



Herald Hindustan

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Pongalo Pongal

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Namaskkaram

This month we enjoyed another festival going by which is Pongal. This festival marks the end of toil and moil of the farmers and their hard word for months. Pongal is the day when the farmers harvest and reap benefits out of their hardwork. This is prime festival in south where the livelihood was predominantly farming and agriculture. Pongal is actually the name of a dish made out rice and we make it sweet on that occasion so that a sweet year starts. This day is followed by another day of festival where we celebrate the day with the cattle that helped us with farming. In Madurai one of the most celebrated and looked forward event is also the Jallikattu (harnessing the bulls which is similar to the bullfight in the western countries)

But, it is quite unfortunate that we are oblivion to the origin behind these festivals. It just turns another holiday with some couch potatoes.

At this juncture, I would sincerely like to thank the volunteers who helped us replicate Pongal in a village in Madurai . The zing and enthusiasm they carried was awesome. It was so moving to see them so sincerely clad in Saris and dhothis. The kolam (painting with color powders) that they were doing throughout the day was so inspiring. It was a day full of celebration for the volunteers, staffs and the villagers. Looking forward sincerely for more such events and help us with a throwback to our old days.

Best Wishes..

JAGADISH KUMAR
COUNTRY DIRECTOR - INDIA
PROJECTS ABROAD

Thai Pongal

In Early days, 70 percent of India's population lives in villages, and a vast majority of people solely depend on agriculture. As a result, we find that most Hindu festivals are directly or indirectly linked to agriculture and related activities. Pongal is one such big festival, celebrated every year in mid January - mostly in the south of India and especially in Tamil Nadu - to mark the harvest of crops and a special thanksgiving to God, the sun, the earth and the cattle. Pongal is celebrated during the same time as 'Bhogali Bihu' in the North Eastern State of Assam, Lohri in Punjab, 'Bhogi' in Andhra Pradesh and 'Makar Sankranti' in the rest of the country, including Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal.



What's Pongal?

'Pongal' comes from the word 'ponga' which literally means 'boil' and so 'Pongal' denotes 'spillover' or that which is 'overflowing'. It's also the name of the special sweet dish cooked on the Pongal day. Pongal continues through the first four days of the 'Thai' month that starts on January 14 every year. Pongal is directly associated with the annual cycle of seasons. It not only marks the reaping of the harvest, but also the withdrawal of the southeast monsoons in southern India. As the cycle of season rings out the old and ushers in the new, so is the advent of Pongal connected with cleaning up the old, burning down rubbish, and welcoming in new crops. Pongal follows the winter solstice and marks the favorable course of the sun. On the first day, the sun is worshipped, signifying its movement from Cancer to Capricorn. This is also why, in other



parts of India, this harvest festival and thanksgiving is called 'Makar Sankranti'. [Sanskrit *Makar* = Capricorn]

Each day of the four-day festival has its own name and distinct fashion of celebration.



Day 1: Bhogi Pongal

Bhogi Pongal is celebrated in honor of Lord Indra, "the Ruler of Clouds and Giver of Rains".

On the first day of Pongal a huge bonfire is lit at dawn in front of the house and all old and useless items are set ablaze, symbolic of beginning a fresh new year. The bonfire burns through the night as young people



beat little drums and dance around it. Homes are cleaned and decorated with "Kolam" - floor designs drawn in the white paste of newly harvested rice with outlines of red mud. Often pumpkin flowers are set into cow-dung balls and placed among the patterns. Fresh harvest of rice, turmeric and sugarcane is brought in from the field as preparation for the following day.

Day 2: Surya Pongal

The second day is dedicated to Lord Surya, the Sun God, who is offered boiled milk and jaggery. A plank is placed on the ground, a large image of the Sun God is sketched on it and Kolam designs are drawn around it. This

icon of the Sun God is worshipped for divine benediction as the new month of 'Thai' begins.

Day 3: Mattu Pongal

This third day is meant for the cattle - the giver of milk and puller of the plough. The farmer's 'dumb friends' are given a good bath, their horns are polished, painted and covered with metal caps, and garlands are put around their necks. The pongal that has been offered to the gods is then given to the cattle to eat. They are then taken out to the racing



tracks for cattle race and bullfight - an event full of festivity, fun, frolic and revelry.

