

Kerala

According to R. C. Bell in his book BOARD AND TABLE GAMES from Many Civilizations, the game of Kerala was described by a commonwealth houseman — a House Officer in the British Military of old. Bell says that the identity of the houseman and the origins of Kerala have been lost. Though one would logically assume the game to be from Kerala, India, Bell does not allude to this; the name Kerala may have been substituted for a forgotten name.

However, one thing we do know is that the game board was typically drawn in the sand, and each player had their own distinct stones to use as playing pieces along with five cowrie shells that were used for dice — the open mouths of the shells acting like the pips on a dice.

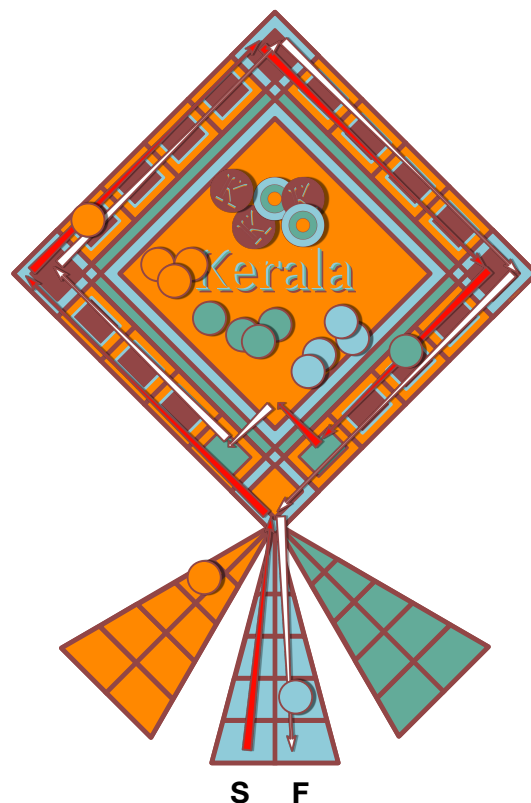
The cowrie shells alone indicate that the game, more-than-likely, originated in the East, and Indian games typically used cowrie shells for dice. Fortunately, thanks to the houseman in question, the rules and board shape remain to be enjoyed to this day.

The game is for two to three players whose pieces start their journey up the starting-lane on the left-hand side on one of the tracks jutting out from the bottom of the main square track above. Their return journey will be down the right-hand side of their coloured track.

In this printable version, each player has five pieces of their own colour, and the moves of these pieces are controlled by throwing five two-sided dices. The side with the orange centre being the pip-counting side on the printable version.



(You can use five coins if you do not wish to make the ones provided. You must decide which side will act as the counting pips — heads or tails. The other side will act as the blank side, which would typically be the smooth, rounded side of a cowrie shell. You could also use three sets of different coins for the playing piece.)



The dice scores are:

- 5 orange centres facing up = 10 points
- 4 orange centres facing up = 4 points
- 3 orange centres facing up = 3 points
- 2 orange centres facing up = 2 points
- 1 orange centre facing up = 1 point
- 0 orange centres facing up = 5 points

