

Topaz – Birthstone for November

'Gem of the setting sun'. Derived from the Greek word topazos meaning 'to shine'.



General Information

Topaz is the birthstone for November and blue topaz the anniversary gemstone for the 4th year of marriage. Due to its clarity, durability and affordability, blue topaz has become one of the most popular gemstones on the market today. Imperial topaz is the anniversary gemstone for 23rd year of marriage.

Although topaz is most often associated with golden yellow hues, it also occurs colourless, orange-yellow, red, honey-brown, light green, blue and pink.



History

Topaz has been known for around 2,000 years and is one of the gemstones forming the foundations of the twelve gates to the Holy City of the New Jerusalem.

The first use of the name topaz appears in 1737 describing the deposits in Germany. The term 'Imperial' came about following the discovery of pink topaz in Russia during the 19th century. The gem was so coveted, its ownership was restricted to the Tsar, his family and to those who received it as a royal gift. Imperial shades are the rarest therefore the most valuable.

Legend and Lore

The mystery and appeal of topaz goes back thousands of years. The Egyptians believed the gem was coloured with the golden glow of the mighty sun god Ra, which protected the wearer from harm. The Romans associated topaz with Jupiter, the god of the sun.



Topaz also holds the distinction of being the gemstone thought to have the widest range of curative powers. According to legend, topaz can drive out spells and improve the eye sight. Ancient Greeks believed that it had the power to increase strength and make its wearer disappear in times of emergency. It is also said to change colour in the presence of poisoned food or drink. Through out history it was held as a symbol of love and affection and was even thought to ward off sudden death.

Location

Gem topaz has been found at a number of localities around the world, including Brazil, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Russia, Burma, Pakistan, USA and Mexico. The premier source is in Brazil's Minas Gerais state.

Physical Properties

Mineral Special:	The mineral topaz
Crystal Structure:	Orthorhombic crystal system
Specific Gravity:	3.53
Hardness:	8
Refractive Index:	(DR)1.609 -1.637

Durability

With a ranking of 8 on Mohs scale of hardness, topaz is exceptionally strong and well suited for everyday wear in jewellery.

However, it can be split with a single blow, a cleavage trait it shares with diamond. As a result it should be protected from hard knocks.





Enhancement

Several varieties of topaz are enhanced. Most common is the combination irradiation/ heat treatment that produces blue topaz. For this treatment colourless topaz is irradiated turning it brown. The stone is then heat-treated, which turns it blue which is stable and permanent.

There are three main colours of blue: sky blue, London blue and the darker Swiss Blue. Most natural brown topaz is heated to produce a permanent pink colour.



Synthetics and Simulants

To date, synthetic topaz has not been produced. Apart from synthetic or natural sapphire of equivalent colour, the only other stones which can imitate topaz are tourmaline, aquamarine and quartz.