# pulse

#LivingIt

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# pulse
#LivingIt

The jingle bells are jingling, Colombo's streets are glowing, and there's a festive buzz in the air; it's officially the most wonderful time of the year! Can you believe it? 2024 is in its final chapter, and as we wrap up this whirlwind of a year, the Pulse Magazine December issue is here to make your season extra special!

This festive edition is an absolute treat, packed with exclusive interviews, heartwarming stories, dazzling features, travel guides that will make you want to explore, seasonal shopping inspo and celebrations around Colombo. Whether you're a tech wizard, a fashionista, a sports buff or someone who lives for good food, Pulse takes pride in curating something exciting for every reader.

Gracing the cover of this festive edition of Pulse Magazine is the incredible Darshi Keerthisena, the undisputed queen of batiks! In this issue, Darshi takes us on a journey through her mission of taking batik to the global stage, continuing her father's legacy while crafting her own. From empowering women in her Koswadiya workshop to championing circular fashion, she's a true trailblazer. Darshi is not just a designer; she's an advocate, an artist and a guardian of Sri Lanka's cultural heritage.

Art lovers, you're in for a visual feast with Jyothee Murali, the internationally acclaimed artist whose work blends cultural heritage with futuristic expression. Her art is more than just viral; it's a movement that captivates the soul.

Tech enthusiasts, we've got you covered, too! Alagan Mahalingam, the brilliant mind behind Rootcode, shares his vision for Sri Lanka's future in artificial intelligence. From humble beginnings as a startup to becoming a global tech powerhouse, Alagan's story is an inspiring blueprint for innovation and growth.

If luxury fashion is your vibe, Dimuthu Sahabandu is here to redefine what it means. With designs that marry high-end elegance with sustainability, Dimuthu's creations prove that luxury can be glamorous and environmentally conscious.

To stay on top of your TikTok game, we are featuring Alison Wijemanna, the TikTok sensation juggling a career in tea exports, a passion for makeup and a love for pet rescue. With over 100,000 followers and 2.5 million likes, Alison is a masterclass in authenticity and creativity.

For the sports enthusiasts, we bring you the inspiring story of Yevan David, a young prodigy who has made motorsport history as the first Sri Lankan to compete in the prestigious Euroformula Open. He shares insights into his remarkable journey and the relentless passion that fuels his pursuit of excellence in the high-speed, adrenaline-charged world of racing.

And it wouldn't be Christmas without food! Our very own Aunty D brings you the season's best recipes, guaranteed to make your festive table a hit.

On the travel front, we're whisking you away to the breathtaking landscapes of the Xizang Autonomous Region in China and giving you a seasonal guide to Sri Lanka's enchanting southern coast.

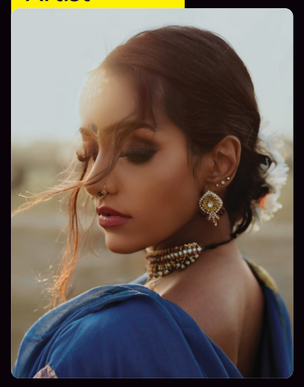
Not to forget, our event roundups will keep you informed about the hottest events and dazzling hotspots in Colombo. Grab a copy and dive into the December edition of Pulse Magazine, a merry medley of stories, inspiration and holiday cheer! #LivingIt

Wishing all our fabulous readers a joyous Christmas and a spectacular 2025!



# in this edition of pulse #LivingIt

Artist



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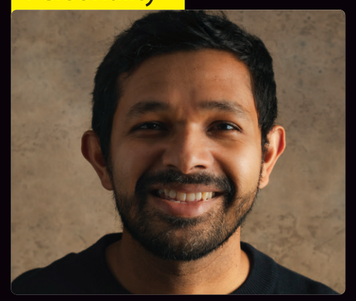

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**Variety Is the Very Spice of Life:**
Amal


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# Unveiling



# THE VISIONARY ARTIST



# WHO TRANSCENDS TRADITION AND MODERNITY

**Jyothee's work invites us all to see beyond the traditional constraints of art and embrace a world where creativity is limitless.**



*By Nirma Kumarasiri*

In the dynamic and often exclusive world of contemporary art, there's a name that continues to stand out with each brushstroke— Jyothee Murali. A painter, educator, and visionary, popularly known as Jyxdi, her art is a celebration of both her roots and the modern world, a unique blend of cultural heritage and futuristic expression. Her journey is not just about her stunning artwork but about challenging the very definition of what it means to be an artist in the 21st century.











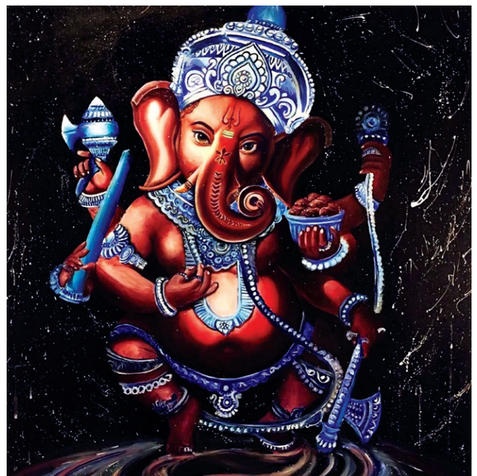

She is redefining the narrative for brown women, artists, and creatives everywhere, breaking free from conventional roles and embracing a multifaceted identity. Whether dressed in traditional attire or painting at the edge of a bustling cityscape, Jyxdi's presence commands attention.

More than an artist, Jyxdi is a storyteller, using her craft to express themes of identity, culture, and spirituality. Her work extends beyond the canvas into the digital realm, where her Spirit Gates NFT series has reimagined how stories are told through art. Jyxdi's passion for teaching and inspiring others has also made her a beloved figure among aspiring artists, whom she encourages to explore their creativity without fear or limits.



## Early Life and Artistic Beginnings

Jyxdi's journey as an artist started at an unusually young age. Raised in a traditional South Asian household, she was encouraged to follow a path deemed 'successful' by societal standards—one that leaned towards professional careers like medicine or engineering. However, Jyxdi's fascination with art began early; as a child, she spent hours sketching on any available surface, an inclination that her parents allowed, despite their initial hesitation.



At the age of ten, Jyxdi's talent became apparent when she won her first painting competition at school, a victory that set the stage for her creative future. Yet, her artistic path was largely self-guided. Without formal training, she learned through experimentation and determination, teaching herself techniques that would later become the hallmark of her work. This early experience of self-teaching also laid the groundwork for her passion as an art educator, as she sought to provide others with the opportunities she had to carve out for herself.

## A Bold Leap into the World of Professional Art

Jyxdi's choice to abandon the conventional route was validated in 2017, just after she left university. Within months, she began landing significant projects with influential names in the entertainment industry. Her work quickly attracted high-profile figures, leading to notable collaborations, including a painting acquired by The Weeknd's creative director, Lamar C Taylor, and a commission for custom shoes by Drake's producer, OVO 40. These collaborations allowed her to move seamlessly between the worlds of street culture, luxury fashion, and digital art. Her collaboration with Coach on a Michael Jordan anime-inspired clothing line further elevated her visibility, cementing her status as a sought-after creative mind.

Her Instagram, initially a modest platform showcasing her work, transformed into a global portfolio almost overnight, growing from a few thousand followers to over 100,000 in a span of three months. This success didn't come from traditional portraiture or landscapes but rather from Jyxdi's unique decision to focus on anime-inspired art, resonating with a wide audience due to its nostalgia and accessibility.

## Breaking Stereotypes and Challenging Norms

Jyxdi's rise to prominence isn't just a story about art; it's about challenging expectations and stereotypes. In a world where brown women are often boxed into limited roles, Jyxdi's success sends a powerful message about cultural and gender identity. She has repeatedly stated that her goal is to show that artists, particularly women of South Asian descent, can be multifaceted, glamorous, and innovative. Her decision to dress in traditional attire during exhibitions and public appearances, while simultaneously diving into modern digital art like NFTs, beautifully embodies this duality.

One of the standout features of her art is the way it bridges worlds—the traditional and the modern. She is as comfortable painting the delicate details of Hindu gods like Ganesh and Shiva, infused with bright fluorescent UV paints, as she is collaborating with urban streetwear brands. For Jyxdi, tradition is not a limitation but a source of inspiration that she uses to create something completely new.

## Showcasing Sri Lanka: A Canvas of Heritage and Innovation

Sri Lanka has always held a special place in Jyxdi's heart, not only as her homeland but as a source of inspiration that fuels her creativity. One of her most celebrated projects involves a series of collaborations and art demonstrations in Jaffna, a culturally rich region in northern Sri Lanka. This area, known for its deep-rooted traditions and unique Tamil heritage, became the backdrop for Jyxdi's exploration of identity and history. In Jaffna, she collaborated with local artists and showcased her skills in a series of live painting sessions and workshops, allowing her to engage directly with the community.

Her artworks in Sri Lanka are a vivid celebration of the country's vibrant culture and landscapes. She painted traditional Sri Lankan motifs, such






as temple architecture, lush flora, and ancient mythological figures, each scene bursting with the textures and colours that define the region. These projects were not just about aesthetic beauty but about reclaiming cultural narratives that have often been marginalised. Through her art, she placed Sri Lanka on a global canvas, showcasing its beauty and complexity to audiences who might not have otherwise appreciated its depth.

## The Spirit Gates: A Bold Fusion of Tradition and Innovation

One of Jyxdi's most groundbreaking projects is her NFT collection, Spirit Gates. A deep admirer of anime and manga, she channelled her passion for storytelling into this digital series, creating characters and narratives that drew inspiration from both her South Asian heritage and the vast universe of Japanese animation. In 2022, she released the first volume of Spirit Gates, blending her signature painting style with digital art and pushing the boundaries of what art could be.

The project was a huge success, with the initial collection selling out almost instantly. For Jyxdi, Spirit Gates wasn't just about selling art; it was about creating a fandom, a community of supporters who saw the potential in blending traditional art with cutting-edge technology. She's now working on the second volume, promising even more innovation and engagement with her global audience.

## An Artist on the Move: Creativity Without Borders

Jyxdi's life is a testament to the idea that creativity knows no bounds. From Toronto to Melbourne, from New York Fashion Week to the beaches of Sri Lanka, she is constantly travelling, painting, and engaging with diverse cultures. This nomadic lifestyle is not just a byproduct of her success; it is central to her creative philosophy. Every new city is a source of inspiration, every landscape a potential backdrop for her next masterpiece.

Despite her busy schedule, Jyxdi remains dedicated to art education. She has conducted free workshops across Sri Lanka, teaching both children and adults the fundamentals of painting, and encouraging them to embrace their creativity regardless of background or circumstance. Many of her students come from marginalised communities, and she sees this outreach as an essential part of her mission—giving back to the places that shaped her own artistic identity.







## The Next Chapter: What Lies Ahead for Jyxdi

As Jyxdi continues to evolve as an artist, she remains grounded in her original vision—using art as a way to tell stories, connect people, and break down barriers. She is currently working on new projects that involve her Hindu heritage, blending ancient symbols with contemporary techniques. Additionally, she is expanding her NFT collection, exploring the intersection of spirituality, identity, and technology in ways that promise to be as captivating as her previous works.

Jyxdi is not just an artist; she is a movement, a celebration of diversity, creativity, and authenticity. Her work invites us all to see beyond the traditional constraints of art and to embrace a world where creativity is limitless, where culture is celebrated, and where the future is painted with bold, vibrant strokes of innovation.

With her relentless passion, entrepreneurial spirit, and unwavering commitment to her roots, Jyxdi continues to paint a future where art is both timeless and forward-thinking—a world that is as diverse and complex as the artist herself.












# COLIND'S diwali BALL 2024

Organised by Colombo Indians in association with the Indian CEO Forum, the Diwali Ball 2024 was a dazzling evening that brought the essence of Diwali to the heart of Colombo. The Grand Marquee at Taj Samudra transformed into a vibrant hub of festivity as guests came together to honour this cherished festival with elegance and excitement.

The evening unfolded with a sumptuous spread of authentic Indian cuisine that left everyone spoilt for choice. From chaat stations to delicate mehendi art booths, every detail was thoughtfully curated, creating a cultural experience that delighted the senses. Dance performances set the stage on fire, while raffle draws added a thrill of anticipation, with attendees cheering as lucky winners emerged.

The night was not only about the glamour of celebration; it was also a heartfelt gathering of community and joy. Dressed in traditional Indian attire, guests filled the venue with colour, laughter and the unmistakable spirit of Diwali. It was an evening of unity, food, dance and shared joy, capturing the very essence of the festival.

Here's a peek into the colourful moments!

*Pictures by* ***Malshan Wijayathilaka***


































































Kamal Munasignhe & Mikael Svensson


Stephanie


Rozanne & Kumar




Danusha & colleagues








Katie & daughter




Vrai



# Grand Christmas CAKE MIXING *Ceremony*

## at Cinnamon Grand Colombo

The holiday season kicked off in style at Cinnamon Grand Colombo with a grand Christmas Cake Mixing Ceremony, bringing guests and staff together for a memorable evening. This beloved tradition marks the start of the festive season with unity, joy, and of course, a delicious Christmas cake in the making!

With this annual tradition, Cinnamon Grand Colombo continues to bring people together, creating cherished memories and celebrating the spirit of Christmas.

