

Cultural Celebrations: *January*



What's on in January?

January is full of important events and celebrations. Tamil Heritage Month is celebrated this month, and in the W̱SÁNEĆ Calendar, January falls under the NINENE Moon. The month contains various religious and cultural celebrations, including Lohri, Makar Sankranti, and Vasant Panchami, which you can learn more about below.

Observances & Celebrations

- **NINENE Moon**
- **Tamil Heritage Month**
- **Lohri**
- **Makar Sankranti**
- **Vasant Panchami**

January in the W̱SÁNEĆ Calendar

NINENE – MOON OF THE CHILD (MID DECEMBER TO MID JANUARY)

In the W̱SÁNEĆ Calendar, January falls under NINENE - Moon of the Child, representing youth, new beginnings and, the rebirth of the natural world. This is the New Year for Saanich Peoples. During this time, there is typically little hunting and fishing happening; instead, stocks of fish and game from the previous year that had been dried and stored are eaten, and efforts go into weaving, producing tools and fishing nets and preparing for the new year. The new moon also signals the season when fawns start to be born, so this is recognized as a time to stop deer hunting.

Source: [W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council, NINENE \(Moon of the Child\)](#)



Cultural & Religious Celebrations

JANUARY 13TH: LOHRI

Lohri is a North Indian winter folk festival celebrated on January 13th, marking the end of winter, the harvest of winter crops, and winter solstice. Lohri features communal bonfires and a feast of seasonal foods symbolizing warmth and harvest, with dishes such as Sarson da Saag (mustard greens) with Makki di Roti (cornmeal flatbread) and butter, plus sweets like Til & Jaggery, peanuts, and popcorn, often offered to the fire before eating.

JANUARY 14TH: MAKAR SANKRATI

Makar Sankranti festival celebrated across India on January 14th; with regional variations in the festival names. The festival celebrates the sun's shift into the Capricorn Zodiac, and often involves activities such as kite flying, bonfires, feasting on seasonal foods, and taking holy river dips for spiritual cleansing. The Tamil version of this festival, known as **Thai Pongal**, takes place over 4 days: 1. Bhogi Pongal, 2. Thai Pongal (main festival), 3. Mattu Pongal, and 4. Kaanum Pongal, with each of these four days having distinct traditions, practices and symbolism tied to them.

Typical foods and food traditions relating to Makar Sankranti & Thai Pongal include: sakkarai pongal (sweet pongal), vadai, and plain rice are prepared for neivedhyam (offering to God). The offerings are made at the moment when the **Tamil month of Thai** begins.

JANUARY 23RD: VASANT PANCHAMI

Vasant Panchami is celebrated in Hindu culture to celebrate the preparation for the arrival of spring. The day is associated with the Goddess Saraswati, who is the Goddess of Knowledge, associated with wisdom, art, music, and learning. It is believed that worshipping her on this day removes sluggishness and ignorance and prepares you for the season ahead.

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What is Tamil Heritage Month?

January is also **Tamil Heritage Month**, a time to celebrate Tamil culture, history, and contributions to the world. Tamil culture, rooted in South India and Sri Lanka, is one of the world's oldest, beginning over 2,000 years ago. Renowned for its art, music, dance, and festivals like Pongal, it thrives among vibrant global Tamil communities. Tamil culture is rich in art, music, dance, literature, and cuisine, with traditions like Bharatanatyam, Pongal celebrations, and temple architecture. It values family, community, and spirituality, thriving both in its South Indian roots and vibrant global diasporas.

What can you do during Tamil Heritage Month?

This month serves as a reminder of the importance of solidarity, empathy, and cultural preservation.

- Take this opportunity to **explore** Tamil music, dance, cuisine, and festivals. Engaging with these cultural practices can help you gain a deeper understanding of the Tamil community's resilience and traditions.
- **Share stories** and experiences from the Tamil diaspora with others. By amplifying these voices, we can help raise awareness about the challenges faced and the contributions made by Tamils worldwide.



