

Makar Sankranti

Makar Sankranti is an ancient Hindu holiday celebrated throughout India, Nepal (where it is called *Maghe Sankranti*), and countries such as Mauritius, Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and South Africa with a wide variety of traditions and practices. It is now also celebrated widely in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, thanks to the growing Hindu diaspora, particularly those of Tamil descent, in those countries. The holiday is referred to by different names throughout the Indian subcontinent, including *Lohri* in northern India, *Sukarat* in central India, and *Pongal* in southern India. Due to the agricultural origins of the holiday, Makar Sankranti is one of the few Hindu holidays that follows the solar calendar and is observed annually on **January 14th** (January 15th during a leap year).

Significance of Makar Sankranti

Makar Sankranti marks the sun's transition into Capricorn (*Makar*), which aligns with the winter solstice. This action of the sun moving from one astrological sign to another is referred to in Hindi as *Sankranti*. This significant astrological shift reflects the harmony of six months of northern movement of the sun followed by six subsequent months of southern movement. A harvest celebration, Makar Sankranti heralds the arrival of longer and warmer days.

Makar Sankranti has been celebrated for millions of years, evolving and adapting with celebrants across time and geographical space. Traditionally, Makar Sankranti also marked the start of *Uttarayana*, the six-month period of the sun's northward movement, regarded as a period of auspiciousness. Due to the gradual shift of equinoxes, however, the actual dates have diverged.

Observance of Makar Sankranti

Makar Sankranti observances reflect the variety of climates, agricultural environments, and cultural landscapes throughout the country. Many observances include offerings to the sun deity, *Surya*, and bathing in sacred bodies of water.

Others observe Makar Sankranti by exchanging gifts with family in gratitude to those who have enriched our lives. Many choose to pray to the Goddess Saraswati, the deity who embodies wisdom and knowledge, to receive clarity of mind. In several regions, flying colorful kites is an important part of celebrating the holiday. Bonfires, dances, and creating rangolis, or floor art, are just a few of the many regional traditions. Sweets made with sesame seeds and sugar are traditionally eaten, symbolizing affection and sweetness.

How Will Makar Sankranti affect the Global Workplace?

The holiday is almost always observed on January 14th. Celebrations may last from one to three days depending on which regional traditions are observed. Makar Sankranti is a bank holiday in several regions of India, as well as in parts of Sri Lanka and Mauritius, and some businesses and institutions may be closed. Those who observe Makar Sankranti around the world may take the day off from work or school to celebrate, but generally, most who celebrate do not unless it is a recognized holiday.

Greeting

"Happy Makar Sankranti" is an appropriate way to acknowledge the holiday with friends and colleagues.

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