

THE HOLI FESTIVAL IN INDIA

The Holi festival commemorates the victory of good over evil, brought about by the **burning** (brûler) and destruction of the demoness named Holika. This was enabled through **unwavering** (inébranlable) devotion to the Hindu god of preservation, Lord Vishnu.

Holi got its name as the "Festival of Colors" from Lord Krishna, a reincarnation of Lord Vishnu, who liked to play **pranks** (farces) on the village girls **by drenching** (en trempant) them in water and colors.

The festival marks the end of winter and the abundance of the upcoming spring **harvest** (récolte) season.

When is Holi Celebrated?

The day after the full moon in March each year. In 2021, Holi will be celebrated on March 28 . The festival takes place a day earlier in West Bengal and Odisha. In addition, in some parts of India festivities begin a week or so earlier.

Where is Holi Celebrated?

Holi celebrations take place in most areas of India. However, they're more exuberant in some places than others. Traditional Holi celebrations are the biggest at Mathura and Vrindavan, four hours from Delhi. However, **safety issues** (problèmes de sécurité) are a concern for women there, due to the **rowdy behavior** (comportement bruyant) of many local men, so it's best to travel as part of a guided group tour.

How is Holi Celebrated?

People spend the day **smearing** (barbouiller) colored powder all over each other's faces, throwing colored water at each other, having parties, and dancing under water **sprinklers** (arroseurs). *Bhang* (a paste made from cannabis plants) is also traditionally consumed during the celebrations.

Special Holi events with music, rain dances, and colors are organized in large cities across India -- particularly in Delhi and Mumbai. It's possible to celebrate Holi with a local Indian family in Delhi and in Jaipur.

What Rituals are Performed?

The emphasis of Holi rituals is on the burning of demoness Holika. On the **eve** (veille) of Holi, large **bonfires** (feux de joie) are lit to mark occasion. This is known as Holika Dahan. As well as performing a special *puja*, people sing and dance around the fire, and walk around it three times.

The burning of Holika is mentioned in the Hindu text, the *Narada Purana*. Apparently, Holika's brother demon King Hiranyakashyap instructed her to burn his son, Prahlad, because he followed Lord Vishnu and didn't **worship** (adorer) him. Holika sat with Prahlad in her **lap** (genoux), in the burning fire, because it was thought that no fire could **harm** (blesser) her. However, due to his devotion to Lord Vishnu who protected him, Prahlad survived and Holika was **charred** (carbonisé, brûlé) to death.

Unlike (contrairement à) most other festivals in India, there aren't any religious rituals to be performed on the main day of Holi. It's simply a day for having fun!

Holi in Odisha and West Bengal

Similar to Holi, the Dol Jatra celebrations in West Bengal and Odisha are dedicated to Lord Krishna.

However, the mythology is different. The festival celebrates the love that Krishna is believed to have expressed to Radha on that day. Idols of Radha and Krishna are carried around in procession on specially decorated palanquins. The idols are also smeared with colored powder. Of course, colors are thrown at people on the streets too! Festivities actually begin six days beforehand, on Phagu Dashami.

What to Expect During the Celebrations

Holi is a very carefree festival that's great fun to participate in if you don't mind getting **wet** (mouillé) and dirty. You'll end up saturated in water, with color all over your skin and clothes. Some of it doesn't wash out easily, so be sure to wear old clothes. It's also a good idea **to rub** (frotter) hair oil or coconut oil into your skin **beforehand** (à l'avance), to prevent the color from absorbing.

Holi Safety Information

As Holi provides an opportunity **to disregard** (ignorer) social norms, males commonly take it too far and act disrespectfully. Single women should avoid going out alone in public places during Holi, as **inebriated** (en état d'ébriété) young Indian guys often pose a safety **threat** (menace) . These males, who have consumed excessive amounts of *bhang* and other intoxicants, will

inappropriately touch women and make a nuisance of themselves. They are usually in groups and can be very aggressive. Incidents of **rape** (viol) also do occur, which makes it important to take proper care during Holi.

If you plan on going out into the streets do so early in the morning. Be back in your hotel by midday before the men get too inebriated. Expect to have colored powder and water rubbed and thrown onto your face, mouth and ears. Keep your mouth shut and protect your eyes as much as possible.

Places and Ways to Celebrate Holi in India

Barsana: Holi with Sticks (bâtons)

The women of Barsana and Nandgaon villages near Mathura beat up men with sticks, in what's known as Lathmar Holi celebrations. Unfortunately, this event isn't recommended for solo female travelers due to the disgusting behavior of men, who continue to go around molesting women. It takes place in the week before the main day of Holi. The following day, the celebrations move to Nandgaon village. Sweets are thrown around and spiritual songs related to Radha and Krishna are sung.

Mathura and Vrindavan: Traditional Holi

Holi celebrations get underway at the end of winter, 40 days before the main Holi day, in the temple towns of Mathura and Vrindavan, four hours from Delhi. Mathura is where Lord Krishna was born, while Vrindavan was where he spent his **childhood** (enfance).

The week before Holi, celebrations in Vrindavan are also legendary, and culminate with the throwing of colors in the morning on the day before Holi. They start with the throwing of flowers.

Shantiniketan, West Bengal: Cultural Holi

Students dress up in spring colors and put on a huge cultural program for visitors, including dances to Tagore's songs. This is followed by the usual throwing of colors.

Anandpur Sahib, Punjab: Warrior Holi

Hola Mohalla is an annual **fair** (foire) that dates all the way back to 1701. Instead of throwing colors, expect to see a demonstration of physical agility. There's **wrestling** (lutte), martial arts, **mock** (simulacre) **sword** (épée) fights, acrobatic military exercises, and turban **tying** (attache).

Udaipur: Royal Holi

On the eve of Holi people light bonfires to mark the occasion and **ward of evil spirits** (conjurer le mauvais esprit) in a ritual called *holika dahan*. For an unforgettable regal experience, join in the celebration of Udaipur's Mewar royal family. There will be a magnificent palace procession including **bedecked** (ornés) horses and royal band. Later the traditional sacred fire will be lit and an effigy of Holika burnt.

Delhi: Musical Holi

If you're staying anywhere near Paharganj, be prepared to be covered in color by shopkeepers and children alike if you step outside. The Holi Moo Festival of color has more than 40 Indian and international **performers** (artistes) spread over four **stages** (scènes). The environment is safe, and non-toxic colors are provided, along with *bhang lassi*, street food, and sprinklers to get everyone in the **mood** (ambiance).

Jaipur: Holi and Elephants

Every year on Holi eve: Elephant parades, elephant beauty contests, folk dances, and **tug-of-war** (tir à la corde) between elephants, locals and foreigners are all regular events. But this event hasn't been held since 2012 due to pressure from animal rights groups.

Hampi: Holi in South India

If you're looking for an exuberant Holi, south India is generally best **avoided** (éviter). As Holi is primarily a north Indian festival, it's quite **subdued** (atténué) at most places in the south. The **focus** (l'accent) is mainly on religious aspects and temple rites. However, Hampi in Karnataka is a notable exception! The whole town turns out to play Holi in the morning (perhaps for the benefit of the many western travelers there), **drumming** (tambours), dancing, and the evocative ruins of the grand Vijayanagar empire. Afterwards, the **crowd** (foule) slowly moves to the river to wash all the color off.

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