*Pictures by* ***Kumara Bopearachchi***

# Taj Samudra Ushers in the Holiday Season

## Festive Cake-Mixing Celebration

Taj Samudra Colombo officially rang in the holiday season with its signature annual Christmas Cake-Mixing Ceremony at the grand Samudra Ballroom. The highly anticipated event hosted by the Area Director of Taj Maldives and Sri Lanka, Samrat Datta, was a heartwarming celebration of festive traditions, fine cuisine, and the joy of community.

Here's a visual journey through this joyous occasion, a celebration of colour, warmth and togetherness that set the tone for a truly magical holiday season at Taj Samudra Colombo.

*Pictures by* ***Iraj Walisinghe***

# Malaka

# APPLYING VERSATILITY TO DIVERSITY

**Driven by the power of passion and magic towards an exciting, illustrious journey in photography.**

*By Haritha Athapattu*

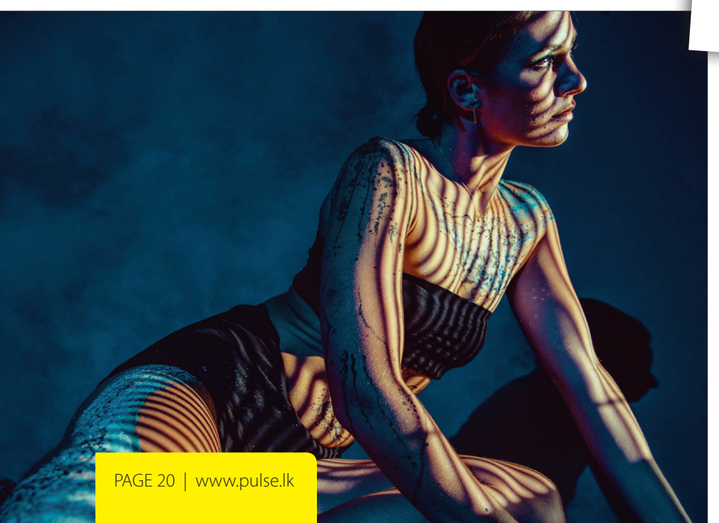
In a world where every click of the camera captures a fleeting moment, Malaka Mp stands out as a master of visual storytelling. His journey into photography is a testament to the power of passion and the magic that unfolds when one pursues what one loves. Initially, a hobbyist armed with a camera phone, Malaka's path was not carved with intentions of fame or fortune. Instead, it was an organic evolution, driven by a genuine enjoyment of capturing life's myriad moments. As Malaka continues to hold a significant place in the realm of photography, Pulse had the opportunity to share his experiences and thoughts.











## A Hobby Transformed

Tracing back to the roots of his career as a photographer, Malaka shared how his photographic journey began with simple snapshots taken for personal enjoyment. With every click, he discovered an exhilarating sense of freedom that propelled him to invest in a point-and-shoot camera. This marked the beginning of a beautiful relationship with photography. By uploading his shots to Flickr, he connected with a vibrant community of like-minded amateur photographers. Their shared passion ignited his ambition, leading him to explore various genres, from nature to street photography.

As his skill set grew, so did his equipment. He gradually invested in better gear, allowing him to experiment with different styles and techniques. The establishment of a small home studio provided the perfect environment for him to delve into experimental photography, pushing the boundaries of his creativity. This exploration bore fruit when he began receiving freelance gigs while balancing a full-time job in an advertising firm. Each assignment was a new opportunity to challenge himself creatively and learn more about the industry. Eventually, with consistent clients and a rapidly growing portfolio, Malaka took the leap into full-time photography. This decision, marked by uncertainty and excitement, has led him to a fulfilling career, devoid of regrets.

## Versatility Across Genres

What truly sets Malaka apart is his remarkable versatility. His portfolio encompasses various genres, including fashion, food and commercial photography, each requiring a different creative approach. This adaptability is crucial to his success, as he understands that each client presents a unique challenge and requires a tailored solution. "As a photographer, it's essential to grasp the essence of the brand and the story it wants to convey," he explained. This understanding informs his choices regarding lighting, composition, and styling, allowing him to evoke specific emotions in the viewer.

## Mastering Light and Mood

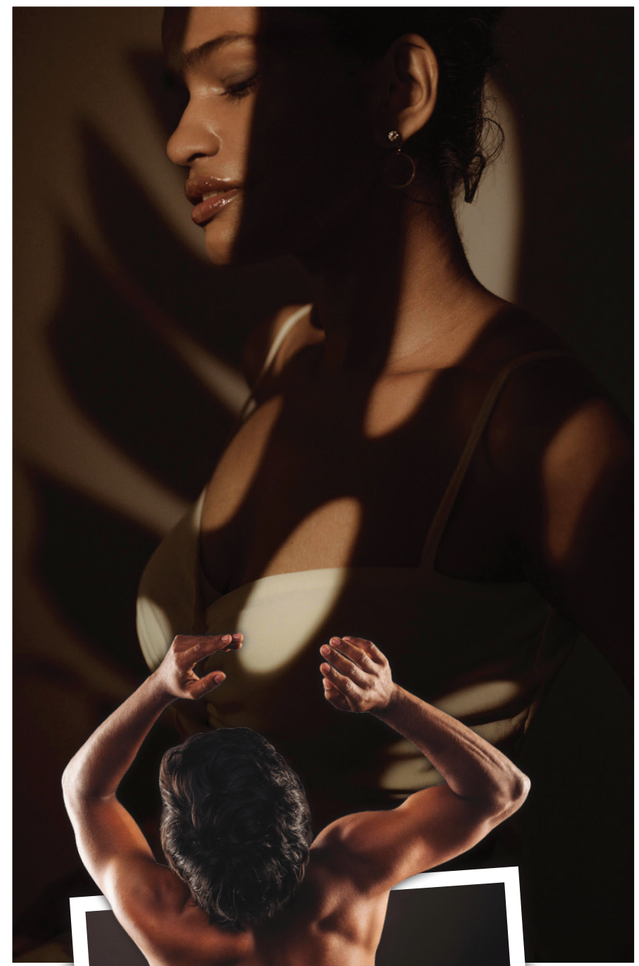
If you have come across Malaka's work, you must have noticed how lighting is a pivotal aspect of his creative photography. His keen eye for natural light transforms ordinary scenes into extraordinary visuals. As he shared, he meticulously considers the direction, angle, and colour of the light, crafting atmospheres that resonate with the story he wishes to tell. "It's about reading the light and understanding how it interacts with the subject," he said. "I like to work backwards from the mood I want to create, allowing for 'happy accidents' along the way." This hands-on approach to light not only enhances the aesthetic quality of his images but also deepens the emotional impact they have on viewers.

## Navigating a Changing Landscape

In an industry that continually evolves, particularly with the rise of digital media and social platforms, Malaka is someone who embraces these changes as opportunities for growth. The demand for fresh, engaging content has shifted the landscape, with brands requiring consistent visual material rather than relying solely on high-budget campaigns. "While this can sometimes lead to a focus on quantity over quality, it's crucial to strike a balance," he noted. "Well-curated content can still be achieved even with moderate budgets if you approach it wisely."

Despite the fast-paced nature of commercial photography, Malaka believes that technical skills are only part of the equation. "It's essential to have a solid grasp of your gear," he asserted, "but it's even more important to apply that knowledge in real-world scenarios." He advocates for photographers to focus on honing their craft through constant practice rather than getting lost in technical jargon. Effective communication with clients is also vital; understanding their needs and translating them into stunning visuals is the hallmark of a successful photographer.

Sharing a thought with aspiring photographers, Malaka expressed that in a saturated market, finding a distinct style or niche can set a photographer apart. He encourages aspiring photographers to explore their interests, discover what resonates with them, and cultivate their



unique perspectives. "Start shooting what you love, and eventually, your passion will attract the right audience," he advised. As per Malaka, it is by developing a personal voice that photographers can carve their path and make a lasting impact on the industry.

## Looking Ahead

As he looks toward the future, Malaka is excited about the evolving landscape of photography and his role within it. His team has been branching into film production over the last five years, exploring new creative avenues and storytelling methods. "We've been working on some selective yet exciting projects in that sphere, and I can't wait to share what we've been creating," he shared.

Additionally, he revealed his plans for an art photography exhibition next year, where he aims to showcase his creative journey and the evolution of his style. This new chapter not only signifies growth, but also the desire to share his work with a broader audience.

# Celebrate the Magic of Christmas at ITC Ratnadipa





This December, ITC Ratnadipa, the Jewel of Colombo, invites you to celebrate the festive season with grandeur and charm as we unveil our very first Christmas. Immerse yourself in the holiday spirit as the hotel transforms into a wonderland of shimmering lights, delightful aromas, and seasonal joy.

From lavish festive dining experiences to enchanting entertainment, indulgent afternoon teas, and irresistible treats, ITC Ratnadipa promises an extraordinary Christmas season filled with culinary excellence and heartfelt celebrations.

## Curated Hampers for the Perfect Gift

Spread the joy of the season with our exclusive hampers, carefully curated to feature a blend of traditional Christmas favourites and local delicacies. Presented in elegant signature packaging, they are ideal for gifting or enjoying with loved ones. For a personalised touch, opt for our Customized Hampers, which are tailored to your preferences.





### Festive Treats Price List

- Christmas Pudding (500g) - **Rs. 4,000**
- Christmas Cake (800g) - **Rs. 6,000**
- Vanilla Yule Log - **Rs. 6,500**
- Chocolate Yule Log - **Rs. 6,500**
- Love Cake (750g) - **Rs. 4,500**
- English Dry Fruit Cake (250g) - **Rs. 1,750**
- Christmas Stollen (250g) - **Rs. 1,500**
- Fruit Stollen (250g) - **Rs. 1,750**
- Breudher (800g) - **Rs. 4,500**
- Panettone (1000g) - **Rs. 4,500**
- Apricot & Nut Florentine (Box of 6) - **Rs. 3,250**
- Mini Christmas Cakes (Box of 6) - **Rs. 3,500**
- Mince Pies (Box of 6) - **Rs. 2,500**
- Christmas Rum Balls (Box of 15) - **Rs. 4,000**
- Christmas Truffles (Box of 15) - **Rs. 4,500**
- Christmas Cookies (per piece) - **Rs. 400**



### Signature Hamper Collection

#### Hamper of Joy - Rs. 6,500

- Festive dry fruit cake (250g), two festive cookies, a festive jar of rum balls (6 pcs), and gingerbread sticks (150g).

#### Box of Goodness - Rs. 9,500

- Six hand-rolled truffles, rum balls, mince pies, and apricot & nut Florentine.

#### Festive Curation - Rs. 12,500

- Mini Christmas cakes (6 pcs), hand-rolled truffles (15 pcs), festive cookies (4 pcs), jars of marshmallows, gingerbread sticks (150g), and nuts (150g).

#### Grand Curation - Rs. 15,000

- Mini Christmas cakes (6 pcs), rum balls (15 pcs), Christmas stollen (250g), festive cookies (2 pcs), jars of marshmallows, gingerbread sticks (150g), and nuts (150g).

#### Christmas Collection - Rs. 22,000

- Chef's signature Christmas cake (800g), love cake (750g), mince pies (6 pcs), rum balls (15 pcs), hand-rolled truffles (15 pcs), Christmas stollen (250g), festive cookies (4 pcs), and jars of marshmallows, gingerbread sticks (150g), and nuts (150g).





## Unwrap a Season of Culinary Bliss

Our chefs have prepared an array of festive feasts and delightful seasonal menus to tantalise your taste buds. From traditional Christmas flavours to modern culinary innovations, indulge in the finest offerings at our restaurants and bars. Enjoy festive afternoon teas, happy hours, and gourmet experiences that capture the season's essence.

## Visit the Gingerbread House

Explore our enchanting Gingerbread House, where you can place your festive orders and immerse yourself in the magic of Christmas.

### For Orders

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**Celebrate the festive season in style at ITC Ratnadipa. A merry and magical Christmas awaits you!**





Ramani Fernando & Michael Wijesuriya

















# COUTURE MEETS HIGH TEA

## *A Stylish Affair at The Sapphyr Lounge*

The Sapphyr Lounge at Shangri-La Colombo hosted a Couture High Tea Experience, a collaboration with Bride and Groom Magazine. Guests were treated to an afternoon of blended fashion and fine dining, headlined by Michael Wijesuriya's latest bridal and fashion collections. The event's highlight was Michael's stunning showcase, which offered a front-row view of his bridal designs choreographed by Rozanne Diasz.
Adding to the charm, the culinary team at Shangri-La presented a wedding-inspired high tea menu, perfectly complementing the afternoon's theme. Ramani Fernando and her team created flawless hair and makeup looks, enhancing the beauty of each outfit.

Here's a glimpse into the stylish affair.

*Pictures by **Malshan Wijayathilaka***







































# HILTON COLOMBO
## Lights Up the Festive Season

The Hilton Colombo ushered in the holiday season in grand style with a dazzling Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, officially marking the start of its much-anticipated 'Home for Christmas' festivities. The evening unfolded with heartwarming choral performances as timeless carols filled the air and created an enchanting festive atmosphere. Guests indulged in delectable seasonal treats that perfectly complemented the hotel's cosy and family-inspired theme. The 'Home for Christmas' theme was brought to life through thoughtful, detailed decorations, blending the warmth of cherished family traditions with opportunities to create new memories.

Here are some of the highlights from the celebration, capturing the essence of Hilton Colombo's heartfelt 'Home for Christmas' festivities.

