



unavailable.

Finally she makes ularthu, a vegetable stir fry. To this she will add tiger prawns.

"It's the food of the south — lighter, more subtle. Food from the north is spicier, heavier. The south is not as cold. If you eat heavy food, you are going to get tired."

Cuisine reflects food availability, region and climate and religion, Nimmy says.

In the north, with more Muslim and Arab influence, there is more meat and nuts. In Kerala, "more rice than meat", she says.

She describes herself as "a very strongly practising Catholic". Syrian, or St Thomas, Christians of Kerala, believe that apostle St Thomas landed in here in AD52.

"I like to go for my daily service," Nimmy says. "I feel I put my day in the hands of God. He's going to run it for me."

She adds that "Syrian Catholics are firm and successful people".

Nimmy's success with the cookery school came after spending many years first learning and then teaching in a finishing school. "In those days

every young girl was sent to finishing school to learn how to keep a good home — cook, bake, sewing, textile. I was selected as a cooking teacher.

"I had no professional qualifications as a cooking teacher — I went to a finishing school, that's all. I was given a teaching trial for one week and it went on for 10 years."

The work at the faculty was not paid but was prestigious. She had to wear a sari and she was soon taking her young son to the school with her. Recipes were all dictated.

Nimmy didn't just teach girls how to prepare Keralan or Indian food but soups, salads and cakes from all over the world.

But today the focus is firmly on the local — south Indian dishes and Kerala spices. It is on passing on a long-simmered local knowledge that comes from a lifetime of cooking, a childhood of learning from her mother, and generations of Keralan cooks before that.

"My experience is that each and every person who comes wants to learn how to cook," Nimmy says. "And it is the individual that creates culture."

#### SPICE OF LIFE

Journeys of the Spirit's Indian Spice Journeys takes travellers to the origin and source of spices and tea in the southern part of India. Visiting Nimmy Paul's cooking school is an integral part of that journey.

Julie Baker, of Journeys of the Spirit, says Kerala has the biggest variety of spices of any State in India and explains: "In the 1500s the Portuguese introduced the Kerala spices to the world and it was their major trading port for about 300 years. Their influence is still obvious in the building and architecture throughout Kerala — quite a contrast to the Hindu temples and all that is pure India.

"We explore where they went and understand why these spices were so valued."

Journeys of the Spirit also offers Kerala Ayurvedic retreats (treatments, cuisine, yoga, deep relaxation). Julie says: "This is our 13th year to Kerala for the Ayurvedic health retreats. They are now so popular that for 2015 we have seven guided departures."

Each is themed slightly differently, depending on the guide leading it.