



Lights Around the World



All around the world, in countries north of the equator, November and December bring the darkest days of the year.





It is no surprise that during these months, people of many religions celebrate holidays that worship light. After all, human beings need light and warmth to live!





In Judaism, Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights, celebrates the dedication of a Jewish temple after the revolt of the Maccabees. Though there was enough oil to keep the lamps lit in the temple for one night, a miracle kept them lit for eight.





Gifts are given each night of Hanukkah, and donuts and latkes are enjoyed.





The Hindi festival of Diwali also celebrates the victory of light over dark. On Diwali night, people don their best clothes and light lanterns and candles.





In some places, *rangoli*, designs made from colored rice, sand or flour, are used to decorate the floors.





After prayers, participants enjoy fireworks displays and sweets.



Sharing Your Wisdom

What are some of your favorite holiday traditions?

Would your family eat special foods or sing favorite songs?

Would you rather stick with old traditions or try new ones, or both?

What makes a tradition worth keeping every year?





Christmas lights started out on trees -- like this very famous tree at Rockefeller Center. Christmas trees were lit with candles, to honor the wood of the cross.





But soon after electricity was invented, people began hanging Christmas lights on the outsides of their houses.





In Scandinavia, St. Lucia's Day is celebrated to honor St. Lucy, who wore a candlelit wreath on her head to light her way as she carried food and aid to Christians in hiding.





In Sweden, girls dressed as St. Lucy walk in procession, carrying cookies and rolls like these *Lussekatte*. The beautiful Italian song, *Santa Lucia*, commemorates this holiday.





The African-American celebration, Kwanzaa, features a *Kindara*, a candle-holder with seven candles, each representing a different principle of African heritage.





Lighting the Kindara with a child is a wonderful way to teach lessons about culture and morals.





Martinmas, which began in France and is celebrated throughout Europe, is the feast day of St. Martin de Tours.





Families eat roast goose and children walk from home to home with lanterns lit, singing songs to St. Martin.





In Thailand, Loi Krathong is celebrated to honor the Buddha. Candles float in banana leaf baskets, honoring the Buddha with light while floating away darkness.





The festival of Li Peng happens at the same time as Loi Krathong. Celebrants float lanterns into the sky for good luck.





In countries near and far, the longest nights of winter are filled with the light and warmth of people coming together to celebrate.





Whatever holiday you celebrate this season, we hope it is filled with warmth, peace and light. Thank you for reading!

