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Explanation of INDIAN CALENDAR YEAR, Vikram Samvant

There are many different calendars followed by people in India. One of the most commonly followed is that named after the famous king Vikram. Samvant literally means year.

Vikram Samvant is a lunar calendar. Thus, it is based on the orbit of the moon around the earth. There are 30 days in each month, thus giving 360 days in a year. The Roman calendar used in the western countries is based on the sun. Since the earth rotates around the sun in about 365 days, each year the lunar calendar falls about 5 days behind the sun calendar. To remedy this, about every 32 months and 16 days (about 2 ½ years), an extra month (known as an Adhik maas) is added to make up for the lost days. This extra month is celebrated as a holy month. Only one of the last four months is added as an extra month.

Vikram Samvant is 57 years ahead of Christian calendar, thus in the year AD 2001, it is Vikram Samvant 2058.

The names of these months and approximate Roman calendar months with which they coincide are as follows:

1.	Kartrik	Nov	Dec	7.	Vaishakh	May	Jun	
2.	Marghshir	Dec	Jan	8.	Jayaistha		Jun	Jul
3.	Posh	Jan	Feb	9.	Ashadh	Jul	Aug	
4.	Maha	Feb	Mar	10.	Shravan	Aug	Sep	
5.	Fagun	Mar	Apr	11.	Bhadrapad	Sep	Oct	
6.	Chaitra	Apr	May	12.	Aaso	Oct	Nov	

Various other calendars use different months of the year as a first month, such as Vikram Samvant calendar used in some parts of Northern India use Chaitra as the first month. Spellings and pronunciations of these months differ from State to State.

The last day of the year is Diwali or Deepawali that celebrates the return of the Lord Rama (Seventh incarnation of the Lord Vishnu) to the capital city Ayodhya with his wife Sita.

Each month is divided in two, based on the lunar phase. From new moon to full moon, the 15-day period is known as Sud (meaning moon is being formed). From full moon to new moon, the 15-day period is known as Vad (meaning moon is decaying). Each day is known by its own name. They are as follows:

First day after new moon is Padvo. The rest of the Sud days are:

2	Bij	3	Trij	4	Choth or Chaturthi
5	Pancham	6	Chhath	7	Satam
8	Aatham	9	Nom	10	Dasham
11	Ekadashi	12	Barash	13	Terash
14	Chaudash	15	Poonam or Purnima (Full moon)		

Days 16 to 29 are counted as Vad days. The day 30th is Amas or Amavashya (new moon).

Almost all days in the Hindu calendar have some religious significance. Pages 2 & 3 show selected major holidays.

January Holidays:

Makar Sankranti (in North India), Pongal (in South India) Usually in Posh. This always falls on Jan 14th. This signifies the movement of the sun from Cancer to Capricorn. The celebration varies from state to state. Gujarat: Kite flying; Tamil Nadu: Sun worship; Karnataka; Cow worship; Andhra Pradesh: Doll displays.

January -February Holidays:

Vasant Panchami. This is celebrated on Maha Sud 5. Celebrates arrival of spring (Vasant). Usually marked by worshipping Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of learning.

February - March Holidays:

Maha Shiva Ratri. This is celebrated on Maha Vad 14. Every month, a day before the New Moon is known as Shiva Ratri. Maha (great) Shiva Ratri occurs only once a year. This is to worship Lord Shiva. There are special ceremonies at Temples.

March - April Holidays:

Holi. This is celebrated on Fagun Sud 14. The next day is celebrated as Dhuleti. This celebrates the triumph of Dharma over evil. Prince Prahlad, a devotee of Lord Vishnu, is put to test by his evil aunt Holika by taking him to the burning pyre. The Lord protects the prince and Holika is burnt to ashes. The festival is celebrated by symbolically burning Holika. This is famous for its marked celebration with songs, dances, and spraying colors on each other. Most notable celebrations at Barsana (near Mathura), the birthplace of Radha, the divine lover of Lord Krishna, 8th incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

April - May Holidays:

Ram Navami. This is celebrated on Chaitra Sud 9. It is the birth date of Lord Rama, the 7th incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Meenakshi Kalyanam - Usually celebrated in South India. This celebration is to mark the marriage of Meenakshi (Avatar of Goddess Parvati) to Lord Shiva. This is usually a ten-day festival. Spectacular festivals are held in South Indian temples.

Baisakhi is a major North Indian spring festival is always celebrated on April 13th.

May - June Holidays

Akha (Akshay) Trij. This is celebrated on Vaishakh Sud 3. This is the birth date of Lord Parshuram, 6th incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Buddha Jayanti. This is celebrated on Vaishakh Sud 15. Jayanti means Birthday. This celebrates the birthday of Lord Buddha, 9th incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

June - July Holidays

Gayatri Jayanti. This is celebrated on Jayaistha Sud 10. It is Goddess Gayatri, avatar of Goddess Saraswati, consort of Lord Brahma.

Vat Savitri Poonam, celebrated on Jayaistha Sud 15, by married women for the longevity and well being of their husbands. Celebrated nationwide.



