

FISH FOR THE FUTURE



Fish for the Future is our annual calendar series that celebrates the deep connections between the people of Lakshadweep and the sea that sustains them. Across the islands' reefs, lagoons, and beaches, everyday life is shaped by the ocean, in livelihoods, traditions, and stories passed through generations. Since 2015, the calendar has shared glimpses of these relationships, offering a window into how island communities understand and care for their changing seascapes. Through art, photographs, and collective voices, Fish for the Future invites reflection on what it means to live with the sea in all its beauty and fragility.



This year's calendar celebrates the traditional games of the Lakshadweep Islands, each carrying within it the stories, culture, and connections between the islanders and the islands. More than just play, these games reflect the rhythm of island life, the creativity of the islanders, and the spirit of cooperation and stewardship. Over generations, these games have evolved in relation to the resources available on these islands: coconut shells, palm leaves, sand, wood, and stones. With no plastic and no modern tools, they echo a way of life deeply connected to the sea. Passing these games on to the next generation helps preserve the essence of Lakshadweep, its simplicity, unity, and harmony with nature. Featuring twelve games unique to the islands, this calendar honours these timeless traditions and the enduring spirit of the community that keeps them alive.

January

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01 New Year's Day

26 Republic Day

koliya Moodal

Koliya Moodal is a lively beach game played between two teams of five to ten players each. The sandy shores, coconut trees, and island breeze form its natural playground. One team hides at a distance, often behind trees or nearby shelters, while the other selects a player to lie face down on the cool white sand, knees bent and forehead resting on the ground. The player is completely covered with a cloth, concealing their identity. After this, all members of the covered player's team, except one, scatter and hide. When everyone is ready, the covered player gives a signal for the game to begin. The opposing team then steps forward and tries to identify who lies beneath the cloth by carefully observing posture, shape, and subtle clues. They must speak the name without touching or teasing. If they do, the hidden team earns a point.



February

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Ekkutta

Ekkutta is played between two teams of eight to ten players each. A small pit is made in the ground, and a wooden piece shaped like a cricket ball, called the kutti, is placed inside it. The game begins when a player, standing with their back turned towards the pit, flicks the kutti out of the pit using a uniquely shaped wooden stick. The batting team stands parallel to the pit, while the opposing team stands on the opposite side. If the opposing team catches the kutti after it is flicked, or if it is hit with the palm before touching the ground and crossing the pit, the player is out.

Players standing parallel to the pit catch the kutti and throw it to the opposite side, from where it is returned to the pit. From where the kutti stops, the distance to the pit is measured with the stick, and seven traditional names are called in sequence: Ekkutta, Shanthimer, Mathrumutti, Dallakkoda, Haidakkoni, Aaranga, and Chukku. Each name corresponds to a specific style of striking the kutti: lifting and striking with the flat side (Shanthimer), tapping up and striking as it falls (Mathrumutti), placing on the back of the hand, and subsequently flicking and striking the kutti (Dallakkoda), balancing on the elbow, flicking and striking the kutti before it lands (Haidakkoni), and finally, placing the kutti above the eye and striking before it falls (Aaranga). Chukku is the scoring unit; every time the word "Chukku" comes up during measurement, the team earns one point, and the team with the most chukkus wins.



March

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03 World Wildlife day

04 Holi

20 Eid-UI-Fitr

22 World Water day



Challakka pullakka

Challakka pullakka -This traditional water-based game is played in the sea or a pond, where water itself becomes the playground. One player takes a floating object, dives below the surface, and places it underwater. As the object slowly rises and breaks the surface, all the players watch closely, ready to spot and grab it. The person who first catches the floating object scores a point and wins that round.

To make the game more challenging, players splash water to create foam and waves, hiding the exact spot where the object might appear. They also splash strategically to push the floating object toward themselves or away from others, trying to gain an advantage without clearly revealing its location. In the next round, the winner becomes the one who hides the object underwater.

