

Makar sankranti and harvest festivals across India

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In news : Makar sankranti is the first major festival to be celebrated in India and usually takes place in January, this year the festival will be celebrated on January 14.

About the Makar sankranti

- **God: Makara Sankranti** or **Uttarayan** or **Maghi** or simply **Sankranti**, is a festival day in the Hindu calendar, dedicated to the deity Surya (sun).
- **Month:** It is observed each year in the lunar month of Magha which corresponds with the month of January as per the Gregorian calendar and is a day the people of India and Nepal celebrate their harvest
- **Geographical phenomena:** It marks the first day of the sun's transit into Makara rashi (Capricorn), marking the end of the month with the winter solstice and the start of longer days
- **The festival is observed according to solar cycles, while most festivals are set by the lunar cycle**
- Being a festival that celebrates the solar cycle, it almost always falls on the same Gregorian date every year (January 14/15), except in some years when the date shifts by a day for that year of the lunisolar
- Makar Sankranti marks the end of winter as well as the beginning of longer days on account of the sun's northward journey, this period is also known as Uttarayan on this account and is considered to be very auspicious.
- The harvest festival is both a religious as well as seasonal observance, and is dedicated to Lord Surya, the Sun God and marks the sun's transit into Makara (Capricorn) raashi (zodiac sign).

Festivals associated with Makara Sankranti and its different names

The festivities associated with Makar Sankranti are known by various names, such as **Magha Sankranti in Nepal, Magh Bihu in Assam, Maghi** (preceded by Lohri) **in Punjab**, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, popular amongst both the Hindus and Sikhs, Sukarat in central India, **Thai Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Uttarayan in Gujarat, Uttarakhand** and Uttar Pradesh, Ghughuti in Uttarakhand, **Makara Sankranti in Odisha, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Goa**, West Bengal (**also called Poush Sankranti**), Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh (**also called Khichidi Sankranti**) or as Sankranthi in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

MANY NAMES, ONE FESTIVAL

Makar Sankranti is one of the many names given to the winter harvest festival



Beliefs associated with Makara Sankranti

- **Dipping in river:** Usually on this day devotees take a dip in rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery that are considered to be holy.

- For believers, taking a dip washes away their sins, it is also considered a time of peace and prosperity and many spiritual practices are conducted on this day.
- **Distributing sweets:** Sesame and jaggery ladoos or chikkis are distributed on this day. Popularly referred to as til-gud. The sweet signifies that people must stay together in peace and harmony despite their differences.
- **Kite flying:** In Gujarat, kite flying is organised as part of Makar Sankranti festivities.
- **Death:** It is also believed that those who die on Makar Sankranti are not reborn. According to Hindu belief, if one dies on Makar Sankranti they are not reborn, but go straight to paradise