

# Diwali – Celebrating the Festival of Light

## What is Diwali?

Diwali is a religious celebration that originally came from India. It is celebrated by people of the Hindu, Sikh and Jain faith. Diwali is the Indian version of Matariki and it signifies the start of the new year. The dates of Diwali change each year (just like Matariki) depending on the position of the moon but it always lasts for 5 days and is always in October or November.

There are many different stories that are linked to Diwali and they all revolve around the same theme. Traditionally this is celebrating new beginnings, the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness. Some of the rituals done during Diwali are done to ward off bad or evil spirits to this day. Different regions in India have different stories about Diwali and celebrate slightly differently. Even so, Diwali is the biggest holiday in the Indian calendar and some think it dates back 2,500 years!

*Diwali means row of lights.*

## What happens at Diwali?

There are many different rituals and traditions during Diwali. Because it is the Festival of Light, people decorate their homes with lights and oil lamps. These are called diyas. The light is said to help the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, find her way into people's homes and bring good luck for the following year.

Diwali is also a people centred celebration. People exchange gifts during Diwali, have a meal together, enjoy fireworks displays and wear new clothes. Traditionally, it is also a time to clean and declutter your home in preparation for the year ahead. Another reason for this is to help encourage Lakshmi to come into your home as Indians believe that she only enters your home if it is clean.



## Rangoli Patterns

Rangoli patterns are another part of Diwali festivals. Rangoli patterns are made on the floor out of coloured rice, flour, sand and flower petals. These brightly coloured patterns are another way to welcome Lakshmi and people try to create exciting and vibrant rangoli patterns to impress her. These traditional patterns are passed from generation to generation and are an important part of celebrating Diwali. Rangoli patterns vary by region in India and are known by different names.

Although the actual patterns of the Rangoli can vary a lot, some common symbols that are found in them are lotus flowers, peacocks, mangos, feathers and fish. They are often quite symmetrical and geometric in design. The main component in a Rangoli pattern is it being super colourful!



## The 5 days of Diwali

Diwali is a 5 day celebration. Just like in western culture of having the 12 days of Christmas, Diwali has the 5 days of Diwali with each day having something special attached to it. The five days are:

**Day 1:** Buying jewellery (gold or silver) is to help you have future success.

**Day 2:** Known as Narak Chaturdasi is when homes are lit up with 14 diyas to ward off evil spirits.

**Day 3:** This is when Diwali is actually celebrated. On this day, 21 diyas are lit.

**Day 4:** A remembrance day for Lord Krishna who is said to have lifted a hill to shelter people from heavy rain.

**Day 5:** The final day observes Bhai Dooj which is a traditional day to strengthen the relationship between brothers and sisters.

### How is Diwali celebrated in New Zealand?

Each year, Auckland hosts one of the largest Diwali celebrations in New Zealand. Created by the Auckland Council in conjunction with the Asia New Zealand Foundation, more than 60,000 people attended the event in its first year. The event includes dance performances, Indian delicacies, a fireworks display and a bright and colourful atmosphere. In 2020, this event spanned over three weeks!

Most other main centres around New Zealand also host a Diwali festival. This might include fireworks, fairs, performances, Indian cuisine and speciality foods.



### What Will You Do to Celebrate Diwali?