

What do you know about Diwali? It's one of the biggest events in the Indian calendar. And that means big celebrations in multicultural cities in Britain, too. Find out all about the festival and how it is celebrated in Britain.

An Indian festival

Did you know that Diwali is one of the biggest events in the Indian calendar? It is celebrated around the world by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. In London, Birmingham, Belfast, Edinburgh, Leicester and other multicultural cities in Britain, British Asians celebrate Diwali. Celebrations include firework displays, Diwali lanterns, music, dancing, plays, as well as delicious traditional Indian food and sweets.

What does Diwali mean?

Diwali (or Deepavali) is also known as the Festival of Light. The word Diwali comes from the Sanskrit language and means 'row of lamps'. In South Asia, homes, shops and streets are decorated with small oil lamps called diyas. During Diwali, patterns, called rangoli, are drawn on floors. The lotus flower is one of the most popular patterns to draw. Diwali is celebrated every year on the darkest night of the month in October or November. The exact date changes every year to coincide with the new moon. With the new moon Diwali marks a new beginning and for many people it symbolises joy, love, reflection, resolution, forgiveness, light and knowledge. Diwali is traditionally a time for cleaning your home, decorating your house with lights and candles, wearing new clothes, painting henna tattoos on hands, giving presents, and getting together with family and friends.

Leicester and London

If you have ever visited London, the capital of England, you will know that it is a truly multicultural city where people of different ethnic groups and religions live, work, study and go to school. Depending on the time of year you can join in with celebrations for Christmas, Eid or Diwali in London's Trafalgar Square. Diwali is celebrated every year in this world-famous square with Bhangra dancing around the fountains, vegetarian food sold at stalls, and free performances of South Asian contemporary and classical music and dance. Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, helps to organise the annual event. He describes Diwali in Trafalgar Square as 'a magical celebration'.

Leicester, in the north of England, has one of the most important Diwali celebrations outside of India. The Festival of Light in Leicester starts with a display of thousands of lights along Belgrave Road, also known as 'The Golden Mile'. There is Bollywood singing and dancing. You can go late-night shopping and restaurants stay open late too. All this is followed by spectacular fireworks. Tourists, visitors and local residents are all welcome to enjoy the fun! Leicester's Asian community say that this is the best (as well as the biggest!) Diwali celebration outside of India.

#HappyDiwali

Is Diwali all about tradition? These days many people in the UK celebrate the Festival of Light with electric fairy lights instead of old-fashioned oil lamps. Instead of traditional gold and silver gifts, it is common to give money to put towards electronic gifts or iTunes credits. Shopping has changed too. Now many people buy their Diwali presents online rather than visiting a shop. Family and friends can communicate easily via social media and #HappyDiwali tweets spread the message of hope and light around the world.

Happy Diwali!