

Onam



Onam-Harvest Festival of Kerala

- *Onam* is the biggest and the most important festival of the state of Kerala, India.
- It is a harvest festival and is celebrated with joy and enthusiasm by *Malayalis* (Malayalam speaking people) all over the world. It celebrates rice harvest.
- *Onam* is celebrated in the beginning of the month of *Chingam*, the first month of Malayalam Calendar (*Kollavarsham*), which in Gregorian Calendar corresponds to August-September. *Chingam* 1 is the New Year day for Malayali Hindus.



- It celebrates the *Vamana* (fifth avatar of god *Vishnu*) avatar of *Vishnu* (principal deity of Hinduism).
- It is celebrated to welcome King *Mahabali*, whose spirit is said to visit Kerala at the time of *Onam*.
- The festival goes on for ten days.
- *Onam* celebrations include *Vallamkali* (boat race), *Pulikali* (tiger dance), *Pookkalam* (floral carpet), *Onathappan* (worship), *Vadamvali* (Tug of War), *Thumbi Thullal* (women's dance), *Kummattikali* (mask dance), *Onathallu* (martial arts), *Onavillu* (music), *Kazhchakkula* (plantain offerings), *Onapottan* (costumes), *Atthachamayam* (folk songs and dance), and other celebrations.





Vallamkali



Pulikali



Pookkalam



Onathappan



Vadamvali



Thumbi Thullal





Kummattikali



Onathallu



Onavillu



Atthachamayam



Onapottan



Kazhchakkula



Significance

- King *Mahabali* was also known as *Maveli* and *Onathappan*. *Mahabali* was the great great grandson of a Brahmin sage named *Kashyapa* , the great grandson of demonic dictator *Hiranyakashipu*, and the grandson of *Vishnu* devotee *Prahlada*. *Prahlada*, was born to a demonic Asura father who hated *Vishnu*. Despite this, *Prahlada* rebelled against his father's ill-treatment of people and worshipped *Vishnu*.
- *Hiranyakashipu* tried to kill his son *Prahlada*, but was slain by *Vishnu* in his *Narasimha* avatar, *Prahlada* was saved.



- *Mahabali* came to power by defeating the gods (Devas) and took over the three worlds. He was a wise, judicious and extremely generous. Kerala witnessed its golden era during the reign of king *Mahabali*. There was no discrimination based on caste or class. There was no poverty, sorrow or disease in the reign of *Mahabali*.
- The defeated Devas approached *Vishnu* for help in their battle with *Mahabali*. *Vishnu* refused to join the gods in violence against *Mahabali*.
- He instead, decided to test *Mahabali's* devotion. To test the king, lord *Vishnu* disguised himself as a poor Brahmin, *Vamana*. He came to the kingdom of *Mahabali*, just after the king performed his prayers and was preparing to grant gifts to Brahmins. Disguised as *Vamana*, *Vishnu* said he was poor and asked for three feet of land.



- The generous king granted his wish and said he could ask him more if needed.
- The Brahmin said that he just wanted as much land as he could cover with his three steps. *Mahabali's* advisor, *Shukracharya*, suspected that *Vamana* was not an ordinary person and warned the king against making the promise. But the generous king replied that it would be a sin for a king to back on his words and asked the Brahmin to take the land.
- As soon as the king agreed to the promise, *Vamana* began to grow in size.
- With his first step he covered the whole Earth and with the second he covered the heaven and hell. Then he asked the king where to keep his third feet.
- The king realized he was not an ordinary Brahmin and *Mahabali* with his folded hands bowed before *Vamana* and asked him to keep his third step on his head, to keep the promise.



- The Brahmin placed his foot on the head of the king . This pushed him to *Pathala* (Hell), the new world.
- The king requested him to reveal his identity and Lord *Vishnu* appeared in front of him.
- The king requested the he should be allowed to visit Kerala once in a year and *Vishnu* granted his wish.
- This day is celebrated as *Onam*, a tribute to the sacrifice of King *Mahabali*.



