

SAFEABROAD



SafeAbroad Forecast Report

# Diwali Festivals 2023

SAFETY IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

## Overview

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SafeAbroad Analysts have assessed Diwali celebrations in major Indian cities to be relatively low-risk at this time; however, petty crime, protests, environmental hazards, and traffic-related incidents pose a moderate risk to students.

## Key Takeaways

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1. **Travelers in India should plan for transportation disruptions and delays between November 9–14.** Poor road quality and an increased number of travelers will lead to traffic delays and heightened congestion.
2. **Diwali celebrations outside of India face an increased risk of anti-government demonstrations.** Many Indian diaspora communities throughout the world celebrate Diwali. These celebrations have the potential to draw out protestors denouncing the policies of the Indian government.
3. **Fireworks are often employed in commemorating Diwali, but their usage may give rise to health concerns among susceptible demographics.** Fireworks used during Diwali cause heightened levels of air pollution, which can lead to adverse health effects for travelers with chronic respiratory conditions.

## Background

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**Diwali is a widely celebrated primarily Hindu holiday, taking place between November 9–14 in various Indian cities.**

Diwali, also known as the “Festival of Lights”, is a religious holiday celebrated primarily by Hindus, but also observed by Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists. The festival is a multi-day affair, with most of the festivities occurring this year on **November 12**. Diwali is commonly celebrated by lighting oil lamps, decorating floors with rangoli, taking part in parades and fairs, and lighting fireworks.

## Celebration Hotspots

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**Diwali is celebrated across the world, with more than one billion participants, though the largest events take place in India.**

- **Varanasi, India draws extra attention from Hindus during Diwali.** Varanasi is regarded as one of India’s most holy cities by Hindus. Religious celebrations such as Diwali attract large amounts of visitors to the area and extra celebrations due to its spiritual significance.<sup>1</sup>
- **New Delhi, India draws large crowds for its yearly Diwali celebrations.** Every year, New Delhi hosts lively Diwali celebrations. Despite a city-wide ban on fireworks, these measures are often ignored, resulting in extremely high levels of air pollution in the days following.<sup>2</sup>
- **Udaipur, India hosts The Udaipur Light Festival, attracting vast amounts of attendees.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.travelogyindia.com/blog/best-places-to-visit-in-diwali-vacation-in-india/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/25/104>

The festival hosts music, food vendors, and the releasing of lanterns. This event attracts thousands of people to Udaipur each year.<sup>3</sup>

- **Jaipur, India draws many visitors to lit bazaars on Diwali.** In Jaipur, the holiday draws tourists even from outside of India to witness the yearly lit markets.<sup>4</sup>
- **Large celebrations are held every year in London, United Kingdom during the holiday.** Diwali celebrations in London are the largest outside of India according to the city's mayor, Sadiq Khan.<sup>5</sup> Ceremonies take place in Trafalgar Square, drawing hundreds of people. In previous years, anti-government protests have taken place at the same time as Diwali in London.

## Potential Risks to Travelers

**Past Diwali seasons have been largely peaceful and safe, but minor concerns travelers should be aware of include petty crime, demonstrations, and traffic disruptions.**

- **During the Diwali celebrations, travelers are susceptible to petty crime and theft, particularly in crowded areas.** In popular destinations for festivals such as Delhi and Jaipur, India, travelers should beware of pickpocketing and other opportunistic theft.<sup>6</sup> Diwali celebrations are likely to be well attended, meaning that thieves may be targeting more densely occupied areas. Travelers should also stay alert in common pickpocket hotspots, such as heavy tourist areas and on busy public transport.
- **The popular use of firecrackers and fireworks is known to cause air pollution and injuries every year, subsequently attracting the attention of local governments in India.** Firecrackers and fireworks are widely used across India during Diwali festivities. Over the past years, the safety hazards of these devices have been pointed out by authorities; in 2019 more than 150 people in Lucknow alone were burned or injured by firecrackers during Diwali.<sup>7</sup> The local governments in Delhi, Karnataka, and Noida have started to implement widespread bans on the use of firecrackers and fireworks until January, citing health risks as the primary reason.<sup>8, 9, 10</sup>
- **Diwali celebrations have occasionally been expressed through political demonstrations.** Most celebrations of Diwali are familial and cultural, refraining from any statements on political life; however, the holiday is occasionally used as a tool to gather people for political causes. Larger examples include events organized by ethnic groups with

