



A VISIT TO A HINDU PLACE OF WORSHIP SHRI VENKATESWARA (BALAJI) TEMPLE

Dudley Road East, Tividale, Oldbury, West Midlands B69 3DU



WELCOME TO THE BALAJI TEMPLE

Balaji Temple in Tividale, west of Birmingham, is a Hindu place of worship. Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions and is the largest religion in India where it began over 4000 years ago. The name '**Hindu**' comes from the river **Sindhu** in the Indus valley in northern India. In 1995, Hindus in the region raised money to buy some land and to build Balaji Temple to serve the community. It is built in the style of Tirupathi (meaning 'heaven on earth') which is the most visited temple in India.



Find **India** on a map of the world



The temple is a place of peace and provides space for prayer and meditation. There is the main place of worship, some shrines, a community centre and the Gandhi Peace Centre.

People of all faiths and backgrounds are welcome. **All are equal.**

AT THE ENTRANCE

The **East Tower** creates a grand entrance. It is the tallest building and acts like a beacon guiding people to the temple. At Balaji, priests live here. Priests are scholars of **Sanskrit**, an ancient Indian language in which the Hindu holy books are written.



There are two carved **elephants** at the entrance. In the Hindu religion, elephants are sacred animals, respected for their strength, gentleness and intelligence. These elephants are used for ceremonial processions and special events.



स्वागतं ते

This is an example of Sanskrit and means "you are welcome".

Devotees and visitors are welcomed by **rangoli**.

These are traditional patterns made in bright colours on the ground at the entrance. In India, the patterns may be made in petals, coloured flour and rice at the entrance to homes. Here they are made in paints and chalks.



When preparing for worship, a coconut is broken near this stone block as a symbol of getting rid of your 'outer shell' and being your true self. Everyone wears modest dress and removes their shoes as a sign of respect.



WHAT DO HINDUS BELIEVE?



Hindus have respect for everyone and everything in creation. They practise their religion by being good and doing good. This is called **dharma**.

IMAGES OF GOD - THE DEITIES

God is worshipped in many forms. An image of God might be a human form, an animal form or might have an animal head and a human body, like Ganesh. The image is called a **deity**. There are shrines for several deities and a sacred pond.

Ganesh Shrine



On the side of the shrine, you can clearly see **Ganesh** - the elephant-headed god, who is brave and wise. He removes obstacles and brings good luck.

Hindus worship Ganesh before they start anything new or have an important decision to make.



look out for the eagle

Can you see the nervous, humble but mighty mouse?



You will also see vahana as carvings on pillars and in illustrations of wonderful stories on walls.



carved pillar



A wall picture of Vishnu. When Hindus think of God as a person, they call him Vishnu. His four arms represent strength, protection, kindness and generosity.

In The Sacred Pond



Vishnu - God who preserves the universe, lying on a seven headed serpent, with **Brahma** - God as creator.

The deities use mythological creatures, animals and birds as vehicles called **vahana** on which to travel.

Look out for the bull, **Nandi**, (which means energy and power) in Shiva's shrine.



A bronze statue of **Lakshmi**, wife of Vishnu, with 4 arms reaching out to all parts of the world.



The peacock, a fine bird of beauty and grace, is the vahana for **Murugan**, son of Shiva, protector of the weak.

All the deities at Balaji, like Murugan, are adorned with flowers, jewellery and other beautiful objects.

Look out for these in the mandir.



THE MAIN TEMPLE AND THE WORSHIP CEREMONY



Craftsmen from South India have carved the roof from blocks of granite (**gopura**).

Lord Venkateswara (Lord of the Heavens) is the main temple (often called a **Mandir**). **Balaji** (meaning strength) is an alternative name.

There are shrines for **Lakshmi** - goddess of wealth and purity - and **Hanuman**, the monkey-headed, devoted servant of God **Rama**.



Inside the main temple



Hanuman has great strength, courage, leadership and power to do good. Children are taught to develop his qualities.

The priest performs rituals and prayers to God, as supreme guru (teacher). The worship ceremony is called Pooja.

During Pooja our five senses are engaged.



Hanuman



Look out for the sacred symbol for "**Aum**" in Sanskrit: a sound chanted by devotees when they pray and meditate.



