

EDI Sounding Board

The celebration of Vaisakhi and its importance to Sikhs around the world



What is Vaisakhi?



The 14th of April is a significant day for Sikhs around the world, as we celebrate “Vaisakhi”. It is traditionally a spring harvest festival originating from the Punjab which spans through North-Western India and Eastern Pakistan. Farmers in the Punjab give thanks at this time for a plentiful harvest and pray for a good one in the year to come.

Why is it important to Sikhs?

On this day in 1699, the Sikh religion was formally founded as a collective faith by Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Gobind Singh was a spiritual leader who continued the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev (founder of Sikhism).

On Vaisakhi, Guru Gobind Singh formed the Khalsa (meaning pure ones) to create a group of people who were prepared to stand up to injustice, protect innocent people from religious persecution, uphold freedom, foster spiritual observance, promote honesty and equality, and ensure all people could access basic needs such as food and health.

Five male volunteers were initiated by Guru Gobind Singh first and were given a new surname, Singh, which means lion. This tradition is now widely observed in all Sikh communities and includes women, who are given the title Kaur, meaning leader.



How is it celebrated?



Families come together to enjoy food such as Mango Lassi (milkshake), sweet yellow rice, rice pudding, spicy curries and fried chapattis. People will also dance to traditional music called “Gidha” and “Bhangra” to a beat on the dhol drums while wearing vibrant colours. And yes, the “changing of the light bulb” is a popular and genuine dance move, although it does take skill to dance to the beat perfectly!

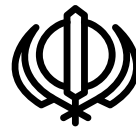
On Vaisakhi, Sikhs attend the Gurdwara (Sikh temple) to pray and then a procession follows the streets with singing of hymns. The procession (Nagr Kirtan) is lead by 5 men who represent the first group of people that were initiated as Sikhs back in 1699. Women also lead by reading prayers to the congregation from the holy book called the Guru Granth Sahib.

The annual event commences with the ceremonial unfolding and replacing a new Nishan Sahib (a flag that is found outside Sikh Gurdwara and is a saffron coloured triangular flag with a Sikh symbol of a Khanda in the centre).

Accompanied by a decorated float carrying the Guru Granth Sahib, the congregation proceeds on foot with people lining the streets offering drinks, sweets and other traditional foods. People pay their respects and enjoy the beautiful atmosphere and the singing of hymns.



How I celebrate Vaisakhi:



A BCHG colleague shared:

'We decorate our home on Vaisakhi to mark this occasion. We are lucky as my mother-in-law makes amazing food for us on this day to enjoy. As well as dressing in traditional Punjabi clothes and teaching my children a dance move or two, we also visit the Gurdwara to remember the values Guru Gobind Singh instilled in his followers – for the unity of people and “to recognise the human race as one”.'

Other events to celebrate Vaisakhi that are open for everyone include:-

15th April – Exhibition at Walsall Art Gallery

23rd April – Nagar Kirtan from Gurdwara on Smethwick High Street

7th May – Nagar Kirtan from Gurudwara on Cannock Road in Wolverhampton



Wishing you all a
very happy Vaiskahi!