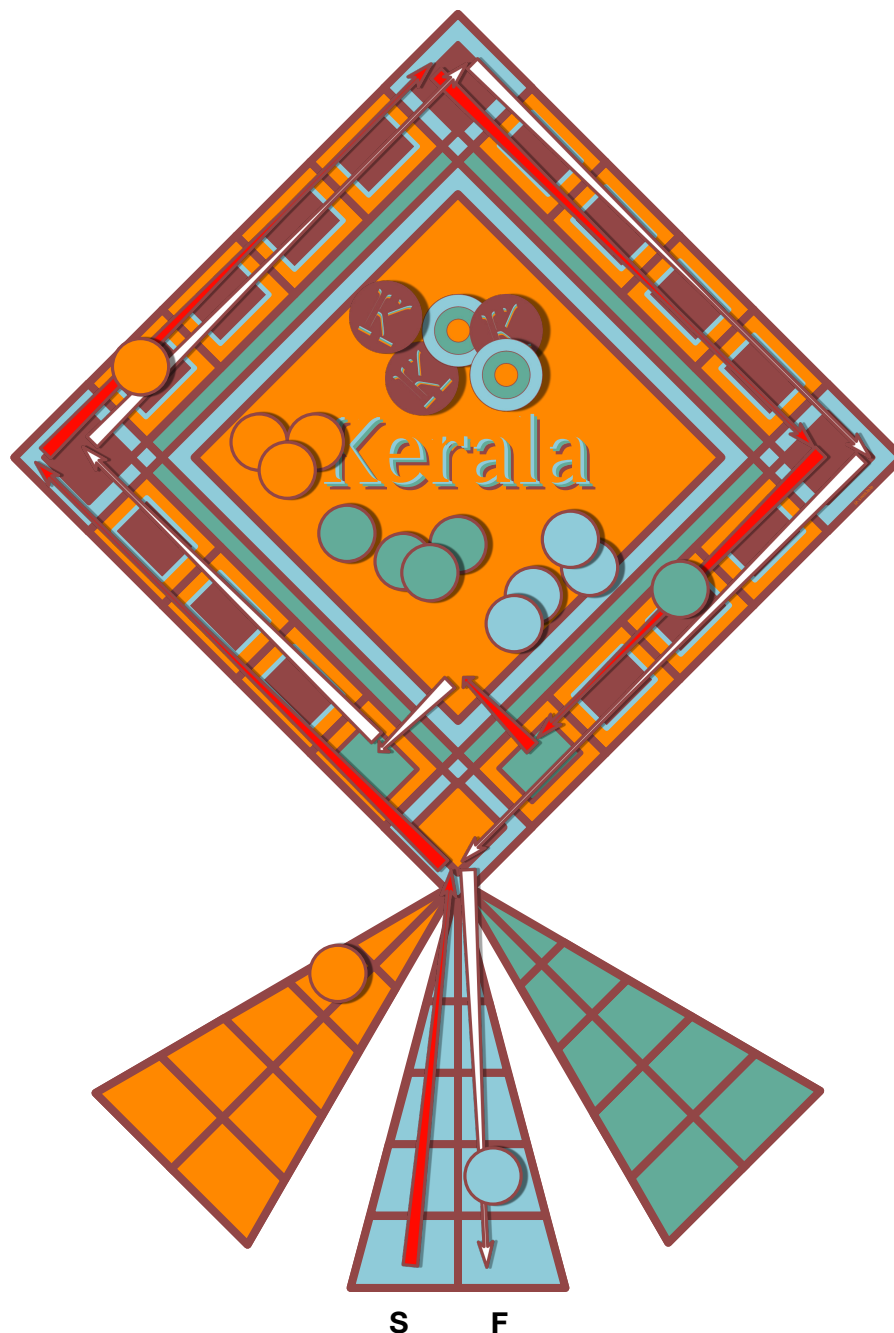
Each player's pieces start off the board, and only a throw of 1 or 5 permits a player to start a piece on the board. A 5 permits a starting piece to start five spaces on the starting-lane.

Only one piece can move on a throw. If a 5 is scored the player has a second throw, and this can be used to advance the same piece or a different one. If a 5 is scored again, the player has another throw, with the possibility of a third piece being moved — this choice continues as long as 5s are thrown. If a player cannot make use of a throw, their turn must be forfeited, and this includes having another roll if they have rolled a 5.

All five of a player's pieces must travel once around the square track and enter the centre of the board. Once all five pieces are in the centre, then, and then only, can the return journey be made by once more traveling around the track before leaving down the right-hand side of their finishing-lane.

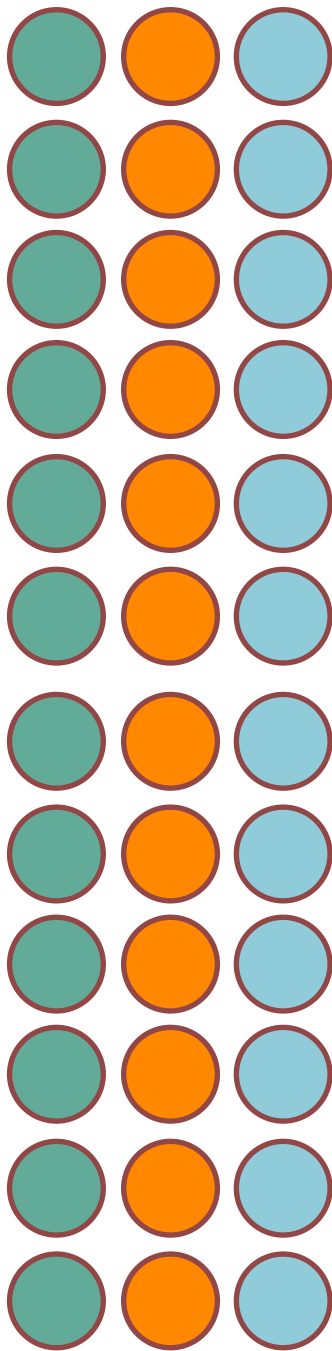
If a piece is hit on its way to the centre, whether by an opponent's piece or by the player's own piece, it retires to the starting point and must begin again. If it is hit while travelling from the centre, it retires to the centre position.

A piece resting on a corner square is safe from attack, and each player may have one piece on a haven-square at the same time. The first player to get all his stones off the board wins the game, and the other players continue for second and third place.



Print out the playing pieces and stick to card, then cut the pieces out. For the two-sided coin-dice: print out and stick to card, then cut out the rectangles and stick back and front together, making sure they are lined up properly. Then cut the pieces out.

On the next page is the printable playing board.



Coin Dice
BACK FRONT