Our noses smell the sweet scent of incense.

Devotees feel the warmth of the flames on their hands as they receive God's blessings.



Food is offered in thanks. It is blessed by the priest. We taste it when it is shared. (**prashad**).



Our ears hear the tinkling of bells.

Our eyes see **Venkateswara**, the decorated image of God.

The priest shines a lamp on the Murti (image of God) and moves the lamp in a clockwise direction while praying for happiness for all and peace everywhere.

Devotees pray, meditate, sing or chant the sacred verses sitting on the floor or walking slowly round the shrine in a clockwise direction.



The Garland maker at Balaji: a skilled craftsman using real flowers.

FESTIVALS



Festivals play an important part in the Hindu calendar. Special events are dedicated to the deities, for example, **Ganesh**, **Vishnu** and **Shiva**.

Two festivals are particularly widely celebrated:

Diwali (from Sanskrit meaning "rows of lights") is celebrated between October and November and marks the beginning of the new Hindu year. Houses and temples are decorated with small lamps, houses are thoroughly cleaned, visits are made to relatives and friends and gifts are exchanged.

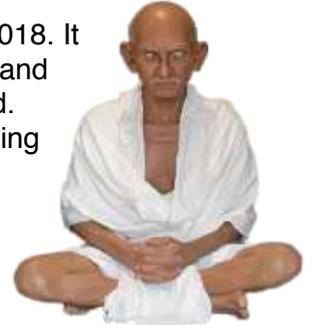
Holi is held in early March and celebrates the arrival of spring. It is a time of rejoicing when people dress in their best clothes, light bonfires and have fun.

GANDHI PEACE CENTRE



Gandhi Peace Centre was opened in 2018. It provides space for meditation, teaching and learning for people from any background. Together, they work towards understanding how to help diverse communities live peacefully and without violence.

The building includes an exhibition to celebrate the life of **Mahatma Gandhi**.



Why do you think the building is round in design?

He was born in India in 1869 when Britain ruled India. Gandhi came to Britain to train and work as a lawyer. When he returned to India as a devout Hindu, he shunned luxury, wore the traditional Indian **dhoti** and shawl, ate simple vegetarian food and lived as part of an **ashram**, which is a Hindu monastery. Gandhi is world famous for leading India to independence from Britain, basing his efforts on **Ahimsa** (non-violence).

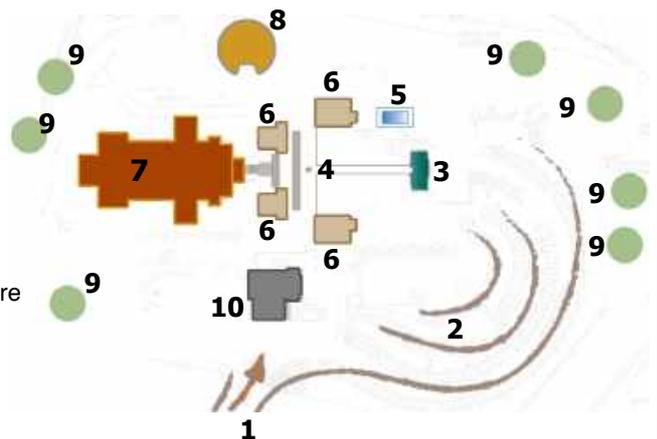
India was granted independence in 1947 and ever since, Gandhi and his peaceful methods have inspired people throughout the world.

PLAN OF BALAJI TEMPLE AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

A South India Hindu style wedding in the **Community Hall** which is also used for social and educational purposes.



1. Entrance
2. Car park
3. East Tower
4. Stone Block
5. Sacred Pond
6. Shrines
7. Mandir
8. Gandhi Peace Centre
9. Faith Hills
10. Community Centre



Seven Faith Hills have been created as symbols of the seven peaks at Tirupathi. They show respect for other major faiths: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism. The Faith Hills reflect a multicultural community.

Three short films 'Birmingham Faith Visits: Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple' (Parts 1,2 and 3) and a quiz accompany this guide, available on both the Balaji and Arts Society websites.

Designed by The Arts Society Birmingham, in collaboration with members of Balaji Temple 2021 edition. Photos: P. Wolf & Balaji



Westhill
make things happen

