest ones from time immemorial, the 23<sup>rd</sup> one Parshvanantha, whom the historians date to 8<sup>th</sup> century BC and the 24<sup>th</sup> Thirthankara, Mahavira around 600 BC.

Jain dharma or principles are ahimsa (non-violence), anekantavada (many-sidedness), aparigraha (non-attachment), asceticism (abstinence from sensual pleasures), and believes that the function of the soul is to help one another. The Jain ethics are five; non-violence, truth, not stealing, celibacy and non-possessiveness.

Their practice of non-violence towards all living beings has led to the Jain culture of vegetarianism, fasting for prescribed periods (upavasa, Tapasya, vrata) during many auspicious festivals, meditation, and many rituals. Of the 24

Tirthankaras, the Jains worship predominantly four: Mahavira, Parshvantha, Neminata, and Rishabhanantha.

Jainism has a very rich life of rituals and festivals, with significant meaning for the benefit of the participants. Their rituals are woven into their pious life, like spreading the grain for the birds, filtering the water, the practice of equanimity and repentance for any harm caused. The principal festivals that people of the Jain faith celebrate are, Paryushan, Mahavir Jayanti, Mahamastakabhisheka, Diwali, Bhai Beej, Jnan Panchami, Karthik Poornima, and Maun Ekadashi.

## **Paryushan**

**(August/September)**

The Paryusana Parva is the most important festival for the Jains. It is celebrated from the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the waning moon in the lunisolar month of Bhadrapada, typically during August/September. During the eight days, Jains fast and pray, emphasizing their five vows, making an active effort to stop cruelty to all forms of life.

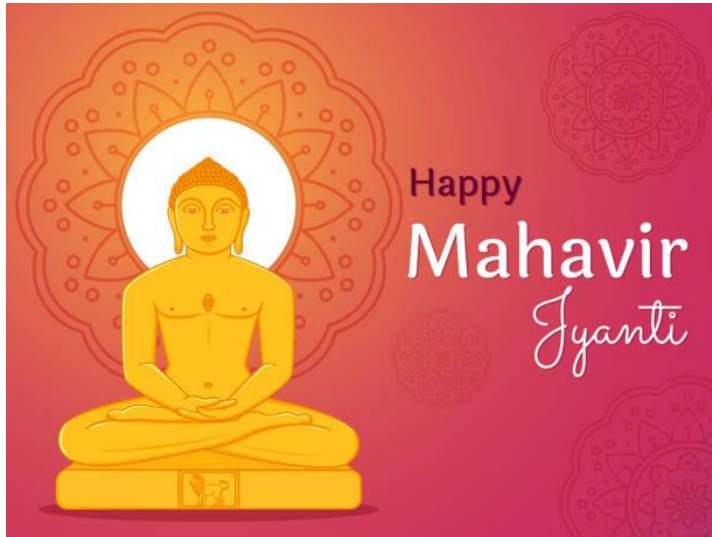


The last day is focused on prayer and meditation sessions known as Samvatsari. This is the time for atonement, granting forgiveness to others, seeking clemency from others. The literal meaning of Paryushana is 'abiding' or 'coming together.'

During these days, the spiritual preceptors read out and explain the Kalpasutra, the sacred scripture of the Jains, as the members listen to it, overwhelmed with emotions.

## **Mahavir Jayanti**

**(March/April)**



Also called Mahavir Janma Kalyanak, is one of the most important festivals of Jainism that celebrates the birth anniversary of the 24<sup>th</sup> Thirthankara Mahavir, who played a significant role in preaching Jainism. It is celebrated on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the lunisolar month of Chaitra that falls in March/April. The festivities include visiting Jain

temples, pilgrimages to the shrines, reading scriptures, and processions of Mahavira by the Jain community.

Mahavira was born in 599 BCE, to his mother Trishala, and at the time of his birth, the surroundings became peaceful and serene, even the Gods offering reverence to the Thirthankara. He was given the name Vardhaman. At the age of 30, he left earthly pursuits and began meditating under an Ashoka tree for 12 years, following which, he was enlightened. Mahavira travelled across the country, preaching Dharma, non-violence, moral and ethical values, and honesty, and conveying lessons to eliminate superstitions.

The event celebrating Mahavir's birthday takes place in temples of Pawapuri in Bihar, Girnar and Palitana in Gujarat, and Parasnath temple in Kolkata. There would be lectures spreading the goodness of Jain doctrine along with feasting with customary food and serving the needy.

## **Mahamastakabhisheka**





The ‘Grand Consecration’ refers to the abhisheka, anointment of the Jain images, held on a large scale. The most famous of such consecrations is at Sravanabelagola in Karnataka, of the Bahubali Gommateshwara statue. This important festival is held once every 12 years, as an integral part of the ancient and composite Jain tradition. The festival is held in veneration of the 58 ft monolithic statue of Siddha Bahubali, in a posture of meditation, accessible through a flight of 700 steps. The first event started in 981 CE and the next one, the 89<sup>th</sup>, should be in 2030.

Bhagwan Bahubali is the son of Rishabhananda, the first of the Tirthankaras, who is worshipped for his living with exceptional qualities. The process involves pouring purified water and sandalwood paste, carried in 1008 prepared vessels or kalasas. The statue is also bathed with milk, sugarcane juice, saffron paste, turmeric, and vermilion. Offerings are made of petals, gold and silver coins, and precious stones. Similar anointments of Jain images take place at Jain temples all over India.

**Diwali** has a special significance in Jain tradition, marking the anniversary of

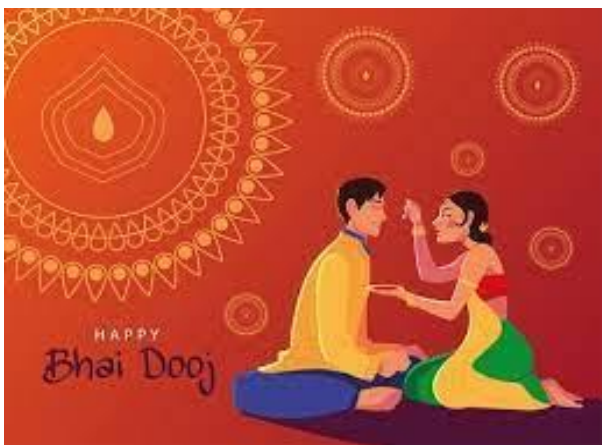


Nirvana, or the final release or liberation of Mahavira's soul, the 24<sup>th</sup> and last Thirthankara, being celebrated like the Hindu festival of Diwali. The Jain's light lamps symbolize keeping the light of Lord Mahavira's knowledge alive. It is assumed that the Lord discarded the body of bondage of all karmas and

attained mukhti or deliverance. Participants observe fast especially on the 14<sup>th</sup> day (Chaturdashi) and new moon day and listen to the Uttaradhyayan Sutra, which contains the final message of Mahavir. There is singing of hymns and recitation of bhajans as well as participating in charitable feasting, and sweets are distributed along with gifts.

## **Bhai Dooj**

This is the festival days of honoring brothers (Bhai). When Raja



Nandivardhan, the brother of Bhagwan Mahavir was in sorrow and on account of the latter's nirvana (attainment of Mukti), his sister, Sudarshana took him to her house and comforted him. This happened on the second day of the fortnight of the waxing moon, in Kartik.

This day is observed as Bhai Beej. This festival is like Raksha Bandhan. On the day of Rakshabandhan, the sister goes to

the brother and ties the Raksha; but on this day, the sister invites her brother to her house to felicitate him.

## Jnan (Gyan) Panchami

This is the holy day for acquiring knowledge, the name given to the celebration that takes place on the 5th day of the fortnight of the waxing moon in Kartik (the 5th day after Diwali). This day has been assigned for the worship of



pure knowledge; and on this day, there is fasting, devavandan, offering veneration to Gods, and meditation. Moreover, the books preserved in the religious libraries are cleansed and worshiped.

## Kartik Poornima



On the full moon day of Kartika, the Chaturmas (the holy four months) begins as Ashadh Chaturdashi comes to an end. After this, the Jain Sadhus and Sadhvis begin their wandering Padyatra, traveling on foot. A pilgrimage to Shatrunjay - Palitana on this day is considered to be of great importance. Thousands of Jains go on pilgrimages on this day.

## Maun Ekaadashi

(December)

The holy day for observing silence, Maun Ekaadashi falls on the 11th day of the fortnight of the waxing moon in the month of Margashirsha, in December. This is an important day for Jains on which they observe total silence-Maun and carry out austerities as Paushadh vrat, fasting, worshipping of gods, meditation,



etc. This is the day on which the great events relating to the one hundred and fifty Jineswaras are celebrated through holy recitation. The story of Suvrat Shresthi is connected with this day.



## **Buddhist Festivals**

Buddhism is the fourth popular faith in the world behind Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, with about 490 million (7%) followers. It was founded by Siddhartha Gautama (“the Buddha”) more than 2,500 years ago in India. Gautama was born as a prince in the present day Nepal (which was a part of India at the Buddha’s time; he was raised and lived his entire life in North-eastern India, mostly in the present-day Bihar state), but was moved by the suffering around and walked away from the lavish life, and attained Enlightenment while meditating under a Bodhi tree. His spiritual teachings gathered a large following and thus the religion of Buddhism was born. Its practice has historically been most prominent in East and Southeast Asia, like China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and Tibet, but its influence is growing in the West.

Many Buddhist ideas and philosophies overlap with those of other faiths. The Buddha ignored the concept of God, afterlife, and creation theories, embracing instead, its main tenets based on dukkha (suffering), its truth, its causes, its elimination, and the path leading to its elimination. Buddha’s teachings of the virtues of wisdom, kindness, patience, generosity, and compassion are collectively known as ‘Dharma’.

There are three forms based on different interpretations of Buddha: Theravada Buddhism, in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, Mahayana Buddhism in China, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, and Vietnam, and Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Bhutan, and northern India.

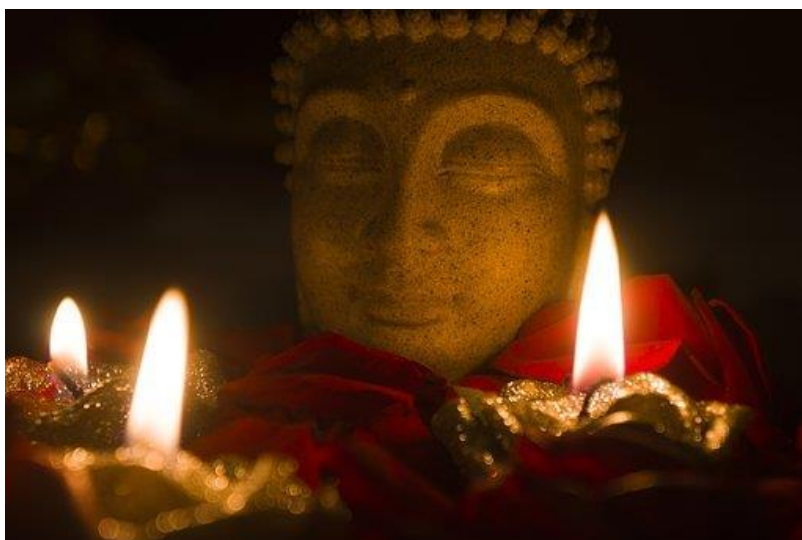
His Holiness, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, is a simple Buddhist monk, the spiritual leader of Tibet. The Dalai Lamas are believed to be incarnations of the previous ones, realized beings inspired to attain Buddhahood for the

benefit of humanity. But after China invaded Tibet, and following the brutal suppression of Tibet by communist China, His Holiness was forced into exile, and India welcomed him and settled him in Dharmasala of Northern India.

