**Diwali**

Diwali or Deepawali, known as the ‘festival of lights,’ is usually celebrated in October or November, and is on October 24 this year. Lasting over five days, the holiday is celebrated by millions of Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs worldwide. The name of this festival is derived from ‘avali,’ which means ‘row,’ and ‘deepa,’ meaning ‘clay lamps.’ When merged, these words mean ‘a row of lights.’ For this reason, lights are symbolic of this festival and Indians go overboard with sparklers and fireworks to fuel the inner light that spiritually protects them from the darkness.

## History of Diwali:

The beauty of Diwali is that it is not limited to the celebration of just one historical event. Each religion remembers different stories and historical events behind it. Hindus honor the return of their religious deities Sita and Rama to Ayodhya, following an exile of 14 years. The day when Goddess Mother Durga destroyed the demon Mahisha is also celebrated. The festival of lights also honors the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the form of Ramachandra.

Sikhs also celebrate the release of their sixth guru, Hargobind Singh, from prison in 1619. Remarkably, the foundation stone of the holiest place for Sikhs, the Golden Temple of Amritsar, was embedded in 1577 on Diwali. For Jains, Lord Mahavira, the founder of their religion, called Jainism, reached the state of Nirvana or Moksha on the occasion of Diwali.

Regardless of the events or religion surrounding it, Diwali brings with it happy tidings and a promise of a better tomorrow. People zealously light lamps in their houses and throw grand feasts to celebrate happiness, good times, and good fortune. Purity, cleanliness, and brightness are all synonymous with Diwali. The new harvest and new financial year in the business community also begins on this occasion.

Diwali festivities last five days. On the first day, people clean their houses and buy kitchen utensils or gold as a sign of good fortune. On the second day, colorful decorations and clay lamps are furnished. Day three, the main day of Diwali, brings families together for Lakshmi pooja, during which they praise the Goddess Lakshmi and host grand dinners. The same festivities then continue on days four and five, with the exchange of gifts and welcoming families and friends into homes.