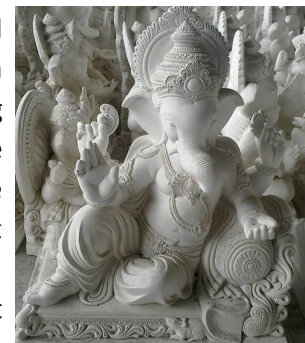


Holy Days and Festivals

Hindu holidays and ways of celebrating those holidays are as diverse as the family of traditions within Hinduism. However, there are certain holidays that have come to be widely celebrated throughout the Hindu diaspora. Generally, Hindu holidays may commemorate a particular deity, season or event in history. Often times the same holiday may celebrate several different events or attributes of a variety of manifestations of the God. Hindu holidays don't necessarily fall on a specific day each year as the Hindu calendar is lunar.

Deity Celebrations

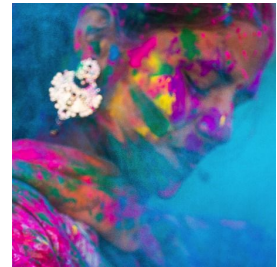
- *Shivaratri* occurs in either November/December or February/March and pays homage to Shiva, the God of Transformation. Devotees celebrate by sitting in meditation with Shiva. They fast (eating only fruit) all day, and chant his name and sing hymns all night while adorning a Shiva *linga* (a *murti*) with milk, honey, water, fruits, and leaves that Shiva is thought to like.
- *Ramanavami* happens around April and is the celebration of the birth of Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu who is considered to be the embodiment of *dharma* (righteousness). Some Hindus choose to fast for nine days leading up to this day, and celebrate by depicting the Ramayana through song, dance, and dramas.
- *Krishna Janmashtami* takes place around August/September and celebrates the birth and life of Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu who delivered the Bhagavad Gita. Because Krishna was born at midnight, many Hindus choose to fast up to midnight, then mark that moment by blowing conches, shouting Krishna's praises, and sitting down to a feast comprised of many sweets.
- *Ganesha Chaturti* is generally in August/September. This festival pays homage to Ganesh, the Remover of Obstacles. This is a multiple-day festival that culminates in devotees immersing *murtis* of Ganesh into a nearby body of water. The *murtis* are made of material that dissolves in the water, and Hindus believe that the ritual is symbolic of the cyclical nature of time, and that even the Gods themselves will eventually dissolve.
- *Navaratri* is a nine-night celebration of the Feminine Divine that occurs five times a year (the spring and fall celebrations being amongst the more widely celebrated). The most popularly worshiped manifestations of the Feminine Divine include Durga (the Mother Goddess), Saraswati (The Goddess of Knowledge, Speech, and the Arts) and Lakshmi (the Goddess of Health, Wealth, and



Prosperity). Many fasts and rituals associated with *Navaratri* are exclusive to women. The tenth night is known as *Dashera* and is marked with many festivities.

Seasonal Celebrations

- *Makara Sankranti/Uttarayana/Pongal* is one of the few solar holidays that Hindus celebrate, and is celebrated on January 14. It marks the transition of the Sun into Capricorn or *Makara rashi* on its celestial path. It also broadly coincides with the winter harvest in many parts of India. Hindus thank God for the bountiful harvest and may pay homage to Goddess Saraswati on this day, as well as to ancestors. *Pongal* is widely celebrated in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.
- *Holi* is a colorful festival that welcomes the arrival of spring and the harvests it brings. Holi also celebrates triumph over divisiveness and negativity. Many celebrate by tossing colored powders in the air and using dyed water to color each other. In the evening, some Hindus celebrate by lighting bonfires and eating festive foods. One of the largest festivals in the world, Holi is celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists.



Other Celebrations

- *Raksha Bandhan* is celebrated in August. It is a holiday that celebrates the bond between brothers and sisters. Sisters tie a decorative sacred thread or amulet called a *rakhi* on the right wrist of her brothers (often including distant cousins and friends considered honorary brothers) with her prayers for their protection and well-being while sweets are exchanged. In return, brothers give their sisters small tokens or gifts of appreciation.
- *Diwali/Deepavali*, celebrated in October/November, is one of the most celebrated Hindu festivals. Diwali commemorates the victory of good over evil. The word refers to rows of earthen lamps celebrants place around their homes. Hindus believe that the light from these lamps symbolizes the illumination within the individual that can overwhelm ignorance, represented by darkness.

Key Takeaways

- Hindu festivals are very diverse, and vary from region to region and tradition to tradition in commemoration of deities, seasons, and events.
- Diwali, the Festival of Lights, is one of the most widely celebrated Hindu festivals.