

Maghe Sankranti

Maghe Sankranti is the beginning of the holy month of Magh, usually mid-January. It brings an end to the ill-omened month of Poush (mid-December) when all religious ceremonies are forbidden. Even if it is considered the coldest day of the year, it marks the coming of warmer weather and better days of health and fortune. This day is said to be the most significant day for holy bathing despite the weather. This ritual usually takes place at the confluence of sacred rivers and streams. In addition to holy bathing and worship of shrines, certain auspicious foods like till laddoos (sesame seeds ball cakes), chaku (molasys), ghee (clarified butter), sweet potatoes, khichari (mixture of rice and lentils) and green leaf spinach are taken on this day.

Lhosar

Several indigenous communities in hilly and mountain areas celebrate Lhosar as the New Year festival. Festive activities like singing, dancing and feasting are observed across the country. Losar is celebrated for 15 days, with the main celebrations on the first three days. On the first day of Losar, a beverage called changkol is made from chhaang (a Tibetan cousin of beer). The second day of Losar is known as King's Losar (gyalpo losar). Losar is traditionally preceded by the five day practice of Vajrakilaya. Although it often falls on the same day as the Chinese New Year (sometimes with one day or occasionally with one lunar month difference), it is generally not thought to be culturally directly connected to that holiday. It is culturally more related to Tsagaan Sar in Mongolia than to the Chinese New Year festivity. Losar is also celebrated in Bhutan, although different regions in the country have their own respective new years. The Sonam Losar or Lhochaar, is celebrated by the Sherpas it mostly falls in the month of February. Tamangs, Sherpas and Gurungs celebrate Lhosar on different dates.

Maha Shivaratri

This day is the celebration dedicated to the Lord Shiva. Hindus all over the world know Shiva through different names and forms. The country has thousands of idols and monuments, which glorify his name, the most common one being the Shiva Linga or the phallus of Shiva that represents him. For it is the Shiva linga that Hindus regard as the symbol of creation, the beginning of everything. Hindus all over the world celebrate this day with great enthusiasm. Shiva Ratri literally means 'the night consecrated to Shiva'. This auspicious festival falls in the month of Falgun (February – March). The temple of Pashupatinath in Kathmandu, which is considered as one of the holiest shrines of the Hindus, glorifying Lord Shiva, receives more than 100,000 worshippers during the festival of Shiva Ratri. Pilgrims come from far and wide to pay their respects and homage to Shiva. One of the interesting aspects of Shiva Ratri is that on this day devotees and non-devotees alike freely indulge in smoking intoxicating substances such as marijuana and bhang. Shiva Ratri falls in the month of March.

Fagu Purnima (Holi)

The ancient Hindu festival of Fagu Poornima falls on the full moon day in the month of Falgun according to lunar calendar (late February or early March). Allegedly named after the mythical demoness Holika, it is a day when the feast of colours is celebrated. The festival is of a week. However, it's only the last day that is observed by all with colours. People can be seen wandering through the streets either on foot or on some vehicle, with a variety of colours

smear over them. Families and friends get together and celebrate the occasion with a lot of merry making. This spring time celebration is also an outburst of youthful exuberance in which throwing colours and water balloons (lolas) on passers-by is acceptable. People in Tarai celebrate the festival a day later with more pomp and ceremony.

Ghode Jatra

Ghode Jatra, or the Horse Racing Day, falls in the month of Chaitra (late March or early April). A grand horse parade takes place at Tundikhel, the central point of the city. According to folklores, this festival is organized to celebrate the victory over a demon named Tundi who resided over the meadow, today known as Tundikhel. Tundi was a terror and when he met with his death, people rejoiced by dancing on his body with horses. It is believed that the clamor of horses' hooves on Ghode Jatra at Tundikhel keeps the demon's spirit at bay as it still threatens to ruin the city.

New Year Day

Nepal follows Bikram Sambat calendar and the New Year day falls approximately in mid-April. It is known as "Navavarsha" in Nepal. The day falls approximately in mid-April. People enjoy the New Year by having gathering with friends or by organising outings. A day later, Bisket Jatra and Tongue Piercing festivals are organised in Bhaktapur. Of late, Pokhara has been organising various programmes to mark the festival. Such programmes are mostly targeted to foreign and domestic visitors.

