Women’s Kolam retreat And Pongal Festival Celebration
MOHANAM

Bio-region culture and Heritage centre, Auroville
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Women’s Kolam Retreat &
Pongal Festival Celebration

Since the dawn of time, women in South India honour an ancestral tradition that celebrates the creation of the world: the Kolam.

Dates: 12th to 16th of January, 2017

Join us for an immersive 5 day retreat bringing local and global women together to share the arts and culture of Tamil Nadu

- Color Making
- Kolam Techniques
- Spiritual Significance
- Village Homestay
- Dance and Sharing Circle

The retreat will culminate in creating a permanent kolam unity mosaic in the local village.

Venue: Mohanam Bioregion Cultural & Heritage Centre, Isaiambalam, (opposite of Imagination, Auroville)

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KO L A M . 5.
INTRODUCTION

The women’s Kolam retreat and Pongal Festival celebration was an immersive five days long workshop that brought local and global women together to share threats and cultures of Tamil Nadu. Over the period of these five days, volunteers were made a part of various activities and celebration of the Pongal festival.

The first day, focused on learning about the art of kolams and the importance of the festival of Pongal. The volunteers were actively involved in making Kolams. On the second day of the workshop, the volunteers took part in exploring a nearby village. They visited a temple for pooja and also met the families living in the village, and explored the daily lives of these people. After the village tour the volunteers took part in a meditation session. Later during the day, the volunteers took part in decorating an entire hall with Kolams. The local women were actively with helping the volunteers to finish the task. In the end they created a permanent Kolam unity mosaic. The third day of the workshop focused on the celebration of the Pongal festival. The volunteers were a part of the celebrations took part in various tasks throughout the day. A kolam making competition was also hosted. The volunteers took part in the competition along with several other local women.

This workshop hosted by Mohanam succeeded in bringing together people from all around the world and creating an environment wherein people shared various cultures and traditions with each other. It was not only a Pongal festival celebration, but the celebration of having, preserving and sharing the rich culture of South India with people from various parts of the world.
So many questions without answers in our mind at the beginning. What is a Kolam? What is the signification? Why do they do that every day?

« Kolam in Tamil means beauty, make something already beautiful, much more beautiful. »

Meenakshi
«That's an offering they do for the universe and the solar system»
There are different possibilities to make a Kolam. Powder, seeds, rice flour mixed with water...

Good, but how to use it is the most complicated part...
Every single day they make Kolams. If it's not there, it sends you a message. Somebody has passed away or a bad thing happened in this house...”

DAY 1

Meenakshi Amma led the prayers of the beginning of the workshop.
It is believed that Lord Ganesha is the ruler and remover of all obstacles. He is both vighnakarta (creator of obstacle) and vighnaharta (remover of obstacle).

The first day started off by worshiping Lord Ganesha. In the Indian culture every work should commence by worshiping him.
After the Ganesha pooja, all the participants gathered in the hall for a briefing of the workshop that would take over the next few days.
The session included everybody, introducing themselves and the women which were going to teach us, welcoming the participants for the workshop and celebration they were going to be part of.
After the briefing of the workshop, it was time for Meenakshi amma’s talk. She spoke about the importance of Pongal as a festival and the history of Kolam. Her talk gave an insight into the various traditional practices carried out throughout South India. She spoke about the importance of the Kolam and what every style represents something different. The talk included shlokas and legends related to Pongal. She also shared her personal experiences with the participants, allowing them to understand the day to day life of the locals.

The session ended with an interactive question answer session between the locals and the participants, leading them to understand the importance of the celebration they will be involved in.
First task: sprinkle water mixed with mud and cow dung on the floor. Cow dung is considered to be anti-sceptic and natural cleaning agent.
Once the cow dung applied on the ground, let's start with the powder.

But how to do?

Help!
Before starting to make Kolam it’s time to clean the floor with the broom. This is done to make the ground even such as it is easier to draw the Kolam on.
We need the help of the ladies. It's not as easy as it looks, but the students worked hard to succeed.
«For a woman, the time where she makes Kolams is her time, her PRIVACY, by this way she gets appreciation otherwise they never get appreciation, except a shy smile sometimes»
It’s with a lot of attention and concentration that the volunteers try to learn and practice.
What if we try to make a Kolam with flowers?
Or seeds?
We went in the village, in the temple where we met the priest for Pongal celebration.

We also met a family of the village and this beautiful girl made a Kolam in front of us and we made one with her...
We shared a moment with the priest for the Pongal celebration, he did all the religious and traditional ritual for us and with us.
We met in the village this woman who has a lot of experience about Kolam. Kindely she made one for us. We all were in circle around her, observing her technique and Kolam skills.
Now, let's fill the ground with a big Kolam made by the volunteers and the ladies.

A quiet moment with meditation music...

...concentration is required to make a beautiful Kolam.
Kolams feed the animals, ants, little birds... and the creatures around us. It develops more compassion to the living beings around, it's a very conscious art.
«Making a Kolam is like dance, the body movement is part of it.»
«It’s an offering they do for the universe and the solar system»
Last step of the workshop, we created a giant permanent Kolam with stones.
A woman drew the BIG Kolam on the ground, around a tree. We dug, put cement and stones.
PICTURE OF BIG KOLAM FINISH
« Most of the children have their own notebook for Kolam they start collecting and they applied later »
DAY 3

The competition can start!

Ready, steady, GO!

It’s time to show what they learnt during this workshop.
Everybody took part of it, the volunteers, the ladies who taught us... The spectators and a jury were there to chose the best Kolam.
CONVIVIAL AND WARM MOMENT AROUND THE ART OF KOLAM
WHO IS GOING TO WIN...?
It was not only a competition but a moment of sharings between different cultures.
« We have a pray to Lord Ganesh who helps us to begin everything in a beautiful way, to Maha Lakshmi to bring perfection, harmony, rhythm and proportion in our work.

And that we all have a peaceful and prosperous life.

The Pongal festival is a festival of thanksgiving and abundance and so through these prayers the place is sanctified for the creative art Kolam. »

Meenakshi
Thank you to Mohanam, Balu, Radjivani, Meenakshi, Matt and all the people who worked to make this experience beautiful.

Pictures & Edition

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