

Diwali is a festival of light which originated in South Asia and is celebrated over five days. The dates change every year, but it is always celebrated in October or November and is now celebrated around the world.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. to symbolise
2. a bank holiday
3. valuables
4. prosperity
5. a demon
6. a victory
7. a battle
8. a doughnut

Definition

- a. a fight between different groups
- b. a small, fried cake
- c. an official holiday when most shops are closed
- d. an evil spirit
- e. to represent or stand for something
- f. having more than enough money for a good life
- g. objects that are worth a lot of money
- h. when you win a fight or competition

Diwali

Diwali comes from the word *deepavali*, which means ‘rows of lighted lamps’. During the festival, these lamps, called *diyas*, are used everywhere. They symbolise the victory of light over darkness, or good over evil.

Diwali is celebrated differently in different regions and by different religions and is a bank holiday in many countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Singapore, Malaysia, Mauritius, Fiji, Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. It is often considered a Hindu festival, but in fact it is also celebrated by Sikhs, Jains and Newari Buddhists.

Here are some of the things that happen during the five days of Diwali.

Day One – Dhanteras, or Day of Fortune

The first day has a focus on fortune, both good luck and money or valuables. People may wash money to show that they intend to use it to do good in the world. It is also a day for helping people who are not as well off.

It is a lucky day for buying gold and silver and other metals, so people often buy jewellery or cars, or anything made of metal. It is estimated that last year Indians spent about \$3.9 billion during Diwali.

People also make sure that their houses are clean, ready to welcome in Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth and Prosperity, in the evening.

Day Two – Naraka Chaturdashi

According to Hindu stories, the demon Narakasura was killed on this day. The day is all about getting rid of anything bad. People get up early and wash and put on clean or new clothes.

Afterwards, they will celebrate by having a special breakfast with their friends and family. This day, also known as Chhoti Diwali, is a day for visiting friends, business associates and relatives, and for exchanging gifts.

Day Three – Diwali

In most regions, this is the most important day of the festival. It is the last day of the year in many regions of India. The story goes that on this day, Lord Rama rescued his wife, Sita, from the demon Ravana. Candles are lit to celebrate his victory, and to light his way home after the battle. In the evening, people may set off fireworks.

Day Four – Annakut

Annakut means 'mountain of food'. Hindus prepare a great deal of food and take it to the temple to celebrate the beginning of the new year.

Food is important throughout the period of Diwali, especially traditional sweet treats such as *gulab jamun* (a very sweet deep-fried doughnut), *kheer* (a creamy dessert made with rice) or *barfi* (a sweet made with condensed milk and sugar).

Day Five – Bhai Dhoj

This is the last day of Diwali, and it also sometimes celebrates the relationship between brother and sister. Brothers may visit their married sisters' homes, and they will take gifts.

A universal symbol

Diwali is celebrated by millions of people in India and across the world. The festival marks different historical events and stories for each faith that celebrates it, but for all the faiths it symbolises the victory of good over evil, and darkness over light, which means something to all of us.

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. The lamps (<i>diya</i>) symbolise the beginning of winter.	True	False
2. Diwali is only celebrated by Hindus.	True	False
3. Shopping is an important part of Diwali.	True	False
4. On Naraka Chaturdashi, people wash after a large breakfast.	True	False
5. Day Three of Diwali is not always the most important day of the festival.	True	False
6. People only eat sweet foods on Day Four of the festival.	True	False

Task 2

Write a number (1–5) to write the number of the day these events happen.

- The year ends.
- People spend a lot of money.
- Relatives take presents to each other.
- People put on brand-new clothes.
- The new year begins.

Discussion

What is the most important festival in your country? What do you do to celebrate?

Answers

Preparation task

1. e
2. c
3. g
4. f
5. d
6. h
7. a
8. b

Task 1

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True
6. False

Task 2

- | | |
|---|--|
| 3 | The year ends. |
| 1 | People spend a lot of money. |
| 5 | Relatives take presents to each other. |
| 2 | People put on brand-new clothes. |
| 4 | The new year begins. |