Day 4: Kanya Pongal

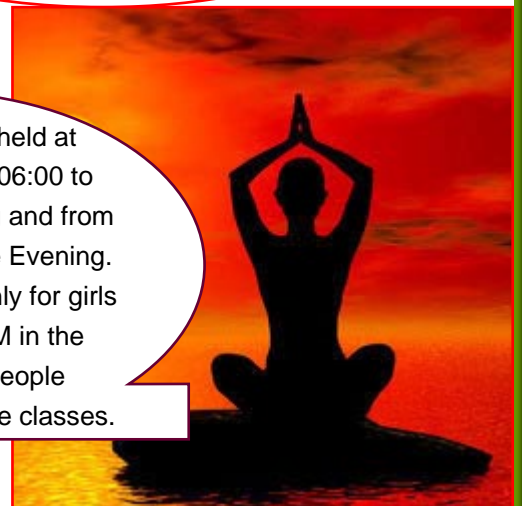
The fourth and final day marks the Kanya Pongal, when birds are worshipped. Girls prepare colored balls of cooked rice and keep them in the open for birds and fowls to eat. On this day sisters also pray for their brothers' happiness.

What's On...??? - Madurai



Best time to visit the Meenakshi Amman temple is from 09:00 to 11:00 in the morning and from 06:00 to 07:00 in the evening...

Yoga Classes are held at Gandhi Museum from 06:00 to 07:15 AM in the morning and from 17:00 to 18:00 PM in the Evening. And there is a session only for girls from 10:30 to 11:30 AM in the Morning. Interested people can attend these classes.



Gandhi Museum - the museum where one can see the monuments of Mahatma Gandhi (the great Indian Freedom fighter and leader). The museum will be kept open from 10:00 AM to 13:00 PM and from 14:00 PM to 17:30 PM.

The rock-cut temple - Thirupparankundram is open from 05:30 am to 01:00 pm and from 16:00 pm to 21:00 pm. This is the place where you can see White peacocks, a rare variety Indian Bird



Birthday Celebrations

Projects Abroad India's heartfelt greetings to all the volunteers and staff members who are all celebrating their birthdays during the month of February 2011..

Volunteers...

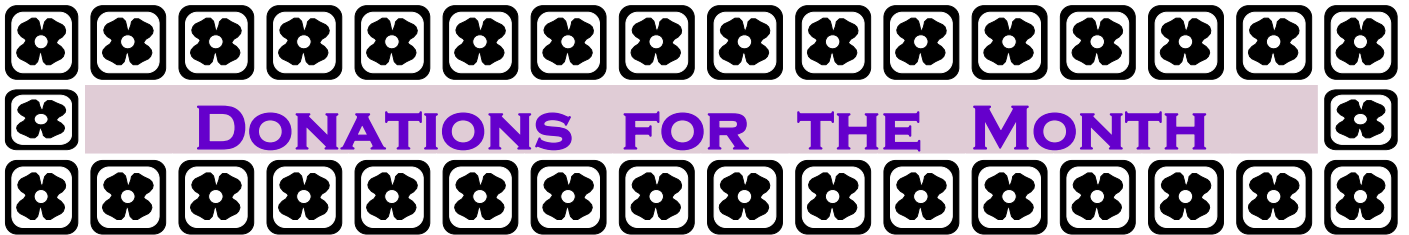
Ms Lara TREFZ - 6th February

Mr Goolam MODACK - 8th February

Ms Katie ROBERTSON - 14th February

Ms Martina ALONSO - 17th February

Ms Carole LURTHY - 22nd February



Projects Abroad Contribution

- Projects Abroad sponsored the Veterinary Medicine for the Rural Veterinary Camp which was held at the village - Nadumudhalaikulam and that costs 6000 INR.

Volunteer's Contribution

- Projects Abroad appreciates one of our Previous Medical Volunteer - Mr Kushant Sunkara's donation of US\$1275 to the Leprosy hospital - St.Luke's Leprosarium which is located at Peikulam.

Once in a Lifetime

While I was thinking about my time and experiences in India as I began writing this in my last week, I was sitting in my room thinking how crazy it was to imagine leaving all this so soon. This house has brought me an unforgettable 'Indian experience'. It was my home in a country that was completely strange to me. We all know that a house alone doesn't make a home, but the Mahendran family definitely made this house a home for me. They showed me India from the inside out. A culture shock to begin with, yes, but oh man am I going to miss it! My trip was simply amazing. Before I came here I didn't expect to become so attached to all the people I met along the way. They have made my trip a once in a lifetime experience.