*Pictures by* ***Kumara Bopearachchi***


















# ECHOES OF A BREAKOUT JOURNEY THROUGH SOUND AND SPIRIT



## From Local Roots to International Stages

*By Mia Abeyawardene*

While many local bands play the cover circuit in the Sri Lankan music scene, The Soul has captivated audiences by embracing their roots and crafting authentic, original music that resonates deeply with fans. They are renowned for their electrifying live performances that transform the night into an unforgettable party, leaving everyone dancing non-stop. Their sound is a unique blend of experimental, pop, blues, rock reggae and sound art, which effortlessly melds both Sri Lankan and global elements.

The Soul is made up of five members: Khazim Miskin (guitars), Dave Roberts (vocals and percussion), Divanka Weerasinghe (drums), brothers Uvindu Perera (bass) and Sarani Perera (guitars and keys). Their captivating, joyful, and brooding essence not only shapes their personalities but also establishes the tone for the musical journey they began over a decade ago. Since then, The Soul has been making waves both in the local music scene and overseas, playing tours in the Maldives, Oman, and even some of India's biggest Indie Festivals such as NH7 Weekender, Echoes of Earth and Goa Sunsplash.

We sat down with The Soul at their recording studio, Sound Asia, diving into how they expanded their music internationally, exploring the creative process for their new album and hearing some of their highlights from 2024.

After making a big splash in Sri Lanka, The Soul took their sound internationally and went on tour in India last year - from Chennai to Goa, then Bangalore and Mumbai. Khazim recalls, some fans even followed the band by train!

"In India, they were going nuts! Jumping up and down. They took the lights down in Goa, they were on tables at some points. Chennai was also a lot of fun, there were over 10,000 people there." Dave recalls.

"We started by saying "I love you" in Tamil, which went down really well with them," adds Uvindu.

According to Khazim, it was in India that the band discovered the importance of sound engineers. “We would usually handle our own mixing and tweak it during the show. At the festival in India, we used an in-house engineer. So we did a sound check, and we played the gig, and it was a mess. We had no idea what it sounded like outside to thousands of people. One day there was an engineer balancing another band. He heard us while he was walking around and wanted to work with us for the rest of the festival. He basically guided us and taught us song selection, teaching us to break down and simplify our set. We knew how to play to a party crowd of one or two hundred, but we had no idea how different the sound is outside compared to in a venue.”

The Soul has since released their latest album ‘Western Sunrise’, about a dystopian future that's controlled by artificial intelligence. Dave describes the concept: “A lot of the humans are also connected to artificial intelligence (AI) by chips and mechanical limbs and things like that. There's a very small section of actual organic, free humans, and they are losing the battle against this AI metal-driven, connected, higher consciousness that doesn't really like organics. They have been told that there will be a person who will come and kind of help them fight. They don't really know who it is. But then they discover this child who has the ability to emanate the electromagnetic pulse. He's really fast. So he can always be in front when they're charging. The older he gets, he really learns how to control and emanate an electromagnetic pulse. What happens is, if you're fighting the mechanical hive things, if you emanate the EMP, they just go down for a week. So that way, this organic group of humans starts to get the upper hand slowly.

In terms of the creative process, Dave does the final writing of each track, but everybody else in the band is putting in their energy and their own ideas.

“When it comes to the musical part, we all sit down and then go through it. We play something, and then he's like, this is great. And then he starts writing, and then he goes back and forth, and we decide. And then he gives us ideas. When it comes to music, we don't think in a very technical way. It’s more like, can we make it dip? Can we make it sound like somebody's dying?” says Uvindu.

Dave adds: “We try to capture a feeling. There's a point where, in one of the first songs, ‘Wasted Me’, this person is trying to go into himself and use this drug set to a machine. So instead of talking about what chords we can play, we think about how it would feel for somebody to die, having a really euphoric high on drugs, and then going through limbo to whatever lies next.”

With so many young musicians in Sri Lanka looking up to The Soul, Sarani acknowledges that the music industry is really hard to get into because it’s not financially viable for a lot of people to do and start living off. Perseverance is needed to actually get somewhere. He recommends that young musicians try to create their own music and find their own sound. He smiles saying, “The hours that you put into your music make you who you are.”

Khazim’s approach is to learn, explore and experiment. “See what works best for you. My main advice is to make originals. If your music sucks and you still want to make originals, keep making originals and play some covers on the side. Make your money, but don't let the playing of covers disturb the creative process of your artist. Be very expressive. Don't put any boundaries on your music. Just explore and express.”

Divanka agrees, “As musicians, we need to find new things and experiment. As Khazim said, we need to make originals. Covers shouldn’t be everything. It would be enough if we could keep it as an income to pay our bills. The other thing is, that we need to show how we view the world and what we have experienced in life so far through art and music. We need to take creativity to another level, that’s what I want to say to the young musicians.”



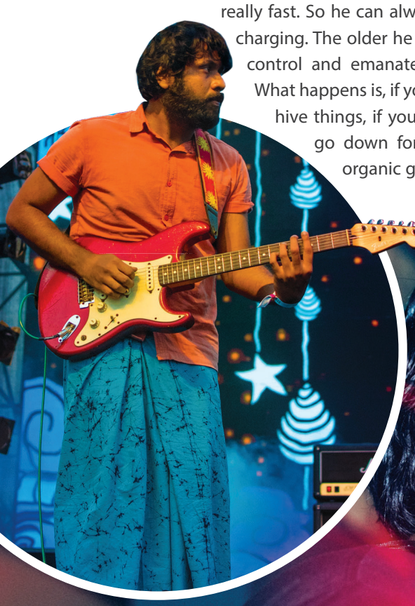



As a band with such a unique sound, we spoke about interesting trends that are coming up in the Sri Lankan music scene. Khazim mentions a group called Drill Team. “They are trying to do the rap scene with live bands, and no backing tracks. They’re not lip-syncing anymore. So they're trying to keep it live as much as possible. And that's a new thing in comparison to the Sri Lankan boy band pop-rap scene of the 90s and 2000s.”

Reflecting on their top moments from 2024, Dave recalls recording the fourth album, then releasing the third, ‘Western Sunrise’ at the end of October. He also mentions the Maldives was a highlight, and that he started eating fish again. Uvindu jokingly adds: “I got into oversised shirts, that was nice.”

The Soul’s journey from local stages to international festivals showcases the band’s relentless creativity, passion, and drive to push boundaries. Through their unique blend of sounds and meaningful storytelling, they’ve carved a space for themselves not just as musicians, but as artists who speak to the spirit of Sri Lanka while resonating with audiences far and wide. As they continue to evolve, they invite fans to join them in this unfolding musical adventure. With ‘Western Sunrise’ capturing their vision for a dystopian future, The Soul's impact is only growing, inspiring young artists and proving that originality and authenticity are powerful forces.

For upcoming gigs follow The Soul on **Instagram @thesoulsrilanka** and stream **‘Western Sunrise’** now on Spotify or iTunes.





**The Soul has since released their latest album ‘Western Sunrise’, about a dystopian future that's controlled by artificial intelligence.**

# Lanka COMIC CON

Lanka Comic Con 2024, held at Trace Expert City from 24-25 August, brought together comic, manga, anime and pop culture enthusiasts for an unforgettable weekend. The event featured vibrant cosplay displays, with attendees showcasing their favourite fictional characters in impressively crafted costumes.

Beyond cosplay, the convention offered a treasure trove of geek merchandise, panel discussions featuring local and international artists, and interactive activities. Locally-made board games, books, and films were on display, with tabletop games drawing enthusiastic participants throughout. From anime screenings to creative panels, Lanka Comic Con 2024 delivered something for every fan to enjoy.

Here are some outstanding cosplays from the event!

*Pictures by* ***Ramesh Roshan & Ayesh Danushka***

# Journey of Architect and Changemaker



*By Nirma Kumarasiri*

Kamilka Perera Architect (Pvt) Ltd is more than just a design firm in Sri Lanka's architectural landscape. It embodies its founder's journey, shaped by resilience, creativity, and a client-first philosophy. Guided by Kamilka Perera, the firm has built a reputation for creating spaces that transcend functionality, offering emotion and purpose. For Kamilka, architecture isn't just about constructing buildings—it's about telling meaningful stories and reshaping perceptions of success.

## Building a Culture of Kindness and Grit

At the heart of Kamilka Perera Architect (Pvt) Ltd is a workplace culture rooted in kindness and dedication. Leading an all-female team, Kamilka fosters an environment that combines growth, learning, and a commitment to excellence. "I've seen the damage a toxic workplace can do, and I've made it my mission to lead differently," she says. Her leadership is compassionate and firm, balancing support for her team with high expectations.

Creating a positive workplace is fundamental to Kamilka's vision. "Commitment and curiosity—that's what I look for in team members," she emphasises. "If you're willing to work hard and stay open to learning, you'll grow." These values echo Kamilka's journey, marked by grit and determination in an industry often driven by privilege.

## Starting from Scratch

Kamilka launched her firm while preparing for motherhood, navigating immense change and responsibility. "I didn't have the luxury of waiting for the perfect moment," she recalls. "I was juggling work, pregnancy, and everything in between. Starting a business wasn't a calculated decision but a necessity."

Her first breakthrough came with Caramel Pumpkin, a café refurbishment that became pivotal. "That project gave me the confidence to think beyond working alone," she reflects. From her bedroom workspace, she expanded to her guest bedroom, building a small team and learning to trust others with her vision. "This city thrives on connections—your last name, family, or spouse," she says. "I had none of that. I had to work twice as hard to make my name mean something." Her perseverance in carving her path sets her apart in Colombo's competitive architectural scene.

## Client-Centric Design

Kamilka's design philosophy focuses on profoundly understanding her clients. "Before we even talk about the space, I try to understand who the client is," she explains. This approach uncovers personal details that shape each project, from favourite colours to cherished memories or art pieces that inspire the design.





# Kamilka Perera

**Kamilka's people-centric philosophy redefines modern architecture and focuses on her ability to blend creativity, practicality and emotional resonance**





Her client-centric philosophy fosters trust and builds lasting relationships. "When you design with people's stories in mind, the results are always more meaningful," she says. It's a balancing act — staying true to your design while being open to feedback."This ability to navigate complex dynamics with empathy reflects her journey. "Every project has its story, and every client has struggles or aspirations," she notes. "To navigate those, you need emotional intelligence as much as technical skill."

## Blending Art and Functionality

A hallmark of Kamilka's work is her ability to harmonise art and functionality. "A space can be both beautiful and practical," she asserts. Whether using polished marble or simple cement finishes, her designs thoughtfully layer materials to create cohesive, inviting environments.

Drawing inspiration from her background as a painter, Kamilka's creative process integrates multiple mediums. "Art challenges you to see things differently," she says. "That mindset translates into my designs—every detail matters." Beyond architecture, her projects often include custom furniture and interior styling, reflecting a holistic approach. "We're not just designing spaces—we're designing lifestyles," she explains.

## Navigating Challenges with Resilience

Leaving a large architectural firm after eight years to start her own practice was a leap of faith. "When you're on your own, there's a lot of second-guessing," she admits. Despite the doubts, she embraced the learning curve, sought guidance when necessary, and trusted her instincts.

Her journey highlights the unique challenges women face in the industry. "You have to fight for your seat at the table," she says. "It's not just about skill—it's about proving, time and again, that you belong." Despite these hurdles, Kamilka's unwavering commitment to her craft has earned her respect and recognition in a competitive field.

## A Philosophy Rooted in People

For Kamilka, architecture is deeply personal. "I don't design for awards or trends," she explains. "I design for the people who live, work, and create in these spaces." This philosophy underscores her belief that architecture should evoke emotion and foster connection.

Her people-first approach extends to her team and clients alike. "This is a people business," she says. "Whether you're working with clients or collaborating with your team, empathy and grace take you further."

## The Joy of Creation

Kamilka's creative pursuits extend beyond architecture. As a painter, she explores various mediums, which enriches her architectural vision. "Art helps me approach problems more open-mindedly," she shares. Her passion for fitness, particularly CrossFit, has also shaped her approach to work. "CrossFit taught me resilience and discipline," she says."Pushing through physical limits translates into mental toughness."

## A Lasting Legacy

For Kamilka, success isn't measured by accolades or the size of her projects but by the emotional connection her designs foster. "If I can create spaces that people connect with on a deeper level, then I've done my job," she says.

Her journey—marked by resilience, creativity, and empathy—has transformed the spaces she designs and the lives of those who inhabit them. In an industry often defined by privilege, Kamilka's work proves that hard work and integrity can create a lasting impact.

In a world where trends come and go, Kamilka's work endures because it is rooted in timeless principles. Through her thoughtful approach and unwavering dedication, Kamilka continues to leave a legacy not of monuments, but of memories—spaces where life unfolds in its most meaningful ways.













# Gintastic: An Enchanting Celebration of Gin

The art of gin met the soul of Sri Lankan hospitality at Gintastic, which recently took place at WH Sri Lanka. Organised by Haut Monde Event Management, the occasion brought together gin enthusiasts. Guests were treated to an exquisite range of gin cocktails, expertly crafted by IDL Global, complemented by Sri Lankan-inspired canapés from The Hela Platter.