Buddhist practice considers many festivals and celebrations as part of their culture. There are variations of religious and social events developed from different countries that follow Buddhism and are also based on their observance of Mahayana (M), Theravada (Th), or Tibetan (T) versions of Buddhism.

### *Buddhist New Year*

*(First full moon day in April or January. Please check below for details)*



In countries following Theravada Buddhism, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and Laos, the new year is celebrated for three days from the first full moon day in April. In Mahayana countries, the new year starts on the first full moon day in January. However, the Buddhist New

Year depends on the country of origin or ethnic background of the people. As, for example, the Chinese, Koreans, and Vietnamese celebrate in late January or early February according to the lunar calendar, whilst the Tibetans usually celebrate about one month later.

### *Vesak*

*(First full moon day in May)*

Otherwise known as Visakha Puja the "Buddha Day", traditionally, is Buddha's Birthday. Vesak is the major Buddhist festival of the year as it celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha on the one day, the first full

moon day in May, except in a leap year when the festival is held in June. This celebration is called Vesak being the name of the month in the Indian calendar.



## **Magha Puja Day**

(Full moon day of March)



Magha Puja Day, or the Fourfold Assembly or "Sangha Day" takes place on the full moon day of the third lunar month (March). This holy day is observed to commemorate an important event in the life of the Buddha. The event occurred early in the Buddha's teaching life. After the first Rains Retreat (Vassa) at the Deer Park at Sarnath, the Buddha went to Rajagraha city where 1250 Arahats, (enlightened saints) were the Buddha's disciples, had returned from their wanderings to pay respect to the Buddha. The assembly is called the Fourfold Assembly because it consisted of four factors: (1) All 1250 were Arahats; (2) All of them were ordained by the Buddha himself; (3) They assembled by themselves without any prior call; (4) It was the full moon day of Magha month (March).

## **Asalha Puja Day**

(Full moon day of July)

Asalha Puja ("Dhamma Day") is to pay homage to the Buddha on the full moon day of the 8th lunar month (July). It commemorates the Buddha's first teaching: the turning of the wheel of the Dhamma, or Dharma, the 'cosmic law and



order', to the five ascetics at the Deer Park (Sarnath) near Varanasi city, India. Kondanna, the senior ascetic attained the first level of enlightenment here.



## ***Songkran***

*(Thailand, middle of April)*

This Thai Buddhist festival goes on for several days during the middle of April. People clean their houses and wash their clothes and enjoy sprinkling perfumed water on the monks, novices and, other people for at least two or three days. They gather around the riverbank, carrying fish in jars to put into the water, that the ponds dry out and the fish would die if not rescued. People go to the beach or river bank with jars or buckets of water and splash each other.



## ***Ulambara***

*(First to the fifteenth day of July)*

Ulambara or the Ancestor Day is celebrated throughout the Mahayana tradition from the first to the fifteenth days of the eighth lunar month. It is believed that the gates of Hell are opened on the first day and the ghosts may visit the world

for fifteen days. Food offerings are made during this time to relieve the sufferings of these ghosts. On the fifteenth day, Ulambana, people visit cemeteries to make offerings to the departed ancestors.

Many Theravadins from Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand also observe this festival. Ulambana is also a Japanese Buddhist festival known as Obon, beginning on the thirteenth of July and lasting for three days, which celebrates the reunion of family ancestors with the living.



## **Zoroastrian Festivals**

About 60,000 Parsis or Zoroastrians live in India. They arrived from Persia (modern-day Iran) to escape religious persecution by the Muslim majority, between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. They live mostly around Mumbai and a few live in Karnataka. They believe in one God, Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord), who is compassionate, omniscient, and the creator of the universe. They have a flair for commerce and are wealthy from businesses and trades, charitable and law-abiding people, and one of the finest communities in India.

Some of the Parsi festivals are Jashans, Mehragan, Tiregan, Sadeh, Abanagan, Adargan, Farwardgan, and Gahambars. Most of these festivals are celebrated as austere events without any pomp and glory in their temple or at homes.

## Gahambars:



These are six seasonal festivals, each for five days and commemorating the sanctity of universal creations of God, namely the earth, water, plants, animals, and humans, reciting scriptures and people coming together and enjoying a feast.

There are monthly festivals celebrated in honor of the divine entities, to

whom a day of the month and a month of the year are dedicated. These are the Jashn days.



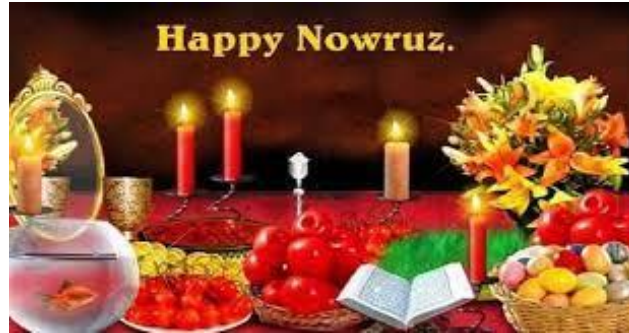
Farwardgan is dedicated to the guardian angels, Tiregan to the rains, Abanagan to the waters, Adargan to the fire, Mehregan in honor of Mithra, Sadeh being similar to Sankranthi.

## Nouruz:

(March 21)

Nouruz is the most important festival for the Parsis; it falls on March 21. The day is celebrated as a mark of respect for the Creator, the birth of the spiritual and material world, the elements of earth, that are believed to be an extension of the Creator. The Zoroastrians visit the temple on that day, offer prayers, meet relatives and friends and spend the evening in Jashn.



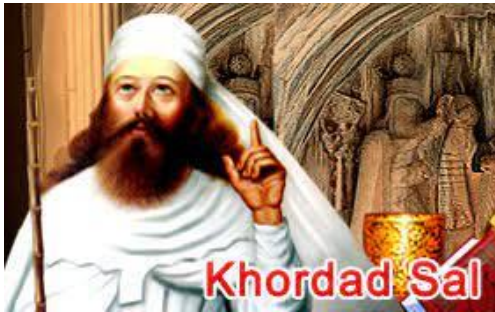


### **Thanksgiving:**

Thanksgiving is a ceremony of blessings, performed outside the premises of a temple, in a clean place with priests conducting the ceremony. The purpose is to enhance the purity and integrity of the visible and invisible worlds and to bring good tidings to the people.

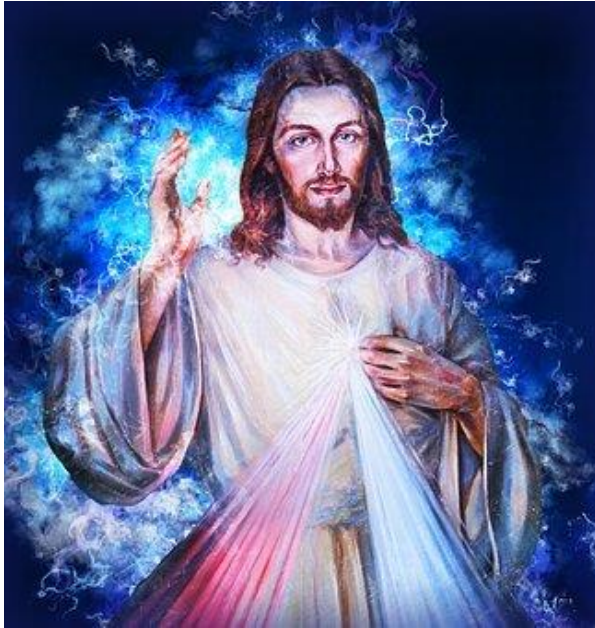
### **Khordad Sal:**

(Aug/September)



This is the birth anniversary of Zoroaster which falls on the 6<sup>th</sup> day in the first month of the Parsi calendar, around August/September.

### **Christian Festivals in India**



There is general scholarly consensus that St. Thomas the Apostle came to the Malabar coast of India, in AD 52 and by the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Christianity was established in the country. Initially, they used Syriac liturgies and by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, several western Christian denominations like Latin Catholics and Protestants were living in different parts of the country. Many Christian schools, hospitals, and primary care centers were created through Roman Catholic missions.

India, the land of vibrant culture and ethnicity is a secular nation, people following different religions coexisting in harmony. All the important festivals of the religions are celebrated with equal pomp and gaiety. Although Hindus predominate the total population of the country, about 2.5 % of people follow Christianity. They celebrate Christian festivals including Christmas, Easter, and Good Friday with great enthusiasm and fanfare. Friends and acquaintances following religions other than Christianity also eagerly take part in the celebrations of the Christian festivals, which speaks volumes for the unity in diversity in India.

India has a system of a limited number of restricted holidays that gives individuals the flexibility to take time off to celebrate a holiday within India's vast religious and cultural society. Since there are many religions and traditions in India, such an option allows each group to choose their holidays.

## Christmas



Millions of Indian Christians celebrate Christmas in a most traditional way and with enthusiasm and vigor. There are several beautiful churches throughout the country. Christians attend the Midnight masses, with the churches remaining open through the night and people come with family and friends, often non-Christians. The state of Kerala has the largest

number of Christians in India and celebrates Jesus Christ's birthday most gloriously, and as one of the most popular festivals of Kerala. Homes and churches are decorated, star lamps are mounted on the trees, Christmas trees are set up, non-Christians are invited, greeting cards are sent, friends participate in feasts and in exchanging gifts. Carols are arranged and groups of singers march through the streets.

## Easter and Good Friday

In India, as elsewhere Easter is celebrated and begins with Lent and culminates with Easter Sunday. Easter is the most festive event of the Christians celebrated all over the world. It falls on a Sunday. It signifies the remembrance of Jesus Christ resurrecting from death after his crucifixion as we've all read in the bible.





The Good Friday in commemoration of the crucifixion of Jesus and his death at Cavalry. It is also known as Holy Friday or Great Friday. The worshippers gather in the church, they are read Gospels from the Bible to remember and relive the days of Jesus. Christians of all denominations participate in their

groups, observe fasting and other traditions including eating meat during the time.

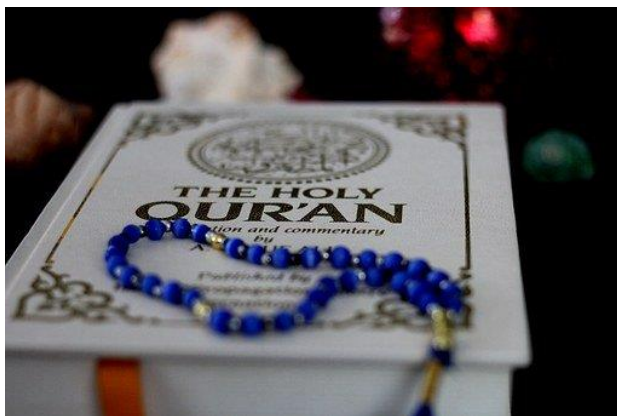
Most Christians in India are in Kerala, Goa, the states of Bombay, and the North-Eastern areas. Good Friday is a day of sadness and mourning, and the services happen in the afternoon. India is diverse with sets of people and their traditions, but everyone is involved with everyone else, people of all religions join Easter celebrations along with their neighbors and friends.

Easter is celebrated in the joy of Jesus being resurrected after the gruesome crucifixion and sacrifice for his people. The devotees believe that he fought with death, defeated it, and rose to glory. It happened on Sunday as Easter is celebrated. In Kerala, after Sunday morning mass, people eat meat, consume alcohol, and celebrate the merry occasion. In Tamil Nadu, special masses are held, in North-East states, Christians celebrate by singing folk songs, have Easter sermons, sunrise service, and even baptisms and egg hunting.

