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### **Festivals of India and Ukraine**

India is a land of festivals, where people from different religions coexist harmoniously. The wide variety of festivals celebrated in India is a true manifestation of it's rich culture and traditions. Virtually celebrating each day of the year, there are more festivals celebrated in India than anywhere else in the world. Each festival pertains to different occasions, some welcome the seasons of the year, the harvest, the rains, or the full moon. Others celebrate religious occasions, the birthdays of divine beings and saints, or the advent of the New Year. A number of these festivals are common to most parts of India. However, they may be called by different names in various parts of the country or may be celebrated in a different

fashion. Some of the festivals celebrated all over India are mentioned below.

Most popular festivals of India: Diwali, Holi, Navratri, Onam, Durgapuja, Dussehra, Janmashtami, Ganesh Chaturthi, Eid-ul-fitr etc.

**Diwali** honors the victory of good over evil and brightness over darkness. It celebrates Lord Ram and his wife Sita returning to their kingdom of Ayodhya, following the defeat of Ravan and rescue of Sita on Dussehra. It's known as the «Festival of Lights» for all the fireworks, small clay lamps, and candles that are lit to guide their way. For Indian Hindu families, Diwali is the most anticipated festival of the year.

**Holi**. Often referred to as the «Festival of Colors», is one of the best known festivals outside of India. The festival is centered around the burning and destruction of the demoness Holika, which was made possible through unwavering devotion to Lord Vishnu. However, the really fun part involves people throwing colored powder on each other and squirting each other with water guns. This is associated with Lord Krishna, a reincarnation of Lord Vishnu, who liked to play pranks on the village girls by drenching them in water and colors. *Bhang* (a paste made from cannabis plants) is also traditionally consumed during the celebrations. Holi is a very carefree festival that's great fun to participate in if you don't mind getting wet and dirty.

The nine nights of the Navaratri festival honor the mother goddess During all her incarnations. The tenth day, called Dussehra, celebrates the defeat of demon king Ravan by Lord Ram and monkey god Hanuman in northern India. It also coincides with Durga's victory over the evil buffalo demon Mahishasura. In eastern India, the festival is observed as Durga Puja. It's the biggest festival of the year in Kolkata. Huge statues of the Goddess Durga are made and immersed in the river there. In Delhi, nightly Ramlila plays are held around the Red Fort, recounting episodes from the life of Lord Ram.

**Onam** is the biggest festival of the year in the South Indian state of Kerala. This lengthy harvest festival marks the homecoming of mythical King Mahabali, and it showcases the state's culture and heritage. People decorate the ground in front of their houses with flowers arranged in beautiful patterns to welcome the king. The festival is also celebrated with new clothes, feasts served on banana leaves, folk dance, games, and snake boat races.

Krishna **Janmashtami**, also known as Govinda, commemorates the birthday of Lord Krishna. An extremely fun part of the festival involves teams of guys climbing on each other to form a human pyramid to try and reach and break open clay pots filled with curd, which have been strung up high from buildings. This activity, called *dahi handi*, falls on the second day. It's best experienced in Mumbai.

The Ukrainians, like any other people, have their own customs and traditions: many of these are very old, some appear nowadays. Most of the customs are connected with the religious festivals or with Ukrainian dwelling.

Christian holidays and saints' days are grouped in four cycles according to the seasons: in the spring cycle the Annunciation, Easter, and St. George; in the summer cycle Pentecost, Ivan Kupalo, and St. Elijah; in the fall cycle, the first and second Blessed Virgin, the Holy Protectress, and St. Demetrius; and in the winter cycle, Christmas, New Year, and Epiphany.

The most popular of the holidays is the **New Year Day**; it is celebrated on the 1st of January. On the eve of the holiday children and their parents decorate a New Year's Tree with shining balls and other Christmas ornaments. The mothers of the families prepare holiday dinners. On that day people exchange presents with their relatives and friends: they often go to see them or invite them to their place to see in the New Year together. They lay festive tables and at 12 o'clock raise their glasses with champagne and say to each other «Happy New Year».

The Orthodox Ukrainian people celebrate **Christmas** on January, 6: the evening before Christmas is called the Holy Evening. On the Holy Evening all the family get together to have the Christmas Supper. According to the religious tradition, it is necessary to prepare 12 different dishes because of 12 apostles; no

one at the table can eat till the first star appears in the sky. On the Christmas Evening the religious people go to church; some of them spend the whole night there – they pray and listen to Christmas religious songs which glorify Christ's birthday.

**Easter** is another great religious festival: usually it is celebrated on one of Sundays in spring. On that day the religious people go to church and listen to the service; usually they bring with them baskets with food – Easter cakes, butter, cheese and, of course, painted eggs. The priest in the church consecrates all the food: many people believe that the Easter eggs possess magic power and can protect from evil, thunder or fire and have healing powers. In the morning after the end of the service, the people greet each other with the words: «Christ has resurrected!» and return home for breakfast.

They celebrate Easter as the beginning of spring, too.

**Kupalo festival** (also Kupailo, Ivan Kupalo). A Slavic celebration of ancient pagan origin marking the end of the summer solstice and the beginning of the harvest (midsummer). On the eve unmarried young men and women gathered outside the village in the forest or near a stream or pond. There they built «Kupalo fires» – a relic of the pagan custom of bringing sacrifice – around which they performed ritual dances (see Khorovod) and sang ritual songs. Magical properties were ascribed to the plants and herbs gathered on Kupalo eve. It was believed that such herbs could protect one

from the evil forces of nature and even cure illnesses in humans and animals.

There are many other interesting customs and traditions in Ukraine, too.

Thus, India and Ukraine have ancient beliefs and traditions, which are reflected in modern holidays. It is important to note that both nations have a long history, worldview, their own mentality. People in the both countries have a rich culture, a huge treasure of which consists of values acquired by many generations. From ancient times the wisdom of life and the way of life have come down to us.

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