India

By Tom Kirvan

Diwali

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

DIWALI ILLUMINATES HEARTS, HOMES IN INDIA EACH YEAR

Diwali, the Festival of Lights, is India's most significant and spectacular celebration, symbolizing the spiritual victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil. This year, the five-day festival runs from Friday, Nov. 6 through Tuesday, Nov. 10.

Observed by millions of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists worldwide, the festival transforms the Indian subcontinent into a luminous blend of flickering clay lamps (diyas), vibrant street markets, and spectacular fireworks. Beyond its deep religious roots, Diwali is a multi-faceted phenomenon that shapes India's economy, defines its seasonal geography, and showcases the country's rich cultural diversity.

Diwali's origins are tied to ancient agrarian harvest festivals, but its mythological narrative varies beautifully across India's diverse regions. Despite these varied narratives, the core theme remains universal: the inevitable triumph of righteousness.

Distinctive Features of the Celebration

The festival spans five distinct days, each carrying its own ritual significance:

1. **Dhanteras:** The grand opening dedicated to prosperity. Families meticulously clean their homes and purchase gold, silver, or new kitchen utensils to welcome good fortune.
2. **Naraka Chaturdashi (Chhoti Diwali):** A day focused on elimination of the old, characterized by early morning ritual oil baths and the creation of intricate rangoli (geometric floor patterns made of colored powders, rice, or flower petals) at doorsteps.
3. **Lakshmi Puja:** The pinnacle day of the festival on which families gather in their finest traditional attire to worship Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and Ganesha, the remover of obstacles. Homes are entirely illuminated and doors are left open to welcome the deity.

AN INDIAN CONNECTIONS FOR PRIMERUS MEMBERS

Primerus has a member law firm in India, **Sarthak Advocates & Solicitors**, located in New Delhi, specializing in energy; dispute resolution (litigation and arbitration); education and training; investments; mergers & acquisitions; insolvency and restructuring; ESG, data protection, and human rights; cross-border transactions across Asia, Europe, Africa, and the U.S.; regulatory advisory work for governments, regulators, and global institutions; and more.

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4. **Govardhan Puja/Padwa:** Celebrating the bond between husband and wife, or honoring Lord Krishna's protection of herders and nature.
5. **Bhai Dooj:** A beautiful finale celebrating the lifelong bond between brothers and sisters.

A unique cultural cornerstone of Diwali is Mithai (festive sweets). Millions of boxes of sweet treats are exchanged among families, friends, and business associates as tokens of love and goodwill.

Diwali takes place between mid-October and mid-November, precisely tracking with the Hindu lunar calendar month of Kartika. Geographically, this aligns with the transition from the humid monsoon season to the crisp, cooler autumn air.

The geography of the festival dictates its regional flavors. In coastal Goa, giant paper-effigies of the demon Narakasura are filled with firecrackers and burned at dawn. In Varanasi, the festival merges with the holy Ganges River, where thousands of floating lamps create a glittering galaxy on the water. However, the geographic convergence of autumn weather patterns, agricultural stubble burning, and heavy firecracker usage has increasingly sparked critical environmental dialogues, driving a modern shift toward eco-friendly, "green" Diwali celebrations.

Economically, Diwali is the ultimate engine of India's retail and commercial sectors, akin to the Thanksgiving-to-Christmas shopping season in the West. It accounts for a massive share of annual consumer spending. Businesses offer their highest discounts of the year, driving unprecedented sales in electronics, automobiles, real estate, and apparel.

The jewelry industry experiences its sharpest surge due to Dhanteras, as India remains one of the world's largest consumers of gold. Beyond corporate retail, Diwali serves as a critical lifeline for millions of rural artisans, potters, and street vendors who manufacture hand-woven textiles, decorative lights, and millions of biodegradable clay diyas.

5 Must-See Diwali Attractions

1. **The Golden Temple (Amritsar, Punjab):** Celebrated as "Bandi Chhor Divas," the entire architectural marvel is draped in thousands of golden lights. The reflection of brilliant fireworks over the sacred Sarovar (holy pool) surrounding the illuminated temple creates a breathtaking, ethereal visual.
2. **Dev Deepawali in Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh):** Occurring fifteen days after Diwali on the full moon night, the steps of the Ganges River are illuminated by more than a million earthen lamps. The evening Aarti ceremony, accompanied by rhythmic chanting and conch shells, transforms the river into a surreal sea of fire.
3. **The Illumination of Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh):** As the mythological birthplace of Lord Rama's Diwali, the city regularly breaks world records by lighting hundreds of thousands of diyas simultaneously along the banks of the Saryu River, creating an unforgettable, luminous landscape.
4. **Jaipur's Festive Markets (Rajasthan):** The famous "Pink City" trades its daytime hue for a glowing neon spectacle. Entire markets, including Johari Bazaar and Nehru Bazaar, compete in a government-sponsored contest for the most creatively illuminated streets, accompanied by traditional Rajasthani folk music.
5. **Kolkata's Kali Puja (West Bengal):** While most of India worships Goddess Lakshmi, Kolkata celebrates Diwali by honoring Goddess Kali – the fierce destroyer of evil. Massive, intricately designed temporary temples house spectacular idols of the goddess, offering a uniquely high-energy, spiritual experience.

Image credit: Abdul Munaff (2018 November 12). *Hyderabad, Telangana, India – Hindu devotees of Hindu Deity Lord Shiva light up oil lamps during a maha pooja ceremony held during Diwali* [Photograph]. Shutterstock. Retrieved November 2, 2026 from Shutterstock