



Welcome home! This is how you are greeted after your day's shopping, boating or bird watching on Kerala's backwaters - and it's how you will feel as the guests of Vinod and Anu Mathew at Philipkutty's Farm - a special place where you can reside with a Kerala family and experience the real Kerala.

This is one of the best kept secrets of the Kerala backwaters - a working farm called Philipkutty's, named after the family's patriarch who personally reclaimed this land from the Vembanad Lake in 1957 to make it today one of Kerala's best homestay experiences.

Though the family hosts you, your privacy is assured as the three waterfront cottages are entirely independent and away from the family residence. Each cottage comprises a veranda with lake views, a breakfast pavilion, sitting and writing areas, and the bedroom with en suite bathroom. The traditional Kerala design means that it's really one large room divided into smaller spaces. It could easily sleep one couple and a child without feeling cramped.

Swiss architect Karl Damschen has added some delightful touches of his own such as the beautifully carved doors and support pillars. The three doors to the outside world can be thrown open during the day for maximum breeze (there is no air-conditioning). The beds are comfortable and very clean, the first drinks in the mini bar are free, and the colourful reflections all around make sunset a real treat and sunrise, with its dawn chorus, even more so.

All meals at the farm are lavish feasts, cooked by Vinod's graceful and skilful mother, and are invariably the highpoint of your



peaceful day. For lunch you are treated to an eight-dish curry spread, including two fish curries, one coconut chicken dish as well as various vegetables, rice and chapattis.

Here then is an opportunity to see the real Kerala away from the fancy resorts of Kumarakom. Enjoy a sunset cruise on a *vallam* (country boat) out in the open backwaters. Go on a walk with the family and learn about farming below lake level as well as the different crops

cultivated. Do a wider sightseeing and exploration trip of the countryside on a bicycle and you get to enjoy the coconut groves, paddy fields, canals and villages that blend into each other. Try fishing, or, if you are lucky, check out if you can spike scampi at night. And visit the St. Mary's parish church at Vechoor. This is an old church with a history dating back over 500 years. But, if you are the kind who wants to just relax and cool off, sit on the verandah or under the trees and dream or observe the passing backwater life or catch up with your reading.

When you stay at Philipkutty's, you get the feeling of living in Kerala rather than visiting it. Philipkutty's provides a very personal insight into the way of life and fabulous cuisine of Kerala.

About the author: Ashish Gupta runs his own travel company, Milesworth Holidays, an American Express Travel office in Chennai. He specializes in customized tours to popular and exotic destinations in India and overseas. Enquiries are very welcome at: R. M. Towers, 108 Chamiers Road, Chennai Tel: 2432 0522, Fax: 2435 9554 E-mail: ashish@milesworth.com



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