DIWALI, HANDCRAFTED

Diyas, bamboo and a dollop of mythology bring Diwali's lesser-known traditions out of the cultural attic

Bindu Gopal Rao

As Diwali draws near, Kuteera 2026 offers more than festive shopping. The five-day mela brings India's rich craft traditions, regional Diwali customs and forgotten cultural narratives under one roof, inviting visitors to celebrate the festival with greater awareness while supporting artisans and keeping generations-old skills alive.

The vision behind Kuteera goes beyond a traditional Diwali mela. It seeks to bring alive the stories, customs, craftsmanship and cultural expressions that make Diwali such a diverse and meaningful festival.

Organised by the Crafts Council of Karnataka, Kuteera 2026 showcases India's handmade traditions, featuring wood carving, leather puppetry, traditional embroidery, handloom textiles, tribal jewellery, pottery, folk paintings, natural fibre crafts and metalwork, among other crafts.

Revathi Prasad, convenor of Kuteera 2026, says the event also explores lesser-known cultural and mythological dimensions of Diwali, including its association with Dhanvanthri and Ayurveda.

"The festival is not merely about lights and prosperity but also about health, wellbeing and renewal," she says.



Celebrating with a conscience

In an age of mass-produced festive decor, handmade crafts offer a more mindful and sustainable way to celebrate Diwali. The idea is to illuminate homes while sustaining the artisans, communities and traditions that keep India's cultural heritage alive.

"Every craft we celebrate is a living tradition, and every artisan we support helps ensure that this heritage continues into the future," says Prasad.

The artisans participating in the mela preserve traditional skills while adapting their creations to contemporary homes and changing lifestyles. For many, the challenge lies in striking a balance between preserving age-old techniques and finding a place for them in modern life.

"Our artisans and craftspeople are custodians of skills that have often been passed down through generations, and their challenge today is to preserve the authenticity of these traditions while making them relevant to contemporary times," Prasad explains.

Preserving a craft, however, does not mean keeping it frozen in time. It means ensuring that it continues to find a place in everyday life. When traditional crafts enter contemporary homes, they bring more than beauty and functionality; they carry the memories, identities and cultural wisdom of generations.







Getting involved

This year's mela introduces interactive workshops in diya-making, diya-painting, palm-leaf folding and bamboo craft, offering visitors, particularly younger participants, an opportunity to engage directly with traditional skills.





"The workshops in diya-making and diya-painting connect participants with one of the most enduring symbols of Diwali. Palm-leaf folding introduces them to the ingenuity of working with natural materials, while bamboo craft shows how simple and sustainable materials can be transformed through skill and imagination. Traditions survive not simply by observing them, but when we practise them," says Prasad.

Storytelling is another key attraction. Sessions by Geetha Ramanujam and the Kathalaya team will explore Diwali's varied narratives and their continuing relevance.

From Lord Rama's return to Ayodhya to Krishna's victory over Narakasura, the stories associated with Diwali differ across regions and communities, giving the festival a rich tapestry of meanings and customs.

"At Kuteera 2026, we want storytelling to remind us that Diwali is not just a festival of lights but a celebration of stories, values and shared cultural memories that continue to illuminate our lives across generations," Prasad adds.

Health over wealth

Dhanteras is widely associated with wealth and the purchase of precious metals. Kuteera, however, invites visitors to explore another dimension of the occasion through Dhanvanthri, the Hindu deity associated with Ayurveda and healing.

An installation featuring Dhanvanthri connects the story of Samudra Manthan, the churning of the cosmic ocean, with the Ayurvedic tradition of the Diwali oil bath.

According to Hindu mythology, Dhanvanthri emerged from the cosmic ocean carrying a pot of Amrita, the nectar of immortality. His appearance symbolises health, healing and longevity.

The tradition of oil baths on Naraka Chaturdashi is associated with purification and renewal. The ritual signifies shedding negativity and preparing the body and mind for a fresh beginning, reflecting the importance of wellbeing and harmony with nature.

"Through these installations, we invite visitors to look beyond the familiar celebrations of lights and festivities and rediscover the deeper wisdom embedded in our customs," says Prasad, adding, "Diwali is not only about illuminating our homes but also about nurturing the light within, through good health, inner balance and a renewed sense of wellbeing."

Heart for art

Kuteera brings artisans and visitors together, creating opportunities to interact directly with makers, understand their techniques and discover the significance of their work. Supporting traditional crafts also means supporting the livelihoods and communities behind them.

The mela's larger purpose is to encourage people to celebrate Diwali with greater awareness, warmth and purpose, making conscious choices that help sustain India's craft traditions and cultural diversity.

"For me, Kuteera is ultimately a celebration of continuity; connecting the wisdom of our past with the aspirations of our future. I hope every visitor leaves with the feeling that preserving our traditions is not someone else's responsibility; it begins with each one of us, in our homes, in our choices and in the way we celebrate," Prasad concludes.