Sun Crush proudly served as the beverage sponsor, ensuring guests stayed refreshed throughout the night. Beautifully curated door gifts from Aroma Bliss Ceylon, La.Perfumerie.lk and Tiesh added charm, while Blooms Flower Shop enhanced the ambience with stunning floral arrangements. The event was possible by collaborating with several sponsors, including Aadaraya Ceylon, Real Lands & Properties (Pvt) Ltd, and Salsa Sensation.

Here is how the evening unfolded.

*Pictures by **Praveen Madu***





























# tiesh Jewellery at Galle Fort Hotel

Tiesh Jewellery recently teamed up with Ropewalk at Galle Fort Hotel and Fig & Maple, India for an exclusive evening of luxury, fine dining and stunning jewellery. Held at the historic Galle Fort Hotel, the event treated guests to a stunning showcase of Tiesh's 'Timeless Elegance' collection alongside a night of cocktails and a multi-course dinner.

The highlight of the night was the presentation of Tiesh's exquisite jewellery, featuring bold necklaces, earrings, pendants, and rings adorned with sapphires, diamonds, rubies and emeralds. Guests were captivated by the beauty and craftsmanship of these statement pieces, perfect for special occasions.

Set against the backdrop of the 300-year-old Galle Fort, the event also introduced guests to Ropewalk, Sri Lanka's first arrack-specialty bar, known for its innovative cocktails. Ravish Bhavnani from Fig & Maple, along with the mixologists from Ropewalk, served bespoke cocktails that set the tone for a delightful evening.

Chef Radhika Khandelwal from Fig & Maple, Delhi, wowed guests with a sustainable, seasonal menu crafted from locally sourced ingredients. Her culinary creations, paired with the stunning jewellery on display, made for an unforgettable experience.

Maya and Diandra modelled the jewellery collection, offering a closer look at the intricate designs that embody Tiesh's signature elegance.

*Pictures by* ***Samal Bandara***



Stephanie Siriwardhana



Thiyasha De Fonseka



Ayesh De Fonseka



Lasantha De Fonseka & Bryony De Fonseka








Dilrukshi, Chrishanthi & Bryony



Prithi



Sajeira, Pritiva & Treshan



US Ambassador Julie Chung



Naomi

# DARSHI KEERTHISENA

# The Queen of Batik

**From the vibrant studios of Koswadiya to the Global Stage, Darshi embodies the spirit of batik, breathing new life into an ancient craft with innovative designs that speak of heritage, empower artisans and inspire a sustainable future – A movement born from love for fabric and family**





**"I want to make batik something you'd wear to the Met Gala or Buckingham Palace."**



*By Savithri Rodrigo*

Batik is a delicate interplay of art and tradition, blending wax-resist dyeing with natural fabrics like cotton, silk, and linen. Buddhi Batiks stands as a beacon of this craft in Sri Lanka, infusing contemporary design into a heritage art form. Each creation is a masterpiece, hand-painted by artisans, dyed in vibrant hues or subtle pastels, boiled, sun-dried, and perfected through meticulous repetition. These pieces are more than fabric—they are art, a testament to generations of craftsmanship.

At the helm of this legacy is Darshi Keerthisena, a trailblazer who has taken batik from local workshops to international acclaim. Her journey began at the tender age of ten when she designed a batik shirt for her brother Boodee, a shirt which he cherished until it fell apart. Decades later, Darshi is the undisputed 'Batik Queen', transforming this heritage craft into a contemporary fashion statement. "I wanted to make batik something you'd wear to the Met Gala or Buckingham Palace," she says—and she has done just that.

Darshi's work has graced the Commonwealth Fashion Exchange on Livia Firth's EcoAge platform, where her sustainably designed, hand-pleated silk dress dazzled an audience that included the Princess of Wales, Kate Middleton, and supermodel Naomi Campbell. It was a proud moment for Sri Lankan craftsmanship, showcasing both ethical and exquisite batik.

Beyond fashion, Darshi has shaped Buddhi Batiks into a movement. Based in the village of Koswadiya, the workshop empowers artisans, many of whom have been with the brand since its inception in 1970. "These women are the heart and soul of Buddhi Batiks," Darshi says. With artisans aged 18 to 65, the workshop provides employment and a way of life, offering flexible hours and fostering a sustainable regional micro-economy.

Darshi's designs have dominated Colombo's runways, reached royal palaces, and attracted admirers globally. Yet, she remains grounded and committed to creating a niche market in Sri Lanka rather than mass production. "There's something deeply personal about batik," she explains. "It's not about bulk—it's about individuality, sustainability, and storytelling."

A passionate advocate for circular fashion, Darshi campaigns for reusing and repurposing clothing, urging a shift away from disposable fashion. Her creations reflect her ethos: bold, ethical, and deeply rooted in heritage.

Darshi's influence extends beyond fashion. She is also a visiting lecturer at leading Sri Lankan design institutions, she inspires the next generation of creatives. Her commitment to animal welfare, women's rights, and sustainability shines through in every facet of her life.

With her signature mane of curls and infectious smile, Darshi Keerthisena is a force of nature—a designer, lecturer, advocate, mother and storyteller. She's not just the queen of batik; she's its fiercest guardian and most passionate voice, paving the way for Sri Lankan artistry on the global stage.

## Of Cauldrons and Dyes

Darshi Keerthisena was born eight and a half years after her brother in a world where batik was more than art; it was a way of life. She grew up immersed in the vibrant chaos of her parents' workshop, surrounded by cauldrons of bright dyes, bubbling pots of hot wax, and tables draped with fabric waiting to be transformed. "My father propelled the batik industry forward and our backyard was his creative playground," she recalls. "I spent hours watching him and my mother breathe life into plain fabric. It was magical to see them create beauty from nothing. Those memories still inspire my designs today."

Her mother, Ranasiri, was the quiet force behind it all. While her father brought the artistic vision, her mother ensured everything ran seamlessly. "My mother managed the operations, the household, and the people. She was the wind beneath my father's wings," says Darshi. Together, her parents built Buddhi Batiks into a household name, teaching her lessons that extended beyond the craft.

Darshi's childhood was a mix of disciplined schooling and carefree adventures. A diligent student, she always completed her homework to avoid complaints. But the gardens at home often called to her. She climbed trees, ran barefoot, and spent hours on the swing. "Once, I faked a headache to skip school just to play on the swing," she admits with a laugh. "My father caught me and scolded me. After that, I never missed a day of school and even won the prize for best attendance!"

Her early life, filled with colour, discipline and creativity, laid the foundation for her journey into the world of batik, making her not just an artist but a storyteller of heritage.

## Passing the Baton

Darshi however, adds another trait she cultivated from Buddhi – positivity and optimism. "He was always so positive about everything and anything. I remember how he would always be perfectly dressed and very punctual, sometimes arriving early for meetings. I will also never forget what a genuine friend he was." According to Darshi, Buddhi was not just creative; he also had the insight to run a successful business. "That I have been unable to do because while I'm on Cloud 9 creating and drawing things in my head, my business operations tend to take second place. But for my father, both areas were equally important."

Her brother had already made a name for himself in the world of cinema, while Darshi was destined to carry forward Buddhi's renowned batik legacy.

From childhood, she accompanied Buddhi to exhibitions and trade shows in Europe and Nordic countries, sitting in on business meetings and watching how hard he worked. "He would arrange the stalls himself – putting up the wall hangings and creatively arranging everything in the stall," says Darshi. But she also knew that being creative and hardworking alone could not take this legacy forward.

"I've always loved fabrics more than fashion itself," explains Darshi. "As a child, I would wrap myself in yards of fabric from my father's workshop and imagine the stories they could tell. I think I knew early on that this was my calling, but I didn't realise the depth of my passion until I started studying Fashion and Textile Design in the UK." After A/Ls, Darshi took off to England and returned with a BA (Hons) in Fashion and Textile Design from Central England University in Birmingham and a Postgraduate Teaching and Learning Art and Design course at the London College of Fashion.

To hone her fundamentals, she began a five-year design stint, first at Brandix Lanka and later as consultant head of design at MAS Linea Aqua, where she worked for seven years.

## Working with the Legend

Darshi's journey involves passion, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to heritage. Reflecting on her beginnings, she shares, "Working with my father was an incredible experience. He had a sharp eye for detail and a deep respect for the craft. We often agreed on the importance of preserving the authenticity of batik. He was always ahead of his time, with remarkably contemporary ideas for someone who started in a small village." This early exposure to innovation shaped her approach. "It pushed me to experiment and elevate batik into high fashion, striking the perfect balance between heritage and modernity," she says.

Inspired by nature and culture, Darshi's creations are masterful expressions of design, where every sweeping line and hue reflects her unique vision. "I design because it's in my blood. I grew up surrounded by this cultural heritage right in my backyard. Batik became like a second skin—it was the most natural thing for me to do," she explains. Yet, batik's handmade essence adds an unpredictable charm. "The colours might shift, or the wax might crack differently. I always tell clients that batik isn't like a planned print; it's an adventure. If they embrace that journey with us, it brings happiness."

As the daughter of an industry legend, Darshi acknowledges the duality of privilege and responsibility. "My father is an icon. Growing up, I felt the weight of his legacy, but he was also my biggest inspiration. He taught me to stay true to my craft, no matter how challenging the journey."

## DARSHI'S PROFILE

**BIRTHDAY:** 31st March

**ALMA MATER:** Holy Family Convent, Wennappuwa and St. Bridget's Convent, Colombo

**FAMILY:** Husband Johan De Livera, Daughter Arya, Parents Buddhi and Ranasiri, Brother Boodee

**QUALIFICATIONS:** Bachelor's Degree in Fashion & Textile Design, Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching Art & Design

**FIRST JOB:** Mast Lanka (now Brandix)

**SHOWN AT:** Sri Lanka: The Railway Fashion Show by the French Embassy curated by Jacquie Mei, Colombo Fashion Week, Sri Lanka Design Festival, bridal showcases, and numerous other prominent fashion events across the country.

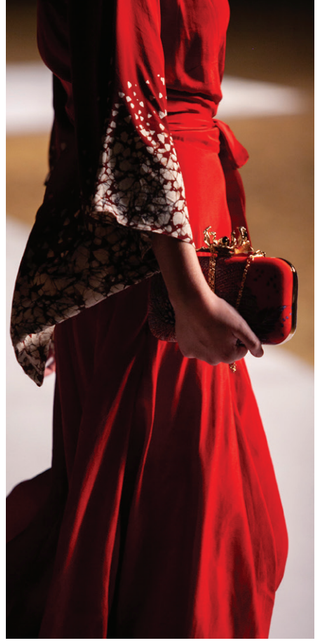
**INTERNATIONALLY:** Batik Exhibition in Petio Sweden 2003 was done with her father, International Thai Silk Fashion Week in 2019, The London Static Exhibition at London Fashion Week February 2013, Showcased in fashion shows in Milan, Washington DC, Bejing, India, Buddhi Batiks in Bangalore for CFW X Bangalore in 2023 and more

**ADMIRES:** Alexander McQueen for his ability to tell stories through his designs



**"Batik is more than just a craft; it's a way of life. It's a medium through which I express my creativity, connect with my heritage, and support a community of talented artisans."**







## DARSHI'S

| | |
|---|---|
| **PASSION:** | Batik |
| **PHOBIA:** | Dishonesty |
| **MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT:** | Arya's birth |
| **MOST CHALLENGING MOMENT:** | Losing thaththa |
| **MOST MEMORABLE DESIGN:** | Sustainably sourced algae silk hand-pleated batik gown created for a showing at Buckingham Palace |
| **ROLE MODELS:** | Parents |
| **INSPIRED BY:** | Buddhi Keerthisena's positive outlook and 'can do' attitude and also Boodee Keerthisena's Mille Soya film to think out of the box |



By 2005, Darshi's bold experimentation began yielding results, transforming batik into glamorous yet functional designs for the modern woman. A year later, a Buddhi Batiks store was opened in the basement of Crescat Boulevard. Her meteoric rise gained momentum as she showcased her work at Colombo Fashion Week in 2007 and won the prestigious British Council Young Fashion Entrepreneur Award in 2008. Darshi's journey to stardom continued, earning her international recognition when Livia Firth carried a Buddhi Batiks clutch to the Met Gala in 2019. Today, Darshi's creativity knows no bounds, from saris and accessories to groundbreaking collaborations like the Buddhi Batiks Luxury Tile Collection with Macktiles.

## Turning Heads

There's something about Darshi that turns heads—not those unruly yet endearing curls falling wildly about her face; it's her 'Elton John'- type spectacles (she has quite a collection). Her style is bold yet effortlessly authentic, especially when she wears her Buddhi Batik saris, draped with a quirky twist. Paired with unconventional footwear, be it hiking boots, platform shoes, or plain slippers, Darshi always adds her unique flair to tradition.

