

ONAM



TIME

DATES

August/September (*Chingam*)

FREQUENCY

Annual

DURATION

10 Days



ABOUT THE FESTIVAL (Legend/History/Myth)

Onam is the harvest festival of Kerala and is the biggest and most colourful of all the celebrations in Kerala. Legends associated with Onam dates back to the *Treta Yuga* and has it that the beautiful state of Kerala was once ruled by the demon King Mahabali. The King was greatly respected in his kingdom and was considered to be wise, judicious and extremely generous. It is said that Kerala witnessed its golden era during the reign of King Mahabali. However, the King's fame and popularity however was a cause of concern for the Gods as they felt threatened about their own supremacy. Hence, they sought the help of Lord Vishnu (the preserver in the Hindu Trinity) whom the King worshipped. So, Lord Vishnu decided to test the generous and righteous King. He disguised himself as a poor dwarf Brahmin called Vamana and asked the King for a piece of land for himself. Although the King said that he could take as much land as he needs, to his surprise, Vamana chose to take only as much as measured by three of his footsteps. Just as the King agreed, Vamana began to grow in size to cosmic proportions covering the earth and sky with two steps and asked the king for space to place his third foot. The King offered his head to let Vamana scale the third step and was pushed to the nether world. On King Mahabali's request, the Lord revealed his true identity to him conveying that he had put the King through a test and was indeed moved by his devotion. The King who had a great affinity for his earthly kingdom expressed his wish to let him visit his subjects once a year. Lord Vishnu is said to have granted this wish of the King and it is hence believed that Onam is the time of the year when Mahabali visits Kerala.





EVENTS/PROGRAMS

Pookkalam
Thiruvathira
Kummattikali
Pulikali
Thumbi Thullal
Onam Kali
Onasadya
Vallamkali

DESCRIPTION (*How festival is celebrated*)

Onam falls in the Malayalam calendar month of *Chingam* and festivities commence on the day of *Athamasterism* followed by celebrations in sequence on all days until *Thiruvonamasterism*. Beautiful floral carpets called *Pookkalams* are laid in front of houses lending a stunning aura to each day of the celebration. Government, public and private organizations also take part in the festivities by organizing *Pookkalam* competitions, *Onasadyas* (traditional feasts) and various cultural and sporting fetes. These include traditional dances like *Thiruvathira*, *Kummattikali*, *ThumbiThullal* and *Pulikali*, spectacular boat races, tug-of-war called *Vadamvali* etc. Cultural processions (significant amongst these is the *Athachamayam* in Thripunithura) are organized across Kerala and people dressed as King Mahabali reviving the legend and spirit of Onam can be seen in public places. Onam showcases the cultural richness and heritage of Kerala.