Atham – Day one

- *Atham* is the first day of *Onam* festival.
- *Atham* day comes ten days before *Onam* or *Thiruonam*.
- It is believed that King *Mahabali* starts his preparations to descend from *Pathala* (netherworld) to Kerala on this day.
- People take early bath on the day and offer prayers in the local temple.
- Major highlight of *Atham* is that people start making *Pookalam* (floral carpet) from this day. It is also called *Athapoo*. It is small in size and the size increases with each passing day of the festival. Only yellow flowers will be used on this day and the design will be simple.
- A grand procession called *Athachamyam* is also carried on the day of *Atham* to mark the beginning of the grand carnival of *Onam*. It is flagged off at *Thrippunithura* near Kochi, the place where *Maveli* is supposed to have been banished from Earth.



Athachamayam



Chithira – Day two

- *Chithira* is the second day of *Onam* festival.
- There isn't any unique rituals or traditions for the day but devotees offer prayers as always. People offer their prayers to evoke the divine blessings.
- More layers are added to *Pookalams*. Orange and creamy yellow flowers will be used on this day.
- People start cleaning their houses to get ready for the big day, *Onam*.



Chothi – Day three

- *Chothi* is the third day of the *Onam* festival. It is a fun filled day.
- Families head out to purchase new apparels, accessories and various items of decoration for the household. A significant aspect of the festival revolves around gifting one another with new clothes, known as *Onakodi*.
- Multiple layers of flowers are added to the *Pookalam*, which makes it significantly larger in appearance.



Vishakam – Day four

- It is the fourth day of *Onam* festival.
- It is considered as one of the most auspicious day of the *Onam*.
- This is the day when preparation for the *Onasadhya*, or the *Onam* feast, is kick started.
- *Pookalam* also increases a little bit in size as per the previous day.
- During these days, *Pookalam* competitions are held at various places where men and women equally participate.



Anizham – Day five

- It is the fifth day of *Onam* festival.
- The grand snake boat race called *Vallamkali* takes place on this day. The competition takes place on the banks of the river *Pamba* at *Aranmulla*. A large number of national and global travelers come to enjoy the vibrant thrill of *Vallamkali*.
- More flowers are added to the *Pookalam* laid in the front courtyard of the house.
- Women become extremely busy making preparations for *Thiruvonam* and a atmosphere of excitement prevail at this time in Kerala.



Vallamkali



Thriketa – Day six

- It is the sixth day of *Onam* festival. A feeling of joy and jubilation can be felt amongst the people of Kerala at this time.
- Cultural programs and social gatherings are organized by various cultural societies all over the world. People of all religions caste and creed participate in these events.
- People start visiting their friends and families and exchange gifts with their dear ones.
- The *Pookalam* gets very large with at least 5 to 6 flowers.



Moolam– Day seven

- It is the seventh day of Onam festival. Enthusiasm grips the state of Kerala at this time.
- There is hustle and bustle everywhere as people do their last minute shopping.
- A new design of *Pookalam* is made with joy on this day with the most beautiful flowers. Since Maveli is coming, there is happiness everywhere.
- Many traditional dances like *Pulikali*, *Thiruvathirakali* etc.. are performed on this day.
- People also fix a florally adorned swing in their courtyards.
- People start serving *Onasadhya* in small versions.

Swing



Pooradam– Day eight

- *Pooradam* is the eighth day of the Onam festival.
- Devotees create clay idols in the shape of small pyramids called a *Ma*. Therefore this day is also called *Poorada Uttigal*.
- The small statues of Maveli and Vamana are finally kept in the center of the *Pookalam*.
- It is believed that only after the statues are placed does the invitation stands open for *Maveli* to visit the homes of people.
- The statue of *Maveli* is called *Onathappan* from this day thence.
- Massive house cleaning starts as people ensure that everything looks neat and tidy when *Onathappan* arrives.



Uthradam – Day nine

- It is the ninth day of the *Onam* festival.
- It is a public holiday on this day.
- *Uthradam* is considered as first *Onam* along with the next day *Thiruvonam* as the second *Onam*.
- Families bring their farm produce to the head of their families (*Karanavar*). These gifts to the *Karanvar* are called *Onakazhcha*.
- *Karanvar* greets these people warmly and treats them with a sumptuous meal on *Thiruvonam*.
- People do their last minute *Onam* shopping on this day called “*Uthrada pachil*”.
- *Pookalam* is given a nice design with new and special flowers on this day.



