

My Diwali

A Hindu Festival of Lights

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Diwali is one of the biggest and brightest Hindu holidays. It is also known as the festival of lights. It is celebrated in late October or November, and it is the beginning of the Hindu New Year. Many people in Guyana, where I grew up, celebrate Diwali.

For the festival of Diwali it is important to clean your house and yard, making your home presentable to guests and family. However, this is a ritual whose true purpose is to welcome the

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Goddess Lakshmi, who brings spiritual and material prosperity.

Diwali is celebrated by lighting small lamps called diyas.

They are usually arranged in rows, for example, along the driveway and other entranceways to

the house. These patterns are supposed to show Lakshmi the way into your home. The lamps can be made of clay or mud.



Small lamps, called diyas, can be made of mud or clay.



People play with sparklers on Diwali, also known as the festival of lights.

Growing up in Guyana, we were poor and could not afford to buy the commercially made diyas. The ones I saw at the market, I remember as being so beautiful, and when we went there I would stay for hours admiring all the different types of diyas. The colors were bright orange, yellow, and red.

Many times I sat with my grandmother in the weeks before Diwali, and we would make our own diyas out of mud. I remember we would go to the river with my brothers and sisters to dig the mud. When we returned home, we would knead the mud into little bowls that looked like lamps. These were our homemade diyas. We put them in the sun to dry. After several days, they were ready to be lit up for Diwali. Even though the mud diyas were not all perfect like the clay ones, the mud ones were all different sizes and shapes. Inside the diyas we would put a wick and some ghee, a type of oil we made out of cows' milk. Then our homemade diyas could be lit up and set down for the celebration.

On the day of Diwali everyone cooks vegetarian. Many sweet foods are prepared and given as presents in goody bags. My mom would cook up

lots of great food even though we did not have a great deal of money to spare. My sisters and brothers made homemade sparklers out of steel wool. The family would also dress up in our best clothes to go and visit our grandmother. She was

Diwali signifies the renewal of life.

also a great cook, so this became a highlight of Diwali for me. On the way to my grandmother's, my family and I would stop and

admire all the decorations that we saw honoring the celebration of Diwali.

Diwali signifies the renewal of life. You might say that it is the equivalent of Christmas for Hindus. Although I am actually not Hindu, many of my relatives and some family members do practice the Hindu religion. I have many fond memories of this holiday from my childhood in Guyana.



Sue Byman was born in Guyana, South America, and now lives and works in the U.S. She started out as a home health aide and is presently a rehabilitation technician. Sue attends Mercy Learning Center in Bridgeport, CT, where she plans to enroll in the National External Diploma Program and continue her studies. She would like to thank everyone who has helped her so far.



Extend Your Knowledge

Label the map. Name the continent and as many of the countries as you can. Look up the names of the countries you can't identify.

Use the internet to learn more about the history of Guyana. What European country colonized it? What religion did they bring? What does it mean to "colonize" another country? What is the story of how Hindus came to live there?

Four major world religions are discussed in the four articles on pp. 34-39. Each article focuses on one holiday. What are the four religions? What do these holidays have in common?

Write about a holiday that matters to you. Compare and contrast your holiday with those of these writers. Use phrases like "similarly" and "in contrast."