April

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03

Good Friday

05

Easter

14

Ambedkar
Jayanti

15

Vishu



Aaruva

Aaruva is a traditional team game played between two equal-sized groups on beaches or open grounds. Several coconut shells are stacked one atop another, and from a fixed distance, one team throws a ball to knock them down. When the shells fall, the opposing team grabs the ball and throws it at the players who knocked them over. If the ball hits any player's body, that player is out. Players can defend by catching the ball before it touches them or by deflecting it with their palms and running away. Meanwhile, if the team whose shells fell works together to restack them as before, they win the round. If the opposing team hits all players with the ball first, they win instead.

May

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01 May Day **01** Buddha Purnima **02** World Tuna Day **27** Eid-ul-Adha (Bakrid)

Yettukali

Yettukali is a traditional outdoor game played on white or slightly wet sand, usually on beaches or other open sandy spaces. A square playing area 60-90cm long and wide is drawn on the sand, with horizontal and vertical lines at one-inch intervals forming a grid. Four players sit around the square, with two players sitting opposite each other to form a team. Player tokens, called Aal, are made from thin sticks or palm leaf ribs, and each player places one Aal at the center of the side facing them. The main playing pieces, called Ettu, are four strips cut from the thicker part of a coconut leaf sheath, each about one foot long.

On their turn, a player holds all four Ettu together and throws them to their right. Each Ettu that lands face-up scores one point, all four face-up score four points, and all four face-down score eight points. Based on these points, the player moves their Aal forward along the grid, step by step, aiming to reach the pit or hollow at the end of the board. The first team to guide all its Aal into this final pit wins the game.



June

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01 World Reef Awareness Day

08 World Oceans Day

25 Muharram

Fadakali

“Fada” is used in the sense of “a battle formation.” This game simulates a battle between opposing groups of warriors, where the main objective is to capture the opponent’s fort through rule-bound moves. Victory goes to the side that either defeats the opposing force or manages to retain a greater number of warriors within a fixed time limit.

Played on the seashore with moist white sand, the game begins by preparing a raised platform about two inches high and two feet wide, where a special battlefield layout is drawn. Small sticks, about the length of a finger and made from coconut leaf ribs or palm strips, represent the soldiers. Players carefully move their soldiers across the battlefield, observing opponents’ moves, advancing strategically, and eliminating enemy soldiers one by one. The team that defeats all opposing soldiers or has the most remaining at the end of the allotted time wins.



July

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Mas ari kae kae

Mas ari kae kae is a traditional team-based outdoor game played between two teams, each with six main players and two supporting members. The teams stand facing each other with a short distance between them, a circle drawn in the center, and a small wooden piece shaped like a dried tuna (masmin) placed inside it. A starting line is marked in front of each team. Before the game begins, players on both teams choose a number, starting from 1 up to the total number of players. A referee then calls a random number, and the players with that number from each team step forward.

They run to the center and stand near the wooden piece, facing each other. When the round begins, both move swiftly around the object, trying to grab it within 40 seconds and return across their team's line. Each player can also get tagged by the opponent in this process. A successful run without being tagged scores two points, while tagging the runner scores one point for the opposing team. If neither picks up the piece within 40 seconds, no points are given.



August

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15 Independence Day

25 Milad-un-Nabi

26 Thiru Onam

Cheelo cheelo

Cheelo cheelo is a traditional beach game played by children on white sandy shores. Two children sit facing each other and build a long ridge of sand between them. The playing object is a cowrie shell or a small stone.

One player secretly holds the object in their hand. While sliding their fingers along both sides of the sand ridge, they chant "Cheelo, cheelo" and smoothly move their fingers from one end of the ridge to the other, hiding the object somewhere inside the sand during this motion.

The other player then brings both hands together, spreads them wide, and presses down on a spot along the sand ridge where they suspect the object lies hidden. If the object is found between the hands, the player who guesses wins. If it lies outside the hands, the player who hid the shell wins.