Learn More

[Global Hindu Tamil Diaspora](#)

[Human Rights Action Group](#)

Explore Tamil Cuisine *Traditional Recipes*

Idli & Dosa

Idli is a popular South Indian dish made from fermented rice and lentil batter, steamed into soft cakes. A cultural staple, idli represents South India's focus on healthy, fermented foods and is enjoyed during meals, festivals, and gatherings.

Dosa is a thin, crispy pancake made from fermented rice and lentil batter. Dosa is not only a popular meal choice but also a symbol of South Indian culinary tradition, celebrated for its versatility and lightness, enjoyed during daily meals, festivals, and communal gatherings.

Idli & Dosa are often served with **sambhar** (flavorful South Indian lentil soup made with toor dal (yellow lentils) and a mix of vegetables, cooked with tamarind, spices, and curry leaves.) and **coconut chutney**.

Recipes: **Idli Dosa Batter:** [Cook With Manali](#)

Idli Recipe: [Raks Kitchen](#)

Dosa Recipe: [Indian Healthy Recipes](#)



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Murukku

Murukku, a traditional South Indian snack, is an iconic part of Tamil cuisine. Its name derives from the Tamil word "murukku," meaning "twisted," a nod to its distinctive spiral shape. This crispy delight is made primarily from rice flour and lentil flour, spiced and deep-fried to perfection.



Recipe: [Murukku Recipe](#) – Two Brothers

Kozhukattai

Kozhukattai, a quintessential Tamil delicacy, is a steamed rice dumpling with roots deep in Tamil Nadu's culinary and cultural heritage. This versatile dish is associated with festivals, especially Ganesh Chaturthi, where it is offered as a favorite treat to Lord Ganesha.

Recipes:



[Sweet Kozhukattai](#) – Jeyashri's Kitchen

[Savory Kozhukattai](#) – Padhus Kitchen



Pongal



Traditionally eaten during the harvest festival of Pongal, this dish symbolizes prosperity and gratitude for the harvest. It is enjoyed as a breakfast or festive meal, embodying the warmth and simplicity of South Indian cuisine.

Sweet & Savory Pongal

Sakkarai Pongal (Sweet Pongal)

- A sweet variation made with rice, moong dal, jaggery, and flavoured with cardamom, ghee, and cashews. It is traditionally prepared as an offering to the Sun God during Thai Pongal.

Ven Pongal (Savory Pongal)

- A savoury dish made with rice and split moong dal, flavoured with ghee, black pepper, ginger, and curry leaves. It is often served as a breakfast dish or an offering during pujas.

Recipe:



[Pongal](#) – Jeyashri's Kitchen

Pongal Festival

A Celebration of Abundance & Gratitude

Thai Pongal, celebrated in mid-January, marks the Tamil harvest season and is a time for giving thanks to the Sun God for agricultural prosperity.

The festival spans four days, with rituals that honor nature, the land, and the animals that play a crucial role in farming.

The four Days of Thai Pongal

Day 1: Bhogi Pongal

- Significance: A day to discard old possessions and usher in prosperity, symbolizing renewal.
- Rituals: Houses are cleaned, and bonfires are lit to burn old items, signifying the removal of negativity.

Day 2: Thai Pongal (Main Festival)

- Significance: The centerpiece of the celebration, honoring the Sun God.
- Rituals:
 - Cooking Pongal: Families prepare the traditional dish Pongal, made with freshly harvested rice, milk, and jaggery, in a clay pot. The dish is offered to the Sun God as a gesture of gratitude.
 - Decorations: Homes are adorned with colorful kolams (rangoli patterns) made of rice flour, symbolizing joy and prosperity.

Day 3: Mattu Pongal

- Significance: A day dedicated to cattle, recognizing their role in agriculture.
- Rituals:
 - Cows and bulls are washed, decorated with garlands, and worshipped.
 - In rural areas, cattle races and games are organized.

Day 4: Kaanum Pongal

- Significance: A day for socializing and strengthening bonds.
- Rituals: Families visit relatives and friends, exchange gifts, and enjoy festive meals together.

