

Feedback from visitors to our Mannar Homestay



'On our arrival in Sri Lanka an airport official's indignant response to which part of the island we were visiting was, "Why would you go there there's nothing to see?"

But Abode Hibernation home-stay in Pesali, a small fishing village on Mannar in NW Sri Lanka, turned out to be the highlight of our holiday.

The project brings much needed income and contact with the outside world to an isolated

community of Tamil Christians, and for us the chance to experience a small part of their lives, culture and food.

Staying at Hibernation you have to fit in with the rhythm of the family's working day, rising early, washing in the well, helping with cooking and preparing food. It's a short walk to Pesali's busy beach, crowded with thatched fishermen's huts and their blue fishing boats.

This is very much a working beach, teeming with scavenging egrets, dogs and children, where you can help bring the catch in and buy the freshest fish for dinner.

At the end of the day you eat with the family outside, exchanging ideas with the stream of friends and relatives who drop in.

Sharing your skills, be they practical, medical or just useful is encouraged, and in return locals will share with you the best places for swimming, bird watching and toddy shacks.



Mannar Island is a sand spit of small fishing communities.

It teems with birdlife, wild donkeys, baobab trees and wild and deserted palm fringed beaches, there are very few guest houses, no beach bars just a sense of stepping back in time when you cross the causeway from the mainland.

Staying at Abode

Hibernation is about

sharing the lives of Pesali's fishing community and the

beach is their working environment. The project has helped give Shanthé's extended family a sense that they do have something special that visitors want to experience, at a time when the community was feeling very much isolated and abandoned in post-war Sri Lanka.'

Diana Phillips, Wimbledon, London.



'Small community home stays provide for low impact tourism, which supports and sustains the wider ecology of the region. From our experience the ecology of Mannar is diverse and thriving and is one of the most important areas located in the north of the country for the migrating water birds including Greater Flamingos which are returning to Mannar in larger numbers. Just off Mannar Island in Mannar district is Giant's Tank (Yoda Wewa), a protected and very large reservoir of water. This tank not only feeds 11,000 hectares of paddy fields but is home to a variety of birds, reptiles and fauna including Openbill, Great Cormorant, Spot-Billed Pelican and Crocodile.

This was our second visit to Sri Lanka and we noticed a huge difference, the road blockades and army checkpoints we experienced in 2009 had mainly been relaxed. In many cases communities and families that had been displaced during the war are now rebuilding their lives. The infrastructure has had much improvement over the last few years to enable the links between Mannar and the capital Colombo to be re-established. These links include; new roads and bridges,

the vital new train line linking Mannar with Colombo. The imminent ferry service linking Mannar

with southern India which was suspended over 30 years ago is also due to resume in the next couple of years.



Hibernation community home stay brings money directly into the heart of a community that otherwise may not benefit from normal streams of tourism. It benefits host families but also local businesses and independents such as market traders, local fishermen, village shops and restaurants. People live a hand to mouth existence in Mannar and staying in these communities provides much needed extra income.

The support of the government to ensure that tourism truly generates benefits to the people of Mannar and harnessing this through local businesses. This will also ensure that any growth in the local tourist business is structured and provides principles of responsible travel to the travel companies and individual tourists. There is also scope for creating activities in and around Mannar, such as bike tours or local arts and crafts.'



Gavin and Gale Burnett

'Mannar - The words "Manna from heaven" comes to mind. Mannar has huge contrasts poverty resulting from the ravages of war and stunning landscapes, amazing wild life and,

a virtual bird-watchers paradise. I found the people delightfully welcoming and so willing to share their food and culture whenever possible. Given this generosity of spirit it made my homestay experience very enriching. A project which generates income to this delightful community could only enhance and help prosperity to this wonderful part of Sri Lanka.'

Vicky, London

I was visiting Sri Lanka, not only as a tourist, but also to write a piece on how the northern part of the island was slowly opening up for tourism after the end of the civil war. Sid's tour and home stay was the highlight of this trip. There are several reasons why this was so:

Firstly Sid himself - he is an excellent guide. He seems to intuitively know what his guests want to see and what they are interested in and adapts his tours accordingly. He was unfailingly conscientious and kind, whether playing football with my son and the neighbour's kids, or discussing politics with me. His first aim, it seemed to me was to act as a bridge, to show us a part of Sri Lanka we could never have seen without him and also to bring financial help and business to a community, which had suffered greatly through the war. He was never pushy, always accommodating and always very informative.



Secondly - Mannar itself was a fascinating place to visit. We stayed with a local woman and ate the food that she and her children cooked for us. We played cards with the neighbours in the evening and were shown around by Sid and members of the community in the day. We visited the empty, beautiful beaches and met the local fishermen and hunted for shells. We went birdwatching in the local tanks and climbed over the ruins of ancient temples. Wherever we went, we were kept fully informed about what we were looking at and the stories around it.

Thirdly - it was an absolute pleasure meeting local people and hearing their stories and about their lives. It was an eye opener for my son, one which he'll never forget.



All in all I'd recommend Sid and this tour to anyone who is interested in learning more about this fascinating country and who wants to travel to a remote unspoilt area in the hands of someone, who is quietly, carefully making a real difference to people's lives.