Rato Machhendranath Jatra

This is the longest as well as the most important festival of Patan. It begins with several days of ceremonies and the formation of a wooden-wheeled chariot at Pulchowk, near the Ashoka Stupa in the month of Baisakh (March-April). The chariot bears the shrine of the Rato Macchendra Nath and carries a very tall spire made from bamboo poles raised from four ends of the chariot. This unwieldy spire is around 10 meters tall and on account of which, the chariot balances precariously. It is said that calamity is certain to strike the land in the event of the chariot overturning or breaking down during. The chariot is taken through all the ancient Newari settlement in Patan. Interestingly, only the women pull the chariot in one particular day. The

festival concludes after officials show a colorful Bhoto 'sacred vest' from the chariot in Jawalakhel.

Gaijatra

The festival of "Gai Jatra", the procession of cows, is generally celebrated in the Nepalese month of Bhadra (late July or early August). The festival of cows is one of the most popular festivals of Nepal. The festival has its roots in the ancient age when people feared and worshipped Yamaraj, "the god of death". The festival began in the medieval period of Nepal during the reign of Malla Kings. According to folklores, every family who has lost relative(s) during the past year must participate in a procession through the streets of Kathmandu leading a cow. If a cow is not available then a young boy dressed as a cow is considered a fair substitute. After the procession is over, people take part in another age-old tradition in which the participants dress up and wear masks. The occasion is filled with songs, jokes, mockery and humour of every kind become the order of the day until late evening.

Dashain

During is the biggest festival of Nepal and it is celebrated in the month of Ashwin (late September or early October). It is the longest and the most auspicious festival in Nepal and is celebrated by Nepalese of all caste and creed throughout the country. The festival is celebrated for fifteen days. People worship manifestations of Goddess Durga for the first nine days. Thousands of goats and buffaloes are sacrificed throughout the country on the eight and ninth day of the festivals. The tenth day is the main day of the festival as people receive tika and jamara from elders and receive their blessing. Dashain is also the time of great family reunion as family members from far off and distant relatives come for a visit as well as to receive tika from the head of the family.

Deepawali

Deepawali, the festival of lights, is the second biggest festivals of Nepal and it falls in the month of Kartik (September-October). In this festival people worship Laxmi, the Goddess of wealth. The festival spans for five days but the major celebration occurs in the last three days. On the first two days, people worship crow, which is believed to be the messenger of god of death Yamaraj, and dog. On the third day, people worship cow in the morning and thoroughly decorate their houses and display lightings to welcome Goddess Laxmi. During the night, entire village or city looks like a sparkling diamond. During the evening, women sing Bhailo songs wishing for the prosperity of the house-owners. On the fourth day, people worship oxen and men sing Deusi songs throughout the night. The fifth day is the day of major celebrations. Women across the country worship their brothers and offer sweets and other delicacies. In turn, the brothers give gifts and other offerings to their sisters.

Mani Rimdu

Mani Rimdu is the biggest event of the year for the Sherpas of the Khumbu region. Sherpas from the Khumbu region congregate at Thyangboche Monastery, the picturesque monastery situated on a spur at 3,870 meters. The three-day celebrations of Mani Rimdu follow the ten days of non-stop prayer sessions addressed to the patron deities seeking blessing from the god of all mankind. The deity propitiated is Guru Rinpoche, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. The ceremony begins with the blowing of horns in the afternoon after which the abbot of the

monastery accompanied by other monks chant prayers. The congregation is blessed and given holy water and auspicious pellets for good luck and longevity. An orchestra of cymbals, horns, flutes, and conch shells announces the start of the second day's celebrations. Monks in colorful robes and huge glowering masks perform dances symbolizing the destruction of evil. On the last day, tormas (figures made of dough) are consigned to a sacred fire. This implies the end of negative forces and the advent of a blessed new year. The festival falls in October.

New layer... New layer... New layer... New layer...