

PRESS RELEASE

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TASTE THE HIDDEN GEMS OF A TROPICAL PARADISE

Dispel preconceptions of India as a destination where visitors are prone to a dose of Delhi Belly – the region of Kerala boasts divine cuisine plucked straight from the arms of Mother Nature. And whilst tourists flock to the beaches of South Kerala to bask in the winter sunshine, Unique Home Stays has strayed away from the crowds to the heart of Malayalee traditions, culture and cuisine.

From the backwaters of Cochin to the virgin forests and plantations of the Western Ghats and the unspoilt beaches of Malabar (north Kerala), we have picked a cluster of the most intimate, luxurious and unique home stays hosted by local families. These homestays and their hosts invite couples, families and more mature travellers to experience an insider's view of the region and the exotic tastes of Kerala. Until the monsoon season approaches again next April, this is the best time to travel to Kerala and take a bite of a rich tropical paradise.

EAT YOUR HEART OUT

Indulge in fresh, zingy curries made with freshly caught fish and freshly ground spices grown in and around the lush plantations. At Motty's Marari beach cottages watch fishermen pull in the fresh catch, which your chef Binu will sizzle in Keralan spices and serve on your private veranda with a sea view. At Philipkutty's island you can see the vegetables, fruit and spices growing in their natural environment – the ingredients for the freshly cooked feasts you will find on the dinner table. Nutmeg, vanilla, coconuts, mangoes, cashews, bananas, peppers, cardamom, cocoa and cinnamon – the exotic flavours we pay a premium for in the UK, are available in abundance across the region. Take a trip in a dugout canoe or houseboat in the Cochin backwaters, and meet the local villagers who will invite you into the teahouses and pick fresh coconuts for you to eat.

Head north to Tellicherry – the centre of the world's spice trade – and internationally renowned chef, Fazia Moosa, will conjure up a feast fit for royalty for you to enjoy as the sun goes down over the ocean. Source produce from the markets, the ocean and the forests, and take cookery lessons so that you can recreate the Keralan cuisine for an exotic dinner party back at home. Explore the plantations of the north where the coffee, vanilla, cashews and jackfruits grow, and the monkeys swing in the trees.

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A Special Place to Stay

The home stay culture has a firm place at the heart of Kerala, and we have spent time hand-picking the very best that Kerala has to offer – including a 200-year-old heritage home in the rice paddies, luxury cottages on a backwater island and a tree house in the coffee plantations. Enjoy original Keralan architecture, knockout locations, and the most welcoming and generous hosts. And even in India you can expect creature comforts, modern amenities and stylish décor.

AYISHA MANZIL, Tellicherry, Kerala (www.ayishamanzil.uniquehomestays.com)

Indulge in sumptuous regional cuisine and enjoy being pampered when you stay in this Malabari heritage home that almost topples into the Arabian ocean. Inside you will find terracotta-tiled floors, regal furnishings, and a maze of spacious rooms linked with living spaces, mezzanine levels and balconies facing the divine views. With an internationally renowned chef to prepare sumptuous Mopillah-style dishes there is nowhere better to sample to the local cuisine.

PHILIPKUTTYS, Kottayam District (www.philipkuttys.uniquehomestays.com)

Arrive by boat to this magical island retreat that encapsulates eco-tourism at its most luxurious. Six cottages fashioned in traditional Keralan style peep out from beneath the coconut palms, on the edge of the backwaters. The coconuts, nutmeg, bananas, cocoa, cardamom, cinnamon and peppers growing on the lush farm island are just some of the fresh ingredients you will find on the dinner table.

TRANQUIL PLANTATION HIDEAWAY, Wayanad (www.tranquilresort.uniquehomestays.com)

A plantation hideaway in the Western Ghats that is tranquil by name and tranquil by nature. Oozing with the colonial ambience of yesteryear, this extravagant homestay is situated in a 400-acre coffee, cardamom and vanilla plantation. Follow the jungly paths to 'Lookout Rock' for breakfast served with a jaw-dropping view or take a dip in the azure-blue pool; but it is the luxury tree house for two that really steals the show.

MOTTYS HOMESTAY AND MARARI BEACH COTTAGES, Alleppey (www.mottys.uniquehomestays.com)

Enjoy the culture and cuisine of Kerala on the beach and the backwaters when you choose from a traditional heritage home in the heart of the backwaters, or one of four luxury fishermen's cottages on a nearby palm-fringed beach. Learn the secrets of the local cuisine, try an authentic ayurvedic massage, or head into the backwaters by houseboat or dugout canoe.

THARAVAD, Palakkad (www.tharavad.uniquehomestays.com)

A two-hundred-year-old ancestral home set in the lush rice paddies, Tharavad has been meticulously maintained to keep its original features. It makes an exceptional location for an overseas wedding celebration in true Indian style, but whatever the occasion your warm host, Mr Bhagwaldas, will treat you to the finest local cuisine and hospitality and take you to the local villages where you can witness the artisan skills of the region.

IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

The balmy climes of Kerala are well kitted out for families and will leave the children wide-eyed in amazement. This is a destination that offers the exotica of India at its most gentle pace.

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How much? Ranging from US\$50-\$200 per night

How do I get there? The easiest route is to fly into Cochin (Kochi) International Airport. You can also fly to Trivandrum or Bangalore. Your hosts will be happy to organise a private driver for you at a very reasonable price – this is the best way to travel around Kerala. Please feel free to contact us for any further travel advice.

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Notes to editors:

- Unique Home Stays (www.uniquehomestays.com) has properties in the UK, USA, Spain, South Africa, Portugal, New Zealand, Italy, India, Greece, Germany and France.
- Please contact Unique Home Stays in the event of featuring any of our properties.
- A selection of high-resolution images is available.
- We can organize press trips for select journalists (flights not included) and we work alongside a handful of professional journalists who can provide bespoke write-ups if required.
- Launched in 2001, Unique Home Stays offers the crème de la crème of privately hosted accommodation that offers a unique alternative to run-of-the mill hotels. Having travelled the world, MD Sarah Stanley knew what she expected from top quality accommodation: Intimate and luxury hospitality, pristine homes oozing with character, excellent regional cuisine and comfortable bedrooms with all the trimmings. Today Unique Home Stays offers superior accommodation in over 100 homes scattered over 14 different countries. The properties include castles, priories, rectories, windmills, water mills, townhouses, coastal homes and even a house in the sea.