

Exploring Diwali

This article is part of a series this year celebrating the key religious festivals of the main religions.

What is Diwali?

Diwali (*pronounced di-va-li*) marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year. It is the most popular of all the festivals from South Asia and is also an occasion for celebration by Jains and Sikhs. Diwali starts on 3rd November this year and continues for five days. The festival of Diwali - also known as the 'festival of lights' - celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, and knowledge over ignorance. For many Indians, the festival honours Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

What happens during Diwali?

Diwali is known as the 'festival of lights' because houses, shops and public places are decorated with small earthenware oil lamps called *diyas*. These lamps, which are traditionally fuelled by mustard oil, are placed in rows in windows, doors and outside buildings to decorate them. The lamps are lit to help the goddess Lakshmi find her way into people's homes. In India, oil lamps are often floated across the River Ganges - it is regarded as a good omen if the lamp manages to get all the way across.

Hindus will leave the windows and doors of their houses open so that Lakshmi can come in. Rangoli patterns - colourful designs made on the floor near the entrance to a house to welcome guests - are drawn on the floors. The most popular rangoli is the lotus flower, as images of Lakshmi traditionally show her either holding a lotus or sitting on one.

In Britain, as in India, Diwali is a time for thoroughly spring cleaning homes, wearing new clothes and most importantly, decorating buildings with fancy lights. There is much feasting and celebration, with the festival being a children's favourite, due to the lights, fireworks and sweets involved.

Diwali Celebrations in Leicester are some of the biggest outside of India, with up to 35,000 people attending the switch on of the

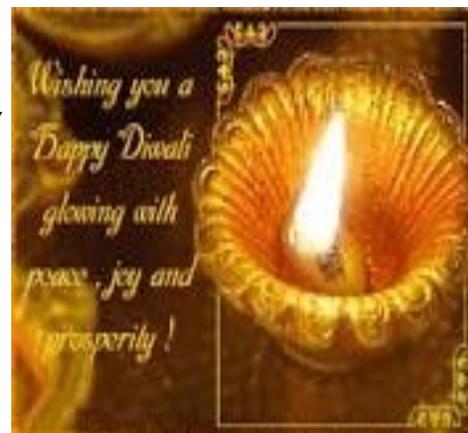
lights and even more attending Diwali day itself in the heart of the city's Asian community.

Did you know?

- There are around 900 million Hindus worldwide, with 80% of the Indian population regarding themselves as Hindu.
- Hinduism is closely associated with other Indian religions - Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism
- 1% of the UK population identified themselves as Hindus in the latest census, mainly living in London or Leicester
- Hinduism originated around the Indus Valley (in modern day Pakistan)
- Most Hindus believe in a Supreme God
- Unlike most other religions, Hinduism has no single founder, no single scripture, and no commonly agreed set of teachings
- Hindus believe that existence is a cycle of birth, death and rebirth governed by Karma
- Hindus celebrate many holy days, with Diwali being the best known.

Read our earlier article in the series on Rosh Hashanah by clicking [here](#)

The Chaplaincy Team



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Prayer Diary

October 2013

Week 4

We give thanks in our prayers for the work of:

- NATS
- Aviation Shop
- Cathay Pacific
- Cargo Centre
- SSP UK

Daily Prayers (Christian) take place every day at 8.30am in T1 Prayer Room

(and at many other times and places too)

Friday Jumma Prayers (Islamic) are held in T3 Prayer Room

1300 GMT (Winter)
and 1330 BST (Summer)