

Hinduism/Sikhism: Why is Diwali an important festival?

Hinduism: Diwali

Diwali is the Hindu 'festival of lights', which celebrates the New Year. It is India's most important holiday.

Diwali is a five day celebration. The fourth day of Diwali is the Hindu New Year.

Diwali celebrates the return of Rama and Sita, who were banished from their home by their father, the King.

People light hundreds of small oil lamps. This represents lighting the way home for Rama and Sita.

The festival of lights is held in honour of Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth and good fortune. Hindus pray to Lakshmi to bring them good luck in the coming year.

Lights are left burning all night so that Lakshmi may feel welcomed and enter.

During Diwali, gifts are exchanged, homes are decorated and oil lamps are lit. Fireworks are another big part of the celebrations.

Hinduism beliefs and worship

Most Hindus worship every day at home and have a shrine there. A shrine can be anything from a room, a small altar or simply pictures of statues. Family members often worship together.

The Hindu building for communal worship is called a Mandir (Hindu temple).

Worshippers repeat the names of their favourite gods, goddesses and repeat mantras. Water, fruit, flowers and incense are offered to the gods.

The river Ganges is one of many holy places.

Pilgrimage is important to Hindus.



Artefacts and symbols

Aum	Aum is the main symbol of Hinduism. It is the sound heard in meditation and is said to be the name most suited for God.
Vedas	The Vedas is the most ancient sacred text of the Hindu religion. It guides Hindus in their daily lives. Vedas means knowledge.
Khanda	The main symbol of Sikhism.
Guru Granth Sahib	The Sikh scripture. It is a collection of teachings and writings by Guru Nanak and other Gurus as well as Sikh, Hindu and Muslim saints.

Sikhism: Diwali

For Sikhs, Diwali is particularly important because it celebrates the release from prison of the sixth guru, Guru Hargobind, and 52 other princes with him in 1619.

On the day Guru Hargobind safely returned to the city of Amritsar, Hindus were celebrating Diwali. When he arrived in the city, Sikhs lit candles and lamps to celebrate his safe return.

It is known as the 'Day of Liberation'.

Houses and shops are decorated with small earthenware oil lamps called Diyas.

Sikhism beliefs and worship

Sikhs worship at home and in the Sikh temple called the Gurdwara. Visitors, irrespective of their religion, can expect shelter, comfort and food from all Gurdwaras.

There is one God. Sikhs practice meditation to remember God.

All are equal: men and women have the same rights and responsibilities.

Sikhs are supposed to work hard and live honestly.

Sikhs share with others and give to those who are less fortunate.

Key Vocabulary

avatar	A deity which comes down to earth in a human form, an animal form. Rama was an avatar of Vishnu, one of the three main gods of the Hindus.
moral	A lesson that can be learnt from a story or experience.
Guru	A spiritual teacher.
significance	The quality of being important.