<sup>3</sup><https://www.tripoto.com/udaipur/trips/celebrate-diwali-differently-this-year-with-this-unique-light-festival-in-udaipur-5daaaae4678435>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.travelogyindia.com/blog/best-places-to-visit-in-diwali-vacation-in-india/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-67254366>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.securewest.com/diwali-safety-and-security-travel-considerations>

<sup>7</sup><https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/over-150-people-suffer-burns-during-diwali-celebrations/articleshow/95110679.cms>

<sup>8</sup>[https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/as-diwali-nears-what-s-taking-the-sheen-off-sivakasi-s-firecracker-sales-123102900320\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/as-diwali-nears-what-s-taking-the-sheen-off-sivakasi-s-firecracker-sales-123102900320_1.html)

<sup>9</sup><https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/diyas-symbolise-diwali-crackers-cause-pollution-delhi-environment-minister-101635359379184.html>

<sup>10</sup>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-capital-renews-firecracker-ban-combat-pollution-2023-09-11/>

opposing ideals. In previous years, anti-Indian government protests have taken place leading up to Diwali in London. In 2019, a 10,000-person protest took place near Trafalgar Square. The protesters were restricted by police on their march route, for fear violence would break out.<sup>11</sup> More often, small-scale demonstrations in towns and cities are seen. They often call for better infrastructure, with participants placing Diwali candles in potholes.<sup>12</sup>

- **In India and other developing nations, poor sanitation may impact travelers.** Poor sanitation standards can lead to stomach illnesses for travelers. Travelers should research and follow food and water hygiene advice for foreigners in India.
- **Poor road safety measures may lead to danger when traveling, and disruptions are expected due to congestion from celebrations.** Some countries need better-established road safety rules, and the lack thereof poses a risk to foreign travelers. During the festival, travel disruptions or delays are likely due to road closures, traffic diversions, and congestion.
- **There is a minor potential for terrorist organizations or lone actors to target Diwali festivals.** Celebrations in urban areas such as Delhi are particularly susceptible to terrorist attacks.<sup>13</sup> Shopping malls, major thoroughfares, busy transport routes, and worship venues are flashpoints for violent attacks.<sup>14</sup>

## Implications for International Education

**SafeAbroad Analysts predict that students participating in Diwali festivities in both India and other places abroad will face minor risks to health and safety, which can be mitigated.**

With proper training, preparedness, and practical safety precautions, travelers can navigate these risks confidently.

The following recommendations may help mitigate the risks outlined in this report:

- Travelers should maintain enhanced situational awareness when in areas with large crowds such as transit hubs, large commercial areas, city centers, and other congregational areas at this time.
- Travelers should avoid driving in areas with poor road safety measures and should exercise increased caution when taking public transport.
- Travelers attending Diwali festivals should watch their personal belongings at all times, as theft is common in large crowds.
- Travelers should exercise caution when near religious sites, as there may be increased risks for religious tensions or political violence.

<sup>11</sup><https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/anti-india-protest-over-kashmir-on-diwali-in-london-curbed/story-rXgptMXF0y4SL8Ajr26g5N.html>

<sup>12</sup><https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/citizen-protest-diwali-lighting-lamps-potholes-karnataka-mysuru-watc-2289169-2022-10-25>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.securewest.com/diwali-safety-and-security-travel-considerations/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.securewest.com/diwali-safety-and-security-travel-considerations/>

- Travelers should avoid any Diwali-related protests both in India and abroad.
- Travelers should monitor local media sources and report any suspicious activity to local authorities.
- Travelers should research and follow food and water hygiene advice specific to India and follow all guidelines.