September

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05 Teachers Day

Achennal

Achennal is a traditional outdoor hide-and-seek game commonly played in coconut groves of coastal villages. One player stands among the coconut trees, covers their eyes, faces a tree, and counts aloud to 100. During this time, all the other players hide behind coconut trees or other hideouts, but within a pre-designated boundary. After counting, the seeker searches. When the seeker spots a hidden player, both must clearly see each other, and the seeker runs back to touch the counting tree to claim the find.

While searching, any hidden player can dash to touch the counting tree before being spotted, winning that round successfully. The first person found by the seeker becomes the next to count in the following round.



October

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02 Gandhi Jayanti

Thari bari

Thari bari is played by two teams of eight players each, using a stone painted black on one side and red on the other. Two lines are drawn on the ground, one metre apart, with each team standing behind one line. A finishing point is marked for each team about 30 metres from their starting position. At the start, the painted stone is tossed into the air. When it lands, the team matching the colour facing upward must run toward their finishing point, while the opposing team chases and tries to tag the runners. If any runner is tagged, they are out, and the tagging team earns one point. If no one is tagged, no points are awarded that round. Players who are out can re-enter if their team tags opponents in the next round, with the first out returning first. This cycle continues over multiple rounds.



November

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01 Lakshadweep Day

08 Diwali

21 World Fisheries Day

Vellakkaa kuthikkali

Vellakkaa kuthikkali, or (Machchinga), is a traditional children's game played in coconut-growing regions. Vellakka refers to the early stages of a coconut and contains neither water nor kernel.

To begin, players collect fresh green vellakka fruits that have fallen near the base of coconut trees. A small pit is dug in the sand, and all the collected vellakka are placed inside and covered with sand. The players then sit in a circle around the pit. Using a small, sharp-tipped iron piece, they take turns trying to pierce the vellakka buried in the sand and pull them out. The player who retrieves the most vellakka is declared the winner.



December

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25 Christmas Day

Uppukali

Uppu Kali, also known as Uppu Vaaral or "salt-collecting game," is a traditional outdoor team game played on sandy ground by children in coastal areas. It unfolds between two teams on a large rectangular court drawn in the sand, divided into two halves. One team defends and the other attacks. One half of the rectangle splits into narrow lanes assigned to each player of the defending team, while guards from the defending team stand along the central dividing line. The attacking team waits outside the court.

The attacking team's goal is to jump across all lanes, reach the far end, collect a handful of sand, symbolically called "uppu" (salt), thereby linking to coastal livelihoods, and return without being touched by the guards. If touched while entering or returning, the attacking team loses the round, and roles switch.





Dakshin Foundation, a non-profit organisation, focuses on equitable and inclusive approaches for natural resource conservation and management. Our work in Lakshadweep aims to enhance fisheries co-management through local community engagement and stakeholder participation, fostering stewardship and influencing policy-making.

Dakshin Foundation's Sustainable Fisheries interventions were co-created with fishers in January 2014 with the intention of empowering fishers in knowledge generation and fisheries management. The larger aim of the programme is to strengthen the islands' fishery to ensure sustainable livelihoods while preserving marine biodiversity. The programme has evolved and responded in time to meet the requirements of the community.

Our work in the Lakshadweep Islands is supported by the Lakshadweep Administration, Department of Fisheries, Department of Environment and Forests and the Department of Science and Technology. We would like to particularly thank the Lakshadweep fishing community, without whom this work would not have been possible.

Created by Dakshin Foundation's Sustainable Fisheries Team, Lakshadweep
Team: Mahaboob Khan, Hakeema Jasmeen, Hafeera B K, Shaniya Shamsudheen, Kumar Sahayaraju, Abhilasha Sharma, Sreyasi Mukharjee, and Naveen Namboothri

Calendar Design, Artwork, and Layout: Shaheer Ali, Agatti
Mahal Translation: FG Mohammed, Minicoy
Malayalam Translation: Mahaboob Khan.