The reason I decided to come to India was because of my wish to become a doctor. I wanted to become a part of India's health system for 5 months. During my stay I worked and observed from two different hospitals, and I still remember my first day as if it was yesterday. As soon as I walked into the surgery room at my first hospital I knew that this was it, that I am so unbelievably honored for what I have learned during my stay in India. I saw such amazing things, such as several brain and heart surgeries while also being able to observe doctor-patient contact. I got an insight of several specialties and I was fortunate to see many different doctors. I cannot wait until I can start my studies and make my wish come true.



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Thank you India, you have been amazing!

Willemijn de KLAVER/Medicine

My Projects Abroad India

First of all: India is the last place (on earth) I will deliver my future babies.

I came to India with a lot of expectation and exact ideas of how everything would be. Of course I was hugely surprised when I arrived in Madurai because of course it was totally different from all my clear expectations. AND I LOVE IT!

After my 2 whole days of travelling (from Denmark) I came to Madurai with the feeling of being completely alone and without any control of the situation: me being in India. When I stood in



the airport and waited for my luggage, I wondered if I would be picked up by the PROJECTS ABROAD staff member. I knew I was promised to be but I was still afraid that no-one would be there to take care of me.

When I came out of the Airport after getting all my stuff (for the next three months), one man caught my eye. It was a very big-smiling man standing in the middle of a big crowd of people. He was holding a 'Projects Abroad Welcomes You' – sign in his hands, just as I was promised and I suddenly felt very safe. I think this big-smiling man (also well known as Austin) was the main reason that I knew from the very beginning that India would be something just for me. It was as if his smiling face gave me the promise: We will take good care of you and make your stay full of experiences. Now when I am very close to going back home, I can say that the smile didn't prove itself wrong. It kept its promise – My stay in Madurai has been absolutely amazing and the experiences have been so many. My project in India was at a nursing home for pregnant women. I want to become a mid-wife and I still want to after this project. In the beginning of my placement at "Booma Nursing Home", I kept getting really surprised about how they do the procedures at the Hospital because I know it is extremely different from how it is done in Denmark. The big differences are also my reason to say that I will NEVER give birth in India. But when that is said, I will say I truly loved my placement and to be around and care for pregnant women everyday in my 3 months there. I have so much respect for the very busy and knowledgeable doctors who took the time to explain us our doubts whenever we asked them to.

I still remember the first delivery I observed very clear. I didn't understand why neither her husband nor any of her relatives supported her during her labour. Didn't they want to be there? - I asked myself. During her whole labour, she was lying on a table made out of stone and I thought: "How cruel is that?" Plus she didn't get any drugs at all: "Could that really be true?" She got "the cut" to deliver easily. "WHAT?"

EVERYTHING WAS SO DIFFERENT!

Later on, I understood that is just how it works here in India. All women get “the cut”, none of them get drugs or personal care and everyone delivers on a stone table. I can’t wait to see my first Danish delivery!!!

The doctors here have my respect but my respect for the Indian delivering women is much bigger. To get back to the first observed deliveries of mine, I personally wanted to support this woman and encourage her as much as I could because no-one else was there to do it.

After the delivery (and my fighting back all the happy tears), I talked to the woman about the whole experience (I felt we had something in common HA HA). She told me how thankful she was for me being there for her all the way through and she promised never to forget me. I will never forget her either!

This is just one story out of many others I can take with me back home!

When I was off my “work” at the hospital I had my base at this WONDERFUL family. I feel so lucky to have met these people who now I call as my own family. You have to look for so long to find a family as warm and welcoming as this family...MY FAMILY!

The toughest part of leaving India is to say Good-bye to this new family of mine. When I first met them all, my Indian mother made me feel at home immediately. She is amazing. I have so much respect for my Host Father and I had so much fun with my 2 Indian Brothers. Back in Denmark, the family will be the first thing that pops up in my mind when I think about India. Together with the volunteers I lived with (I think about them all the time too), they made my stay in India just perfect.

How lucky you can be? I have a family and a big bunch of life-long friends. I’m very thankful!

I will miss my Indian life. I will come back!!!

For the whole stay, I had the organization behind me. The Projects Abroad India team does a lot for all the volunteers: different medical projects, weekend away trips to nearby places and get - togethers, arranging to attend weddings and social things. For that, I am very thankful as well. It has been so interesting!

