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Meaning of Uttarayana (Makar Sankranti) :

Uttar-Ayan (Northern-Arrival of the Sun)

- Uttarayana marks the end of a long winter with the return of the sun to the Northern Hemisphere and hence the name Uttarayan.
Makara Sankranti: In terms of Zodaic sign, on this day, the sun makes a transition to Capricorn from Sagittarius
- Agricultural Importance:
Around this time winter (Kharif) crops are ready and are reaped.

Celebrated on:

14th January, every year.

How is it celebrated in Gujarat:

Kite flying:

One of the most celebrated festivals of Gujarat. People in large numbers gather on terraces, grounds to fly kites of various colors, sizes and shapes to celebrate Uttarayana, the welcome to the sun after the cold winter months. The atmosphere at the festival is electrifying-glass strengthened threads of the Indian fighter kites are matched against each other in the air (act called “paich ladava-no” or dual), and the kite fighter who cuts the other thread is the victor.

It is celebrated all over Gujarat but the excitement runs highest at Ahmedabad, Surat (known particularly for the strong string which is made by applying glass powder on the row thread to provide it a cutting edge) Nadiad and Vadodara. To be in any one of these places during this festival is to feel the heart and pulse of Gujarat and its people.

The excitement continues with the onset of night. As the sun sets and darkness hovers over, youngsters continue competing each other in supremacy in the sky, now with the paper lanterns tied to their kite-strings. These lanterns



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known as tukkal swaying at the mild stroke of wind presents a lovely image while some try to cut off these tukkals and enjoy the fun.

The fun continues on the next day too. 15th January is called “Vaasi Uttrayana”. During this day, people still continue kite flying fun. Most of the people try to use up all their kites and threads, but, many kids would save them for next year’s pre-Uttrayana kite-flying. (Pre-Uttrayana - most of the people start the warm-up by 1st week of January and are geared up for 14th Jan)

The festival draws expert kite-makers and flyers not only from cities of India but also from around the world. Designer's Kites of infinite variety are displayed at the venue. Gujarat Tourism also hosts the International Kite Festival drawing crowds to witness the show of eminent kitists from many states and countries. This International Kite Festival is always held at Ahmedabad on January 14, to coincide with the festival of Uttarayan or Makar Sankranti.

Harvest:

In an economy which is purely agricultural, domestic animals are not forgotten and grass is freely distributed to the village cattle. Uttarayan, thus, becomes a harvest festival in the true sense of the term.

In Gujarat grain from the new harvest is used to cook 'khichdo'. Typical food like Undiya, sugar cane juice and local sweets are served to celebrate the day. Cows and trees are also offered puja since man's existence depends on them.

And of course, there are sweets too: Tal-Sankdi (made from sesame seeds), Chiki (made from peanuts) and mamra-n-ladvaa.

Celebrations in other parts of India:

North India:

Lohri - the popular bonfire festival of North India is celebrated on 13th January every year. As the date of Lohri is decided according to the position of the sun its date remains fixed. Lohri marks the coldest day of winter.

East India:

Gangasagar Mela is the largest fair celebrated in West Bengal. This fair is held where the Ganga and the Bay of Bengal form a nexus. Hence the name Gangasagar Mela.



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South India:

It is celebrated as a three-day festival and the fourth day is a day for outdoors and excursions.

Bhogi Pongal (Day-1):

It is usually meant for domestic activities and of being together with the family members. On this day before sunrise a huge bonfire is lit in front of the houses

Surya Pongal (Day-2):

The "Puja" of the Sun God starts after the auspicious moment of the birth of the new month Thai. Prayers are rendered to the Sun God to seek his benedictions.

Mattu Pongal (Day-3):

Festival of cattle. To the village people cow, the giver of milk and the bull which draws the plough in the fields are very valuable and therefore the farmers honor their dumb friends by celebrating it as a day of thanks-giving to them.

This day is also known by the name of Kanu Pongal when colored balls of cooked rice are placed in the open air by girls for the birds and crows to eat. With each ball of rice that the sister makes she prays for her brother's happiness and the brothers and sisters wherever they may be remember each other.

Tamil Nadu:

Thai Pongal is a harvest festival - the Tamil equivalent of Thanksgiving. It is held to honor the Sun, for a bountiful harvest. Families gather to rejoice and share their joy and their harvests with others. Thai Pusam occurs on January 31 a fortnight before the Mahasivarathri which is on February 14th, 2002.

Celebrating in BayArea:

Since celebrating this festival mainly involves kite-flying and having energy-bars (tal-sankdi, chiki, mamra-na-ladvaa), it can be celebrated as half day picnic in park or at bay (weather permitting).

You can buy kites from walmart, target, kmart or frys (!!!) or amazon ranging from \$8 to \$20. Try making an Indian-kite (use plastic instead of paper). It is very simple to make and needs less wind to fly as compared to Chinese or American kites. You can use any nylon thread. Many stores (try Albertson) carry kite-flying spool (it is exactly a firki - nylon string-spool).



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If interested, try out Berkeley International Kite Flying Festival in July this year. For details see: http://www.highlinekites.com/Berkeley_Kite_Festival

Reference:

<http://www.lohrifestival.org>