

# Deepavali of the Gods

Just when you thought the celebrations were over, and you bid farewell to one of India's most popular festivals, Deepavali; the people of Varanasi gear up for their own Festival of Lights – Dev Deepavali.

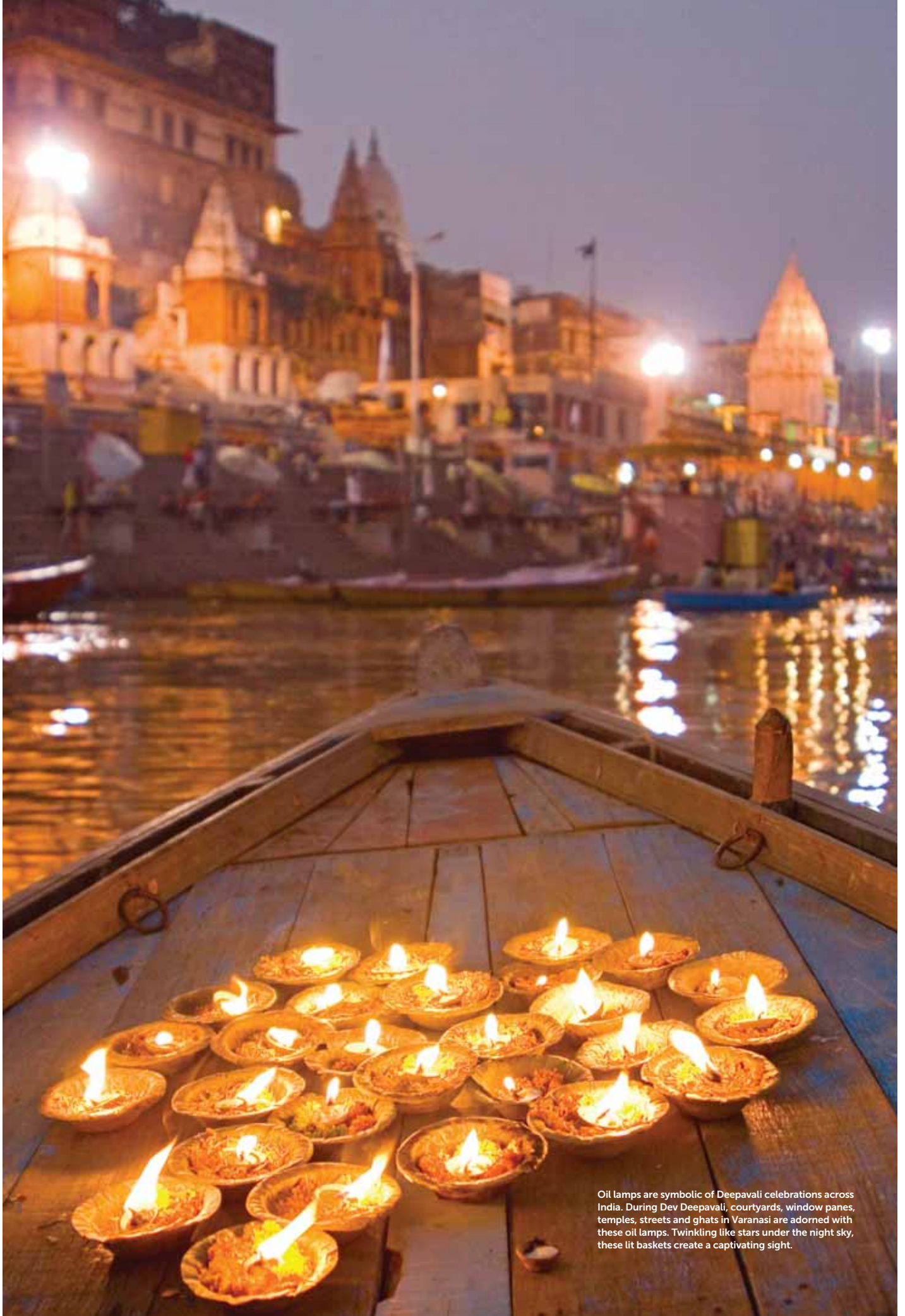
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1. Dev Deepavali, meaning 'Deepavali of the Gods', is one of the biggest festivals in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. The festivities begin on *Prabodhini Ekadashi*, the 11th lunar day of the Kartika month of the Hindu calendar, and conclude on a full moon day – *Kartik Purnima*. During these five days, the city is lit up with millions of diyas (oil lamps).

2. While Ganga Aarti is performed daily by the ghats, during Dev Deepavali it is the grandest and most elaborate one. Twenty one priests hold multi-tiered lamps and perform rituals that involve chanting Vedic mantras, beating drums and blowing conch shells. Each year, the religious spectacle attracts lakhs of pilgrims and tourists.



Oil lamps are symbolic of Deepavali celebrations across India. During Dev Deepavali, courtyards, window panes, temples, streets and ghats in Varanasi are adorned with these oil lamps. Twinkling like stars under the night sky, these lit baskets create a captivating sight.



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**1.** The city of Varanasi comes alive at the crack of dawn with devotees thronging the ghats and adjacent temples. An aerial view of the colourful rooftops on the banks of the Ganges at sunrise; with Manikarnika Ghat in the foreground.

**2.** It is believed that during Dev Deepavali Gods and Goddesses descend on Earth to bathe in the revered waters of the Ganges. According to tradition, pilgrims conduct a puja by the ghats to pay obeisance to the deities, and take a dip in the river in a ceremony called *kartik snan*.

**3.** At any time of the year, the holy city is an amalgamation of vivid colours, enchanting sights and reverberating sounds. During Dev Deepavali this sensory experience amplifies. Pictured here are devotees post their ritualistic baths in the Ganges.



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## The Dos of Dev Deepavali

This year, Dev Deepavali will be celebrated on November 12. Since it is the busiest time to be in the city, it is recommended to book in advance. For the best views of the lit-up ghats, book a stay by the banks of the Ganges. But be prepared to climb up and down the ghat steps each time you need to visit the city centre.

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1. Devotees make an offering of a lit candle placed inside a container made of dried leaves and decorated with fresh flowers. Before setting it afloat, they pay their respects to the mighty river and make a wish as a part of a rite called *deepdaan*.

2. The third key ritual of the festival, following *kartik snan* and *deepdaan*, is the grand *Ganga aarti*. Temple priests offer ceremonial prayers by the ghats at dusk.



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1. From *shivalingams* and swastik (pictured here), to designs resembling Gods such as Ganesh, Krishna and Shiva, diya patterns vary across the ghats, and are often accompanied by rangolis made with coloured powder. Keep an eye out for amusing cartoon characters created by children. Some locals also create designs around social issues.

2. The process of placing clay lamps at the ghats and pouring oil into them commences in the morning. This exercise continues through the day. As the sun goes down, the lamps are lit and every step of the ghats glitters in the golden light exuding warmth and hope. A boat ride at dusk is the ideal way to experience the festival.

3. Another way to explore Dev Deepavali festivities is to get off at Assi Ghat and embark on a four-kilometre walk towards Dashashwamedh Ghat, where the grand Dev Deepavali Ganga Aarti is performed in the evening. End your festival trail by indulging in local street delights – both sweet and savoury.



### GETTING THERE

AirAsia flies to Varanasi from Bangkok.  
airasia.com