## Islamic Festivals

Islam is the second-largest religion in India, with 14.2% of the country's population, with approximately 172.2 million people; India has the second-largest Muslim population, after Indonesia. The majority of Indian Muslims belong to the Sunni sect of Islam while the Shia form a sizeable minority. The religion arrived in India along with Arab coastal trade through the western shoreline, sometime around d 636 CE to 643 AD.

The first mosques were built in Gujarat, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. Afterward, the Arabs conquered Sindh in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and parts of north India in



the 12<sup>th</sup> century, as the Mughal Empire ruled most of South Asia. The peak of Islamic rule under Aurangzeb's reign and sharia happened after the establishment of the Fatwah Alamgiri, and later on by Tipu Sultan in Mysore and Nizams in Hyderabad. Alongside forced conversions, there has been integration between Hindus and Muslims and the Muslims played an

ongoing, major role in the economics, politics, and culture of India.

The important Muslim festivals that are celebrated in India, include Ramzan (Ramadan), Muharram, Id-e-Milad, and Bakr-Id. The celebrations of the auspicious occasions are marked by special prayers offered in mosques, fasting, feasting, and exchange of wishes.

## **Ramzan (Ramadan)**

**(April)**

Observed by Muslims the world over, Ramzan falls on the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, (April) with the focus on fasting along with prayer and reflection. The fasting commemorates the month when the teachings of the Holy Quran were first revealed to Prophet Muhammed on Laylat-al-Qadr (the night when the Holy Quran first came from heaven to earth). Sawm (fasting), one of Islam's five pillars, is practiced during the month from sunrise to sunset. Ramadan is observed for 29-30 days from the first sighting of the crescent moon to the other.

Fasting is obligatory for adult Muslims who are not ill or otherwise compromised. The predawn meal is Suhur and the nightly feast is Iftar. It is not just fasting, but refraining from alcohol, tobacco, sexual relations, and other sinful activities are to be



refrained from along with being engaged in charitable endeavors. The spiritual rewards of fasting during Ramadan are multiple; ‘When Ramadan arrives, the gates of Paradise open and the gates of hell are locked up and devils are put in chains. In some Muslim countries, eating during daylight hours in public places is considered a crime. In some communist countries, fasting is restricted or even banned.

Charitable giving is part of Ramadan. Zakat, translated as ‘the poor-rate’, is the fixed percentage of income a believer is supposed to give to the poor, an obligatory practice and a pillar of Islam. Muslims believe that good deeds are rewarded more during Ramadan than any other time.

In some Islamic cultures, lights are strung up in public squares and streets, a tradition believed to have originated during the Fatimid Caliphate, where the rule was acclaimed by people holding lanterns. Common greetings during Ramadan include ‘Ramadan Mubarak’ and ‘Ramadan Kareem’ meaning has a blessed or generous Ramadan.

## **Muharram**

**(August/September)**

Muharram marks the start of the Islamic New Year and is one of the most important months for Muslims, second only to Ramadan. It begins after the sighting of the first crescent of the new moon on the final day of the Islamic calendar, which usually falls around the August/ September months but migrates through the solar Georgian calendar.





Muharram is a month of remembrance. Ashura refers to the tenth of Muharram in Arabic, and is the time of ‘mourning’. The historical significance of Muharram is that it is in remembrance of the days when the grandson of Muhammad, Husayn ibn Ali, his family, and 72 followers was deprived of water and was killed by the army of Yazid I at the battle of Karbala.

The surviving members were imprisoned in Damascus.

Muharram is observed by Sunni Muslims by reading scriptures related to the holy month, fasting on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> days, showing gratitude to Allah, remembering the battle of Karbala, and participating in certain Shia-led events to bring the sects together. The Shiites observe it by refraining from public display of happiness, even eating meat, wearing new clothes, or getting married; other observations are, dressing in black, attending public lectures, reciting spiritual poems, and walking in processions showing grief. Charitable activities are common to all.

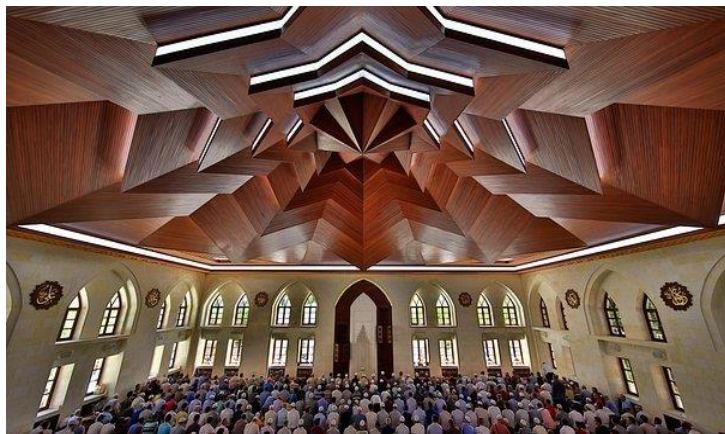
## Eid-e-Milad



Also known as Eid Milad-Un-Nabi is a festival celebrated to commemorate the birth of Prophet Muhammad, who is believed to be the messenger of God in Islam. Its origin dates back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century when Muhammad’s house was transformed into a house of prayer by Al-Khayzuran. Devotees light lamps, decorate their

homes, observe night-long prayer meetings, feast and meet family members and engage in charitable giving.

## Bakr-Id



Id-ul-Zuha, Eid-al-Ad, ha, or Bakr-Id is an Islamic festival celebrated worldwide. It honors the willingness of Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ismael as an act of obedience to the command of God. As per Genesis 22.2, the Jewish and Christians believe that Abraham took his son Isaac to

sacrifice. It is believed that before Isaac was sacrificed, Allah provided a lamb in sacrifice. The practice is controversial as it invokes suffering of life. The custom is for the family to consume only one-third of the meat and distribute the rest to the poor. The event lasts four days, and in the Islamic lunar calendar, it shifts every year.

Id in Arabic is a festival or celebration. Devotees offer prayers in congregations at the mosque, after sunrise. They wear their finest clothes on the day, and after the conclusion of the prayers and sermon, Muslims embrace each other and exchange greetings, give gifts and invite one another.

## Jewish Festivals

Judaism is one of the earliest foreign religions to arrive in India in recorded history. One of the religious minorities Jews have lived in India peacefully and in harmony without any anti-Semitism unlike in many parts of the world. Their ancestors came to India reportedly during the time of Judah, r as descendants of Israel's Ten Lost Tribes. After the creation of Israel in 1948, most Jews have migrated back to Israel, and perhaps only a few hundred remain now. There were about seven Jewish groups in different parts of India like Kochi, Chennai, Nagercoil, Goa, Telugu areas, and others.

The Jews in India observe the Jewish festivals in their limited ways.

## Rosh Hashanah:

(September)

The Jewish New Year meaning ‘head of the year’, often called the day of remembrance or Judgment, falls during September. This is the time each Jew reviews his relationship with God. The custom is to blow a ram’s horn (shofar), calling for spiritual awakening associated with the revelation to Moses. There are services in synagogues, and delicacies are served, bread and fruits, dipped in honey are customary, and a special blessing is recited.



## Yom Kippur:

(September)



Yom Kippur is to effect individual and collective purification by the practice of forgiveness of the sins by others and by sincere repentance of one’s own sin against God. It is observed in September, beginning eight days after Rosh Hashanah, with 25 hours of intense praying, meditating, mostly in synagogues, wearing white with no make-up, or perfumes, fasting, giving for charity, and performing a mitzvah. Mitzvah stands for any good deed performed in following the divine commandment given in the Torah and

offering gifts. Attending Yizkor by visiting the graves of dead relatives, is one of the best things to do on Yom Kippur.



## Hanukkah:

(Late November to late December)



This is the Jewish festival commemorating the recovery of Jerusalem and the subsequent rededication of the Second Temple. It is also the Festival of Lights, observed for eight nights from late November to late December. The candles of a unique candelabrum with nine branches, called the menorah

(or Hanukkah) are lighted one each night, the last one on the final night. Attendees sing Hanukkah songs, play dreidel, eat oil-based foods, and dairy. Hanukkah is celebrated around the time of Christmas.

## State-Wise Festivals of India

Many of the major festivals celebrated on an- Indian basis, on large scale, and involved by many states have been already narrated. But being a land of diversification, India observes its traditions in a vast array of cultural and social celebrations, every state having its unique characteristics and expression in the form of festivals. Some of the important and popular ones are being included in the next session. Festivals in India are celebrated season-wise and state-wise. The relevance of festivals in India may be to honor a deity at a particular temple, celebrate the agriculture cycle, or a cultural event, and each of it would have a flavor and ethos that signifies the persona of that particular state celebrating the event. The state/regional festivals will be listed below, in alphabetical order of the states of India.

## ANDHRA PRADESH

As one of the most significant states in India both culturally and mythologically, Andhra Pradesh is also one of the most visited Indian states because of its large spectrum of cultures and festivals. Thousands of pilgrims visit Tirumala Venkateswara Temple, one of the most popular in India and the shrine of Lord Vishnu, situated on a hilltop.

### Ugadi:

(April)



Widely celebrated as New Year's Day, in April, is also known as Gudi Padwa, the festival is one of fun, lights, new clothes, delicious sweets, followed by special prayers. Garlands of banana leaves are made and hung on the door. In Hyderabad and Vijayawada, this is very popular.

### Lumbini:

(December)

This Buddhist, three-day festival in December, is organized by the Tourism Department of the state government, in the region of Hyderabad and Nagarjunasagar. Buddhism was prevalent in the state in the distant past and the memory is commemorated yearly.



## **Tirupati Brahmotsavam:**

(November)



A vastly celebrated festival at the most popular Tirupati temple, in November, lasting nine days, it is widely believed that Lord Brahma started it. Several rituals are followed during the festive days, and on the last day, a huge crowd gathers to witness the procession of Lord Venkateswara.

## **Deccan Festival:**

(February or March)

Dedicated to Hyderabad's Arts and Crafts, this is a most celebrated, five-day event. The state hosts various cultural programs like dances and poetry sessions. Held in February or March, this is quite a vibrant event exhibiting arts, cuisine, and culture with local fairs, and unique items like Hyderabad pearls are available for purchase.





## ARUNACHAL PRADESH

The north-eastern Indian state Arunachal Pradesh is known for its pristine beauty and the lush green forests. The state is also known as the Land of the Rising Sun with a lot of activities to do like river rafting, paragliding, etc.

### Siang River Festival:

One of the most popular festivals, it is held to celebrate communal harmony and to attract tourism. It offers many adventure and fun activities like elephant race, boat race, river rafting, food festivals, folk dances, cultural shows, hot air balloon and paragliding, and exhibitions.



### Pangsau Pass Winter Festival:

(January)



The modern-day winter festival is celebrated in Nampong in January. It is a three-day festival, people displaying their extravagant ethnicity, perform folk dances, and sing folk songs. There are also handicrafts exhibitions. People from Myanmar join the festival.

## **Solung Festival:**

Celebrated during the monsoon, this is a ten-day agriculture festival by the Adi community. On the first day a bison are slaughtered, the meat distributed and a grand feast is arranged. On the final day, the village people uproot the weak plants as an act done in the hope of driving away insects and worms.



## **Losar Festival:**



This is the festival of the Monpa tribe to welcome a new year. Monpa is the dominating tribe of Tawang and West Kameng district; therefore, one can consider Losar as a major festival here. Tawang is amongst the most popular tourist attractions in North East India and visiting it during the

festival is indeed the ideal time. The festival falls usually in February or in early March and lasts for about 8 to 15 days during which homes are cleaned, prayers are offered, religious flags are hoisted atop each house, holy scriptures are read and lamps with butter are lit in all the houses. The local deity is also worshipped by the Monpas for the welfare of society and the people. Losar is also the time to relish the taste of locally made drinks and savor the traditional cuisine.

