

Festivals of Tamil Nadu, List, Traditions, Cultural Significance

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Festivals of Tamil Nadu reflect the state's rich Tamil culture, agricultural traditions, temple heritage and classical arts. Major festivals such as Pongal, Puthandu, Chithirai Thiruvizha, Thaipusam, Karthigai Deepam and Mahamaham are celebrated through religious rituals, temple processions, traditional customs, music, dance and community participation.

Major Festivals of Tamil Nadu

The festivals of Tamil Nadu are closely connected with the agricultural cycle, the Tamil calendar and temple traditions. Pongal is the principal harvest festival, while Puthandu marks the Tamil New Year. The state is also known for important temple and cultural festivals associated with Lord Shiva, Lord Murugan, Lord Vishnu and other important deities.

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List of Major Festivals of Tamil Nadu

The major festivals of Tamil Nadu, along with their important cultural, religious and geographical features, are given below:

Pongal

- Pongal is the principal harvest festival of Tamil Nadu.
- It is celebrated in January and marks the harvest season.
- The festival expresses gratitude to the Sun, nature and cattle for their role in agriculture.
- It is traditionally celebrated over four days: Bhogi, Thai Pongal, Mattu Pongal and Kaanum Pongal.
- Mattu Pongal is especially associated with the celebration and honouring of cattle.

Puthandu

- Puthandu is the Tamil New Year.
- It is celebrated on the first day of the Tamil month of Chithirai, generally in April.
- The festival marks the beginning of a new year in the Tamil calendar and is celebrated through traditional rituals and cultural observances.

Chithirai Thiruvizha

- Chithirai Thiruvizha is a major festival of Madurai.
- It is associated with the Meenakshi-Sundareswarar Temple.
- A major event of the festival is the celebration of the divine wedding of Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswarar.
- The festival is also associated with the procession of Lord Kallazhagar towards the Vaigai River.

Thaipusam

- Thaipusam is a major festival associated with Lord Murugan.
- It is celebrated during the Tamil month of Thai.
- Palani is one of the important centres of the festival.
- Devotees observe religious vows, participate in processions and carry kavadi as an expression of devotion.

Karthigai Deepam

- Karthigai Deepam is an important festival of lights.
- It is celebrated during the Tamil month of Karthigai.
- Tiruvannamalai is one of the most important centres of the festival.
- The Mahadeepam is lit on Annamalai Hill, making it the distinctive feature of the celebration.

Mahamaham

- Mahamaham is a major religious festival held once every 12 years at Kumbakonam.
- It is associated with the Mahamaham Tank.

- Pilgrims gather at Kumbakonam to take a ritual bath during the festival.
- Its 12-year cycle makes it an important periodic religious gathering of Tamil Nadu.

Natyanjali Festival

- Natyanjali is a classical dance festival held at Chidambaram.
- It is associated with Lord Nataraja, the dancing form of Lord Shiva.
- Classical dancers perform different Indian dance forms as an offering to the deity.
- The festival highlights the close relationship between temple traditions and classical dance.

Thiruvaiyaru Thyagaraja Aradhana

- Thiruvaiyaru Thyagaraja Aradhana is a major Carnatic music festival.
- It is held at Thiruvaiyaru in honour of the saint-composer Tyagaraja.
- The festival is particularly known for the collective performance of his Pancharatna Kritis.

Vaikunta Ekadashi

- Vaikunta Ekadashi is an important Vaishnava festival.
- It is celebrated at major Vishnu temples across Tamil Nadu.
- Srirangam is one of its most important centres.
- The opening of the Paramapada Vasal, or Gateway to Vaikuntha, is a major religious event associated with the festival.

Panguni Uthiram

- Panguni Uthiram is an important festival celebrated during the Tamil month of Panguni.
- It is marked by special religious rituals and temple celebrations.
- The festival is particularly significant at several temples dedicated to Lord Murugan and other Hindu deities.

Arubathimoovar Festival

- Arubathimoovar Festival is celebrated at the Kapaleeshwarar Temple in Mylapore, Chennai.
- It honours the 63 Nayanmars, the important Shaiva saints.
- The festival is marked by a ceremonial procession of the images of the Nayanmars.

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Other Important Festivals

Tamil Nadu also celebrates several other important religious and cultural festivals, including:

- Deepavali and Navaratri, associated with major Hindu religious traditions.
- Krishna Janmashtami, Vinayaka Chaturthi, Maha Shivaratri and Ram Navami, celebrated in honour of important Hindu deities.

- Christmas and Eid, reflecting the state's religious diversity.
- Amman festivals, temple Brahmotsavams, Ther Thiruvizhas and village deity festivals, which preserve local temple and folk traditions.

Cultural Significance of Festivals of Tamil Nadu

- Pongal reflects the importance of agriculture and the rural economy in Tamil society.
- Puthandu is closely linked with the Tamil calendar and regional identity.
- Temple festivals preserve Tamil Nadu's long-standing traditions of religious worship, processions and community participation.
- Classical music and dance festivals contribute to the preservation of India's performing arts traditions.
- Local and village festivals help preserve folk customs, traditional practices and community-based cultural heritage.

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