



LIGHT UP YOUR TRAVEL DIARIES

Light plays a starring role in holidays across the globe, brightening the spirits, the skies and the travel itineraries alike!

words VANI MALIK

Shakespeare's
famous character *Juliet* stated, "Romeo's dead body should be cut up into little stars to light up the heavens so brightly that the sun will pale in comparison." And, indeed this has

become a reality where nights are decked up in different hues during those grand light festivals celebrated across the globe. Just like we celebrate Diwali in India with much pomp, there exist more such festivals that cut across barriers of faith and religion with their light.

LANTERN FESTIVAL

CHINA

Celebrated in the month of February, the Lantern Festival of China is associated with Buddhism. During Han Dynasty, lanterns were lit at the Royal Palace to honour Lord Buddha on the first full moon of the lunar year. This festival, which was meant for the royals, became a source of light and delight for the poor. It turned into a public affair where the skies in China were beautifully covered with millions of lanterns together.

With time, this festival has evolved manifold. One of the major parts of this celebration is the traditional lion dance performed with the belief to ward off evil and pray for good fortune and safety. The delicacy that rules every household during this festival is the *yuanziao* – a rice ball preparation with different fillings of sugar, walnuts, peanuts, rose petals, etc. Its stickiness and shape symbolises how a family should be closely bound to each other.

The lanterns' artwork vividly demonstrate traditional Chinese images such as fruits, flowers, birds, animals, people, and buildings.





FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

BERLIN

Though this festival is fairly new, it is extremely popular and instrumental in making Berlin a major tourist spot. This high-end light art festival is celebrated in the second week of October, spanning across 10 days. The major highlight of this festival is the beautiful illumination presented at historical places, landmarks, city squares, streets and quarters by national and international artists. For these 10 days, the city's landmarks such as Brandenburg Gate, Berlin Cathedral and the Radio Tower are transformed into visual delights through light projections and video art.

This Festival of Lights include various art and music events as well as a tour named *Light Seeing* where visitors can take a tour of the festival by bus, boat or on foot. In all, the 10-day event creates an experience of a lifetime for the audience, leaving them enchanted with the city. This festival has set its own records with over two million visitors almost every year, a grand response on the social media and almost six lakh additional hotel bookings. Photography workshops and open houses at selected buildings and charity events are part of the festival too.



LAS FALLAS

VALENCIA

Resonating the Spanish festivals like the La Tomatina and San Fermin, Las Fallas meaning fire in Valencian, ranks equal in terms of madness and grandeur. The fiery tradition, that gave way to the magnificent celebration of Las Fallas, traces its humble origins to 1497. What started as a feast day for St Joseph, the patron saint of carpenters, has evolved into a five-day, multifaceted celebration involving fire.

Las Fallas literally means 'the fires' in Valencian. The focus of the fiesta is the creation and destruction of *ninots* (puppets or dolls), which are huge cardboard,

wood, paper-machè and plaster statues. The *ninots* are extremely lifelike and usually depict bawdy, satirical scenes and current events. A popular theme is poking fun at corrupt politicians and Spanish celebrities.

Valencia, a quiet city with a population of just over one million, swells to an estimated three million flame-loving revellers during Las Fallas celebrations.

Renowned artists, painters, and sculptors take great care in designing and constructing the enormous fallas – some tower up to 30 metres – that dominate Valencia's public squares and open spaces during the festival.

To sum it all, lights, gunpowder, costumes, music, satire and a great deal of fun are the highlights of this unique festival.



HANUKKAH

Hanukkah is the celebration of triumph of light over darkness and purity over adulteration. This eight-day long festival dates back to 165 B.C. with a fierce battle between the Syrians and the Maccabees. With Jews emerging as survivors, they marched towards their temple to light its menorah. With oil to keep the menorah's candles burning just for a single day, the flames continued flickering miraculously for eight

nights, leaving them time to find a fresh supply. To commemorate these miracles, the sages then initiated the tradition of lighting the menorah with one flame adding to the menorah every night till the eighth night.

Chanukah customs include eating *latkes* (potato pancakes) and *doughnuts*; playing with the *dreidel* and the giving of Chanukah gelt, gifts of money, to children.



LOY KRATHONG

THAILAND

Lights from hundreds of candles twinkling on water; this is the beauty of Loy Krathong, celebrated in November. In literal translation, *Loy* means 'to float' and *Krathong* is a 'lotus-shaped vessel' made out of banana leaves containing candles, flowers and three joss-sticks. On a full moon night, devotees take their Krathongs to the nearby riversbeds, making a wish to the water goddess. Loy Krathong festival is believed to be Brahmin in origin and was originally an occasion for people to apologise to the goddess of water for having used and sometimes polluted her.

Other Loy Krathong holiday traditions include setting eels and turtles free in the river or pond.

