



In Mountain View, California, thousands of oil lamps illuminate the night during Diwali, also called Deepavali from the Sanskrit meaning "row of lights." (© Shutterstock)

Americans celebrate the Hindu festival of Diwali

By
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Each fall — September, October and November in the United States — thousands of American Hindus celebrate one of Hinduism's most important festivals, [Diwali](#), or the Festival of Lights. The five-day holiday marks the triumph of good over evil, knowledge over ignorance and light over darkness as symbolized by the burning oil lamps called diyas.

“New beginnings, new endeavors and an opportunity to renew ties with family and friends” is what Diwali brings to Hindus, says Neeta Bhasin, a Diwali event organizer in New York. Many Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists also observe Diwali in accordance with their own traditions. Diwali takes place this year October 25–29.

Ritual



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A Diwali celebrant in Maryland offers prayers to Hindu deities at a local temple. Although rituals vary among the diverse Hindu population, many Diwali observers especially revere Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, both material and spiritual.

Prayer



(© Richard B. Levine/Alamy)

Like all Hindu festivals, spirituality lies at the center of Diwali. Guyanese-American participants pray and present offerings in the Hawan ceremony as part of Diwali celebrations in the Richmond Hill neighborhood of Queens in New York. The neighborhood of Richmond Hill is home to one of the largest populations in the Guyanese Hindu diaspora.

Tradition



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Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity who is widely revered as the god of beginnings and good fortune, also receives increased attention during Diwali.



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Diwali revelers customarily hold large family gatherings and offer traditional sweets to everyone who visits their homes.

On the fifth day of Diwali it's traditional for sisters to invite their brothers and their families for a meal. In return, brothers treat their sisters with gifts.

Celebration



(Diwali at Times Square)

Diwali at Times Square in New York City is the world's largest such celebration outside of India. It features free Bollywood concerts, dancing, fireworks and stalls that sell traditional Indian food and merchandise.



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