

2. The Festival of Diwali



- Diwali is an Indian word. It means 'a row of lights'. Diva is the word for light, or lamp.
- Diwali is the biggest Hindu festival. For most Hindus, it is the New Year.
- Diwali celebrates the story of Rama and Sita.
- Rama is one of the forms of God (Vishnu) when he comes to earth. Sita was his wife. Rama's favourite brother was called Lakshman.
- Because of trickery, Rama was sent away into the forest. Sita chose to go with him, even though living in the forest was difficult. So did Lakshman. Sita and Lakshman loved Rama very much and wanted to be with him.
- In the forest, the wicked king Ravana kidnapped Sita. Ravana had ten heads. He took Sita away to his kingdom, the Island of Lanka.
- Hanuman, the monkey warrior, became friends with Rama. He helped Rama and Lakshman find Sita. Hanuman's army of monkeys built a huge bridge to the island of Lanka. By magic, the stones floated on the water.
- Rama, Lakshman and Hanuman lead a huge army over the bridge to fight with Ravana. After a long battle, Rama killed Ravana and rescued Sita.
- Rama and Sita returned to their kingdom (with Lakshman, Hanuman and the monkey army). It was the time of the new moon, so the night was very dark. All the citizens lit thousands of divas (lamps) to light the way. This is how they welcomed Rama back to his kingdom.
- Therefore, at Diwali Hindus decorate their house and temples with hundreds of lamps. (These days they often use coloured electric lights.) The lights also welcome the goddess Lakshmi. She is the goddess in charge of wealth and good luck, and is married to Vishnu.
- Diwali is a very colourful celebration! Hindus let off fireworks and make patterns from coloured powders (rangoli). Friends and relatives send each other Diwali cards.
- At Diwali, Hindu children put on plays about the story of Rama and Sita. They also sing songs and have a big feast. The food is usually vegetarian. Why don't you find out what kind of food Hindus eat?
- On one of the pictures (on the other side of this card) there is a painting of Rama, Sita and a golden deer. Find out the story of the golden deer and what happened afterwards.