



BY Sanath Weerasuriya



'Home Stay' concept is a widely accepted guest accommodation around the world, where guests stay in private houses and become part of the resident family for a few days, dining with the hosts and joining in their lifestyle.

The trend is fast catching up in most of the popular tourism destination areas in Sri Lanka. Hikkaduwa, Unawatuna, Arugam Bay and the East Coast locations are some of the popular locations for 'home stay'.

I had the opportunity of experiencing the 'Best Home Stay' in the country recently. Apart from other 'home stays', Halgolla Plantation Home is truly outstanding with a real family touch.

The century old Halgolla Plantation Home (HPH) is the ancestral home of a third generation Sri Lankan born Van der Poorten family. Originally built by the grandfather of the present owner Emil Van der Poorten in late 19th Century and in which the succeeding generations have resided, doing improvements as the years went by.

Emil and his wife, Arlene Madawela, now have three bedrooms in their country home available for seven paying 'visitors'.

HPH is located 'off the beaten track' on the Galagedara Mountain off Metibokka junction just 20 kilometres from Kurunegala on Kandy Road. This plantation of 45 acres is north of Galagedara off a trail through thick tropical wilderness. Though the narrow road to the bungalow is motorable, be prepared for a long and rustic drive on an unmade road. A van or 4WD vehicle is recommended.

Emil and Arlene seek to provide a unique experience for discerning travellers, who wish to sample a slice of life in the rugged mid-country of Sri Lanka, while immersing them in a typically Sri Lankan ambience.

'Guests are invited to become a part of our family for the duration of their visit dining together, taking walks through the vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg, durian, pepper



HALGOLLA

Plantation Home

'Home Stay' at its best



WITH RATES STARTING AT
RS 9,750/=

FOR THE TRIPLE ON BB BASIS TO
RS 14,300/=

ON FB ON NELLIE'S ROOM, HPH OFFERS
DOUBLE ROOM FACILITIES TOO. THE
DOUBLE ROOM RATE RANGES FROM
RS. 7150/= (BB) TO
RS 8450/= (HB) BASIS.

and other crops on the land, negotiating the unique Boulder Path and spend time in the Soaking Pool' said Emil van der Poorten.

Two of the three rooms available for visitors' use have en-suite baths and the third has a large private bathroom. Nellie's suite is a three bed unit, while Ben's Bedroom and the Selva-Gamini Room each have two beds.

All rooms have basic household amenities including a fan and modern bathroom facilities. The common areas are spacious and one of the two sitting rooms is equipped with a stereo and television, though it is very seldom that guests use these devices, never seeming to have enough time to enjoy the natural attractions that abound at HPH. The dining room is very large and its primary source of natural light is that which streams in through a huge stained glass window.



ARLENE AND EMIL

This unique mid-country facility is a prime example of a diversified agricultural enterprise, providing visitors from around the globe an opportunity to observe, at first hand, ecologically-sound agricultural practices in sylvan surroundings.

The exotic food and fruit that come, literally, out of the garden and onto the dinner plate is a normal practice of the HPH.

Most of the green veges and fruits, we serve are from our plantation and they are all organic. At last count, there were in excess of thirty varieties of fruit and vegetables that had reached HPH's table in either fresh or preserved form' explained Emil.

Meals are available on request and are prepared in true Sri Lankan style, often utilising produce from the plantation and



recipes that a hotel chef wouldn't understand. HPH characterises the ability to provide food of extremely fine flavour (and nutritive value), without resorting to the blandishments of gourmet ingredient-retailers. From Madu-Koku' (Local Asparagus-tender Cycas leaf-shoots) to a gourmet Polos-pahi (tender jackfruit curry) simmered over coals for 24- hours, and a variety of Sri Lankan sambols and mallungs, HPH's kitchen, under Arlene's expert supervision, provides meals of unequalled variety, the vast majority cooked on an open-hearth in clay pots.

This is authentic home-cooking

in the classical mould for the visitors from all over the world. They all enjoy traditional Sri Lankan cuisine and we never had any complaint' Arlene explained.

Emil's extensive library of books on Sri Lankan natural history, local and international fiction and non-fiction is available, on request. The rustic benches, tree-swings and hammocks in the garden lend themselves to times of reading and contemplation as does the most-appropriately-named Meditation Flat on the hillside above the house, which looks down the Weuda valley in the North-Western Province from the foothills of the Central Province.

HPH has proven a popular jumping-off point for visits to the Cultural Triangle comprising Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura, and Pinnawela's Elephant Orphanage. The ancient, though lesser-known capitals of Sri Lanka - Panduwasnuwara, Dambadeniya and Yapahuwa - as well as the unique temple at Padeniya and the two Ambalamas near Narammala are also proving a source of significant interest.

PEX Neil Siriweera

Call HPH on 081 3808007, 0722849770 (Emil) or 0773470702 (Arlene) or log onto www.halgollaplantationhome.com

