

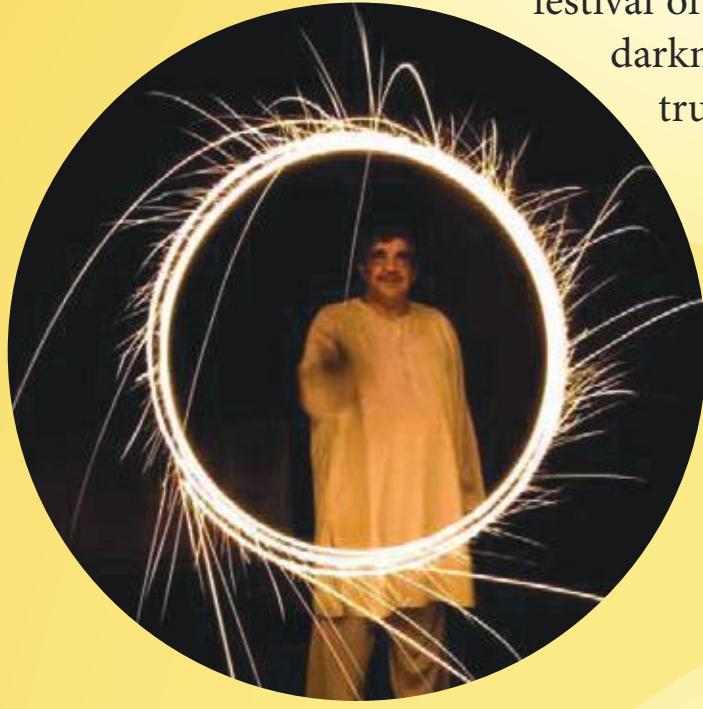
# FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

## Diwali

OCTOBER OR NOVEMBER

Diwali is an ancient South Asian festival important in different ways in the Hindu, Sikh and Jain religions. In the Hindu tradition, Diwali commemorates the return of Rama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, from his 14-year exile. For Sikhs, Diwali celebrates the return of the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Ji, from captivity. The Jains celebrate Diwali as the Nirvana of Lord Mahavira, who established the dharma as they follow it.

Diwali is celebrated in the Hindu month of Kartik, sometime in October or November, depending on the year. Although Diwali is celebrated in various ways, it has a similar spiritual meaning for all. The name "Diwali" originates from the word "deepavali" which means "row of lights." Diwali is a festival of lights that celebrates light over darkness, love over hatred and truth over untruth.



## Hanukkah

8 DAYS IN NOVEMBER OR DECEMBER

Hanukkah is the Jewish festival of lights. It starts on the 25th day of the month of Kislev according to the Jewish calendar, sometime in November or December, and lasts for 8 days. The festival commemorates the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem by a group of Jews after their foreign rulers had desecrated it. When they entered the temple, the Jews found only enough oil to light the temple for 1 day, but the oil miraculously burned for 8 days.



### DIWALI TRADITIONS

Diwali celebrations include fireworks, lighting candles around the home and exchanging gifts.

## Kwanzaa

DECEMBER 26TH – JANUARY 1ST

Kwanzaa is a week-long holiday celebrated throughout the world honoring African heritage. It was created in 1966 by African-American scholar and social activist Maulana Karenga. Kwanzaa was created in order to help African-Americans connect with their African heritage, and as a symbol of Pan-Africanism. The name Kwanzaa is derived from the Swahili phrase "madunda ya kwanza," which means "first fruits."

Maulana Karenga's latest interpretation of Kwanzaa emphasizes that while various people have different holiday traditions, all people can share in the celebration of our common humanity, stating that, "Any particular message that is good for a particular people, if it is human in its content and ethical in its grounding, speaks not just to that people, it speaks to the world."



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## Winter Solstice

DECEMBER 21ST

Winter Solstice is the shortest day of the year in the Northern hemisphere. It is the day when there is the least sunlight and the first day of winter. This festival celebrates the return of the light and the fact that the days will begin to get longer. Winter Solstice was celebrated in ancient Rome and Britain before Christianity, and many Winter Solstice traditions have been integrated into modern celebrations of Christmas.



### WINTER SOLSTICE TRADITIONS

During this mid-winter festival, people bring tree branches and mistletoe into their houses to celebrate continuing life. People put up lights or burn fires to bring light into the darkness of the season. Friends get together to eat and exchange gifts, and large community celebrations are held.

## Shab-E Yalda

WINTER SOLSTICE

Shab-e Yalda is a celebration of the longest night of the year for many people from Iran, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Tajikistan and Turkey (by Kurds and Azeris). The date falls on December 20, 21 or 22 (night of the Winter solstice.)



### SHAB-E YALDA TRADITIONS

Friends and family gather to eat, drink and read poetry until late in the night. Fruits and nuts are eaten, especially red fruit like pomegranates and watermelons whose colour symbolizes the dawn and glow of life.



## Christmas

DECEMBER 25TH

According to Christian tradition, Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. Many non-Christians also celebrate Christmas as a time of peace and generosity.

### KWANZAA TRADITIONS

During Kwanzaa, participants light a kinara or candle holder and reflect on the seven principles of: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith).

### CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

Christmas is celebrated in different ways in many countries around the world. In Columbia, for example, Christmas is a religious holiday marked by 9 days of prayer. In other countries, people celebrate Christmas by attending church, singing religious or non-religious Christmas carols, and getting together with family and friends. Many people exchange gifts and decorate their homes and businesses with trees and lights. In the Northern Hemisphere, Christmas is a winter holiday, and snowmen, snowflakes and sleigh rides are common Christmas traditions. In some countries such as Australia, however, Christmas takes place in the middle of summer.

### FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS SOURCES

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Vancouver Celebrates Diwali: [www.vandiwali.ca](http://www.vandiwali.ca)

Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwanzaa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwanzaa) & [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter\\_solstice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter_solstice)