

What do you know about Hanukkah? Find out how the Jewish Festival of Lights is celebrated in the UK.

What is Hanukkah?

Hanukkah (or Chanuka) is the Jewish Festival of Lights. It lasts for eight days and is usually celebrated in November or December. Hanukkah traditions include lighting candles, giving presents, playing games and eating food fried in oil, like doughnuts or potato pancakes.

Special candles

The traditional Hanukkah candle holder is called a Hanukkah menorah or hanukkiah and it has been used as a Jewish symbol since ancient times. A Hanukkah menorah has nine candles which are lit at night-time during Hanukkah.

In London you can see a giant menorah lit up with candles for the Hanukkah London event, in celebration of the Jewish Festival of Lights. This huge menorah in Trafalgar Square is installed close to the Christmas tree for a truly multicultural winter celebration.

Playing dreidel

A dreidel is a four-sided spinning top with Hebrew letters on each one of its sides. Playing with the dreidel is a traditional Hanukkah game played in Jewish homes in Britain and all over the world, and rules may vary from family to family. There are various games you can play with the dreidel. The games involve spinning the top and placing bets (often using coins, raisins or matchsticks) on which letter shows when the top stops spinning and falls over.

Food

Fried food is traditional at Hanukkah. Latkes are fried pancakes made with potatoes, onions, eggs, flour and oil. Jam-filled doughnuts are another popular Hanukkah treat. Dairy food such as cheese and cheesecake are also traditionally eaten at this festival.

Presents and cards

It's traditional to give presents or money to family and friends at Hanukkah. Hanukkah Gelt refers to money given as a gift at the festival. 'Gelt' is the Yiddish word for money. Children are often given chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil.

People also give Hanukkah greetings cards. The cards often show a picture of a menorah or dreidel. One UK online greetings cards company even combines Christmas (December) and Hanukkah (November/December) to make a card with the greeting 'Very Merry Chrismukkah wishes'!

Happy Hanukkah!