

## History of Abode Tours and The Abode Trust

### Abode Homestays in

#### the Knuckles Mountains

The Abode Tours Community Project<sup>1</sup>, set up in 2002 is the sister organisation of The Abode Trust<sup>2</sup> formed in 2008. Our Trust document which sets out our values and aspirations has already been submitted as part of our original application. Both organisations work together to support these and have been recognised for Ethical Tourism in 2009 and 2015 by Tourism Concern, which features both Abode entities on their international website.<sup>3</sup> Our work is

about more than Tourism, as we are very involved in promoting and improving the well-being of the people in our Homestay locations.

We are named after a simple village house, The Abode, (*pictured right*) where it all began in 2005, which sits at the top of a remote valley in the Knuckles Mountains of Sri Lanka to the east of Kandy on the borders of a World Heritage Site. It has no electricity, internal sanitation, gas. An open hearth fire provides the cooking facilities and the streams water for washing, bathing and eating.

See <http://www.theabodetrust.com/village-life/> and [www.abodetours.com](http://www.abodetours.com) for more pictures and information about the authentic traditional life led at The Abode and offered to our Homestay visitors.



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<sup>1</sup> [www.abodetours.com](http://www.abodetours.com)

<sup>2</sup> [www.theabodetrust.com](http://www.theabodetrust.com)

<sup>3</sup> [www.tourismconcern.org.uk](http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk)



*Above, The Abode House*

Sid Elikewela, Founder and Director, has lived and worked with local people in the Knuckles Mountains for many years and has developed an international reputation as an expert guide in Sri Lanka.

He took some of the first visitors to the previously war torn north of Sri Lanka as early as a few months after the civil war ended, has escorted journalists from the Wanderlust Magazine (Nov 20124), Daily



*Sid Elikewela*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://shop.wanderlust.co.uk/currentback-issues-1-c.asp>

Telegraph, the Guardian<sup>5</sup> and The Geographical (Oct 2008) to remote locations and shown discerning visitors through the resulting articles a truly authentic way of life that is very rare to find in today's modern world.<sup>6</sup> And see: 'About Us' sections on [www.theabodetrust.com](http://www.theabodetrust.com) and [www.abodetours.com](http://www.abodetours.com).

## **Abode Hibernation Homestays on Mannar Island**

Abode Tours extended the work of the Trust in 2010 to develop sustainable tourism on Mannar Island as part of our mission to: 'Work with local people – learning about, enhancing and respecting each other's way of life.'

This involved taking the lead in working with local people on Mannar Island, which is off the north east coast of Sri Lanka and was in the forefront of the twenty six year civil war which ended in 2009. During that time Mannar had been almost totally cut off from the rest of the country and the world and faced continuous barrages of artillery and occupation by the military as shells ripped over and often landed on their small island.

Many of the Tamil Christian community fled across the water 33km to India leaving behind their valuables, land and sometimes family members. Those who stayed faced losing their menfolk to the civil war, their lands being confiscated and the terrible fear and uncertainty being on the front line brings to civilians.



Abode Tours established links with the local fishing community in Pesali in 2010 as soon as the causeway to the mainline was rebuilt and civilians were permitted to enter the area. We found a shattered community, wholly dependent on seasonal fishing, a stunning eco system of glorious beaches, salt flats and endless blue skies, untouched apart from the singeing of plantations of trees by mortar bombs.

*Shanthe and her son outside the Homestay*

The first Homestay, opened in 2010 in Pesali was a local family house belonged to Shanti, a war widow who fled to India with three young children when her husband was killed and she spent years living off

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2011/mar/12/sri-lanka-mannar-island-pesalai>

<sup>6</sup> See Document Three for a list of national and international articles in mainstream publications written about The Abode

benefits in Madurai refugee camp in India. It was not until 2012 she felt confident enough to come home and take over the hospitality of Abode Tours Homestay visitors in her home.<sup>7</sup>

It was the first Homestay in this fishing village, and we restored it to its local style and glory with the help of the community. Not only was the new bridge necessary to access the island, many other bonds had to be built: of trust, cooperation and collaboration between Tamil and Sinhalese people to increase the self-confidence of the previously beleaguered neighbourhood.

Up until then a select few Westerners stayed in her home supported by Shanthi's extended family members and experienced living with local people, taking part in their lives, attending family weddings and sharing the joys and grief. As the years have passed, Abode Tours have seen the children born, watched them grow up and become members of the extended family in Pesali.

Our latest Homestay, due to open in 2018, has reached further into the island to Taliemannar and is being built with the help of the fishing community to local designs, using traditional building methods, local labour and materials. It will bring financial and cultural benefits to another family and open up opportunities for people in this district.<sup>8</sup>



After five years we enjoy a privileged place in the local communities of Pesali and Talaimannar, akin to 'Family Friend', and our visitors have had the unique experience of living and supporting this impoverished community to everyone's mutual benefit.

Our work has brought together Tamils and Sinhalese people and opened the eyes of western visitors to ways of life that are rarely found in the modern world. Everyone benefits from this familiar contact. By adapting tourism on a small scale to the local way of life and utilising available resources sustainably we are proud to have made an impact on lives of people emerging out of war.

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<sup>7</sup>Shanthe told her story to a Guardian journalist Sid guided around the north east in March 2011 and it features in the article: <http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2011/mar/12/sri-lanka-mannar-island-pesalai>

<sup>8</sup> See Document Seven for details of the challenges of delivering our vision for successful Homestays on Mannar Island