While she was once an extrovert, Darshi now cherishes quieter moments with her husband, Johan and their daughter, Arya. Her mornings begin at 5:30 a.m. on the balcony, soaking in the serenity before the bustle of her day, starting with preparing Arya's meals. "My daughter is the



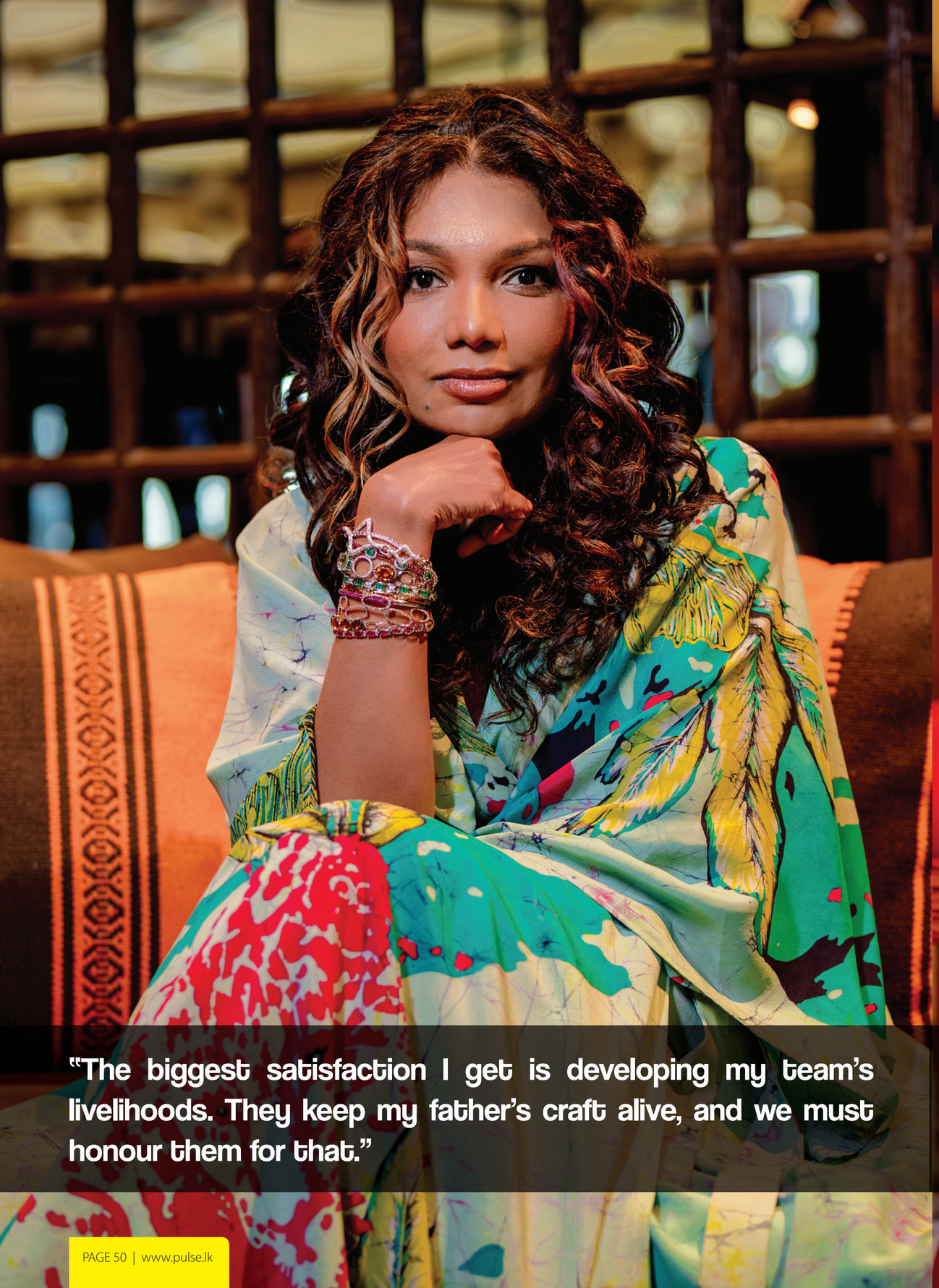












"The biggest satisfaction I get is developing my team's livelihoods. They keep my father's craft alive, and we must honour them for that."





"I've always loved fabrics more than fashion itself. To me, batik represents resilience, innovation, and timeless beauty."

centre of my world," she shares. "I try to spend as much time with her as possible. Family time is sacred; it's how I recharge."

Darshi met Johan through a mutual friend during her time at Brandix, and their connection was instant. "We always knew we'd get married. There was no grand proposal—one day while driving, he just turned to me and said, 'Bandimuda?' And that's what we did," she recalls with a smile. Married for 23 years, Darshi admires Johan's kindness. "He is the kindest man I know. Watching how he treats people and leads his team taught me much about true leadership. If a man is kind, he is a good man."

Juggling many roles as a designer, wife, mother and animal lover, Darshi's life is a balancing act. Her home is filled with rescue dogs—adorably named Gus Gus, Sundari, and Jacksena Keerthisena de Livera, while her workshop hosts Embark adoptees Mars, Brownie, and Jimmy. "My dogs bring so much joy and calm to my life. Being with them reminds me of life's simple pleasures," she says.

Her love for animals led her to veganism six years ago, after 33 years as a vegetarian. "I just didn't want to kill animals to feed myself," she says simply, embodying her deep compassion in every aspect of her life.

## Watch this Space

With lots of plans ahead – "Watch this space", she says – Darshi has her fingers in many pies. Currently involved in a project with the University of Moratuwa, the Buddhi Batiks' factory doors are always open to students as her vision is to keep the craft of Batik alive. "And the biggest satisfaction I get is to develop my team's livelihoods. They keep my father's craft alive, and we must honour them for that," she says of her 75-strong team.

Working through two stores, a studio and the Koswadiya workshop, she surmises, "Batik is more than just a craft; it's a way of life. It's a medium through which I express my creativity, connect with my heritage, and support a community of talented artisans. To me, batik represents resilience, innovation, and timeless beauty."

And on a lighter note: Any regrets? "Not having four more kids!"

## DARSHI'S MUST-HAVES

| | |
|---|---|
| **AT HOME:** | Doggies, notebook, water, |
| **AT WORK:** | Coffee, water, phone, notebook |
| **TRAVELLING:** | Buddhi Batiks pouches to neatly segregate all my stuff for easy reach.' |
| **AT SHOWS:** | Scissors to cut hanging threads, mobile phone |
| **ON DATE NIGHT:** | Lip gloss |
| **AT WORKOUT:** | Water |















# DARSHI'S FAVES

| | |
|---|---|
| **FOOD:** | Vegan junk food (it's a treat as I try to eat clean vegan food) |
| **DESIGNER:** | Buddhi Batiks |
| **LEADER:** | Johan de Livera - I have seen the compassion he leads his team with |
| **PERSON:** | My daughter Arya |
| **ACCESSORY:** | My father's chain, which he gifted me |
| **OUTFIT:** | Sari |
| **HOLIDAY DESTINATION:** | Sri Lanka's coastline |










*Credits:*
*Photography*

***Raffealla Fernando***
***Iraj Walisinghe***
***Vihanga Kaveesha Peiris***

*Location - **ITC Ratnadipa, Colombo***
*Makeup and hair - **Dil Sapukotanage***
*Wardrobe - **Buddhi Batiks***
*Jewellery - **Colombo Jewellery Stores***






















# Türkiye's 101ST Republic Day Celebration

The Embassy of Türkiye in Sri Lanka and Maldives marked a momentous occasion, celebrating the Republic of Türkiye's 101st anniversary. The event took place at the Galle Face Hotel and was an evening filled with pride, unity and cultural splendour. Dignitaries, diplomats and special guests gathered to honour this milestone, showcasing the rich heritage and enduring spirit of Türkiye. The festivities featured elegant Türkiye inspired decor, inspiring speeches and a vibrant atmosphere, making it a night to remember.

Here is a glimpse of the celebratory gathering.

*Pictures by* ***Ayesh Danushka***






















































# Oktoberfest

## AT CITRUS HIKKADUWA

Citrus Hikkaduwa hosted the biggest Oktoberfest celebration in the South, delivering a night of non-stop fun, music, and drinks! The event brought the party to life with performances by Mango Boom, Tha Youngest, The Slipping Chairs, and Magic Box Mixup at the lively Summer Salt Bar.

Here are some highlights from the memorable night!

*Pictures by* ***Malshan Wijayathilaka***













## From Tea to TikTok: Alison's Journey of Passion, Purpose and Creativity




*By Haritha Athapattu*

Meet Alison Wijemanne, the vibrant TikTok star whose authentic content and multifaceted personality have captured over 100,000 followers and amassed an impressive 2.5 million likes. A master of balance, Alison seamlessly blends her professional life as a tea exporter with her creative passions for makeup artistry, storytelling, and pet rescue advocacy.

Through her relatable, heartfelt posts, she has built a connection that goes beyond entertainment, inspiring her audience to embrace their authentic selves and make a difference. Pulse sat down with Alison for an exclusive chat about her rise on TikTok, the stories behind her most meaningful moments, and how she turns her everyday life into a platform for empowerment and self-expression.





TIKTOK TRENDING

# ALISON WIJEMANNE



Scan the QR code for the full video

**One of the best messages I've ever received from a follower is that she had rescued a street dog in need of help and that she had me to thank because she was inspired by me.**

## Describe yourself with three Adjectives.

Ambitious, Organised and Dependable

## What inspired you to start creating TikToks, and did you ever imagine becoming this popular?

Like most TikTok content creators, it was the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 when I was in lockdown at home with much more time. My best friend Tesara had started posting earlier and tried repeatedly to get me to join, but I had sworn that I would never dance on the app because I have no rhythm. But then I started doing some more TikToks on my own and it took off from there. I wouldn't consider myself famous – I just loved how there were fantastic content creators out there in today's world showing glimpses into their lives, and as opposed to Instagram being more dolled up; TikTok had an inviting energy to it. I'm glad if even one person finds joy or connection in my content.

## You juggle your work life, makeup tutorials, and product reviews and showcase snippets of your personal life on TikTok. How do you decide what content to create next?

The short answer is I'm a Virgo. The long answer is I don't have a strict plan or schedule; I always just try to utilise the time I have spare to film during the day – whether it be my morning routine or my make-up whilst getting ready. Being an only child also means you don't have a sibling to share these experiences with, so I suppose that's how I found comfort in connecting with my audience and making content true to myself. I'm not pretending to be anyone else. I genuinely love doing my makeup, and style boosts my confidence and ability to approach the world. It's just something I love doing.

## Out of all your TikToks, is there one moment close to your heart that resonated with your audience or felt personally meaningful?

It's sharing my work life as a tea exporter. I never thought people would be interested in seeing that part of my life (which is funny, considering it takes up more than 80% of my time), but seeing how people interact with the work content I've been producing has been a joy. I'm a nerd in tea; I get it from my dad. I've had many girls and young women reaching out to me, telling me about their aspirations to join the industry. Although we're at a stage in the country where we have influential local players in the tea industry in Sri Lanka– it is still a heavily male-dominated industry. So, it has made me really happy to get tons of messages from girls and young women saying how they aspire to become tea tasters or join the industry after seeing my content.

## What's the best message or comment you've received from a follower, and how has your audience shaped your journey?

One of the best messages I've ever received from a follower is that she had rescued a street dog in need of help and that she had me to thank because she was inspired by me. If someone does 'good' after watching me, that's the best feeling for me, hands down. In this world, doing good and inspiring other people to do is what matters most. All that other stuff really doesn't matter.

## Has your growing popularity on TikTok ever crossed paths with your professional work in unexpected ways?

I used to constantly worry about my career running a tea exporting company and my social media crossing paths – especially as a South Asian woman. But I've gotten to a place where I've realised that it would be dishonest if I weren't showing my whole life. Most of the time, it's just the boundaries in our head, but once we live as authentically as we want, we realise that most of the time, it's just bad-case scenarios. I feel grateful as I know I can do great things with my platform and share more about my professional career and business.

## As a makeup enthusiast, what's your take on beauty standards today? How do you incorporate self-expression into your tutorials?

For me, makeup has always been a way to elevate my look and enhance my features. I feel people try to use makeup to cover their true beauty, but I look at it as if it helps me look more like myself, and it's great to see how popular makeup has become. Makeup works like warpaint or battle armour to give you just the right boost of confidence. Beauty standards today are crazy; even the most beautiful girl will have something to feel self-conscious about. Beauty is subjective, and everyone is beautiful in their own way.

## Tell us about your pets.

Almost all of my pets are rescued except Teo, my golden retriever. They are the best. I'm a dog lover and rescuer. I always encourage people to adopt a street dog needing a home. Animals are the best; you show them love, and they will love you forever. I dream of running a dog shelter to help as many street dogs as possible. Until then, we have 20 dogs between my home and our Children's Orphanage in Negombo – so let Future Alison handle that.

## If you had the chance to collaborate with anyone, who would it be, and why?

I love doing content work with my best friends, Tesara, Shaveena, Sashya, and Adithi. We genuinely love spending time together, and we are lucky we get the chance to do content together and travel together for 'collabs'. We were friends before social media, which makes it even better.

## Looking ahead, do you see yourself diving deeper into content creation, or are there other professional or personal goals you're working towards?

I don't see myself stopping content creation any time in the near future. I enjoy doing it. I love sharing bits of my life with people. However, my business is my top priority; social media will always come second if that requires more time. And once I decide to start a family, I will have to see if I can find the time to balance everything. But it's something I will always have and keep open. I love sharing and I don't plan on stopping anytime soon.

*Pictures by* ***Trevon Perera***
*Location -* ***Cinnamon Grand Colombo***
*Wardrobe:* ***White suit - Suit & Tie***

# BUILDING A GLOBAL TECH EMPIRE

## Alagan MAHALINGAM

## DISCUSSES ROOTCODE'S SUCCESS AND THE FUTURE OF AI IN SRI LANKA




*By Naveed Rozais*

The Global Tech Industry is full of inspiring startup stories – from Facebook and Twitter to Airbnb and Uber. Sri Lanka has its own inspiring startup stories, and one such startup, Rootcode, recently marked its 10th anniversary. From its beginnings in 2014 in a small house behind BMICH to becoming a well-known technology company worldwide, Rootcode has grown from a small startup focused on building a single app to a global software product engineering company that helps businesses and governments across continents leverage the power of AI and technology.

