

Spring! Colours! Love! Holi is a time to play and laugh, forget and forgive.

Holi is the ancient Hindu festival of colours and love. It is celebrated in India and Nepal and many parts of South Asia. There are lots of Holi celebrations in the UK, organised by the large British-Hindu community. Recently, Holi has also inspired non-religious celebrations in Europe and North America, and its popularity is growing.

The festival of colour

Holi marks the beginning of spring. It is a celebration of good winning over evil, and a time to give thanks for the good harvest. The dates change each year according to the full moon, but it is normally in March and sometimes in late February. People go outside and throw coloured paint powder at each other. It does not matter if you are rich, poor, old or young – everyone can throw paint and everyone can get messy! There is a spirit of togetherness and equality. It is a time to forgive people and repair broken relationships, as well as meet with other people, play and have fun.

Traditional Holi

Traditional Holi celebrations start the night before the throwing of colours. People meet around a bonfire and pray that evil will be destroyed, in the same way that the demon Holika was burnt in a fire, according to the legend. The next day is the chaotic and noisy festival of colours. People chase each other and throw coloured paint powder over each other. There is music and drumming, and people run and laugh in the streets and parks. Holi is celebrated outside.

Other Holi events in the UK

Holi celebrations happened as early as the fourth century. It is thousands of years old! But recently, Holi-themed events have become popular with a new generation in Europe and North America. Every year, bigger and bigger crowds of people go to Holi events in London and all over the country, arriving dressed in white T-shirts and returning covered from head to toe in bright colours. There are paint-throwing parties at music festivals and races like the five-kilometre 'Colour Run', which is celebrated in more than 35 different countries. In the UK, restaurants and cultural organisations also offer their own Holi celebrations, with special menus, Indian music and dance.

Know your festival

Many thousands of people in the UK will go to Holi events this year, attracted by the bright colours and playful atmosphere. Holi has a friendly and inclusive spirit, so non-Hindus are often welcomed to join the celebrations. It is always good to know about the origins and meaning of the festival though, even if you do not identify as Hindu. So, as well as being a fun festival and your photos looking great on Instagram, it's good to learn what it's all about and where it comes from.