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## Coconut Creek Kumarakom Kerala Homestay- A Home Away From Home

August 14, 2012

Irena Knehtl



Kerala is the spice coast of India. Edged by a thread of unbroken beach line, the state's heart is composed of intensely green paddy fields and an unique network of rivers and lagoons. Upland Kerala is composed of hills thickly wooded with teach and rubber. It is here that Kerala's most precious spices are grown in carefully nurtured plantations of cardamom, pepper and nutmeg.

Kochi, with a fine natural harbor, has been Kerala's centre of maritime trade for innumerable centuries. Along the harbor, rows of antediluvian Chinese fishing nets indicate Kerala's trade with China, just as buildings along the water's edge testify to the erstwhile presence of Dutch and Portuguese colonizers.

From Kottayam to Allepey is a world of palm fringed waterways. Sailboats, long barges transporting tons of coconuts and tiny skiffs used to transport children to school are common sights on these backwaters.

Best read? Arundhati's Roy "God of Small Things", where "the nights are clear but suffused with sloth and sullen expectation. But by early June the south-west monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water with short spells of sharp, glittering sunshine than thrilled children snatch to play with. The countryside turns an immodest green. Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn moss green. Pepper vines snake up electric poles. Wild creepers burst through late rite banks and spill across the flooded roads. Boats ply in the bazaars... and small fish appear in the puddles...."

A trip to Kerala can spice up life. "Coconut Creek Farm And Home Stay" has been awarded as the best homestay in Kerala in 2009 and 2010. This feel like your own idyllic holiday home.

"Coconut Creek" is a bed and breakfast homestay facility situated beside Kumarakom lake and bird sanctuary, in Kottayam district of Kerala. I thought I will give myself a fore taste and spoke with Ullas Babu, interview

Q: Welcome, would you like to tell us something about yourself, your outlook in life, some of your favorite books, music, sayings, films....?

Ullas Babu: I am a graduate in hotel management and postgraduate in MBA marketing . My aim is to promote social responsible eco friendly bed and breakfast in Kerala. As for my favorite, he is Sydney Shelton , music is KennyG and favorite movie is BraveHeart

Q: A homestay in Kerala – not usual concept – would you like to explain it?

Ullas Babu: Kerala homestay or Kerala bed and breakfast is a unique opportunity for Kerala travelers to gain firsthand experience of Kerala as tourism destination. You get a first and experience of the place, culture, traditions and people in Kerala. It is unlike staying in a hotel and truly - a home away from home.

In Kerala homestay or Kerala bed and breakfast, one gets to interact with the host family as one is staying in their house. It is far more economical and exciting than staying in hotels.

Homestays or bed and breakfast, organized properly, was not too common in India, and it came to Kerala even later. Homestays or bed and breakfast started officially only a couple of years back - in 2001-2002. The Kerala Tourism Department officially announced the beginning of homestay program, and even provided recommendations / certifications to homestay houses in order certain standards to be met.

The program seems to be a success - part of the reason is that tourism in Kerala is geared to the elite tourist with sophisticated tastes - which means no partying, discos, drug scenes - but an interest in the social and cultural heritage of Kerala and its great scenery.

Q: How do you remember the beginnings, the initial idea, first visitors, brief reflection?

Ullas Babu: The idea for my homestay is from my education back ground hotel management graduation and business ideas from MBA. The first guest was from Canada

Q: Would you like to introduce the area, sounds, scents, flavors, perfumes ...

Ullas Babu: Kumarakom is backwater tourist destination .Our area is pure village and it is full of back water. Kerala's largest lake - the Vemnadu lake – is also situated in Kumarakom.

Q: The house – a heritage house – perfectly blends with cultural continuity... would you like to give us

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tour, furnishing, decorations?

Ullas Babu: We belong to a traditional aristocratic Christian Malayalee family. We are in Kumarakom since 1850. We are basically an agricultural family.

Your host/hostess are all well educated, well traveled and fluent in English language. Your host has good knowledge of Kerala.

Q: Introduce us to Kumarakom, - the location - and how best to reach, first sights and sounds?

Ullas Babu: Kumarakom is situated 14 km from Kottayam and 80 km from Kochi on Vembanad Lake. It consists of a cluster of islands, which have been converted into a number of tourist resorts. It is one of the top backwater

destinations in the world.

Kumarakom is of unique beauty. The blue backwaters and the surface of Vembanad lake reflects a captivating scenery. The bird sanctuary located here lures migratory birds from all over the world. The glittering beauty of the land includes vegetations like mangroves, coconut palms, and paddy fields. Water lilies and lotuses that bloom in the water and the birds from the sanctuary are a treat to watch. Kumarakom is the ideal tourist destination for those who love the nature.

The nearest railway station is Kottayam and the nearest airport is Kochi. It is also possible to reach Kumarakom by boat from Alappuzha, Kottayam and Kochi.

Q: Which is the best time to visit

Ullas Babu: October to February

Q: Who should come?

Ullas Babu: Families, honeymooners, groups, senior citizen, budget travelers, bird watchers...

Q: After language, the next important thing in defying a country`s character is – its cuisine. A traveler returning from Kerala summed it up "each mouthful would explode on my lips" What is culinary experience like?

Ullas Babu: We serve traditional kerala food, you will find it is quite like that.

Q: Introduce us to the community, events, festivals?

Ullas Babu: Kumarakom temples and church festivals are on from January and February

Q: Range of activities on site or near by

Ullas Babu: Here are some, boating, Kumarakom lake, back water, paddy fields, Kumarakom bird sanctuary, Kumarakom driftwood museum etc

Q: Suggest must see places, your favorite programme, excursions, day trips

Ullas Babu: Here are some, houseboat cruise, motor boat cruise, country boat cruise , Visit to Pathiramanal island, Cithira paddy field , marthanda paddy field, raany paddy field etc

Q: Who are visitors, tourists?

Ullas Babu: Those who love boating and backwater destinations

Q; How affordable are stays at Coconut Creek

Ullas Babu: Starting from \$ 20 to \$ 50

Q: You constant receive excellent reviews and testimonials. What is the magic formula for success?

Ullas Babu: Food and cleanliness

Q: Memorable moment?

Ullas Babu: "Coconut Creek" has been awarded as the best homestay in Kerala by state of Kerala tourism department

Q: Any forthcoming projects, undertakings you wish to share?

Ullas Babu: A fish farm

Q: Final thoughts, invitations, promotions

Ullas Babu: Homestay is here to stay

Thank you.

From testimonials

Myself, my husband and my parents had visited in February Kumarakom for one week, and we had stayed in this authentic home stay. We are from Kerala but settled in Bombay since long time. In our tours we never stayed in home stay before and I had chosen this "Coconut Creek" and booked online through their website. .

The moment we entered in the small varandha, we received a very warm welcome and mango flavor juice as welcome drink. (Don't expect big resorts reception and check in procedure).

The room was little small but ok for couple like us. My parents were staying in a similar room opposite us. My parents are always concerned about bathrooms cleanliness, but it was totally clean. We usually eat Bombay food and it was very different experience that after long time we eat Kerala home cooked food.

Mr. Babu, the Homestay owner, helped us to get a country boat in bird sanctuary area in early morning hours. If anyone visits bird sanctuary area then don't take motor boat. For enjoyment of the Kumarakom back water, country boats are preferred. Should we visit Kumarakom again, we would like to come back here again.

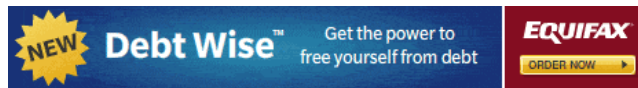
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