Pulse sat down with Rootcode Founder and CEO, Alagan Mahalingam, for some reflections on Rootcode's remarkable journey, his belief in the transformative potential of AI and his hopes for the future of Sri Lanka's tech industry.

### Driving Innovation Through AI

Alagan's inspiration for Rootcode was rooted in his early experiences as a software engineer. He recalls being fascinated by how technology was changing the way businesses operated. "Tech has been instrumental in how people and businesses operate," he says. "When I became an engineer and started creating software, I had this desire to build bigger products that could drive the world forward."

Rootcode's first major product, 'Singify,' was an AI-driven singing and learning app that Alagan developed by himself. It allowed users to improve their vocal skills by analysing pitch and providing real-time feedback. It was a passion project that ignited his interest in AI. "The app was designed to understand the human voice, tell you which note to sing and help you create your own karaoke at home without a studio," Alagan explained. This early experience showed him the potential of AI in understanding and mimicking human processes—a realisation that would later define Rootcode's future direction.

Alagan's decision to focus on AI was a bold one to take in 2014, a time when AI was not yet mainstream, especially in Sri Lanka. But for Alagan, the choice was clear. "In the 1980s, computers took the world into a new dimension. Now, everyone carries a powerful supercomputer in their hands. Tech has changed the way we live and has made the world so connected. Globalisation as it is today, exists because of computers and the internet" he shared, "I knew that the next level of transformation would happen through AI."

What makes AI so transformative and inspiring to Alagan is its capacity to dramatically accelerate human advancement. Instead of the lengthy process of training individuals over many years, using AI we can train millions of intelligent agents in mere minutes or even seconds, speeding up difficult and repetitive tasks so that we can progress as a civilisation.

Rootcode's commitment to AI has paid off, and this commitment to AI is what Alagan attributes to Rootcode's success. "There were enough organisations doing traditional software development, but no one was doing AI. We wanted to be different and forward-thinking and we wanted to believe AI would become what it is today," Alagan reflected, "That's why we're here today as a multimillion dollar company — because we focused before the market did."

## Taking Lankan Tech Talent, Global

Rootcode today is a multinational company with offices in Europe and the United States, serving clients from over 30 industries worldwide. It powers advanced AI systems for governments, enterprises and global clients, including (among many others) the Dutch manufacturer Kendrion and the Government of Estonia. Rootcode's AI systems have enabled organisations to navigate and resolve complex challenges across a range of sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, e-commerce, and governance, by leveraging AI.

Rootcode's ability to compete on the global stage is entirely due to its talent and it is this that has allowed Rootcode to break into and succeed in international markets. "The reason we succeeded—and many other companies in Sri Lanka in similar spaces have succeeded—is because of our great engineering talent," Alagan said, "Our universities produce engineers who can compete head-to-head with engineers from Europe or Silicon Valley. This is something we consistently hear from our clients. Sri Lanka has also demonstrated its capacity to be a reliable high-end software ecosystem. We're not necessarily the cheapest, but we are recognised for our quality."

Alagan believes that more Sri Lankan companies should focus on exporting their services, particularly in the tech sector, where the global market offers vast opportunities. Expanding globally is not just about business growth; it's about bringing foreign revenue into Sri Lanka and helping uplift the local economy, especially after the challenges of recent years.

## Limitless Potential of Lankan Tech

With Sri Lanka already building world-class engineering talent, Alagan shared that he is very optimistic about the potential of Sri Lanka's tech industry, highlighting several factors that make the country an attractive destination for global companies looking to outsource their tech and AI needs.

One key advantage, he says, is the strong foundation in mathematics and science that Sri Lankan students receive in school. "We teach kids mathematics and science very well in schools, which makes their brains develop to understand engineering concepts."

Additionally, Alagan pointed out that Sri Lanka has a reasonably high level of English proficiency, which allows for smooth communication with international clients. "Sri Lanka is a place where professionals can speak English well, which makes a huge difference."

However, while Sri Lanka's talent is undeniable, Alagan emphasised that more needs to be done to make the country an attractive destination for international investors and companies. Stability—both economic and political—is a key concern. "One of the major issues over the last few years was that we lost a lot of great talent during the economic crisis. If the country is not stable, well-educated engineers who can command great salaries will want better lives for their families," he said, adding that this doesn't just mean job compensation, but things like access to key resources like fuel and electricity.

For Sri Lanka to grow as a tech hub, the government and industry leaders must work together to create an environment that is stable and attractive to investors. "We need to make Sri Lanka a better investor-ready nation," Alagan stressed, "I'd like even our global competitors to come here and open offices, it ultimately benefits the ecosystem. This kind of competition fosters growth, drives innovation, and strengthens the industry over the long term, contributing to a more sustainable and dynamic technology landscape."

As Rootcode enters its second decade, Alagan's vision for the future remains ambitious. He aims to continue pushing the boundaries of AI innovation while helping other companies and startups do the same. He has also started the Rootcode Foundation to empower students in rural schools by giving them access to computers, and technology training and education.






Sharing some advice to other startup founders, Alagan stressed the importance of embracing adversity – they strengthen and challenge leaders and their companies. They also build resilience. But above all, Alagan stressed thinking big and thinking global. "Look outside Sri Lanka. We're a small nation; a small economy. Don't get trapped in this economy alone. Try to sell outside it. The global market is so big. Perseverance is difficult, but it's necessary. We're a 100% export company. If we can do it, anyone can. We didn't have investors or connections—it was me flying here and there, convincing people to trust us."

*Pictures by* ***Sassanda Liyanaarachchi***

**One key advantage, he says, is the strong foundation in mathematics and science that Sri Lankan students receive in school.**













# ROCKLAND DISTILLERIES MARKS 100 YEARS

## 'THE GUARDIAN OF THE ISLAND SPIRIT' PREMIERE

In a historic celebration, Rockland Distilleries marked its centenary with a grand premiere of "The Guardian of the Island Spirit" at the Spice Room, Shangri-La Colombo. This event, a tribute to the legacy of Sri Lanka's most iconic spirits brand, launched a video series inspired by Michelle Gunawardana's book, The Adventure of Arrack, capturing the brand's century-long journey.

Attended by esteemed stakeholders, partners, family and friends, the event honoured the timeless essence of Rockland and its role in the local industry. The event buzzed with excitement as guests gathered to watch the debut screening, reliving the history, heritage and stories behind Rockland's remarkable brand.

Take a glimpse into this evening.

*Pictures by* ***Kumara Bopearachchi***














# PAKISTANI FOOD FESTIVAL


Elton Hurtis


Faheem-Ul-Aziz

The Courtyard by Marriott Colombo, in collaboration with the High Commission of Pakistan in Sri Lanka and SriLankan Airlines, hosted a spectacular gala dinner to mark the beginning of the much-anticipated Pakistani Food Festival. The event celebrated the rich cultural ties between the two nations, drawing together a distinguished crowd of diplomats, corporate elites and enthusiastic food lovers.

The evening was a perfect blend of culture, flavours, and camaraderie, offering guests a chance to savour authentic Pakistani cuisine while basking in the lively ambience of the celebration. The gala featured a captivating performance by Rehan and his ensemble, who travelled all the way from Pakistan to entertain the crowd. Their unique fusion of traditional Pakistani music with a modern twist added a soulful melody to the evening, leaving the audience entranced.

It was a night of vibrant culture, delectable food, and shared experiences.

Here are some highlights from the gala dinner.

*Pictures by* ***Kumara Bopearachchi***


Dimuthu Tennakoon



















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# CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION AND CAREERS

## ENDEAVOURS TO EMPOWER YOUTH IN THE DIGITAL MARKET



Mahinda Galagedara, Chairman, EDEX Expo

EDEX was inaugurated in 2004 at the BMICH to offer excellent options and opportunities and opportunities for the Sri Lankan youth to reach the pinnacle of their chosen careers. It also had a mission to become a catalyst for change and growth.

EDEX, the renowned brand renowned brand it is today, began as EDEX-Royal, a school career guidance fair held in Royal College. Later, the ethos of EDEX was reimagined and engineered as a mainstream education and career fair to benefit the public.

EDEX has transformed into a quintessential multi-faced education expo on the island, with parallel editions, sub-brands, and an impressive stakeholder portfolio in the education and related industries.

Since its inception, an impressive portfolio of local and global sponsors has forged an alliance with EDEX, and this business alliance has grown in demand. Long-standing relationships vouch for their importance and validity.

EDEX Careers has served as a year-round platform for discerning Sri Lankan youth, offering career guidance, psychometric testing, and access to the job bank, where they can be considered for top-tier jobs in selected industries. Leavers have secured internships in leading corporate brands.

EDEX, initially centred in Colombo, was strategically introduced to Kandy and its environs as a twin edition. Students from Kandy citadel benefitted immensely from this strategy. Later, a Mid-Year Expo was introduced to consolidate further and strengthen the brand and its outreach.

EDEX sub-brand, the Sithuwam Art Exhibition, has grown and flourished as a key mini-expo of its own. It engages thousands of artistic school children to share their creative drawings, adding to EDEX's kaleidoscope.

Holistically embracing the environment, EDEX ThinkGreen has been actively engaging in eco-friendly initiatives that encompass recycling, reuse and regeneration. The carbon footprinting of Royal College, along with its collaboration on CSR projects, has made ThinkGreen a significant force in contributing to saving the planet.

EDEX Magazine has been instrumental in reaching youth across the island with its quarterly tri-lingual editions, catering to rural libraries. An online edition will continue the same outreach to help students, parents, and career guidance counsellors make the correct choices. Educators can also engage with education brands to promote their programmes.

Parallel, EDEX Nenapahana has been igniting passion and purpose in schoolchildren to read, question, and challenge systems to bring about equitable and sustainable solutions in all spheres of their lives. Sports, computer equipment, and musical instruments have been shared with rural milieus, adding to the enhancement of intrinsic skills and talents.

EDEX will embrace digitisation in keeping with the latest market changes. This alignment will witness expansion to futuristic careers such as AI, cyber security, data science, and robotics, to name a few. The importance of technology will be key and will permeate all facets and features of EDEX in the future.

EDEX, as a CSR, marshalls the resources of its volunteers, who are eminent personalities in the corporate, public, and private sectors. They bring their wealth of expertise and business acumen to the platform. The continuity of this great enterprise has been due to the relentless drive and vision of its pioneers, the current EDEX Management Team, and all stakeholders of the Royal College Union.

EDEX has celebrated a milestone of 20 years and continues its hallmark of excellence: empowering youth and young business leaders to become global citizens equipped with the right academic and professional qualifications to maximise efficiency in global processes that count and make a difference in multi-faceted contexts.






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Nestled in the historic Colombo Dutch Hospital Precinct, &Co Pub and Kitchen blends old-world Scottish charm with the vibrant pulse of Colombo's nightlife. Here, heritage meets flavour, from Seafood Kottu and Roasted Pork Knuckle to the Scottish Salmon Burger and &Co Signature Club Sandwich. Each dish, paired with expertly crafted drinks, invites guests to taste the fusion of local and European flair. With live music and themed-events throughout the week, &Co is more than a pub it's Colombo's lively tribute to timeless tradition and spirited revelry.





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# COYLE Dinner Dance 2024

In celebration of its 25th anniversary, the Chamber of Young Lankan Entrepreneurs (COYLE) hosted an unforgettable 'Chrono Soirée' Dinner Dance. Set against the elegant backdrop of the Shangri-La Colombo Ballroom, the evening sparkled with laughter, music, and camaraderie, bringing together the best of Sri Lanka's entrepreneurial talent.

The ballroom was abuzz with energy as attendees enjoyed a night of mingling, dancing and honouring COYLE's legacy. From sophisticated black-tie moments to friends capturing candid memories, every corner of the room reflected the night's vibrant spirit and the shared accomplishments of this close-knit community.

Here is a glimpse into the evening, capturing some of the most dazzling moments from this celebration!

*Pictures by* ***Sassanda Liyanaarchchi***





# Christmas Cake Mixing Ceremony

## at Cinnamon Lakeside

Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo ushered in the holiday season with its annual Christmas Cake Mixing Ceremony, held at the picturesque pool terrace. A long-standing tradition symbolising the start of Christmas, the event brought together families, friends, and colleagues to mix the ingredients for festive cakes and puddings. The joyous occasion wasn't just about baking – it was about creating cherished memories, blending flavours and sharing the spirit of togetherness. The evening ended with a celebratory toast, setting the perfect tone for the season ahead.

Here are some captures from the gathering.

*Pictures by* ***Sassanda Liyanaarchchi***



# Mogo MEDIA ACADEMY opens its doors

## Shaping the future of animation and VFX and providing a platform for students to transform their passion for media into rewarding careers

*By Naveed Rozais*

Our creative industries are booming like never before, both globally and within our shores. The digital age has seen demand for skills in fields like animation, VFX, and game development soar like never before. The problem with new skills coming into demand is that often, a gap forms when it comes to education, training, and development of these skills. This is where the newly established Mogo Media Academy comes in—to bridge the skill gap that forms in the realms of animation, VFX, and game development.