July - August Holidays

Rath Yatra, celebrated on Ashadh Sud 2, marked by spectacular chariot procession carrying Lord Jagganath (Lord of the Universe). Major celebrations held at Puri, Orissa and at most Hare Krishna Centers around the world.

Teej, celebrated on Ashadh Sud 3, marks the day when Goddess Parvati (as a bride) leaves her parents' home for her husband Lord Shiva's. Largely celebrated by women, particularly in Rajasthan.

Dev Pothi Ekadashi celebrated on Ashadh Sud 11. This marks the day when the Lord Vishnu goes to sleep for a period of four months. Thus, most auspicious undertakings such as marriage are not performed during this four-month period. Please see November - December Holidays, Dev Oothi Ekadashi.

Guru Purnima celebrated on Ashadh Sud 15, to honor Gurus and seek their blessings. This is in honor of the Maharshi Vyasa, considered the greatest Guru of all, compiler of four Vedas, Mahabharata and eighteen Puranas.

Sankat Chaturthi celebrated on Ashadh Vad 4, to seek Lord Ganesh's blessings to remove obstacles in daily life.

August - September Holidays

Raksha Bandhan, also known as Rakhi, is celebrated on Shraavan Sud 15. This is a time when brothers vow to protect (raksha) their sisters who in turn tie (bandhan) a symbolic thread (rakhi) on brothers' wrists.

Naag Pancham is celebrated on Shraavan Vad 5. Snakes, Cobras, and other reptiles (Naag) are considered semi-divine beings and thus worshiped.

Randhan Chhath celebrated on Shraavan Vad 6 by preparing food (randhan) for the next day when no meals are prepared.

Shitala Satam celebrated the next day; Shraavan Vad 7 is to appease the Goddess of Smallpox (Shitala).

Janmastami is celebrated on Shraavan Vad 8. This is the birthday of Lord Krishna, 8th incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Special midnight celebrations are held in temples throughout the country.

September - October Holidays

Ganesh Chaturthi is celebrated on Bhadrapad Sud 4. This is to appease the Lord Ganesh, Lord who removes all obstacles and who is worshiped first before beginning any Deity's worship. In Maharashtra and around Mumbai, this is celebrated by spectacular processions carrying Lord Ganesh's clay images to be immersed into the sea.

Rishi Pancham celebrated on Bhadrapad Sud 5. This is to observe penance for one's sins.

Shraadh (ceremonies held to grant peace to the ancestors' spirits) begins Bhadrapad Vad 1 and lasts for a whole month. Thus, Shraadh ends on Bhadrapad Vad 30.

October - November Holidays

Nav Ratri celebration begins Aaso Sud 1 and lasts for nine (Nav) nights (Ratri), and ends on Aaso Sud 9. This celebrates the nine avatars of Goddess Parvati or Durga. Festivities include traditional folk dances known as Raas and Garbas, especially prominent in Gujarat. This is known as Durga Puja in Bengal, and recitation of scriptures related to the Goddess is conducted in Temples and homes. In many states, this is also celebrated for nine days following Ram Navmi (see April-May Holidays).

Vijaya Dashmi, also known as Dusserah is celebrated on Aaso Sud 10. This marks the day Lord Rama killed Ravana, Demon King of Lanka (present day Sri Lanka). Effigy of Ravana is burnt on this day throughout the land.



October - November Holidays (continued)

Sharad Purnima is celebrated on Aaso Sud 15 to honor the Moon god and to take in the nectar (Amrit) that He showers upon the earth in the form of moonbeams.

Dhan Terash is celebrated on Aaso Vad 13 to appease the Goddess of wealth, Laxmi. Most Hindu businesses in India mark their year-end by closing books on this day.

Kali Chaudash is celebrated on Aaso Vad 14 by worshipping Goddess Parvati as Kali, one of her fierce avatars. This is also celebrated as Narak Chaudash to liberate one from the possibilities of entering Narak (Hell).

Diwali, one of the major Hindu holidays is celebrated on Aaso Vad 30, marks the arrival of Lord Rama with his wife Sita to the capital of his kingdom, Ayodhya after liberating her from Lanka by killing the Demon King Ravana. Almost every home is decorated with little lamps (Deep), and thus it is also known as Deepawali.

November - December Holidays

New Year begins the day after Diwali on Kartik Sud 1. The Vikram Samvatsar begins as a major holiday.

Bhai Bij, on Kartik Sud 2 celebrates the love between brothers and sisters. Brothers are invited to their sister's home for a lavish meal.

Dev Oothi Ekadashi on Kartik Sud 11 marks the day when Lord Vishnu wakes up from his four-month long sleep. Please see July- August Holidays, Dev Pothi Ekadashi.

Karwa Chauth is celebrated on Kartik Vad 4, usually by married women for longevity and well being of their husbands. This is particularly popular in Northern India. This usually marks the last Major Hindu Holiday for the Christian calendar.

There are numerous other holidays that many Hindus would consider major. This list is only that of selected holidays. For actual dates for the current year, there are numerous websites that would provide such information. In addition, most Indian stores in major metropolitan areas provide Hindu calendars either for free or for a nominal charge.

