



Diwali FAQ

A guide for kids, families and educators



What is Diwali?

Diwali (say Di-Vah-Lee) is the festival of lights. The name comes from two words. **Deep** means light. **Avali** means row. So Diwali means "a row of lights."

It is also called Deepavali (say Dee-pah-va-lee), which is its Sanskrit name. Sikhs mark the same day as Bandi Chor Divas, which honors the Sikh struggle for freedom.

Diwali celebrates good winning over evil, light winning over darkness, knowledge winning over ignorance, and justice winning over inequality.

Who celebrates Diwali?

Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists have celebrated Diwali for about 2,500 years. It began in South Asia and is now celebrated in many other countries too. More than one billion people take part worldwide, in places like Nepal, Malaysia, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Britain, Canada and the United States.

Can anyone celebrate?

Yes. Diwali is for everyone. You do not have to celebrate a holiday in order to wish someone a happy one.

When is Diwali?

Diwali follows a lunar calendar, so the date changes every year. It falls in October or November, on the night of the new moon. That is the darkest night of the month, which is exactly the point. The festival of lights lands on the darkest night.

In 2026, Diwali falls on November 8. Because the date moves each year, please check it rather than assuming.

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What are the five days?

Day	Name	What families do
1	Dhanteras	Clean the house to welcome guests. Many families buy something new for good luck. Make snacks and sweets.
2	Choti Diwali	Choti means small. Decorate with rangoli, which are patterns made on the floor using flowers, colored powder, lentils, rice or sand. Hang up lights.
3	Diwali	The main day. Wear your finest clothes. Do a puja (prayer) at home or in a temple. Sing the Aarti song while holding a diya. Put a diya in every room. Receive blessings from elders, then gifts.
4	New Year	Many people treat this as the first day of the new year. It is a day to be grateful and to help people who have less.
5	Bhai Duj	Brother's Day. Siblings and cousins share a meal and play games together.

What can I say to someone who celebrates?

Say "Happy Diwali!" That is all it takes, and it means a lot to someone who is used to their holiday going unmentioned.

How can I join in if I have never celebrated before?

- Wish someone a happy Diwali on the day.
- Light a candle. Always ask a grownup for help first.
- Try the sweets. Look for ladoo, barfi, peda, gulab jamun, shakarpara and jalebi.
- Make rangoli using chalk, colored sand, rice or flower petals.
- Decorate a paper or clay diya.
- Give something to charity. Generosity is part of the holiday.
- Ask a question. Curiosity is welcome. Silence is what stings.



What is the story behind Diwali?

In much of Northern India, Diwali recalls a story called the Ramayana. Prince Ram was sent away to the forest for fourteen years. His wife Sita and his brother Lakshman went with him. A powerful ten-headed king named Ravana kidnapped Sita and took her to the island of Lanka. Sita cleverly dropped a trail of jewelry so she could be found.

Ram and Lakshman followed the trail and met Hanuman, the flying monkey king. His army built a bridge with help from all the animals of the kingdom. After a long battle, Ravana was defeated. When Ram and Sita finally traveled home to Ayodhya, the night was very dark. So everyone in the city lit oil lamps and placed them in rows to guide them home.

In Southern India, the story honors Lord Krishna's victory over the demon Narakasura instead. The story is different, but the theme is the same. Good wins over evil, and light shines through darkness.

Four things worth knowing

1. **Diwali is not only a Hindu holiday.** Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists observe it too, sometimes using different names.
2. **No two families celebrate the same way.** Region, faith and family all shape it. There is no one correct version.
3. **Not everyone uses fireworks.** Many families choose to celebrate without them to cut down on pollution.
4. **Do not put one child in charge of explaining it.** A student who celebrates may be happy to share, but only if they offer first.



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