

GESPI CASE STUDY

Empowering women in enterprise through shared stories

<https://gespihive.surrey.ac.uk/>



HERA'S GARDEN: CREATIVES IN RESIDENCE

We held the first event of its kind in Sri Lanka in November 2023 - an event for Creative Founders with a 100% Sri Lankan female stage. This Creatives in Residence event launched a new event space (HERA's Garden) that has been built for wellness and education of our guests and community. Our passion and purpose is to reframe the term Luxury Travel to encompass an understanding of conscious, regenerative travel, with DEI and inclusion as a central tenet. I organised the event in order to have a blend of travellers, locals and founders all mingling and discussing current issues. It was billed as an event BY women, FOR everybody. We ran it over 3 days with speakers and panels, Q&A's with the audience, workshops and wellness activities in the evenings. During the days, the audience and participants discussed and learned a lot about each other, the landscape of life as a Sri Lankan female entrepreneur and how hospitality and travel can be a force for good. In the evenings the Creatives de-briefed and considered collaborations that they could build upon in the future. Many ideas were borne from the event. The aim was to showcase the innovative female, entrepreneurial demographic who all work with passion and purpose at their core. Covering subjects such as Art, Fashion, Jewellery Making, Textiles, Travel and Photography, each speaker talked about her journey into this creative field, the barriers she faces and how she has overcome them. The event successfully showcased the tangible social impact each entrepreneur had through their business, and highlighted women entrepreneurs' contribution towards building a self-sustaining island with these modern narratives which need to be shared with the world beyond being an ex-colony.

Kalukanda House

WEB LINKS AND FORTHCOMING EVENTS

<https://www.kalukandahouse.com/>
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/dee-gibson/>
Future Creatives in Residence
Hera's Project X



DEE GIBSON
CEO Kalukanda House

**This was Circular Economy in
action, the impact was far
greater than anticipated**

EVENT IMPACT

Many collaborations have started to take shape. At the event, and during one of my panel interviews, an industry titan shared the sofa with a start-up who was facing prejudicial barriers because of their sexuality, the established entrepreneur offered to help them by stocking their products in prime stores. The startup is taking off cast materials from trouser factories and creating bespoke bags and accessories, donations being made to their LGBTQ community. he established entrepreneur gives work to artisans in rural areas and is finding ways to be far more transparent in supply chain pricing so that the artisans are fairly paid.



In another workshop, we welcomed 6 girls who are refugees in a shelter in Colombo (which is supported by Kalukanda House). The shelter had saved the girls from terrible circumstances and life-threatening situations. The girls were inspired by a creative design workshop by a jewellery designer who is now offering the workshops to other girls in Colombo to give them skills to support themselves and live independently. Local artisans who came in to showcase their crafts (like lace making and weaving) shared their stories of hardships that were overcome through running micro-businesses through their crafts.

Many ex-pats living in the area attended the event and some who run businesses are now looking to work with the artisans. The craft workshops are something we can also offer guests, with 100% of funds going back to the artisans, whilst guests learn a little about heritage crafts. A government Human Rights and Sustainability consultant who attended the event has been inspired to reach out to local entrepreneurs to see what initiatives she can implement in other areas of the island that support local causes too. This was Circular Economy in action where we inspired many people to think about how we can collaborate in order to bring economic support to the island while also connecting with guests who travel from other parts of the world.



SOME TESTIMONIALS

It was an awakening moment for me, I made so many allies which was so powerful for me. I had fun, I learnt about leadership, empowerment, togetherness and navigating it with a democratic way with us all around the table. It feels like a system that won't fail.

Aadhitya Jeyaseelan - Sri Lankan Female Founders Architect, Designer and Artist.

You appreciated & celebrated all of us creative women in a brilliant brilliant way by providing a space and stage. So much of happy tears!! It's a relief for someone like us who wants to do so much for the people & the planet and getting to share the stage with women that are already making change was the best feeling ever.

Shakya & Vio Lala Studio

It was great to be able to talk about my work, it was also the first time I was felt really proud of the work I do. I came back ready to lift more women along with me :)

Sara Nazoor, Creative Female Founder Alke Design

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say I fell in love with Sri Lanka because of the Hera X Project. I left feeling uplifted and committed to shifting the narrative around Sri Lanka. These amazing women taught me that we shine brighter when we put our light together. Forever grateful!

Karyn Robarts Business Owner

It was a meeting of women sharing empowering experiences, breaking norms, and challenging traditions while uplifting their communities and the environment. Empowering a woman means empowering a community – this gathering exemplified that belief.

Selyna Pieris, Creative Female Founder Selyn Textiles

Although we all come from different backgrounds, in many ways as women, we all share the same "little battles" in our day to day whether that is in our personal lives or professionally. It is an important reminder not to be complacent and that initiatives like this keep the conversation going and hopefully one day break down those barriers.

Irstel Jansen Consultant on Sustainability and Human Rights

It was lovely and ineffably enriching to be included in a community that was openly vulnerable yet defiantly strong and void of judgement. I wanted to take a minute to say thank you for tossing that stone in the water.

Thushni de Silva Island wide Travel and Experiences expert, one of very few women

From the perspective of a Sri lankan man and the only male to be present at this open event, I invite and urge all my brother's to be part of this important conversation that is emerging. It is vital for men to be present and cocreating the world that is changing and this requires us to listen, reflect and also join in. We are as excluded as we make ourselves to become.

Sala Watura Yoga and Meditation Teacher

By participating in the program, beneficiaries (our girls say they attained knowledge on) gained concepts of income and economic independence, which is crucial for their empowerment and financial stability in the future. We hope that similar programs will continue to be offered in the future, providing more women and girls with the chance to empower themselves and make a positive impact in their communities.

Yasara, Human Rights Lawyer Sisters at Law

