



Kolkata in festivals:

A calendar of celebrations

There's a saying in Bengali that goes, *baro mashe tero parbon*, literally '13 festivals in 12 months', neatly summing up the importance - and yearlong abundance - of festivals in Kolkata's everyday life. From cultural extravaganzas to some of India's biggest Hindu festivals, there's always something going on in the city. Rarely will more than a few weeks pass without some kind of festival filling the streets with celebrations, decorations and fanfare. The following are some of the biggest public festivals in Kolkata, offering rich opportunities to experience Bengali culture, creativity and cuisine.

Durga Puja (September or October)

This flamboyant four-day carnival sees Kolkata grind to a complete standstill, as towering idols depicting the Hindu goddess Durga triumphing over a deadly asura (demon) are created from straw and clay, painted in vivid colors, and worshipped in ornate pavilions called pandals on virtually every road in town.

Apart from the ritualistic splendor associated with the invocation of the goddess, public enthusiasm reaches fever pitch as pandals compete tooth-and-nail with each other to claim prizes awarded by corporate sponsors for outstanding artistic or thematic approaches to the dioramas and idols. Pavilions might be innovatively designed to resemble anything from Jurassic caves and alien spaceships to Egyptian pyramids, while the lighting arrays that surround most of the displays usually highlight events of global importance that happen to be in the news in any given year. City folk (as well as hundreds of thousands visiting from outside city limits) take to the streets to visit pandals across Kolkata through the night, aided by copious amounts of food and drink sold at innumerable food stalls along thoroughfares. All in all, it's 96 hours of non-stop fun, frolic and merriment that ends with the grand immersion ritual, when the idols are paraded through Kolkata's roads on trucks before being submerged in the waters of the Hooghly River.

