

A BREAK FROM THE NORM

Avoid the expensive euro zone if you're looking for a break. C&TH visits Africa, Asia and America for three completely different experiences from a felucca ride on the Nile to shopping on Rodeo Drive

KICK BACK IN KERALA

Northern Kerala has only recently opened up to tourism, so get there early before everyone descends

KERALA, INDIA

Northern Kerala is only now opening up to tourism, and you may be the only white face the locals have ever seen. It's a place of untouched beaches, fabulous nature and a sophisticated, varied cuisine. It's much hillier, more authentic and less populated than the south – where the tourists have been going for years.

BY CAROLINE PHILLIPS

STAY Neeleshwar Hermitage – a remote Ayurvedic meditation and yoga retreat and hotel – with fishermen's-style thatched beach cottages built following the principles of Kerala Vastu (a kind of Hindu Feng Shui).

DAY TRIP Tellicherry for its vegetable and fish markets. The former selling everything from banana blossom, drumsticks and tapioca

root to bitter gourds; and the latter boasting piles of stingray, shark and catfish.

SHOP For several lifetimes of Ayurvedic treatments with names like sajooaya, sandwana and swastha from Neeleshwar's Priya Ayurvedic Spa. Or if you insist on getting something to pop into your suitcase, go for silver ankle chains, Ayurvedic potions and fresh spices.

EAT Fresh fish from local long boats cooked with lashings of coconut and pungent spices, while sitting under a palm tree on the sand of Neeleshwar's beachside restaurant.

DRINK Pathimugam (herbal Ayurvedic water) or the juice of tender young coconut (served in its original packaging straight from the tree) with a splash of something stronger.

WATCH OUT FOR The monsoon when it heats up like a Turkish bath and the heavens open. But then again, that's when Ayurvedic treatments are said to work most effectively.

WHATEVER YOU DO Catch the sacred Theyyam ritual (generally held during the night) in which the Theyyam dancer transmogrifies into a god and invokes magical powers. If you're lucky, he'll roll in hot ashes or walk over burning coals.

DETAILS Scott Dunn offers seven nights on a B&B basis, with flights and transfers for £1,360 per person, between 15 October to 15 March 2010. 020 8682 5075; scottdunn.com

