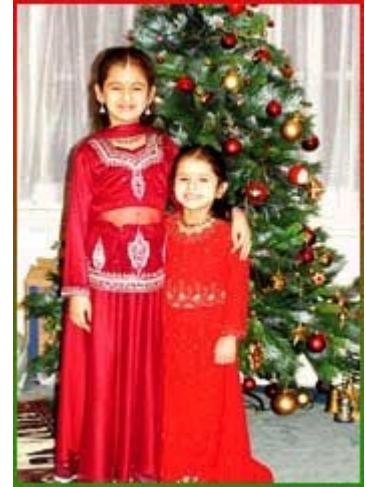


India

India is a very large country of diversity. Compared to other religious festivals, Christmas is quite a small festival in India. There are less than 2.3% Christians who live in India compared to people who belong to other religions. Having said this, the population of India is over 1 billion, so there are over 25 million Christians in India! Each area of India has a distinctly different way of celebrating Christmas. One of the largest Christian communities in India is in **Mumbai** (formerly Bombay). A lot of the Christians in Mumbai are Roman Catholics.



In northwest India, the nomadic Christians of the **Bhil** tribe go out night after night for a week during Christmas to sing their special carols the whole night through and tell the story of Christmas to everybody.

In Southern India, Christians often put small oil-burning clay lamps on the edge of the rooftops and on top of the walls of their houses to show their neighbors that Jesus is the light of the world. Many Hindus have a similar festival called **Diwali** in late October, early November. People also prepare mouthwatering recipes, such as cakes, cookies, pudding etc.



Christians in the Plains decorate mango or banana

trees at Christmas time. Sometimes they also decorate their houses with mango leaves. However, the urban regions are more familiar with fir Christmas trees (mostly small and in pots). These trees are decorated with stars and tinsels, toys, plastic fruits, and colorful streamers and illuminations are placed in front of the houses, shops and restaurants. Santa is also a big part of the town. Churches are decorated with poinsettias and lit with candles for the Christmas Eve service.

A large number of tourists flock to the beaches of **Goa** during Christmas festival, celebrating with music and dance. Catholics in Goa participate in the traditional Midnight Mass services locally called **Missa de Galo** (or Cock Crow) as they go on well into early hours of the morning. The Carnival, preceding Lent, is the most important event at Goa. This is similar to Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

Though the Hindus and Muslims comprise majority of the population, Christmas is celebrated with much fanfare. In several parts of India, especially in big metropolitan cities like **Delhi**, **Mumbai**, **Bangalore** and **Chennai**, Christmas Festival has assumed non-Christian overtones and is celebrated by people of all faiths and communities.

In Mumbai, which has one of the largest Roman Catholic communities in India, there is a tradition to depict nativity scenes and decorate home with big stars. Families hang giant paper lanterns, in the shape of stars, between the houses so that the stars float above you as you walk down the road. Every household also makes sure that they have a stock of home made sweets ready to visitors. Christmas Day, called "**Bada Din**" (Big Day) in Hindi, is a national holiday in India and people from all religions join their Christian friends to make the most of the joyous celebrations.



Christmas is also the time for family reunions. People visit friends and family to celebrate Christmas with their near and dear ones. Indian Christians do not believe in short services. The main service on Christmas Day is a midnight one which lasts from two to three hours, with hundreds of communicants and many children all massed together on the floor. The Day is a national holiday and people of all religions enjoy it along with the Christians.

In India, Father Christmas delivers presents to children from a horse and cart or from an elephant.



Many different languages are spoken in India. In Hindi and Urdu "**Happy/Merry Christmas**" is "**Bade Din ki Mubarak.**" In Sanskrit it's "**Krismasasya shubhkaamnaa**" and in Bengali it is "**Barodiner shubhechha janai.**" In Tamil it's "**Christhu Jayanthi Nalvaalthukal.**" There are many more languages spoken in India!

Resources:

Australian Media Pty Ltd. [Santa's Net. "Christmas in India".](http://www.santas.net/indianchristmas.htm) <http://www.santas.net/indianchristmas.htm>
[Christmas Around the World. "Christmas in India".](http://www.the-north-pole.com/around/india.html) <http://www.the-north-pole.com/around/india.html>
Family Corner's Christmas. [Christmas from the Holiday Spot. "Christmas in India".](http://www.theholidayspot.com/christmas/worldxmas/india.htm) <http://www.theholidayspot.com/christmas/worldxmas/india.htm>
Raval, Vinay. [ZuZu. "Christmas in India".](http://www.zuzu.org/india.html) <http://www.zuzu.org/india.html>
Why Christmas? "Christmas in Holland". <http://whychristmas.com/cultures/india.shtml>