

05 BRIEFING Hindu American Cultural Norms

Practices vary by family, region, and tradition.

Food

Many Hindus are vegetarian. Those who eat meat generally avoid beef. Food served at Hindu temples is generally vegetarian.

Respectful address

In many Indian cultural settings, “ji” may be added after a name as a sign of respect. Usage varies.

Higher Education and Professional Achievement

Many Hindu American families place a strong emphasis on higher education and high achievement in academic and professional life.

Civic Engagement and Pluralism

Hindu Americans participate broadly in American civic life while maintaining cultural and religious ties. Seva — selfless service for the benefit of others — is an important Hindu value often expressed through humanitarian and community work. Hindu pluralism also supports respect for religious freedom and different viewpoints.

Weddings

Hindu weddings are often large in size and may include several ceremonies and celebrations over multiple days. Customs vary widely by tradition, region, and family.

Greeting

Say “Namaste” (literally “I bow to you”), a respectful greeting often offered with palms joined at the heart.

Family

Many Hindu American families value close family relationships, intergenerational ties, and respect for elders.

Community life

Religious and cultural celebrations are held in public venues as well as temples. Major events may draw large crowds and often include worship, music, dance, and a festive meal. Temples also serve as community hubs.

Next Generation

Many younger Hindu Americans are U.S.-born and navigate both Hindu and American identities. For many, Hindu identity extends beyond language and ritual to openness to different viewpoints and service to the greater good.

Funerals

White is traditionally associated with mourning. Prayers and family rites may take place before or during the viewing, and cremation is generally held as soon as practical. Ashes are commonly immersed in a sacred river or another body of water. Mourning and memorial rites may continue for 10–13 days, depending on family and tradition.

FOR PUBLIC LEADERS

When hosting Hindu constituents, offer vegetarian options and check event timing against major observances. Ask hosts about customs in advance.