With a vision of elevating Sri Lanka's media education and positioning it on a global stage, Mogo Media Academy provides a platform for students to transform their passion for media into rewarding careers. Mogo Media Academy opens its doors to its first cohort next month. Pulse sat down with Head of Academics Madonna Joy to learn more about how this revolutionary skill-based school is looking to equip students with hands-on experience and industry-aligned skills.

### Meeting the Growing Demand for Media Skills

Mogo Media Academy was founded in response to the increasing need for trained professionals in the media industry, especially in areas such as animation, VFX, game development, and more. "We recognised a significant gap in the availability of talent, particularly in Sri Lanka's animation and media sector," Joy explained. With a focus on hands-on, practical education, Mogo Media Academy is committed to creating a new generation of media professionals who are ready to tackle the industry's demands.

The Academy offers a range of programmes, including a one-year Professional Diploma Programme and several short-term workshops and seminars. This approach allows students to immerse themselves in critical areas like animation, modelling, and concept art. "Our mission is to equip students with the technical skills, creative insight, and ethical foundations needed to excel in media," says Joy. Mogo Media Academy also works closely with industry leaders to ensure its curriculum remains aligned with the latest industry standards and trends, helping graduates transition smoothly into the workforce.

Mogo Media Academy's Professional Diploma Programme is a cornerstone of its offerings, providing students with comprehensive training in animation, VFX, game development, modelling and texturing, and concept art. This one-year intensive programme is designed to simulate real-world industry environments, giving students hands-on experience vital for their career readiness. Additionally, Mogo Media Academy offers workshops on topics ranging from graphic design and video editing to journalism and multimedia storytelling. These short-term programmes provide flexibility for those seeking to upskill or specialise in specific areas of media.



### An Approach to Learning

What sets Mogo Media Academy apart from traditional educational institutions is its emphasis on practical, skill-based learning. While many institutions prioritise theoretical knowledge, Mogo Media Academy's curriculum is rooted in hands-on industry practices. "Unlike conventional institutions that often emphasise theory, our curriculum is grounded in practical, industry-specific skills. Students spend much time on real-world projects and exercises that simulate professional scenarios, building portfolios that showcase their work to potential employers." Joy explained that this means students effectively learn in a work setting, gaining experience with industry-standard software and tools used by professionals, enabling them to build portfolios that meet industry expectations by the time they graduate. "By the time they graduate, students are adept at using current technologies and production techniques, which enhances their employability and helps them stay competitive in a fast-evolving industry."

To ensure the highest standards in media education, Mogo Media Academy has earned accreditation from local and international bodies, including Sri Lanka's TVEC and MESC, as well as the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). The Academy is also actively working to obtain further accreditation from institutions in Australia and the UK, which would elevate its global recognition. "Our international accreditation aims to ensure that the curriculum aligns with global media standards," said Joy, adding that these standards enhance students' employability locally and abroad. This credibility allows Mogo Media Academy's graduates to pursue careers on a global scale, with qualifications recognised worldwide.

Beyond the classroom, Mogo Media Academy fosters strong connections with industry leaders. These partnerships enable students to benefit from internships, collaborative projects, and guest lectures, offering them direct exposure to the professional world. This network-oriented approach distinguishes Mogo Media Academy from other











educational institutions, giving students a competitive edge as they prepare to enter the workforce.

Additionally, the Academy's faculty comprises seasoned industry professionals, both local and international, who bring current knowledge and experience to their teaching. "Programmes are led by experienced industry professionals, both locally and internationally, providing students with insights and mentorship from individuals actively engaged in the field," Joy said, adding, "This differs from other institutions where faculty may not have direct experience in recent industry practices."

## An Education for the Long-Term

Mogo Media Academy's commitment to career readiness extends beyond graduation. The Academy has a dedicated career services team that assists students in securing placements with studios, production houses, and media organisations. Through these partnerships, Mogo Media Academy ensures that graduates can access immediate job placement opportunities upon completing their diploma.

Another key differentiator for Mogo Media Academy is its focus on portfolio development. By the end of the programme, students leave with a portfolio that showcases their best work, tailored to meet industry standards. This professional portfolio is valuable in their job search, demonstrating their skills and project experience to potential employers. "Throughout the programme, students receive structured guidance on building portfolios that meet industry standards," Joy shared. Graduates also have the option to pursue extended internships or apprenticeships, further enhancing their practical experience and building valuable connections within the industry.

Mogo Media Academy provides resources to help those interested in freelancing or starting their own projects navigate the freelance market. Advanced workshops and international certification programmes are also available for graduates looking to deepen their expertise.



Additionally, graduates join an alum network that provides lifelong support, mentorship, and access to exclusive industry events, keeping them connected to the Academy and its growing media community.

## Why Media Education Matters

The media, animation, and game development industries are rapidly growing sectors with a unique need for specialised skills. Mogo Media Academy's focused education addresses this skills gap and helps build a sustainable industry within Sri Lanka. "The animation and game development industries require a unique blend of technical skills, creative artistry, and industry-specific knowledge," Joy said. By providing this training, Mogo Media Academy supports economic growth, creating high-paying jobs and fostering innovation.

Joy also highlights the cultural impact of media education, noting that animation and games are powerful storytelling mediums that offer creators a platform to share diverse perspectives with a global audience. "Building an education system for these fields allows more creators to bring their unique cultural narratives to a global audience," she explained. In addition, training students in emerging technologies such as VR, AR, and AI encourages technological innovation that can be applied beyond entertainment.

"As digital content consumption continues to rise, the demand for high-quality animation and games spans entertainment, education, advertising, and beyond. Specialised education helps meet this demand by preparing graduates with the technical expertise needed to deliver compelling, high-quality content," Joy said. "Animation and games are powerful storytelling mediums that can represent diverse cultures, histories, and perspectives. Building an education system for these fields allows more creators to bring their unique cultural narratives to a global audience, increasing diversity and authenticity in media."

For more information on Mogo Media Academy and its programmes, visit their website, ***mogoacademy.lk***






# THOMIAN Dinner Dance 2024

The Shangri-La Ballroom sparkled with the spirit of tradition and camaraderie as the S. Thomas' College Mount Lavinia Old Boys' Association hosted the much-anticipated Thomian Dinner Dance of 2024. The evening kicked off with an elegant cocktail reception, where old friends reunited and shared memories and laughter over finely crafted drinks.

Here is a glimpse of the excitement and unforgettable moments that made the Thomian Dinner Dance 2024 a celebration to remember.

*Pictures by* ***Kumara Bopearachchi***

















































## Crafting Stories in Stone

# Artistry of Ruwini Jayarathne

**"It is truly a beautiful process working on making a gemstone wearable." – RJ**



*By Venessa Anthony*

While the world races for fleeting trends, Ruwini Jayarathne creates a haven for lovers of true artistry and craftsmanship. Growing up in Sri Lanka, where the culture is steeped in a rich gemological history, Ruwini found herself captivated by the allure of gemstones from an early age. Today, as a gemologist and jewellery designer, she has transformed that fascination into an eponymous brand known for its timeless, artisan-crafted pieces that celebrate the raw beauty and unique energies of each stone.

With a mission to educate and inspire, Ruwini Jayarathne Jewellery takes clients on a journey—one that begins with the hand-selection of gemstones and continues through meticulous craftsmanship by Sri Lankan jewelsmiths. For Ruwini, the stones are the heart of every design, guiding the creative process and infusing each piece with a story that's both personal and profound. As a female pioneer in a traditionally male-dominated industry, Ruwini brings a fresh, inclusive approach to jewellery design, one that empowers wearers and honours the heritage of Sri Lanka.

Her dedication to collaboration with local artisans breathes authenticity into her work, resulting in pieces that are as timeless as they are meaningful. Whether it's creating future heirlooms or celebrating the beautiful imperfections of natural gemstones, Ruwini envisions her brand as more than just a collection of jewellery—it's a testament to the art of storytelling, the elegance of heritage, and the enduring power of craftsmanship. Here's a look into Ruwini's journey as a gemologist and designer.














## What first drew you to the world of gemstones, and what inspired you to start your own brand focused on artisan jewellery?

Growing up in Sri Lanka, gemstones were an intrinsic part of my life and culture. Sri Lanka has a storied history in gemology, which I was fascinated by from a young age. As I studied gemstones more deeply, I saw not only their beauty but also the stories and energies each stone seemed to hold. This appreciation for gemstones, combined with a desire to create timeless, meaningful jewellery, inspired me to launch my brand, Ruwini Jayarathne Jewellery, where I could focus on artisan craftsmanship and share the elegance of Sri Lankan artistry with the world.



## What unique perspective do you feel you bring as a female gemologist and jewellery designer in an industry that often feels traditional?

As a female gemologist, I feel I bring a unique perspective on both the beauty and symbolism of gemstones. I aim to create pieces that celebrate femininity, strength, and individuality, which are aspects that resonate with my journey and experiences as a woman in the industry. Also, being a woman in this space allows me to connect deeply with clients who seek jewellery that tells a personal story, whether it's a piece that celebrates their own achievements or honours their heritage. I strive to infuse a sense of empowerment and purpose into my designs, creating a more inclusive and contemporary approach to fine jewellery.

## Many people see gemstones as holding certain energies or stories. Have you ever had a moment with a stone that felt particularly special or almost 'fated' in its pairing with a design?

Absolutely. For me, my stones are the hero of the story so the design process starts with the stone. As I work with it, the design comes together almost as if the stone is guiding the process.

It is truly a beautiful process working on making a gemstone wearable.

## Your brand places great emphasis on educating customers about gemstones. What do you hope people will understand or appreciate about gemstones through your work?

Through Ruwini Jayarathne Jewellery, I hope to help people appreciate not only the beauty of gemstones but also their story, rarity, imperfections and the skill it takes to bring out each stone's best qualities. I want customers to see the value in the entire journey of a gemstone—from the earth to the jeweller's hands to the finished piece they wear. My goal is for clients to feel a connection not just to the gemstone, but also to the artisans and the culture that brought it to life. By understanding the story and craftsmanship, I believe people can form a deeper, more meaningful relationship with their jewellery.

## You work closely with local jewelsmiths to create your designs. Could you share a bit about that collaboration and how it shapes the final product?

Collaborating with local artisans is central to my creative process. Sri Lankan jewelsmiths have a remarkable skill set and a deep understanding of traditional techniques, which I blend with my own contemporary designs. This collaboration ensures each piece has both authenticity and uniqueness. It's a process of respect and exchange where we push each other creatively. Their expertise allows me to



realise my vision while honouring the craftsmanship and heritage of jewellery-making in Sri Lanka. The final product, therefore, is more than just jewellery—it's a piece of art that embodies both tradition and modernity.

## Jewellery is often passed down through generations. How do you approach creating pieces that might become a meaningful part of a family's story?

Creating jewellery that feels timeless and meaningful is one of my main goals. I design with the hope that each piece will become a treasured part of someone's story, a piece that carries memories and is passed down through generations. I aim for quality, timeless designs. When I design, I think of the jewellery not just as something beautiful for the present but as an heirloom piece that will continue to be loved and cherished.

## What's a little-known fact about gemstones or jewellery design that people rarely ask, but that you wish they would?

One thing many people don't realise is that gemstones can often have slight natural inclusions. These inclusions are a testament to their natural formation over millions of years. I love it when people appreciate these unique aspects rather than seeing them as flaws. In fact, these natural features give each gemstone a distinct character. It's a reminder that no two stones are alike, much like no two people are alike.

## What do you envision for the future of Ruwini Jayarathne Jewellery, and how do you see your brand influencing the artisan jewellery space in Sri Lanka and beyond?

In the future, I envision RJJ expanding its presence internationally while continuing to honour its Sri Lankan roots. I hope to bring greater recognition to the gemstones and craftsmanship on a global scale. I also aim to inspire a movement towards more personalised, artisan-crafted jewellery that tells a story. My dream is for RJ to be known not just as a jewellery brand but as a symbol of authenticity, quality, and the beauty of cultural heritage. Through our work, I hope to make Sri Lankan artisan jewellery an accessible, meaningful, and cherished choice for people everywhere.



> Dharshana's adventures beneath Sri Lanka's waves on diving into shipwrecks, human stories and the remarkable marine history hidden underwater

# A VOYAGE BENEATH SEA with Dharshana Jayawardena



Cave Diving



*By Kameshi Kohomange*

Exploring land or the sea takes courage; doing it solo is great bravery from which we tend to shy away. Dharshana Jayawardena is a software professional on land and a daring explorer underwater. His story is about conquering his fears and pushing the limits of his skills and capabilities. His book, Ghosts of the Deep — Shipwrecks of Sri Lanka & Diving into Maritime History, tells the stories of his adventures and chronicles the long-forgotten history hidden in the Sri Lankan waters.

"It all started by accident," Jayawardena recalls. While in Bermuda, a friend arranged a "try dive"—an introductory scuba experience allowing beginners to get a taste of diving without an entire course. After a few hours of training, Jayawardena was overwhelmed by fear. The enclosed feeling of the water triggered his claustrophobia, and his inability to swim only heightened his anxiety. In the end, he had no choice but to give up.

Ashamed of his initial fear, Jayawardena felt compelled to overcome it. "I thought, at the very least, I needed to face this," he thought. Once back in Sri Lanka, he took a single diving course, hoping it would help him conquer his anxiety. Now, 22 years later, Jayawardena is Sri Lanka's only certified cave diver, with an impressive list of accomplishments, including being internationally recognised as the Asian Underwater Explorer of the Year 2019. His discoveries include two World War I shipwrecks, the SS Worcestershire and SS Perseus, and he's also undertaken the ambitious task of mapping Nil Diya Pokuna—a pristine, crystal-clear pond hidden within Sri Lanka's most extensive underground cave.

