

THE KERALA SPICE TRAIL

THE FLAVOURS OF BHARAT RECEPTION

9 JULY 2026

OTTAWA, ONTARIO

BY WARREN CREATES

Namaste.

Thank you, High Commissioner Dr. Dinesh Patnaik.
Thank you, Chef Joe (My fellow lobster fisherman).
Thank you, Chief Justice Alan Diner (My close friend of 25 years. Just appointed on Monday by Prime Minister Mark Carney, as our new Chief Justice of the Federal Court).

It is a privilege to be here this evening and an honour to share a few reflections on an unforgettable journey.

I joined Chef Joe's 7th annual Kerala tour in 2023.

Kerala sits on India's lush south-west coast - a place of spice plantations, tea-covered hills, tropical forests, tranquil backwaters, and extraordinary hospitality. It has its own language, its own culture and, perhaps

most importantly for this audience, an unforgettable cuisine.

I travelled with my son Neville, a Red Seal chef, alongside my great friend Simon Tyler from England and his son Alex. Four friends spanning two generations, and by adding India, three continents. All convinced we were embarking on a culinary adventure.

We had no idea just how much more than food Kerala would offer us.

Naturally, we commissioned matching branded SWAN (Acronym for Simon, Warren, Alex and Neville) shirts and hats, ensuring we were impossible to lose. Or ignore. Opinions varied on whether that was actually an advantage.

The journey lasted 18 glorious days.

Every comfort was accommodated, and every special request somehow became possible.

Want to play tennis? Done.

Martial arts show? Done.

Bicycle ride? Done.

Tuk Tuk taxi? Done.

Antique shopping? Done.

Bird watching with ornithologists? Done.

A presentation at a local college? Somehow also... done.

Forget city hotels. Picture instead waking each morning among mist-coated tea plantations, exotic coffee estates and rich tropical forests. Every two days we discovered another spectacular retreat, each somehow more beautiful than the last. Afternoons were spent enjoying the scenery, sharing a drink,

playing cards, reading a book, and getting to know new friends.

Every 2 days Chef Joe hosted a cooking demonstration alongside the Executive Chef of each resort. If you've ever watched Chef Joe cook, you'll know it isn't simply a demonstration. It's theatre. It's storytelling. It's education. And somehow, dinner appears at the end.

Then there were the adventures.

One evening after dark we ventured into the jungle, lead by environmental scientists, flashlights in hand, searching for nocturnal frogs, spiders and snakes. It's remarkable how brave you become when everyone else is walking in front of you.

Every day seemed somehow better than the one before. The food was extraordinary. The accommodations were exceptional. But what made the journey truly memorable was the way every transfer became another adventure - markets bursting with colour and local chatter, ancient temples,

elephant sanctuaries, spice shops, roadside lunches, and conversations that revealed another layer of Kerala's remarkable history and culture.

But perhaps the most memorable experience of all was the evening Chef Joe welcomed us into the home where he grew up. We met his family, walked through their plantation of mangoes and jackfruit, listened to live music, and shared a meal inspired by the recipes he learned from his mother.

That evening reminded me that food is never just about ingredients. It is about family. Heritage. Generosity. And the extraordinary ability of a shared meal to turn strangers into friends.

If you're wondering whether I'd recommend the Kerala Spice Trail, my answer is simple.

I would go again tomorrow.

But I would return for more than the remarkable food or the breathtaking scenery.

I would return because Kerala reminded me that the richest journeys are measured not in kilometres travelled, but in friendships made, generosity given and received, and memories that stay with you long after you've unpacked your suitcase.

Thank you, Chef Joe, for opening the door to your home, your heritage, and your Kerala.

And thank you, India, for reminding us that the greatest journeys are the ones that change us.

Nandi!

Thank you very much.