All in all, I have had the best time in Madurai. I will miss it and never forget all the good times I have had. Probably, when I leave this place, I will have to cry a little bit – HAHA!!!



Nanna HANSEN/ Denmark

Projects Abroad INDIA celebrated the famous Harvest Festival - PONGAL in a traditional village named Mariammakulam for and with the volunteers. The celebration was in a traditional way with all the participants dressed in the traditional costume. Also Projects Abroad conducted a Koalam competition among the volunteers and distributed prizes for the same. Here is the update about the celebration and the following is the interesting pictures taken during the day!!!

India is famous for its festivals and celebrations. One among the festival is the harvest festival popularly called as Pongal. Pongal is also referred as "Thanks-giving day" to the Sun God. So for the sake of our volunteers, Projects Abroad India conducted the Pongal festival for the volunteers in a traditional village of South-India. The name of the village is Mariammakulam.

The actual day of Pongal festival starts on 14th of January 2011 but for the volunteer's convenience, we celebrated the festival on 13th of January 2011.

All the volunteers arrived the village with the help of our Project Coordinators and the staff also arrived the village in the morning itself. We decided the place where to prepare Pongal. Then with the help of the village locals, our volunteers cleaned the place and decorated it with coconut leaves and flowers.

After that, there comes the Koalam competition among the volunteers. At this point, I should really appreciate the volunteer's co-operation and talent. Our volunteers were really good at drawing Kolam and painting it with colours. Also some of them comes out with the theme for their drawing. The local village people are the judges for the competition.

A traditional village Lunch was provided for all the staff members and the for the volunteers. That really tastes well! Then the staff and village people helped our volunteers to be dressed up in the traditional sarees and dhotis. And being dressed up in traditional costume, all the volunteers, staff members and village people assembled in the decorated place together to celebrate and prepare Pongal. There we altogether prepared Pongal by singing songs and making beautiful sounds by the villagers.

And in the evening, the village kids organized some cultural events for our volunteers. Also on behalf of the villagers request, our volunteers danced for a Tamil song. All the villagers were very happy and enjoyed the day. Our volunteers too had a great fun and enjoyable moments over there at Mariammakulam.!

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Upcoming Weekend – Kanyakumari

Kanyakumari is located at the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent. Kanyakumari was referred by the British as Cape Commorin. The Kanyakumari temple is an ancient one and has been mentioned in the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Sangam works Manimekalai and Puranaanooru. It is believed that the image of Kanyakumari was installed and worshipped by Parasurama, who is credited with reclaiming Kerala from the ocean, and building several shrines. Kanyakumari represents the site where the spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda spent days in meditation upon a rock off of the coast. A memorial built in his honor is accessible via ferry. There is also a recently built memorial to Tiruvalluvar, the author of the philosophical work Thirukkural - a treatise on the Indian way of life.



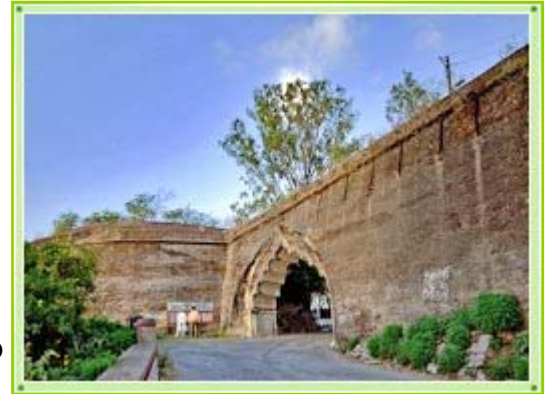
The Legend behind Kanyakumari:

Legend has it that the demon Baanaasuran wreaked havoc on the inhabitants of this world, and that Mahavishnu requested the Gods and the humans to request primeval energy Paraasakthi to vanquish the demon. Answering the prayers of the oppressed, Shakti appeared as a young virgin girl at Kanyakumari and commenced penance with the desire of marrying Shiva at Suchindram. Legend has it that the celestial Sage Narada, fixed the midnight hour as the auspicious time for the wedding. When Shiva's procession reached a site by name Vazhukkumbaarai, a rooster crowed, heralding daybreak, and that Shiva assuming that the auspicious hour was past, returned to Suchindram. The disappointed Goddess decided to spend her life in Kanyakumari as a virgin, and that all the food prepared for the wedding was laid waste and that it turned into the colored sand seen on the southern shores of the subcontinent. The demon Baanaasuran upon hearing of Shakti's story proceeded to Kanyakumari to win her hand in marriage by force, and this led to a fierce battle in which he was slain by her.

