

Festival of the month: Ganesh Chaturthi

by Ami Bhat (Lonely Planet Author) September 2 2016



Ganesh Chaturthi is one the biggest festivals in Maharashtra
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Ganesh Chaturthi, one of the liveliest and vibrant festivals of India, celebrates the birthday of a god with 108 names. Known for his playfulness as well as a symbol for all good beginnings, Lord Ganesha, the god with the head of an elephant, is one of the most revered figures in the Indian mythology.

The story of the birth of Lord Ganesha

Mythology has it that Lord Ganesha was created by Goddess Parvati. She made a human figure from the earth and breathed life into it. Thus was born her son – Lord Ganesha. Her consort – Lord Shiva was unaware of his birth. When he returned from a long journey, he was stunned to see a boy stopping him from entering his own abode. Out of anger, he chopped off the boy Ganesha’s head, only to face the wrath of Goddess Parvati. To undo the damage, he sent his attendants to bring the head of the first creature that they encountered. As commanded, the attendants got back the head of an elephant and Lord Shiva fixed it to re-create Lord Ganesha. He also blessed Lord Ganesha with a boon that his name would always be uttered before any other God or Goddesses name.

The Rituals

Ganesh Chaturthi is celebrated on fourth day of the Bhadrapada month of the Hindu calendar. This is generally around the end of August or beginning of September. Though the celebrations are on for 10 days, the preparation for it starts months in advance, with the making of Ganesha idols using clay. The size of the idols ranges from a few inches to over 50 feet tall. The smaller ones are generally bought for homes while the larger ones are a part of the community celebrations.

Before the idol is brought home or installed on their special tents (pandals), the entire place is cleaned and white washed. On the first day, at an auspicious hour, the chosen Ganapati idol is brought over with its face covered, which is followed by a Pooja. An elaborate aarti follows this and from then, for the next 10 days, the same ritual continues. For those celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi at home, the idol is kept for either 1, 1 ½, 3, 5, 7 or 10 days.

At the end of every pooja, sweets along with red flowers are distributed among the devotees. The community celebrations are accompanied with a lot of dance, drama and special shows. No celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi is complete without Lord Ganesha’s favorite sweets – Modak. A steamed dumpling filled with sweetened coconut and dry fruits. These are ceremoniously prepared and distributed throughout the festival.

On the 11th day, with a lot of fanfare and chanting of the phrase “Ganpati Bappa Morya, Pudiya Varshi laukarya”, the idol of Lord Ganesha is carried to the nearest water body and submerged – a practice called Ganpati Visarjan. The symbolism of this being that Lord Ganesha takes away all the obstacles and evil along with him as he returns to his own heavenly abode. This being the key reason why Ganesh Chaturthi is also, termed as Vinayaka Chaturdashi (Vinayaka means destroyer of all evils).

Maharashtra is known for the fervor of Ganesh Chaturthi. Some of the longest Ganpati Visarjan processions take place in Mumbai – lasting for almost 24 hours. The streets of Mumbai and Pune are filled with various pandals, each Ganpati being unique from the other.

While the rituals being largely similar across the various states, there are a few local nuances followed in various places.

Gauri Ganesha in Karnataka: Gauri as the mother of Ganesha in Karnataka is also, worshipped along with Lord Ganesha. This is primarily done by married women to ensure that their married life is peaceful and happy, without any obstacles.

Serving Kozhukattai in Tamil Nadu: A South Indian sweet called Kozhukattai, made with rice flour, coconut and jaggery, is generally served in Tamil Nadu as this is considered to be Lord Ganesha’s favorite.

Elaborate feasts of Andhra Pradesh: Along with the modaks, elaborate feasts with traditional food like Vundrallu, Panakam, Vadapappu and Chalividi is served during the festival. This is also, observed in the other South Indian states.

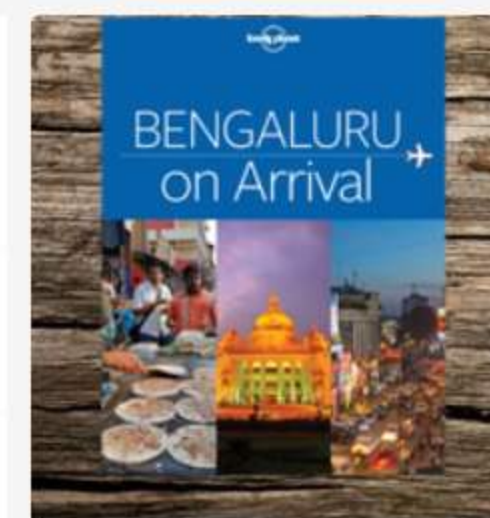
Irrespective of where you are going to be on this Ganesh Chaturthi, you are bound to experience the grandeur of this widely celebrated festival of India.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Ami Bhat is senior marketing professional, currently on a break to pursue full-time travel blogging. A travel enthusiast, who loves sports, photography and dancing with equal passion, Ami believes in planning a short escape for every long weekend that can come up through the year. And when she cannot travel physically, she travels virtually through words on her travel blog. More on: www.thrillingtravel.in



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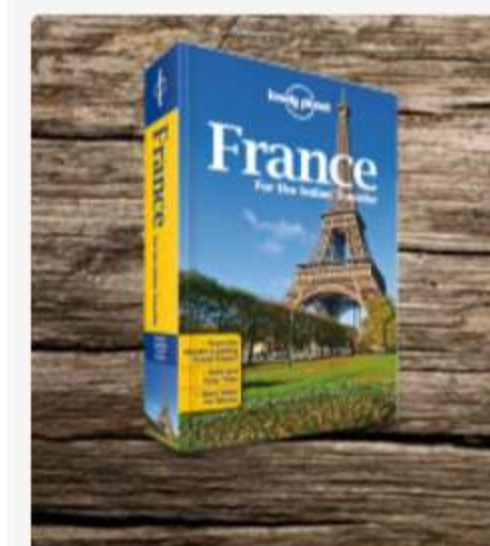
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