## ASSAM

This north-eastern state is south of the Himalayas, bordering Bhutan, Tripura, and Bangladesh. It is well known for its tea and silk and wildlife especially the one-horned rhinos and Asian elephants, and its abundant rainfall, feeding the Brahmaputra river.

### **Bihu:**

This is a set of three important Assamese festivals —Rongali or Bohag Bihu observed in April, Kongali or Kati Bihu observed in October, and Bhogali or Magh Bihu observed in January. The Rongali Bihu is the most important of the three, celebrating spring festival, with an impact on agriculture and crops. There is feasting, music, and dancing. Some hang brass, silver, and copper pots on poles in front of their house, children wearing flower garlands and greeting passers-by. The origin of Bihu can be traced to a mix of cultures of Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, and Indo-Aryans.

### **Ambubachi Mela:**



An annual Hindu Mela is celebrated at the Kamakhya temple during the monsoon season when the sun transits to the zodiac of Mithuna and Brahmaputra is in spate. It is associated with the Tantric Shakti cult prevalent in eastern parts of India. Temple remains closed for

three days since it is believed that the deity is having her menstruation, after which she is bathed and rituals are performed. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, even foreigners come from many areas to receive the blessings.

## Baishagu:

(April)

The **Baishagu** Festival is celebrated with great excitement in the state of Assam; it is popular for its multitude of colors and high spirits. **Baishagu** is usually celebrated by the tribe of Boro Kacharis and is the most awaited festival of the Boros. Several programs are scheduled, with the worship of the cow, the young people bowing down to their parents and elders, Lord Shiva being worshipped with chicken and rice beer, and people joining in the Baishagu dance. It is the celebration of the arrival of spring in April.



## BIHAR

This eastern state is the third most populous state in India and as “Magadha”, this area of India had been noteworthy as the seat of learning and culture, even in antiquity. It was the capital of both the Maurya and the Gupta dynasties. It was also the place where the Buddha meditated and became enlightened and thus, it was also the place of birth of the Buddhist religion. This is also the state wherein a place called Vaishali the democratic system of government was first practiced; this predated the Greek experiment by several centuries!



## Chhath:



The one festival that is uniquely associated with Bihar, is the festival of Chhath. It is an ancient Vedic festival, historically native to the Indian subcontinent; it is dedicated to Surya, the solar deity, thanking him for the bounties of life. The worship is also made to Chhathi Maiya, the mother goddess. The rituals are vigorous and observed for

four days, including holy bathing, fasting, and abstaining from drinking water, standing in water for long periods, and offering prasad to the rising sun.

Environmentalists claim the festival to be the most eco-friendly and transcends the caste system that emerged in the post-Vedic period. It has received a special significance as a folk festival.



## Bihula:

Bihula is a well-known festival of eastern Bihar and is famous in the district of Bhagalpur. This Puja is also known as Bishari Puja. Bihula Festival is observed every year during the month of August. The devotees of Bhagalpur pray to Goddess Mansa for the welfare of their families. The Bihula Festival patronizes the brilliant Manjusha art which stands on par with the other well-known folk arts of Bihar like the Jadopetiya of Santhal Parganas, and the Madhubani paintings of Mithilanchal.

## CHHATTISGARH

Chhattisgarh, meaning 'thirty-six forts' is a state located in Central India. Formerly part of Madhya Pradesh, it was granted statehood on November 1, 2000.

It is the 9th-largest state in India, with a population of about 30 million. The area was under Maratha rule until the British took over in 1845. Its capital city is Raipur. Chhattisgarh is one of the fastest-developing states in India. A resource-rich state, Chhattisgarh provides electricity, coal, and steel to the rest of the nation, as well as horticultural products like rice, maize, peanuts, soybean and tea.

The state is a storehouse of literature, performing arts and crafts with religion, mythology, social and political events, nature and folklore being its favourite themes. Traditional crafts include painting, woodcarving, bell metal craft, bamboo ware, and tribal jewellery. Chhattisgarh has a rich literary heritage with roots that lie deep in the sociological and historical movements of the region.

### **Bastar Dussera:**



(October)

Bastar Dussehra, also known as Jagdalpur Dussehra, is one of the most vibrant celebrations in the country. Centred in the state of Chhattisgarh, this 75-day-long festival (often called the longest festival in the world) is

believed to have started in the 13th century, during the reign of king Purushottam Dev (fourth king of Bastar), who was a devotee of Lord Jagannatha of Puri.

Chhattisgarh is dedicated to goddess Danteshwari, the supreme power and revered deity of all existing tribes in Chhattisgarh. The divine goddess is worshipped at Danteshwari temple in Jagdalpur. This is unlike any other Dussera festival in India, which is celebrated for Rama's victory over Ravana. Many rituals have been performed by the tribals of Bastar which attracts the tourist from various locations of India & abroad.

## Phagun Madai

(February-March)

Is a significant *adivasi* festival of Chhattisgarh, Madai is celebrated across the state with gaiety and fervour. Tribal communities venerate Goddess Danteshwari and unite her with local deities from various surrounding villages – about 500 approximately – in the month of March. Devotees bring the idols of the gods to the Danteshwari Temple in Dantewada and honour them for 10 days. They perform the Relo, Cheetal and masked dances and conclude the festivities with a grand feast of fruits and local specialties, along with brews made from the flowers of *mahua* trees. The festival of Madai begins in Bastar in the month of December, when the Gond tribes worship their local deity, Cheri-Chher-Kin.

The 10-day festival begins in Dantewada on the day of Shivaratri. It is called Phagun Madai as it falls in the Hindu calendar month of Phagun (February–March). Over the next nine days, the tribals worship goddess Danteshwari in nine different forms. On the ninth day, the ritual of *holika dahan* is observed. The bonfire is held to honour a legendary local princess. After this, devotees smear *abeer* (coloured powder) on each other and end the festivities with an elaborate feast.



## GOA

This, the smallest Indian state on the southwestern coast in the Konkan region, stands separated from the Deccan highlands by the Western Ghats. It still exhibits the influence of the Portuguese, who landed there in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and established it as the overseas territory of the Portuguese empire. It was annexed to



India in 1961. The majority of people speak Konkani. Goa is famous for its beaches, nightlife, and rich flora and fauna.

## **Carnival in Goa:**

(The day before Ash Wednesday)



Also called Carnaval or Intruz, or Mardi Gras, Carnival is the largest in India and one of the few traditional Catholic celebrations in Asia. The carnival was resurrected from a minor street celebration in 1965 by a Goan musician Timoteo Fernandes and since then has turned into a major tourist attraction. It dates back to the introduction of Roman Catholic traditions during the Portuguese conquest of Goa. Today, the urban parade includes floats from local villages, commercial entities, and cultural events. The carnival starts on Fat Saturday and concludes on Fat Tuesday, before Ash Wednesday. In Panjim, the capital of Goa, it is complemented by ‘Grape Escapade’, a local wine festival, and dance at Samba Square in the Garden of Garcia da Orta. The parade is headed by King Momo, Mr. Sixtus Eric Dias from Candolim (in 2021). The procession would have horse-drawn carriages, balloons, decorated bullock carts and elaborate floats, dancing groups, revelers wearing masks, music and sports competitions, food, and drinking.



# GUJARAT

The home state of Mahatma Gandhi Ji, Vallabhai Patel, and Narendra Modi, with areas from the ancient Indus Valley Civilization, is on the west coast of India, with claims to Lothal being the world's first seaport, and being the home for the only wild population of Asiatic lions. The early history of Gujarat reflects the illustrious and imperial grandeur of Chandragupta Maurya, Emperor Ashoka, and the Maratha Empire.

People of Gujarat are enthusiastic and amiable, embracing different faiths and cultures, and noted for their acumen in business and finances. The fairs and festivals showcase their vibrancy and diversity.

## International Kite Festival:

This is regarded as one of the biggest festivals celebrated. Months before the festival, homes in Gujarat begin to manufacture kites for the festival. The festival of **Uttarayan** marks the day when winter begins to turn into summer, according to the **Indian calendar**. It is the sign for farmers that the sun is back and that harvest season is approaching, which is called **Makara Sankranti/Mahasankranti**.



This day is considered one of the most important harvest days in India, as it marks the termination of the winter season and the beginning of a new harvest season. Many cities in Gujarat organize kite competitions between their citizens where the people compete with one another. In this region of Gujarat and of many other states, Uttarayan is such a huge celebration that it has become a public holiday in India lasting for two days. During the festival, local food such as

Undhiyu (a mixed vegetable including yam and beans), Chikki (sesame seed brittle), and Jalebi is served to the crowds. Days before the festival, the market is filled with participants buying their supplies. In 2012, the Tourism Corporation of Gujarat mentioned that the International Kite Festival in Gujarat was attempting to enter the Guinness World Records book due to the participation of 42 countries in it that year.

### **Rann Utsav:**



This is a cultural and artistic festival organized by the Gujarat Tourism Department every year. The festival exhibits traditional art forms of India and celebrates the uniqueness and diversity of the Kutch district highlighting the cultural splendor of Gujarat. The Rann Utsav has a variety of programs like cultural and folk dances, craftsmanship,

music, carnival processions, pageantry, etc.

People from various parts of the country gather during the festivities to celebrate the splendid ‘White Desert’ and the spirit and warmth of the people of Kutch. Many cultural activities and programs are organized during the Utsav that engages every visitor. There is a splendid display of the arts and crafts of the region. The most captivating experience is the showcase of different art forms, dances, and music during the chilling winters under the full moon. Visitors can enjoy living in tents, sit by the evening bonfires, watch artisans work, dance with local folk dancers and enjoy camel safaris



## HARYANA

Haryana is a Northern Indian state surrounding New Delhi on 3 sides. The Yamuna River runs along its eastern border with Uttar Pradesh. Shared with Punjab, the state capital Chandigarh is known for its modern buildings and grid-like street plan designed by Swiss architect, Le Corbusier. The state has a thriving economy, are a leading financial hub of the country, the highest per capita income, and home to major fortune 500 companies and IT industries.

Haryana has its traditional folk music, dance and folk theater, and ancestral worship, and arts such as Phulkari and Shisha embroidery. Desi Haryanvi folk music is a form exclusive to the state and is used for celebrating community functions.

## Gugga Naumi:

(August/September)

This is a snake worship festival, observed in Haryana, during August-September. Generally worshipped as a demi-god, Goga is believed to protect his followers from snake bites and other types and forms of evils. He is particularly popular amongst the followers of the Naga cult. Initially a deity



in Rajasthan, records suggest that Goga is being worshipped from the 17th century in Western

Himalayas—probably because of migration from Rajasthan. Goga enjoys unbridled popularity amongst farmers as snakebite incidents and deaths are a frequent occurrence in agricultural farmlands. Amongst Muslims, he is considered to be a peer (saint) who has the power to eliminate the effects of Zahar (poison).

The highlight of the celebration is the Gugga Mela. Bamboo sticks with peacock feathers and a blue flag with colored threads are used as the medium of celebration. The fans carry out a procession on the ninth day along with beating drums across the village. Reverence is offered in the form of “Churma” and “Sevian” by the saints.



## Surajkund Mela:

This is credited as the world’s largest International crafts fair. It is a bonanza of vivid art, craft, music and dance, colorful ambiance, ethnic cuisines, and an immersive cultural ethos – a spectacle that is waiting to blow your mind yet again!