The temple:

The small temple dedicated to Kanyakumari, or the youthful form of the primeval energy Shakti (Mother Goddess) is located on the seashore. Of particular significance is the glittering nose ring that is visible from a distance. Legend has it that the light emanating from this nose ring misguided arriving ships and caused them to crash onto the rocky coast. There is a door now, to the east of the shrine which is opened only five times a year. There are also shrines to Vijayasundari and Balasundari, friends and playmates of the Goddess in her youthful form. There are a total of 11 theerthams associated with the temple in the ocean surrounding the area. The confluence of the seas, at the southern tip of the subcontinent has been held sacred for centuries.

Palakkad



Palakkad is the land of Palmyras and Paddy fields. It's known to be rich in flora and fauna. Etymologically Palakkad is derived from the words Pala and Kadu. Pala, (Botanical name is - *Alstonia scholaris*) is a tree with sweet scented flowers and Kadu meaning forest.



Palakkad has probably the biggest mountain pass in the world (30-40 Kms) separating the two folds of the Western Ghats on the border of Kerala with Tamil Nadu. It is the chief granary of Kerala, often called the Gateway of Kerala. Palakkad is known for its historical background and

the remnants of Tippu Sulthan's Fort. The famous tourist spot of Malampuzha is situated just 8km away from Palakkad Town.

Its a place of tourist importance. Some of the picnic spots are Tippu's Fort , Malampuzha - Garden, Snake park, Aquarium, Rope way, Rock garden and Fantasy park , Loknayak J.P.Smriti Vanam and Deer Park, Mayilladumpara - Cholanoor Peacock Sanctuary, Kanhirapuzha dam, Mangalam Dam, Pothundy Dam, Seetharkundu water falls near Nelliampathy, Meenkara dam, Parambikulam wild life sanctuary and boating, Chulliar dam, Killikurrussi Mangalam, Meenvallam, Siruvani, Silent Valley National Park and Attappady ghats.



Chakkara Pongal

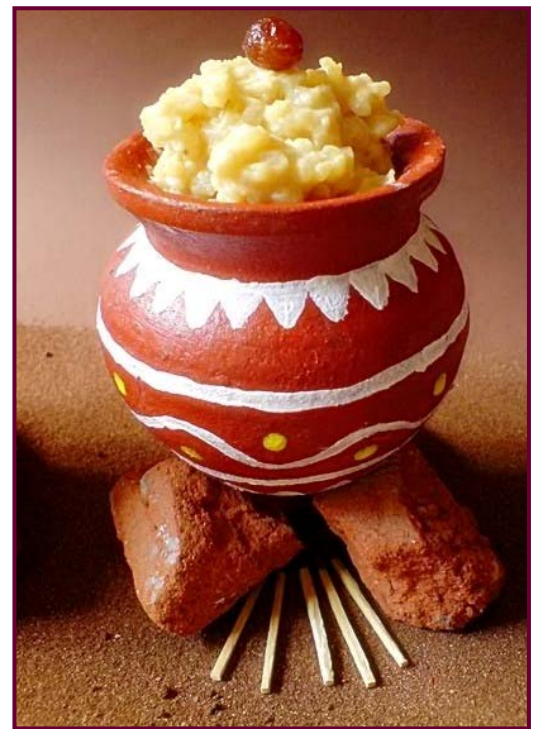
Chakkara Pongal is a very popular recipe which is prepared particularly during festive season in South India. Also this is the sweet dish which is offered to Sun God during the Second day of Pongal Festival in Tamil Nadu.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup Rice
- 1/4 cup Green Gram
- 1-1/2 cup Jaggery
- 2 cups Milk
- 1/2 cup Ghee
- 4 Cloves (fried in ghee)
- 1 tsp Nutmeg Powder
- 1/4 cup Cashews (fried in ghee)
- 1/4 cup Raisins(fried in ghee)
- 4 Cardamoms (powdered)

How to make Chakkara Pongal:

- Take rice and moong dal in a pan and roast them until dal starts to change its color.
- Now add 3 cups of water , milk and cook it till the rice becomes tender.
- In a separate pan take water and add jaggery to it.
- Heat it till the later melts completely.
- Now mix this with the cooked rice and stir properly.
- Add ghee and keep stirring.
- Garnish with nuts, cardamom powder and serve.





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