**Onam**

Celebrating the rice harvest, Onam is one of the three primary Hindu celebrations, along with Vishu and Thiruvathira. Originating in the Indian state of Kerala, the legend goes that King Mahabali brought forth a golden era during his reign over Kerala. Despite his ego, he passed a test set forth by Vishnu, proving his devotion to his people and lands, and so he is allowed to visit Kerala again once every year. Onam celebrates Mahabali’s annual homecoming through a ten-day festival that includes a variety of traditions such as Vallam Kali (boat races), Pulikali (tiger dances), Onathallu (martial arts), and a nine-course vegetarian feast called Onasadya on the last day. The festival takes place 10 days before Thiru Onam, during the month of Chingam (which typically falls between August and September).

## History of Onam:

Onam is a 10-day festival that is observed in Hindu culture. It is a harvest festival that welcomes the mythical King Mahabali. Mahabali was a demon but renowned for his generosity and good heart. His popularity incited jealousy in the Gods, so they asked Lord Vishnu to help them. As Mahabali was a devout worshipper of Lord Vishnu, the latter aided the Gods in their cause but did not initiate a battle with Mahabali.

Lord Vishnu transfigured into a Brahmin dwarf named Vamana, and headed to Mahabali’s kingdoms with a request to have the right over a property measuring ‘three paces.’ Mahabali obliged and fulfilled Vamana’s wish.

The 10 days of Onam are Atham, Chithira, Chodi, Vishakam, Anizham, Thriketa, Moolam, Pooradam, Uthradom, and Thiruvonam. Thiruvonam is the most important day of the festival.  
Several large events mark the festival. ‘Pookkalam’ is the tradition of designing flowers using colored powder in front of houses. ‘Onakalikal’ refers to all the games that are played throughout the festival. These include ‘Thala Panthu Kali’ with a ball, ‘Ambeyyal’ or archery, and the ‘Vallamkali’ boat race, in which 100 boatmen compete.

Women participate in traditional folk dances, which are among the biggest attractions of the festival. The dances and synchronized performances are in honor of King Mahabali and his arrival. The elephant procession is the peak of the festival, with decorated elephants parading and dancing with people at the place of the procession.