Occupying a place of pride on the international tourist calendar since 1987, the fair observes more than a million visitors every year, thousands of them being foreign tourists. Getting more and more attractive, fun, and consumer-friendly each year, the Surajkund Mela is not just the best

platform for the skilled craftsmen and artisans of India and other SAARC nations to show their talent, but also a wonderful opportunity for the public to learn about their vibrant culture and get to respect the age-old craft that is better than any machine products.



## HIMACHAL PRADESH

'Snow-Laden Province' or 'Lap of Ice' is a **state** in the northern part of India. Situated in the **Western Himalayas**, it is one of the eleven **mountain states** and is characterized by an extreme landscape featuring **several peaks** and extensive **river systems**. The state shares an international border to the east with the **Tibet Autonomous Region** in China. Himachal Pradesh is also known as 'Dev Bhoomi' or 'Land of Gods and Goddesses'. Host to the Dalai Lama, Himachal Pradesh has a strong Tibetan presence.

This is reflected in its Buddhist temples and monasteries, as well as its vibrant Tibetan New Year celebrations. The region is also well known for its trekking, climbing, and skiing areas. Around 90% of the state's population lives in rural areas. The hilly state is almost universally electrified with 99.5% of the households having **electricity** as of 2016. According to a survey of CMS – India Corruption Study 2017, Himachal Pradesh is India's least corrupt state.



Apart from the fairs and festivals that are celebrated all over India, several other fairs and festivals are highlights of Himachal Pradesh. These festivals are the time for the Himachalis to adorn colorful dresses and accessories and get mixed up with the rest of their kins.

## Gochi Festival:

(February)

Gochi festival is organized to celebrate the birth of a male child. Also



called Gotsi, the festival is celebrated in February, in the Bhaga Valley of the state. This is observed in the houses of those people who welcomed new members in their families in the form of sons during the previous year.

A day before the festival, the village priest invokes a prayer to the local deity by holding a bow and arrow. Then he visits every home in the village where a male child was born the previous year. All the people of the village assemble on the morning of the festival.

The entire festival is accompanied by the beats of drums known as Lohar. People dress up in their best attires and drink Chaang, a special wine. The festival ends with their dancing to the beat of drums and throwing snowballs at each other.

## **JAMMU AND KASHMIR**

This was a state of India from 1954 to 2019, constituting the southern and south-eastern portions of the larger Kashmir region, which has been the subject of disputes between India, Pakistan, and China since the mid-20th century. The underlying regions of this state were parts of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, whose western districts, now known as Azad Kashmir, and northern territories, now known as Gilgit-Baltistan, are administered by Pakistan. The Aksai Chin region in the east, bordering Tibet, has been under Chinese control since 1962. After the Government of India repealed the special status accorded to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian constitution in 2019, the Parliament of India passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, which contained provisions that dissolved the state and reorganized it into two union territories – Jammu and Kashmir in the west and Ladakh in the east, with effect from 31 October 2019. At the time of its dissolution, Jammu and Kashmir was the only state in India with a Muslim-majority population.

Kashmir is known as the paradise on Earth and rightly so. It has its charm in the enchanting valley views and green nature, but its festivals add an extra flavor to the beauty of the state. People try to forget all the communal tensions that exist and celebrate the festivities together in peace. This exquisitely defines the beauty of this holy land.

In India, festivals are celebrated more than in any other country in the world. And every festival is celebrated with great zeal and zest, fancy feasting, and incredible merry-making. Every religion has its hundred festivals and every state another hundred which makes this land holy, sacred, and culturally rich.

## Bahu Mela:

Bahu Mela is one of the best Hindu festivals of Jammu; it is an astounding celebration held in the Bahu Fort of the region. The mela is stacked with fun, skip, and jubilation, with lights embellishing the whole place, illuminating the entire atmosphere. One can witness the marvellous traditions of the community of Jammu, from the way they dress up, to partaking in the tasty food present all through this celebration. This mela is a great opportunity to witness the vitality with which festivities are welcomed in Jammu. All participants wear their most splendid gatherings, and occupants exchange favors as a sign of worship and warmth towards one another.



## Urs:

(February)

Eid Ul Fitr is celebrated on the last day of a month-long fasting in Ramzan or Ramadan. Namaz is offered six times on this day and fast is broken with feasting. Exchange of sweets and wearing new clothes, meeting relatives, and sharing wishes complete this peaceful festival. Eid ul Azha or Bakra Eid is celebrated in the second half of the year when a goat, camel, or sheep is sacrificed in every Muslim Household. It takes its origin from their principle of Kurbanī or Sacrifice. The Urs or Ziarats is an important festival in Kashmir which witnesses participation from Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. It is a huge inter-communal celebration and is celebrated many times in a year.



This festival is celebrated on the death anniversaries of eminent Muslim saints like Meesha Sahib, Batamol Sahib, and Bahauddin. Often bad weather is faced on the day of Urs celebrations, despite which a huge celebration is marked by people from all religions.



## Tulip Festival:

(May)

With hundreds of Tulip Gardens in all of Kashmir, the state flourishes with Tulips during the spring season. With the largest Tulip Garden in Asia in its bounty, **Srinagar** plays host to the great Tulip Festival every year. The festival boasts of the variety of Tulips garnered here. During the springs, the sight of the tulips in any of these gardens is a sight to behold, undoubtedly a mesmerizing and breath-taking sight, especially for a non-Kashmiri.



Tulip Festival takes place at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden in Srinagar, Kashmir. The festival features a showcase of local handicrafts, luscious cuisine, cultural programs, and of course, Tulips!

## JHARKHAND

Jharkhand meaning 'The Land of Forests', is a state in eastern India, with Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal, bordering it. It is 14th largest by population with Ranchi as its capital, is known for its waterfalls, hills and holy places. The state was formed in 2000, from the territory that had previously been part of Bihar.

The state has large deposits of coal and iron ore, with concentration of industry, in centres like Jamshedpur, Dhanbad, Bokaro and Ranchi. Tata Steel, a 500 conglomerate has its corporate office and main plant in Tatanagar, Jharkhand. But in spite of accounting for more than 40% of mineral resources, almost 40% of its population is below the poverty line. Jharkhand is primarily rural, with about 24% of its population living in cities.

The state is famous for its many folk dances and several festivals.

### Chhath Puja:

(November)

Chhath Puja is one of the major festivals of Jharkhand, celebrated in dedication to the Sun God (Lord Surya) and Chhathi Maiya (another name for Goddess Usha and a known sister to Lord Surya). The festival is called 'Chhath' because it means the number 6 in Hindi or Nepali. The festival is celebrated on the 6th day of the month of Karthika (November).

The celebrations last for 4 days thanking the Sun God, the source of all powers. Devotees of the Sun God observe a fast called Vrat. Chhath Puja occurs twice a year – once during summer and once during winter.

Karthik Chhath is performed on the 6th day of the Karthika month known as Kartika Shukla Shashti. This day falls during October or November every year as per the Hindu Calendar. In the summer, it is celebrated a few days after Holi, and is known as Chaiti Chhath.

The rituals surrounding Chhath Puja are supposedly harsher when compared to other



Hindu festivals. They involve strict fasting (without water), taking a dip in rivers/water bodies, standing in water and offering prayers, facing the sun for a prolonged period, and offering 'prasad' to the Sun during sunrise and sunset. Any food prepared during the festival will have no salt, onion, or garlic.

The celebration is for four days, the first day involving a dip in the holy water body with fasting even

without water, followed through the next days, but broken after sunset. Prasad is prepared and taken to the river in the evening and offered to the setting sun. Women wear turmeric yellow saris while performing the ritual. On the last day more offerings are made as they end the fasting and families and friends gather sharing the prasad.

## KARNATAKA

Originally known as the princely State of Mysore, Karnataka was formed on 1st November 1956 and is located in the South-Western region of India. It is just another paradise where the Western Ghats directly plunge into the Arabian sea. Karnataka is also one of the oldest regions of India where its age-old culture, conservative traditions, and orthodox heritage are kept preserved. The spread of its tourist attractions galore, from the majestic hill stations like Kodagu (Coorg -the Scotland of India), its national parks or Jog Falls, its archaeological sites of Hampi or Sravanabelagola, Chamundeswari Hills, Mysore palace or Brindavan gardens, the list goes on. Its capital city of Bangalore is called the Silicon Valley of India, Mysore being famous for its silk and sandalwood, while the state has earned its name through its culinary delights of Bisi Bele Bhath and Mysore masala dosa.

As with the states' age-old culture, Karnataka is famous for its several festivals throughout the year. The Kambala Festival, Hampi Festival, Pattadakal Festival, Makar Sankranti, Ganesh Chaturthi, and several others, some of which have been already included elsewhere in this article.

### **Kambala Festival:**

(November to March)



This is an annual buffalo race held for two days, organized in southern Karnataka and Udupi districts by the farming communities. More than a hundred buffaloes are specially groomed, decorated, and exhibited before the festivals and are made to race on

tracks in the paddy fields and guided by the farmers. Kamba means muddy and kala means field. The event has become an organized rural sport, with elaborate planning and scheduling as the competition is held in many places. There are many types of Kambalas and the winning buffaloes are rewarded. In recent years,



there have been protests from animal lovers and cases have been filed and fought even in the Supreme court.

## **Hampi Utsav:**

(November)

The Vijaya Utsav, more commonly known as the Hampi Utsav, is a cultural extravaganza, held during the first week of November, for 3 days. The celebrations are usually packed with a grand finale pomp procession, fireworks, dance puppet shows, and music shows. The festival is a celebration of the cultural richness of the region. Recently, a lot of adventure sports have been included in the schedule like rural sports, water sports, and rock climbing. Entry is free and the state sponsors all programs. An otherwise low profile town, the festival makes it a center of attraction for thousands of tourists who visit every year to experience the festivities.

Since the Vijayanagar reign, the festival has been a part of the life of Hampi's locals. With a colorful and lively ambiance, the festival is conducive to an overflow of happiness and joy. The festival is celebrated in the ruins of the ancient city of Hampi. The region relives the past of the Vijayanagar Empire and its ancient and medieval grandeur during these three days of celebration.



## **KERALA**

Kerala state on the southwestern Malabar Coast of India was formed in 1956, by combining Malayalam-speaking regions of the erstwhile regions of Cochin, Malabar, South Canara, and Travancore. The region had been a prominent spice exporter since 3000 BCE. At the time of the independence movement, there were two major princely states in Kerala, Travancore State and the Kingdom of Cochin. Kerala has the highest literacy rate, lowest population growth rate, the highest Human Development Index, and the highest life



expectancy of any state in India. The state has also the highest media exposure in India with newspapers published, mainly in English and Malayalam. The state is perhaps the first in the world, where a democratically elected Communist government took charge and has been in power after many elections. Kerala is one of the prominent tourist destinations of India, with coconut-lined sandy beaches, backwaters with the air-conditioned, houseboats, hill stations, Ayurvedic tourism, and tropical greenery as its major attractions.

## **Onam:**

(August/September)



Onam is the most popular annual festival celebrated in the state of Kerala. It is a harvest festival celebrated by Malayalis, during the dates based on the Panchangam (Almanac) and falls on the star Thiruvonam in the month Chingam of Malayalam calendar, which in the Gregorian calendar overlaps with August–September. According to legends, the

Onam is celebrated to commemorate the visit of Mahabali, the demon King who was sent out to the ‘netherworld’ by the fifth incarnation of Vishnu, Vamana, but who was allowed to come and see his citizens once a year.

Onam is a major annual event for Malayali people in and outside of Kerala. It is a harvest festival, one of three major Hindu celebrations in Kerala, along with Vishu and Thiruvathira. Onam celebrations include Vallam Kali (boat races), Pulikali (tiger dances), Pookkalam (flower Rangoli), Onam Kali, and several other celebrations. It is New Year's day for Malayalis.