Thiruvonam – Day ten

- Finally, the most awaited day, the day of the homecoming of King *Mahabali*, the day of grand jubilation, the day to enjoy the delicious *Onasadhya*, *Onam* is here!!!
- Biggest *Pookalam* of all the ten days is ready to welcome the King *Maveli*. Pyramids of clay idols representing Lord *Vishnu* and *Mahabali* are placed in the front of *Pookalam*.
- The elder family members bring gifts and new clothes to the rest of the family members.
- The delicious *Onasadhya* consisting of 10-13 compulsory dishes are served on a banana leaf.



- This is the best day to be in Cochin and witness celebration at *Trikkakkara* in *Vamana Moorthy* temple. You will see the decorated elephants and the people standing on top of the elephants doing the rituals and magnificent drummers.



Third and Fourth Onam

- The two days following *Thiruvonam* are also called as Third and Fourth *Onam*.
- The third Onam, called *Avvittom* marks the preparations for King *Mahabali's* return ascension to heavens.
- The main ritual of the day is to take the *Onathappan* statue which was placed in the middle of *Pookkalam* and immerse it in nearby rivers or sea.
- The *Pookkalam* will be cleaned and removed after this ritual.
- On third *Onam*, one can see the stunning *Kummattikali* procession with elephants and *Mahabali* etc in Thrissur.
- On fourth *Onam*, one will be thrilled to watch the tiger dances in the streets of Thrissur known as *Pulikkali*.





Kumhattikali



Procession with elephants and *Mahabali*



Kumhattikali



Pookkalam

- The floral carpet, known as *Onapookkalam* or just *Pookkalam*, is made out of the gathered blossoms with several varieties of flowers of differing tints pinched up into little pieces to design and decorate patterns on floor, particularly at entrances and temple premises like a flower mat.
- Lamps are placed in the middle or edges of the *Pookkalam*.
- The *Pookalam* is similar to Rangoli which is made of powders of various colors popular in North India.





Vallamkali

- The grand Snake Boat Race which takes place on the fifth day of the *Onam* is called *Vallamkali*.
- A large number of long snake like boats called *chundan vallams* participate in *Vallamkali*.
- Decorated boats are oared by hundreds of oarsmen dressed in the traditional dhoti and turban. The participants and the crowd overwhelm with joy and sing the boat songs or *vanchipattu*.





Pulikali / Kaduvakali

- It is a performance where artists act as tigers and hunters and dance to the beats of local percussion instruments.
- The performance is quite amusing and entertaining to watch.



Thiruvathirakali

- It is a dance where women dressed in traditional costume of *Set-Mundu* dance around a *Pookkalam* and a *Nila Vilakku* (lamp).
- Women dance in a circle.
- This dance includes steps where the women clap in unison.



Onasadhya

- It is the most delicious part of *Onam*.
- It is a traditional vegetarian meal served on a banana leaf.
- Importance of the *Onasadhya* can be understood from an old saying in Malayalam, '*Kanam Vittum Onam Unnanam*', which means one should not miss *Onasadhya* even if they have to sell their properties.
- A *sadhya* contains 26 dishes, including :
 - ❖ Chips
 - ❖ Papadam
 - ❖ Various vegetables
 - ❖ Thoran



- ❖ Mezhukkupuratti
- ❖ Kaalan
- ❖ Olan
- ❖ Aviyal
- ❖ Sambhar
- ❖ Dal served with a small quantity of ghee
- ❖ Erisheri
- ❖ Rasam
- ❖ Pickles
- ❖ Buttermilk
- ❖ Payasam
- ❖ Pachadi





Traditional wear

- Women wear *Set-Saree* or *Set-Mundu*. Kids wear *Pattu Pavada*.
- Men wear *Mundu* and shirt.



Greeting

- Want to wish your friend on Onam?

Here you go!

“Onam Aashamsaka!” which means “Onam wishes” or Happy Onam in Malayalam.



Thank You!

