



Trip of a Lifetime

ANDREA MCVEIGH DISCUSSES HER TROPICAL TRIP TO INDIA...THE PERFECT HONEYMOON DESTINATION

Some places are just made for romance, and the south-western state of Kerala, nestled on India's tropical Malabar Coast, is one of them.

You may already know that it's famous for its quiet, unhurried pace of life and beautiful and varied landscape, which ranges from palm tree-lined beaches bordering the Arabian Sea to inland backwaters, mountain-based spice plantations and hill stations, majestic national wildlife sanctuaries and magnificent rainforest. Many people travel there to sample its warm hospitality and delicious traditional food, including the celebrated fish curry.

But what you might not have known is that it was also recently voted the Best Honeymoon Destination in India by readers of a travel magazine. And judging from my own experience of travelling through this fascinating state a few months ago, it's the perfect destination for honeymooners in search of the trip of a lifetime.

It's said that all the world loves a lover, and the Indian people, already

known for their friendly hospitality, really pull out all the stops for newlyweds. That ranges from the decorated honeymoon cake given to guests at the Zuri Kumarakom Resort, with its lagoon-view rooms located on the banks of India's longest lake, the Vembanad, to a very special place to rest your head in the north of the country.

When we were shown to our Honeymoon Pool Villa in the Vythiri Resort, after being welcomed with a drink of herbal tea and the 'tilak' - the traditional red vermilion mark made on the forehead to signify a greeting or welcome - we were amazed and thrilled to see the glass floor underneath our bed. These romantic duplex villas feature your own private swimming pool in the basement floor, which you can view through the glass floor of the bedroom.

Feeling like movie stars, we immediately fell in love with this exquisite eco-friendly resort, located on the slope of a forest-clad hill in Wayanad, northern Kerala, and situated

beneath the enormous canopy of a lush tropical rainforest.

But something even more special was awaiting us on our last night there. The resort also features five tree houses, offering views across the rainforest. A luxury treehouse with its own Jacuzzi bath is offered to honeymooners for one of their nights at the resort, and, after dinner a guide will see you to your bamboo-walled dwelling on top of a sturdy 250-year-old Banyan tree. Sitting on our tree house balcony listening to the sounds of nature all around us, my husband and I soaked up this taste of rustic luxury knowing that we were experiencing one of the most special places we would ever stay - after all, staying in your very own tree house is a dream for many people since childhood!

But then again, everywhere we visited in Kerala was magical in its own way. During our trip, we stayed in each hotel for a few nights before moving on to the next location.

At the tranquil and relaxing Niraamaya Retreats located in

HONEYMOONS

Kovalam, in southern Kerala, we enjoyed magnificent food each evening at an outdoor table overlooking the Arabian Sea as we watched the sun set and the sky glow amazing shades of pink and orange. This 'barefoot luxury' resort was voted one of the best Ayurveda spas in India and each one of the heritage-style cottages gives you privacy while also allowing you every opportunity to enjoy the best that the resort has to offer, including its outdoor infinity pool and morning yoga classes in the open air sun temple. Or, you can simply sit during an evening, as we did, listening to the waves crash against the beach as we saw the lights of small fishing boats dot the horizon after sunset.

Honeymooners with a love of nature and the outdoors will find a special treat at the Anantya Resort Travancore, just a 10-minute drive across the border from Kerala into Tamil Nadu. Surrounded by hundreds of acres of rubber plantations, in the foothills of the Western Ghats mountain range, all its beautiful villas face Chittar Lake, offering amazing views. Honeymooning guests can take a plantation tour before enjoying a private honeymoon dinner in a

specially cleared spot overlooking the tree-covered hills, with tribal specialities cooked over a camp fire before traditional dancers provide the entertainment as the sun goes down. All meals and excursions can be tailor-made for you, whether you fancy a 4am trip to the most Southern tip of India to see the sun rise or want to explore the traditional Kerala architecture of the historic Padmanabhapuram Palace, which dates back to the year 1601.

There's another reason why local people will love to honeymoon in Kerala. With a beautiful landscape, friendly people and delicious cuisine, like Northern Ireland, Kerala is also known throughout the world as God's



FACT BOX

- Kerala Tourism: www.keralatourism.org.
- Zuri Kumarakom Resort: www.thezurihotels.com/kumarakom.
- Vythiri Resort, Wayanad: <http://www.vythiriresort.com>
- Niraamaya Retreats, Kovalam: <http://www.niraamaya.in>.
- Anantya Resort, Travancore: www.anantyaresorts.com.

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