There is also sumptuous feasting, (Onam Sadya) and family gatherings, as people of Kerala recreate the utopian life that was enjoyed during Mahabali's rule.



Onam is the official state festival of Kerala with public holidays and is also celebrated by the Malayali diaspora around the world. Though its origins are often attributed to aspects in Hindu mythology, Onam is celebrated as a cultural festival across all communities in Kerala, and nowadays, is participated by all with great enthusiasm.

Any mention of Onam would not be complete without mentioning its 8 century-old, traditional boat festival, the world-famous 'Vallam Kali'. This extremely competitive canoe race, in which any 'Chundan Vallams' participate,



each 100-120 feet long with 64-128 paddlers, is a major tourist attraction. The Nehru Trophy race near Alapuzha, Kerala, and Arnamula Boat races are the most popular races.

## **Vishu:**

(Mid-April)



On the first day of Medam, coinciding with mid-April, the event symbolizes the auspicious ‘Vishukkani’, ‘first viewing’ of Lord Vishnu’s decorated image, with lighted lamps, along with gold, silver, a mirror, and harvest materials, making it a sumptuous viewing representing the whole of the

coming year. The golden yellow flower, Kani Konna, Indian laburnum, adorns the setting, as the family members experience the togetherness, the eldest member offering coins to the younger members (Vishu Kaineettam), fireworks are displayed, all wearing new clothes, visiting temples and enjoying a sumptuous feast afterwards.



## **Thiruvathira:**

(December/January)

Thiruvathira Festival falls on star Thiruvathira in the Malayalam month of Dhanu (December-January) that has been celebrated on this day for more than 1500 years. In Kerala, Thiruvathira is an important traditional festival celebrated by the Namboothiri, Kshatriya, and Nair communities of Kerala. It is largely a festival for women, who fast and pray to have good husbands and for their well-being. The first Thiruvathira of a newly-wed woman is her poothiruvathira.



The typical meal avoids rice but includes cooked broken wheat, Thiruvathira puzhukku, a delightful mix of tuber vegetables cooked with a thick paste of freshly ground coconut. The dessert is koova payasam, a sweet dish made of arrowroot powder, jaggery, and coconut milk. The women in groups dance to the tune of typical Thiruvathira songs and dance (Thiruvathira Kali or Kaikottikkali) all night, taking bath early in the morning as they sing certain songs mostly relating to the God of Love, accompanied by the rhythmic sound produced by splashing water with their palms. Oonjalattom, swinging on an oonjal (swing) is an item of amusement on this occasion. The event spreads the message of joy and also illustrates the emotions of a married woman towards her beloved and the unmarried woman longing for one.



From prehistoric times, Malayalee women enjoyed an enviable position in the society, and she was practically the mistress of her house (Matrilineal system). The elevated position she occupied at home and in the society had distinguished her from her neighbors and influenced her status to a considerable extent in the social structure, customs, and religious practices of the people, a parallel of which can hardly be found in any section of the Indian Society, or for that matter, anywhere else in the world.

## LADAKH

Ladakh is a region administered by India as a union territory, and constitutes a part of the larger Kashmir region, which has been the subject of dispute between India, Pakistan, and China since 1947. It was established on 31 October 2019, following the passage of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act. Ladakh is bordered by the Tibet Autonomous Region to the east, the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh to the south, both the Indian-administered union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, and the Pakistan-administered Gilgit-Baltistan to the west, and the



southwest corner of Xinjiang across the Karakoram Pass in the far north. Ladakh gained importance from its strategic location at the crossroads of important trade routes, but as the Chinese authorities closed the borders between Tibet Autonomous Region and Ladakh in the 1960s, international trade dwindled. Since 1974, the Government of India has successfully encouraged tourism in Ladakh. As Ladakh is a part of the strategically important Kashmir region, the Indian military maintains a strong presence in the region.

The largest town in Ladakh is Leh, followed by Kargil, each of which headquarters a district. The main religious groups in the region are Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Hindus, and others. Ladakh is one of the most sparsely populated regions in India. As its culture and history are closely related to that of Tibet, it is known as the "Little Tibet".

There are several festivals celebrated in Ladakh like the Hemis Festival, Losar Festival, Sindhu Darshan, Phyang Tsedup Festival, Dosmoche Festival, Saka Dawa Festival, Tak Tok Festival, Matho Nagrang Festival, Ladakh Festival and many more.

## **Hemis Festival:(June-July)**

Marking the birth of Guru

Padmasambhava, Hemis Festival is not only one of the most important Buddhist celebrations in Ladakh but is also the most popular festival amongst tourists. Held in one of the most-visited monasteries in Ladakh, Hemis Gompa, the festival is a two-day event that is celebrated on the 10th day of the fifth month of the Tibetan Calendar, which is the month of June/July in the Gregorian Calendar.



On this popular festival in Ladakh, Cham Dance and other traditional dances are performed in Hemis Monastery on the beats of drums and cymbal on the tunes of long-pipe Tibetan music instruments. On both days, giant thangkas (Buddhist paintings) are unfurled for the public. Every 12th year, the

largest thangka in Ladakh is unfurled in Hemis on the first day of the festival for the public to see.

## **Sindhu Darshan:**

(June)



Sindhu Darshan is a three-day festival organized on the full moon night in June on the banks of the river and commemorates the river Indus as a symbol of communal harmony and unity in India. Promoting tourism in Ladakh is also

referred to as a proud salute to the brave soldiers who have been fighting bravely for the safety of the country. Local artists from all over the country perform unique dance performances and people from different religions, castes and religions become a part of this festival.

The most distinct part is that people bring water from their own and immerse it in the Sindhu River. On the first day of the festival, a reception for all the participants takes place, organized on the banks of river Sindhu at Shey. Prayers are also offered on the banks of the rivers by the 50 senior lamas who reside here. A bonfire also takes place at night. On the second day, a cultural program and sightseeing trip is organized, which is further followed by a Puja. The third day is usually packed with many tourists as some grand celebration takes place on this day.

## **MADHYA PRADESH**

As the word means, it is a state in central India. The region was ruled by many dynasties, including the Mughals, afterward the Maratha empire dominating during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. After the Anglo-Maratha wars, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the

region was divided into several princely states under the British. The state is backward, stricken with poverty, substantial discrimination of scheduled communities, and female foeticides. It is noted for its classical and folk music with the legendary Tansen and Baiju Bawra hailing from there, along with its legendary modern-day singers Lata Mangeshkar and Kishore Kumar. The state also is noted for the largest reserves of diamond and copper in India.

## **Lokrang Festival:**

(January 26)

The five-day spectacular show of folk dance and music, the Lokrang festival is one of the most famous that is celebrated in Bhopal. 'Lok' meaning people and 'Rang', color, this is a colorful melange of arts, commencing on the Republic Day



of India, January 26, every year. This is an extravagant exhibition of vibrant culture, ancient art forms, and melodious music from every part of the country and the globe, making it a must-do in Madhya Pradesh. India being a country with many culturally diverse states, the organizing committee of this festival decides to

showcase the diversity of a particular part of a theme of the country each year. It could be the 'Ramayni' dedicated to theatrical presentations of the Gond tribe, or of the heritage of Indian culture 'Dharodar' with music and dance, or the artists from outside India showing their talents in 'Deshantar', or the display of handicrafts in the 'Aakar' show, a show of the toddlers, 'Ullas', or one of delicacies and cuisines, 'Swad' or a book fair, 'Lokwarta'.

The profound idea of the festival is to revive and revitalize the Indian culture with all its splendor and re-energize its people to appreciate its proud legacy that has been destroyed by 200 years of British domination and dissipation of our heritage.

## **Khajuraho Dance Festival:**

(February 20-26)

Organized by the Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad, this is a one-week festival of classical dances held annually beside the **Khajuraho temples** in central **India**. The festival is conducted in February from the 20th to the 26th. This festival highlights the richness of the **Indian classical dance** styles such



as **Kathak**, **Bharathanatyam**, **Odissi**, **Kuchipudi**, **Manipuri**, and **Kathakali** with performances of some of the best exponents in each field. Modern Indian dance has been added recently. The dances are performed in an open-air auditorium, usually in front of the **Chitragupta Temple** dedicated to Surya (the Sun God) and the **Vishvanatha Temple** dedicated to Lord Shiva, belonging to the western group.

## MAHARASHTRA

The second most populous state in the western, Deccan peninsula, with the capital Mumbai (old Bombay), this prosperous state plays a significant role in the industrialized, economic and socio-political aspects of India. Maratha empire, with the legendary Shivaji, was perhaps the most counter-power to the British, with Chalukya, Chola, Yadava, and Sultanate names connected to its history. The freedom struggle of India always respectfully recognizes the names like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Dadabhai Naoroji.

The state has four UNESCO World Heritage sites, Ajanta, Ellora, and Elephanta caves, Shivaji Maharaja (Victoria) Terminus, which make it one of the most popular tourist destinations. Their Warli paintings, Kolhapuri chappals, Lavani folk songs, Pav Bhaji and Puran Boli, are recognized names. In addition to the festivals listed as mainstream Indian, the following may be of interest to some.



## Gudi Pawda:

This is a spring-time festival that marks the traditional new year for Marathi and Konkani Hindus along with other fellow Hindus. It is celebrated in and near Maharashtra and Goa on the first day of the Chaitra month to mark the beginning of the New year according to the lunisolar Hindu calendar. The festival is observed with colorful floor decorations called rangoli, a special Gudhi flag garlanded with flowers, mango, and neem leaves, topped with upturned silver or copper vessels, street processions, dancing, and festive foods. The Sindhi community celebrates this day as Cheti Chand as their new year and is observed as the emergence day of Lord Jhulelal.



## Naga Panchami:

(July/August)



This is a day of traditional worship of snakes (Nagas) observed by Hindus throughout India, Nepal, and other countries where Hindu adherents live. The worship is offered on the fifth day of the bright half of the lunar month of Shravana (July/August), according to the Hindu calendar. As part of the festivities, a Naga or serpent deity made of silver, stone, wood, or a painting of snakes is given a reverential bath with milk, and their blessings are sought for the welfare of the family. Live snakes, especially cobras, are also worshipped on this day, with offerings of milk and generally with the assistance of a snake charmer. The event has reference to the narration of sage Vaisampayana, about the attempt of King Janamejaya to decimate all snakes and avenge the death of his father Parikshit by the deadly bite

of Takshaka, the king of snakes. Sage Astika interfered and the sacrifice was stopped, the day is celebrated as Naga Panchami.

## MANIPUR

This state in north-eastern India has about 3 million inhabitants, including the Meitei, Meitei Pangals, Naga tribes, Kuki/Zo tribes, and other communities. Manipur connects India to Central and Southeast Asia, China, Siberia, and such cultures, practicing a variety of religions, has an agrarian economy, and is home to the famous Manipuri dance. The secular theater is mostly confined to non-religious themes, Shumang Lila and Phampak Lila being the popular themes, performed in the center of the arena on a simple stage.

### Yaoshang:

(February/March)



This is a five-day festival in the spring (February-March), starting on a full moon day. It is an indigenous tradition of the Meitei people. Considered the most important festival in Manipur, it has some similarities to Holi, another festival with stress on colors.

The event starts after sunset, the children visiting homes asking for money (like Halloween), bands playing kirtans in temples, people splashing water at each other and sports competitions organized.

## MEGHALAYA

This state in Northeast India was formed in 1972 by joining some districts in Assam, the name meaning ‘abode of the clouds’. The capital of Meghalaya is Shillong. The British nicknamed it the "Scotland of the East". Like Kerala, Meghalaya has historically followed a matrilineal system where the lineage and inheritance are traced through women; the youngest daughter inherits all wealth and she also takes care of her parents.

