



Significant Times and Dates

Festivals

Festivals and events in Hinduism are often marked by a great variety of activities, including: temple visits, prayer, meditation, fasting, feasts, charity work and donations, and processions.

There are many holy days which are celebrated or recognized. The dates for each of the most commonly recognized holy days will vary from year to year because dates are calculated on the lunar and solar astronomical alignments. *Yugas* are cosmic cycles which last 4,320,000,000 years. There are four *yugas*, each of which moves from order to progressively worse disorder. Hindus believe we are in the most disordered of the *yugas*, the *Kali Yuga*. The *Kali Yuga* is thought to have begun in 3102 BCE.

Specific dates of many Hindu festivals and events vary, given that they follow the lunar calendar. There are an enormous number of significant times, dates, and events within Hinduism. Some of these special dates and events follow.

Diwali/Divali (Deepawali) is a four-day celebration, called the Festival of Lights, which occurs in October or November each year. *Diwali* celebrations include

music, dancing, prayer, and food. Stories from the *Ramayana* are recounted at *Diwali*. It is one of the most widely celebrated Hindu festivals. *Diwali* has many meanings, the most important being the celebration of the triumph of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and happiness over suffering.



Figure 25: Diwali Decor

Sharad Navratri is a nine-night period of fasting and worship. *Vaishnavites* honour Lord Ram, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu. *Shaktas* worship nine forms of the Divine Feminine *Shakti*.

Dussehra (Vijay Dashami) occurs in September or October each year and celebrates the stories of Rama, as found in the *Ramayana*, and the victory of good over evil. For the *Shakti* worshippers, it is the victory of Ma Durga over the demon Mahishasura.

Gudi Padwa is considered by some Hindus to mark the beginning of the year, in remembrance of Brahma's world creation. It typically occurs in March. It is also the beginning of the *Chaitra* or Spring *Navaratri*.

Holi (Spring Festival) marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring, celebrating the god Vishnu.



Figure 26: Sea of Colour (Festival of Colour, Utah 2012)



Figure 27: Celebrating *Holi*, India

Janamashanti (Birth of Lord Krishna) is an annual festival that celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna. It usually falls in August or September of each year.

Kumbh Mela is thought to be the largest festival in the world. Millions of Hindus participate in *Kumbh Mela*. Occurring every 12 years, it is a mass pilgrimage involving ritual purifications in the River Ganga. The *Kumbh Mela* festival is held once every 12 years and rotates locations amongst Allahabad, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain.

Koovagam Festival is a festival that takes place at the Koothandavar Temple dedicated to Aravan (Koothandavar, the Tamil area of India that is popular among the Hindu transgender community). It usually falls in the April/May period.

Maha Shivaratri is celebrated annually and honours the god Shiva. It is a major festival that marks the remembrance of "overcoming darkness and ignorance" in life and the world. Typically, it falls in February or March of each year.

Chaitra Navaratri involves nine days of fasting and worship of *Rama Navami/Ram Navan-Li* (Birth of Lord Rama) to commemorate the birth of Rama. It occurs in March.

Thai Pongal (Day of Thanksgiving) is a 4-day Tamil harvest festival usually celebrated in January.

The Hindu Calendar

Hindu calendars were developed in India to measure time since the early days of the religion. Over the years, the calendar has been revised and changed as India has changed. Today, there are several variations of the Hindu calendar in use. Each calendar is specific to the diverse regions of the country. Though each regional version of the Hindu calendar has characteristics that make them unique, they all share many similarities including the same names for the twelve months of the calendars. As well, Hindu calendars are both solar and lunisolar calendars, and include aspects related to astronomy and religion.



Figure 28: Hindu Perpetual Calendar

Calendar of Hindu Holy Days					
Holiday	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Navaratri	September 21–29	October 9–18	September 29–October 7	October 17–24	October 7–14
Dusshera	September 30	October 19	October 8	October 25	October 14
<i>Diwali</i>	October 19	November 7	October 27	November 14	November 4

Notes