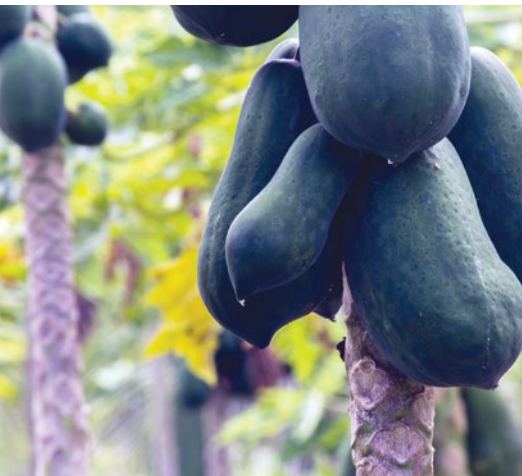


# DIVIDENDS OF PROXIMITY FROM NATURE'S LAP

*Harvest Fresh Farms is located at the Lower Camp in the Cumbum Valley which is a short 15-minute drive down from Kumily*

BY DEEPTHI SREENIVASAN / PICS: ABHISHEK GOPURATHINKAL



**A**s we began our descent, the towering Sahyadri was awash in molten gold showered by the morning sun. With each passing hairpin turn, off in the distance one could see acres of sun-kissed lush green patches towards the foothill of the Western Ghats. For a city dweller, who is escaping the maddening crowd, this is quite a relieving sight. Lying caressed in the lap of the Ghats, right in the heart of Cumbum Valley is Harvest Fresh Farms, an INDOCERT certified organic farm.

One could say that the farm, flanked on all three sides by the Ghats, is aesthetically placed as it offers unspoilt beauty of the surroundings and an amazing feel of being closer to nature. The farm is located at the Lower Camp in the Valley which is a short 15-minute drive down from Kumily, Thekkady. For those coming from Kochi city, it is approximately a four-hour drive. This is an idyllic weekend getaway

which gifts you an opportunity to unwind and also take a liking to farming. What makes the 35-acre farm land unique are the toxic-free organic fruits and vegetables being cultivated there. Like any other farm, Harvest Fresh Farms started off as a barren land five years ago with just a lone Neem tree standing near its present entrance.

“The farm is part of one of the most visited tourist circuits in the State. People sometimes stop by here on their way to Thekkady from Trichy or Madurai and, for those coming from Kerala, this is closest to the jungle paradise of Thekkady. People take a break from their long trips and walk in here just to see the farm for half a day, take a look at the pomegranate and papaya orchards and resume their journey,” says Kurien Jose (Jr), CEO, Harvest Fresh Farms. First-time tourists to Kerala, Anthony Giordano, his wife Sarah Giordano and Katie Srog sat in awe of the appealing beauty of the land-





scape in front of them.

“We are glad we decided to stop here. Though it was just an overnight stay, the experience was amazing,” said Anthony who is based in Dubai. “We will definitely be back here for a longer stay next time,” added Sarah.

The group was taking a break along with Kurien, after a bullock cart ride around the farm. “Our

**“THE FRUITS HERE ARE ORGANIC, FREE FROM PESTICIDES AND FERTILIZERS, FULL OF ORIGINAL HEALTH AS MOTHER NATURE INTENDED IT TO BE AND CAREFULLY NURTURED”**



**KURIEN JOSE (Jr)**  
CEO, HARVEST FRESH FARMS

theatre and one conference facility. The work on this is progressing,” informs Kurien. One can also relish authentic and scrumptious Kerala or Tamil cuisine here. The farm is divided into 37 different plots, each named after a saint. The service of guides is available if one wishes to go around the papaya, pomegranate or passion fruit farms, enjoying their beauty in the natural settings. A walk along the pathways dividing the farm plots planted with blades of bamboo and pines, rustling in the gentle breeze is quite soothing. One can also climb any one of the two watchtowers on either side of the farm and enjoy the splendid view of the entire Cumbum Valley.

“It was my father who purchased the land. The initial plan was to build a factory, but since the Mulla-periyar river was flowing nearby, we thought we could convert it into a farm. After installing drip irrigation, we brought pomegranate from Mumbai and then moved on to coconuts and other varieties of fruit-bearing trees, including papayas. After one year, we started converting it into an organic farm,” Kurien said.

A nursery having polyhouse and greenhouse was set up inside the farm, where people can learn a lesson or two about nurturing young saplings of rare plants. A poultry farm flocks of geese, turkeys and hens and a small shed with a few rare varieties of Kasargod dwarf cattle also form part of the farm. One can windup the farm visit after taking a dip in the Suruli falls nearby.

objective is not just farm tourism, we want to inspire people to start farming,” said Kurien.

The farm is at its beautiful best in the morning with a mild mist hanging in the air. As one takes a stroll through the farm to gather fresh and ripe pomegranates, one could feel the mixed scent of all the 150-odd medicinal plants in the herbal garden wafting through the air in the cold gentle breeze.

Those who have booked in advance for a day’s stay or longer can experience a bullock cart ride and

can have a first hand experience of farming. They have also introduced a tractor ride. The farm is equipped with bicycles too for all age groups. Three cottages are available for overnight stay in the farm enjoying the tranquil night interspersed only by the sounds of nature. Each of these aesthetically arranged cottages have comfortable beds and a bath room which give them an earthy touch complementing the rich surrounding. “We are introducing 10 new cottages, a swimming pool, farm restaurant, basket ball court, amphi-