The state is the wettest region of India, and 70 percent of the state is forested. Meghalaya has predominantly an agrarian economy with a significant commercial forestry industry.

### Nongkrem Dance:

(November)

Meghalaya state is famous for its five days long festival in November, to appease the powerful goddess Ka Blei Sybshar, for the prosperity of the people.



The Ka Pomblang dance is of the Khasi tribes, in the cultural center of the Khasi hills. The priest performs a ceremony, offering oblation to God and offers a cock as sacrifice, as well as offerings to the ancestors. Unmarried girls dressed up in exotic costumes perform dances, men participating with swords and playing drums

and pipes.

## MIZORAM

Another north-eastern state, ‘land of the Mizos’, is in the old-Assam region. About 95% of the population descends from a diverse tribal origin, but with a Christian majority. A highly literate, agrarian community, with horticulture and

bamboo products bringing in high revenue. The culture has changed since Christianity came in the 1890s.

## **Chapchar Kut Festival:**

(March)



Celebrated during March after completion of the arduous task of jhum operation, or jungle clearing and burning the remnants. The festival may have started about 1450-1700 AD in a village called Suaipui when the hunters came back to the village, often empty-

handed and the village chief proposed a feast with rice beer, and meat. People dance, perform skills, play musical instruments, hoping to bring camaraderie to the community.

The other two festivals in Mizoram are Mim Kut and Pawl Kut revived in the last century.



## NAGALAND

This mountainous north-eastern state was formed in 1963; it has experienced insurgency and inter-ethnic conflicts, leading to limited economic development and the only state with a population decline. It is home to about 16 tribes, the majority being the Nagas, their ancestors perhaps migrating from China. The state has a Christian majority and a high literacy rate. Rice, millet, maize, pulses, sugarcane, potato, coffee, and cardamom are the cultivated crops, along with bamboo weaving and wood carving as its crafts. The name may have a Burmese origin Na-Ka meaning ‘people with earrings’, or perhaps, from the



Sanskrit word ‘naga’ the serpents. There are numerous festivals related to their many tribes, but the following maybe some of the most popular.

### Hornbill Festival:

(December)

Launched by the government in December 2000 to encourage inter-tribal interaction and to promote the cultural heritage of the state. The Festival showcases a mélange of cultural displays under one roof, held at Naga Heritage Village, Kisama, and named after the hornbill bird, that is mentioned in their folklores. The week-long festival unites Nagaland to enjoy the colorful

performances, crafts, sports, food fairs, games, and ceremonies, as well as displaying their paintings, wood carvings, and sculptures.



The festival highlights the exhibition and sale of arts and crafts, food stalls, herbal medicine stalls, cultural medley – songs and dances, fashion shows, traditional archery, Naga wrestling, indigenous games, and musical

concerts. Additional attractions include the Konyak fire eating demonstration, literature Festival, film Fest, and several other interesting items.

### **Sekrenyi:**

Locally known as Phousanyi, a ‘purification festival’, Sekrenyi is an annual ten-day event of Angami Nagas, the objective being to cleanse the body and soul, to bring forth unity, and to initiate young ones to adulthood, and celebrated by both Kruna and Christian Angamis. There are many rituals involved in the event. Starting with ‘Kezie’, people sprinkling rice water gathered in leaves, men



performing ablutions and adorning new shawls, followed by singing and dancing and feasting, young people with shaven heads participate in the revelry. It is followed by hunting, pulling down an old gate, as the villagers start exchanging visits, offering greetings, and

restarting another year.

## ODISHA

Is located in eastern India, with about 300 miles of coastline along the Bay of Bengal, and is mentioned as Utkala in the Indian National Anthem. This ancient kingdom of Kalinga, invaded and defeated by Maurya emperor Ashoka in the Kalinga war, was established as Orissa province in 1936 by the British. The state is famous for its heritage sites, beaches, pilgrimage places like Puri and Jagannath, and other tourist attractions, along with its culinary traditions, and Odissi dance.

### Rath Yatra:

(July)

The Festival of Chariot, of Shri Jagannath, is celebrated every year at Puri, the temple town in Odisha, on the second day of the waxing cycle of the moon, in Ashadh Masa (July). The presiding deities of the Jagannath Temple, Lord Jagannath, with the celestial wheel- Sudarshana Chakra are removed from the temple in a ceremonial procession to their chariots. The huge, colourfully decorated chariots are drawn by multitudes of devotees on the grand avenue to the Gundicha Temple two miles away to the North. On their way back, the three deities stop for a while near the Mausi Maa Temple (Aunt's abode) and have an offering of the Poda Pitha, which is a special type of pancake supposed to be the Lord's favorite. After a stay for seven days, the deities return to their abodes.



## Raja Parba:

(Mid-June)

This is a three-day-long festival of womanhood celebrated, in mid-June, the first day called Pahili Raja, the second day is Mithuna Sankranti, and the third day is Bhu daaha or Basi Raja. The final fourth day is called Vasumati snana, in which the ladies bathe with turmeric paste and adorn with flower, sindoor, etc. All types of seasonal fruits are offered to mother Bhumi (Mother Earth). During these three days, women and girls take a rest from work and wear new Saree, Alata, and



ornaments. Just as the earth prepares itself to quench its thirst by the incoming rain, the unmarried girls of the family are groomed for impending matrimony through this festival. They pass these three days in joyous festivity and observe customs like eating only

uncooked and nourishing food especially Poda Pitha, do not take bath or take salt, do not walk barefoot, and vow to give birth to healthy children in the future. The most vivid and enjoyable memories one has of the Raja gaiety are the rope swings on big banyan trees and the lyrical folk songs that one listens from the nubile beauty enjoying the atmosphere.

According to popular belief, as women menstruate, which is a sign of fertility, so also Mother Earth menstruates. So all three days of the festival are considered to be the menstruating period of Mother Earth. As a mark of respect towards the Earth during her menstruation days, all agricultural work comes to a standstill during these days. The young men of the village keep themselves busy in various types of country games, the most favorite being 'Kabadi'.

## PUNJAB

The 'Land of Five Rivers', Punjab is in northern India. It is bordered by a province of Pakistan, again named Punjab, to the west. The main ethnic group is the Punjabis, Sikhs, and Hindus being the dominant religions. The name Punjab is



derived from the five tributary rivers of the Indus River, Sutlej, Ravi, Beas, Chenab, and Jhelum. The Indus Valley Civilization flourished in this region in antiquity, before recorded history until their decline around 1900 BCE, and was enriched during the height of the Vedic period. The region formed the frontier of initial empires during antiquity including Alexander's regime and Maurya empires.

About 75% of Sikhs live in Punjab. They are industrious people, engaged in agriculture, sports, and armed forces, being 15% of the Indian army, including some of the most elite divisions, are comprised of Sikhs. They have an exclusive, cultural tradition with Bhangra music, poetry, cuisine, wedding rituals, folklore, and festivals.

### **Bhangra:**



Bhangra dance began as a folk dance conducted by Punjabi farmers to celebrate the coming of the harvest season. The specific moves of Bhangra reflect how villagers farmed their land. This hybrid dance became Bhangra. The folk dance has been popularized in the western world by Punjabis in

England, Canada, and the USA where competitions are held. It is seen in the West as an expression of South Asian culture as a whole. Today, Bhangra dance survives in different forms and styles all over the globe – including pop music, film soundtracks, collegiate competitions, and cultural shows.

## **Lohri:**

(January)

Celebrated in January, by Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, Lohri is the arrival of longer days after the winter solstice. The significance and legends about the Lohri festival are many and these link the festival to the Punjab region. It is observed the night before Makar Sankranti, also known as Maghi, and according to the solar part of the lunisolar Vikrami



calendar, and typically falls about the same date every year (January 13). Lohri is an official holiday in Punjab, the Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh. The festival is celebrated in Delhi and Haryana but is not a gazetted holiday.

The festival is celebrated by lighting bonfires, eating festive food, dancing and collecting gifts, singing and dancing form an intrinsic part of the celebrations. People wear their brightest clothes and this festival provides the opportunity to interact with family and friends.

## **RAJASTHAN**

‘The Land of Kings’ as Rajasthan means, it is the largest Indian state by area, located on the northwest side of the nation. Thar desert occupies a wide area and borders Pakistan. Major features include the ruins of Indus Valley Civilization, the Dilwara temples, a Jain temple in its hill station Mount Abu and Keolaedo, a world heritage site for its birdlife. Its Ranthambore national park is home to three tiger reserves. The Rajputs, famous for their warfare and chivalry, put up resistance to the Islamic invasions for centuries. Emperor Vikramaditya,

Maharana Pratap, and Rana Amar Singh are noted names in the annals of Indian history. It is culturally rich and varied with its ancient Indian traditions; Classical music and dance, its cuisine, colorful arts, handicraft, wood furniture, carpets, pottery, and the like.

## **Gangaur Festival:**

(March/April)



It is one of the most important festivals, falling after Holi, in March-April, and is celebrated for 18 days in honor of Goddess Parvathi mostly by the womenfolk of Rajasthan. Images of the goddess are made of clay or painted wood, the married ladies and unmarried girls applying mehndi, the red, vegetable dye on

their hands, participating and honoring Parvathi/Gauri, and finally submerging the images in water. The festival in Jaipur is most famous all over the world. There are processions with palanquins, chariots, bullock carts, and folk artists; A sweet dish called ghewar is characteristic of the festival. Udaipur has a dedicated ghat named after the festival situated on the waterfront of Lake Pichola, the prime location for the festival. The festival is also the consequent celebration of the harvest.

## **Desert Festival of Jaisalmer:**

(February)

Happening during February, in the Thar desert, this festival is an expressive way to indulge in the glorious heritage of Rajasthan. There is an abundance of celebrations with vibrant puppet shows, folk music and dance, camel races, camel polo matches, tug of war, juggling events, turban tying, and the longest mustache



competition. Participants wear colorful traditional attires and display the best of Rajasthani folk culture and traditions.

## SIKKIM

This north-eastern, least populous, and smallest state borders China, Bhutan, and Nepal, as also is close to the Siliguri Corridor near Bangladesh. It is host to Kanchenjunga, the highest peak in India, as well as 35% of it is covered by the Khangchendzonga National park, a UNESCO Heritage Site. It was a princely state ruled by a king until 1973 when the Indian army had to interfere against an anti-royalist group and Sikkim joined India as its 22<sup>nd</sup> state. A most environmentally conscious state, it is also the highest producer of cardamom.

Sikkim's majority Nepalese celebrate all Hindu festivals, while the major festivals are Buddhist celebrations, and the Muslims do so with Muharram and Eid ul-Fitr.

### Losar:

(February or March)

The Tibetan New Year is celebrated by Sikkim as a Buddhist festival, that falls in February or March. Losar predates Buddhism and has its roots in a winter incense-burning custom of the Bon religion. During the ninth Tibetan king's rule, it was merged with the harvest festival.

During the celebration, people go to a local spring to perform a ritual of gratitude and make offerings to the nagas. The event is a gesture of relating to the elements of nature, originated by sages, the concept being the sacred connection of the internal and external elements. The celebrations last 15 days, with Chinese, Tibetans, Mongols, and Indian traditions having influences.





### **Saga Dawa:**

One of the most famous festivals of Sikkim, this is an event of Mahayana Buddhism, commemorating Lord Buddha's birth, his attainment of enlightenment, and salvation from the corporeal world. This provides a visual treat of various religious ceremonies and street processions of the Buddhist culture.



## **TAMIL NADU**

Tamil Nadu is a state in southern India, with the Bay of Bengal on the east, mountain ranges on the west and north, with the gulf of Mannar, and the Arabian Sea on the south, separating it from Sri Lanka. They were ruled by the Chera, Chola, and Pandya regimes, and then under the British Colonial rule until Independence. Modern-day Tamil Nadu was formed in 1956 after reorganization as a linguistic state. Its economy is the second-largest in India, and the state is one of the most industrialized. Tamil is its language, which is considered the longest

surviving classical language of the world, and archeologically, it is one of the longest continuous habitations in the Indian peninsula. They were engaged in trades and commerce of spices, pearls, and silk with the Romans, China, and other nations. The Tamils are also noted for epics like Chilappatikaram and Thirukkural, covering all aspects of life.

Known for its rich traditions of literature, art, music, and dance, the state continues to flourish. Bharata Natyam, the South Indian classical music and Tanjavur paintings are globally famous.

## **Pongal:**

(Mid-January)



Coinciding with Makara Sankranti elsewhere, this is a four-day harvest festival, in mid-January. The event starts with cleaning up, destroying old clothes, followed by the main day of Surya Pongal on the second day, and Mattu Pongal on the third, offering gratitude

to the cattle. The following day is Jallikattu, a bull-taming contest, and the final day, Kaanum Pongal, meaning ‘to view’.

Tamils celebrate several other festivals (described earlier) like Deepavali, Ayudha Pooja, Saraswathi Pooja (Dasara), Sri Krishna Jayanthi, Vinayaka Chaturthi, along with the other religious festivals like Christmas and Muharram.

## **Thyagaraja Aradhana:**

This is an annual music festival observed in the states of Tamil Nadu, primarily in Tiruvaiyaru in Thanjavur district of Tamilnadu, and Andhra Pradesh, the place where Thyagaraja attained Samadhi (day of demise). The Aradhana

(praising, revering) is observed on Pushya Bahula Panchami day, where the musicians render the saint's Pancharatna Kritis (five-star compositions).

The event is celebrated in several places all over the world organizing classical music events where hundreds of professionals to students in music performance, reciting the saint's compositions



## TELANGANA

This is Telugu state created from parts of Andhra Pradesh in 2014, from ongoing protests from a section of the people who demanded and agitated such independence. Hyderabad, its capital and cultural heart used to be ruled by the Nizam until 1956. The state has a mixture of Persian traditions from the Mughals who ruled, along with that of south India.

### **Bonalu:**

(July/August)



A Telangana traditional Hindu festival centered on the Goddess Mahakali, with origins traced to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This festival is celebrated annually in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, as well as in other parts of the state. It is celebrated in the month of



Ashada Masam, which is around July and/or August. The name Bonam is from the Sanskrit word Bhojanam, meaning a feast. Women prepare rice cooked with milk and jaggery in an earthen pot adorned with neem leaves, turmeric, and vermillion. It is believed that Goddess Mahakali makes her annual visit to her parental home during this time.

### **Bathukamma:**

Dedicated to Goddess Parvathi, Gauri Devi, and celebrated for nine days during Navarathri, this festival is to herald the abundance offered by nature. Bathukamma means ‘festival of life’ when the goddess is felicitated with traditional celebrations.



## **TRIPURA**

This the third smallest, another north-eastern state, that has tropical Savanna climate, agriculture, and handicrafts of bamboo and cane, but has remained poor despite high literacy, and has a composite culture of Indian and ethnic groups. The name is linked to the presiding deity Tripura Sundari, at Udaipur. Wildlife and bird sanctuaries and national parks of the state are protected under law. Music and dance are an integral part of its culture.



## Kharchi Puja:

(July/August)



The most popular festival, in Tripura, is the worship of the fourteen gods of Tripura and is celebrated in the month of July-August. It ends with sacrifices of cattle to the Earth God. Kharchi means ‘earth’, and the event is in praise of the earth. All the

rituals are of tribal origin, meant to wash out sins, performed for seven days at the local temple, and including the sacrifice of goats and pigeons along with other offerings.

## UTTARAKHAND

On November 9, 2000, the state of Uttaranchal—the 27th state of India—was carved out of Uttar Pradesh, and in January 2007 the new state changed its name to Uttarakhand, meaning “northern region,” which was the traditional name for the area. The area is known for its pilgrimage sites, with the sacred Ganga river and its spiritual gatherings, Rishikesh as a Yoga center, and the wildlife shelters of Bengal tigers. The state is also famous for its literary traditions, its ornate temples, wood carving, Pahari and Gangra painting, handicrafts Uttarkhand cuisine, and dances and music.

## Haridwar Kumbh Mela:



One of the major Hindu pilgrimages, Haridwar Kumbh Mela, takes place in Uttarakhand. Haridwar is one of the four places in India where this mela is organized and most recently hosted the Purna Kumbh Mela from Makar Sankranti to Vaishakh Purnima Snan, dipping in the sacred waters.

Hundreds of foreigners join Indian pilgrims in the festival, which is considered the largest religious gathering in the world.

The festivals of Kumbh Mela at Haridwar, Ramlila, the traditions of Vedic chanting, and Yoga are included in the list of intangible cultural heritage of the UNESCO.

## UTTAR PRADESH

The world's most populous county subdivision with the most population in India, UP is the area of Triveni, the sacred confluence of three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna, and mythical river Saraswati. In 2000, a new state Uttaranchal (now Uttarakhand) was carved out of this state. It is a state with many heritage sites, pilgrimage centers, historical and tourist destinations. Place of creation of many Vedic texts, renowned for its Hindi language writers and poets, folklores, and often referred to as the Hindi heartland. Its music traditions are several; Sohar, Kajari, Gazal, Thumri, Qawwali, Rasiya depicting the divine love of Krishna and Radha and others. The famous Kathak dance hails from UP.

Diwali, Rama Navami, Kumbh Mela, and Holi are celebrated on a grand scale in the state.

## Taj Mahotsav:



Held annually in Shilpgram near the eastern gate of Taj Mahal, Taj Mahotsav is a colorful display of the culture of the Braj area. This ten-day-long carnival, a vibrant platform displaying India's rich arts, crafts, cultures, cuisines, dance, and music. Taj Mahal is the most beautiful, historic

place in the country, is the appropriate site to exhibit the diverse riches of Incredible India.

The festival also invokes the memories of the old Mughal era and also the Navabi style of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. About 400 artisans from different parts of India assemble there grabbing the opportunity to display their talents and India's panoramic cultural contributions to the world.



## Ganga Mahotsav:

The river Ganga has been a sacred river for Hindus for ages. She is considered the Goddess 'who washes away the sins' and millions come to take a holy bath in her. They put forward flowers and floating oil or ghee lamps and save the holy waters for making use of it in a variety of Hindu rituals.

The festival Ganga Mahotsav is five days long and sends a message to all about the spiritual and religious beliefs and culture of Varanasi city. It is believed that Ganga nourishes the Varanasi civilization for long and it has been of great

religious importance to Hindu society. Pilgrims celebrate the event by performing Indian classical style music and dance. Many luminaries irrespective of their religious beliefs participate and perform at the Ganga Mahotsav.



## WEST BENGAL

A state in the eastern region, along the Bay of Bengal and bordering Bangladesh, West Bengal was part of many empires like the Mauryans, the Goudas, and the Guptas. The region has been a hotbed of the Indian Independence movement and has remained one of India's artistic and intellectual centers. Following widespread religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, the state was partitioned in 1947 as Hindu-dominated West Bengal being part of India and East Bengal with a Muslim majority as part of Pakistan. The Bengali language is renowned for its rich literary heritage, the tradition of poetry, folk arts, and for its illustrious people like Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Satyajit Ray, and several others.

There is a saying in Bengal that it has 'thirteen festivals in twelve months. The state's biggest festival of Durga Puja, or Kali Puja, Holi, and others have been covered earlier.



## **Pahela Baishakh:**

(April 14 or 15)

Also known as Pohela Boishakh, this is the first day of the Bengali calendar which is the official calendar of Bangladesh. This festival is celebrated on 14th April in Bangladesh and 15th April in the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam (Barak Valley) by Bengalis regardless of their religious faith.



Pahela Baishakh traces its roots back to Mughal rule in this region and also the proclamation of tax collection reforms of Akbar. The festival is celebrated with processions, fairs, and family time. The traditional greeting for Bengalis in the new year

is "Shubho Noboborsho" which is literally "Happy New Year". The festive Mangal Shobhajatra is organized in Bangladesh. In 2016, UNESCO declared this festivity organized by the Faculty of Fine Arts Under the diversity of Dhaka, as a cultural heritage of humanity.

## **Vishwakarma Jayanti:**

(September 16 or 19)

This is a day of celebration for Vishwakarma, a Hindu god, the divine architect. He is considered the creator of the world. He constructed the holy city of Dwarka where Krishna ruled, the Maya Sabha of the Pandavas, and was the creator of many fabulous weapons for the gods. He is also called the divine carpenter, is mentioned in the Rig Veda, and is credited with Sthapatya Veda, the science of mechanics and architecture. It is generally celebrated every year on September 16 or 19, which is on the last day of the Indian Bhado month, in the Solar calendar. The festival is observed primarily in factories and industrial

areas, often on the shop floor. As a mark of reverence, the day of worship is marked by the engineering and architectural community, by the artisans, craftsmen, mechanics, smiths, welders, industrial workers, factory workers and others. They pray for a better future, safe working conditions and, above all, success in their respective fields. Workers also pray for the smooth functioning of various machines.



## Acknowledgement

The above article on ‘The Festivals of India’, is my humble attempt to assemble information on the topic for inclusion in [www.indiancentury.com](http://www.indiancentury.com), a website created to offer ‘an adequate understanding about India and the enormous contributions ancient Indians had made to world culture’. The concept of such a website is the brainchild of Dr. P. K. Raghuprasad, a physician with a vast array of interests and phenomenal understanding in a variety of fields. It is as per the instructions of Dr. Raghu, my friend, that I have ventured into gathering information on the subject, the festivals of India. I soon realized that I have undertaken a task way beyond my expertise and more elaborate than my anticipated assumptions. Easily the most ‘elaborate and diverse’ country on our

planet earth, India should be a most mesmerizing experience to anyone who is genuinely interested in understanding it. As extravagant as it is in every aspect of its existence, its festivals are numerous, equally kaleidoscopic and representative of its underlying ethos.

The information that I have attempted to collate in this narrative is collected from numerous resources published by extensive research by qualified individuals. As much as I have tried to acknowledge my gratitude to each of them by including the sources as references, any omissions are deeply regretted. As I offer my humble gratitude to each of them who have provided the information, I hope that the readers would benefit from their efforts and enjoy their findings.

*(Courtesy: World religions, India Tourism, India-tours, Tour my India, Travel Triangle, Hello travel, Incredible India, Times of India, India Today, Deccan Herald, Deccan Chronicle, Dreamtimes, The Hans India, Destimap, Steam it, Cadburygifting.in, Wikipedia, Seniority Live Evergreen, Meruka India Tourism, Sadguru's lectures, Encyclopedia Britannica, BBC Bitesize, All About Sikhs – your Gateway to Sikhism, Sikhiwiki, Jainworld, Jainism world resource center, The Buddhist Society, Buddhanet, Hindu Website/Zoroastrianism, Gradeup, Byjus, TravelTriangle, Ideal Leisure Holidays, State of Kerala.in, Adotrip, Everybody Wiki, Taj Mahotsav org, Varanasi.org, Desicommments.com, Navrang India, Tour My India, Pinterest, Tusharupsc, Holidify.com, wikiwand, Heritage institute, All India Roundup, Blazonsart. Courtesy: Pixabay.com, istock photos, Shutterfly- for the pictures)*

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