"I started my dive in a cave 80 metres below the ground. Evolve. It's pitch black, and the water is freezing cold," he explained. "It took me a dozen dives to map the whole underwater cave system, but the furthest part was the toughest," Jayawardena elaborated on how it felt like he was swimming in what seemed like coffee due to the muddy water mixed with sand and sediments. "A bubble of air is enough to dislodge a part of the roof," he noted, "this made it very hard to install the survey lines that now cris-cross the underwater cave and act as guidelines for future explorers."

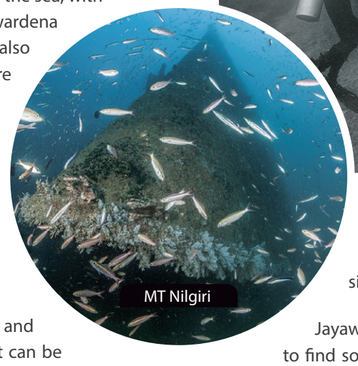


**Jayawardena is already planning his next significant project: to dive and document aircraft that have landed in Sri Lankan waters.**



Moratuwa Gun Boat – Port Bow

However, his one true love lies in the deep of the sea, with its history buried deep underwater. Jayawardena doesn't stop at exploring a wreck but also inquires about how the ship ended up where it was.



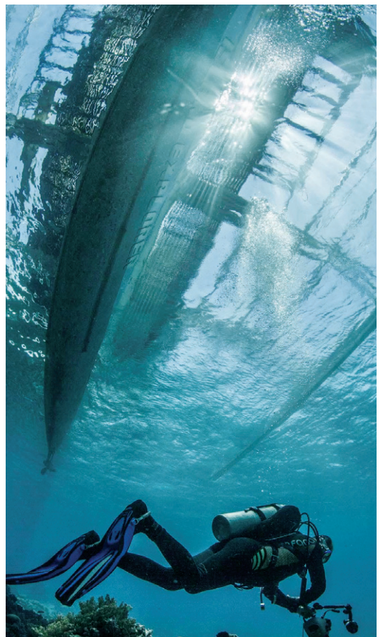
MT Nilgiri

"It's jaw-dropping every time I'm before a new wreck," the awe in his voice was apparent. Suddenly, it emerges like a massive beast from the darkness. This ship has existed long before me and will remain after I'm gone."

Jayawardena's discovery of SS Worcestershire and SS Perseus, the only World War I wrecks that can be dived in Sri Lanka, brought to light not just the history of the ship but also the vessel that caused their downfall, the legendary WW1 commerce raider SMS Wolf. Commissioned by the Imperial German Navy at the time, SMS Wolf, a fully armed naval vessel, spent 15 months travelling worldwide. It was never once called to a port, but it managed to capture and sink around 35 commercial vessels.

Jayawardena spent many years trying to find solid evidence that the two wrecks suspected to be SS Worcestershire and SS Perseus were the sunken British vessels. In 2014, on his 22nd technical dive to SS Worcestershire, he finally found the inscribed ship bell and five years later, he also saw the engraved bell of the SS Perseus, proving the long-lived lore of WWI shipwrecks in Sri Lankan waters—both bells which were handed over to the Maritime Archaeology Unit in Galle.

Another one of his favourite wrecks in our waters is the HMS Hermes, a British aircraft carrier built for the Royal Navy and the world's first ship to be designed as an aircraft carrier. It lies on the seabed off Batticaloa.

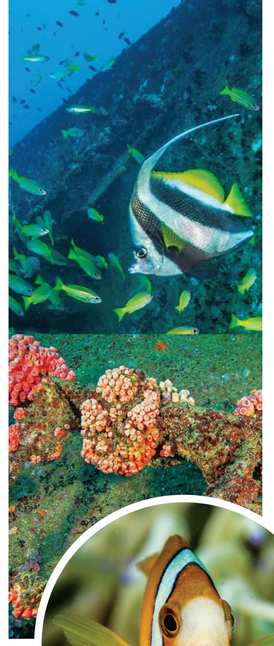








Black Coral Wreck





DJ decompressing after a dive to the Worcestershire

"An interesting project I did was to take flowers on behalf of three daughters whose fathers served on the wreck. One escaped with his life, and the other two perished. They reached out to me and requested if I could keep some flowers at their last resting place on the wreck," he added.

According to Jayawardena, the human stories attached to these shipwrecks encouraged him to document these stories in his book Ghosts of the Deep. "One of the ships attacked during WWII was SS Sagaing. It didn't sink; instead, it burned, taking the lives of three of the crew. The second mate found a camera in a floating suitcase, and he took pictures of the ship burning."

SS Sagaing made a comeback in the mainstream when it was refloated and sunk again by the Sri Lanka Navy with the support of navy divers. "The second mate's grandson made a blog post when BBC News covered the story. I was able to contact him and get the story of his grandfather and pictures of the incident." Jayawardena has dedicated two chapters in the book to the fantastic story of SS Sagaing.

By Jayawardena's count, there could be over 200 shipwrecks around Sri Lanka, based on the recorded maritime losses. Out of those wrecks, he, in collaboration with the Maritime Archaeological Unit (MAU), has documented over 110 wrecks and sunken aircraft. This information is available on the National Shipwreck database developed by the MAU.

For all the budding divers and marine archelogy enthusiasts, Jayawardena's advice was, "Don't do what I did, trying to dive without knowing to swim. I did it the completely wrong way," he said with a laugh. "if you want to do underwater exploration, I think starting to swim is a perfect starting point. It's important to be familiar with the water. Otherwise, if you are a stranger to water, a stranger to the ocean, it's easy for you to panic."

"You have to treat the ocean with respect. It can be unfriendly; there might be storms and strong currents. You never know about the hidden dangers. You must ensure that you cover all equipment requirements and are prepared for any eventualities for which you are trained. Most importantly, ensure you have backups in case of issues."

Jayawardena is already planning his next significant project: to dive and document aircraft that have landed in Sri Lankan waters.

You can keep up with Jayawardena on Facebook ***(@bookoftheseas),*** Instagram and TikTok ***(@tecdivingsrilanka).***

## D J – PROFILE

| | |
|---|---|
| **ALMA MATER:** | Dharmaraja College Kandy |
| **FIRST DIVE:** | 3rd of March 2003 |
| **MOST MEMORABLE DIVE:** | 108m deep cave dive |
| **FAVOURITE PLACE TO DIVE:** | Colombo, Sri Lanka |
| **DREAM DIVE LOCATION:** | Cocos Island, Costa Rica |
| **UNIQUE FINDS:** | The ship bells of the only divable World War 1 wrecks in Sri Lanka, the SS Worcestershire and SS Perseus, which were sunk during World War I. The bells have been handed over to the MAU. |
| **FAVOURITE DIVE GEAR:** | APD Evolution Rebreather |
| **FAVOURITE MARINE CREATURE:** | Jellyfish |

















# Ninth Derana *Lux* Film Awards

The Ninth Derana LUX Film Awards was held at the Waters Edge Hotel. Bringing together the crème de la crème of Sri Lankan cinema, the event celebrated the artistry, talent, and dedication that define the local film industry. From renowned directors and visionary cinematographers to celebrated actors and creative artists, the awards night was a dazzling showcase of talent and style. The highly anticipated event was a celebration of cinematic excellence and a tribute to the hard work behind the silver screen.

Here are some captures from the night highlighting its symphony of glamour, artistry and star power!

*Pictures by* ***Malshan Wijayathilaka***

























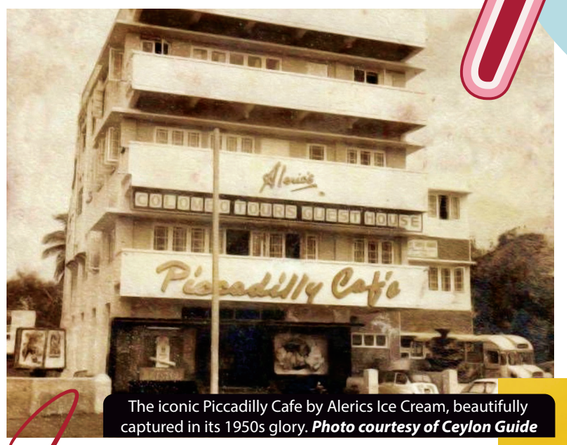







# The Sweet Story of Sri Lanka's Beloved Alerics Ice Cream

Alerics Ice Cream has been a cherished part of Sri Lankan life since it was founded in 1949, by **Aleric De Silva Wimalaratne**.; making his first batch with a simple mission to bring joy to every Sri Lankan.



The iconic Piccadilly Cafe by Alerics Ice Cream, beautifully captured in its 1950s glory. ***Photo courtesy of Ceylon Guide***

It began as a small venture at Piccadilly Café, Sri Lanka's first ice cream parlour at No 45, Galle Road in Colombo, and quickly was treasured by a nation. Piccadilly Café's warm, retro charm, complete with a green jukebox playing Western classics, and its iconic glass-fronted design made it a beloved spot for families to gather, share laughter, and enjoy an affordable scoop of vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry ice cream made from fresh cow's milk with just a mere 25 cents at the time, offering "affordable indulgence" and creating lasting memories.

Beyond the café, Alerics reached more people through its travelling ice cream van, which visited fairs, carnivals, and local gatherings, bringing joy to communities across the island. Even in the 1950s, Alerics was ahead of its time in terms of sustainability, opting for eco-friendly cardboard packaging, a practice that reflected its commitment to quality and environmental responsibility long before it became common.

In 2021, new management infused the brand with fresh energy, introducing modern touches while honouring Alerics' legacy. Stylish, retro-inspired packaging was designed to appeal to a new generation, alongside a variety of new flavours like Cool Mint Choc Chip and Chunky Rocky Road. This reinvigoration balanced the nostalgic warmth that longtime fans loved with a fresh, vibrant look.

Alerics remains committed to local sourcing, incorporating Sri Lankan ingredients such as strawberries from Jagro, mangoes from TJC Farms, and honeycomb from local producers. This dedication to purity is evident in its all-natural fruit popsicles, which are made from pure fruit pulp with no additives. The company continues to honour its heritage while innovating for modern tastes, offering classic favourites like the ice choc popsicle, butterscotch, and Ceylon vanilla, alongside bold new creations such as Strawberry Cheesecake and Passionfruit Pavlova.







Now, Alerics is widely available across Sri Lanka, sold in supermarkets and through delivery platforms such as PickMe Food and Uber Eats. This expansion ensures Alerics could reach both its long-time fans and a younger audience. Despite changing times, the brand's core mission remains unchanged, to spread happiness with each scoop, preserving the tradition, simplicity, and joy that have made Alerics a Sri Lankan icon for over 75 years.




Alerics Ice Cream embodies not only the taste of quality ice cream, but also the enduring love of family traditions and shared moments. From its humble beginnings at Piccadilly Café to its present-day renaissance, Alerics remains a testament to the timeless joy of ice cream and the beauty of memories shared across generations.

*Fashion Designer*

# DIMUTHU SAHABANDU



*By Naveed Rozais*

Luxury fashion is fast evolving beyond high price tags and designer labels. Especially in markets like ours, it is being defined increasingly by craftsmanship and its impact on the people and the world around it.

Dimuthu Sahabandu has built a name for himself, bringing luxury to life through quality materials, meticulous craftsmanship, and environmentally conscious practices. As he sees it, true luxury isn't just about "labelling something luxury, but about justifying that luxury through quality and craftsmanship."

For Dimuthu, true luxury isn't about following trends but about making lasting, unique items that bear the touch of skilled artisans. "You can't call anything luxury. There must be a good enough reason and justification as to why it is 'luxury' and must be relevant. It's about creating a piece that's truly different from anything mass-produced, and that's where craftsmanship and quality come in. Attention-to-detail, quality materials, and craftsmanship are all things you must not be willing to compromise on," Dimuthu said, adding, "Sometimes you pay ten times or more attention to crafting something in the luxury sector than you would if it was mass-produced sometimes this means intricate detailing or a craft textile that you're trying to keep alive because most of these techniques are slowly dying. Craftsmanship is a huge part of a luxury product."

## ENDEAVOURS A VISION THAT PRIORITISES CRAFTSMANSHIP, QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY






### 'Value' is the new luxury.

From the perspective of Dimuthu Sahabandu, high-quality fabrics and intricate hand-finished details are how the brand brings luxury and artistry to each piece. Beyond that is also a commitment to the long-term impact of what the brand creates. Each 'Dimuthu Sahabandu' design is intended to stand the test of time, not only in terms of durability but also in terms of timeless appeal. Dimuthu's approach to luxury fashion values the longevity of a garment, with pieces that are made to be cherished and worn over many years and brought back into his atelier to be 'edited, refreshed or upcycled' and be given a new lease of life for more years to come.

Dimuthu also encourages clients to consider investing in timeless pieces that suit a range of settings, from formal events to casual gatherings. To make luxury fashion more practical, he often incorporates features such as dyeable fabrics, which allow garments to be refreshed and adapted over time. This commitment to extending the life of each piece reflects his broader philosophy on sustainability and mindful consumption.

Even with bridals, he tries to guide clients to value versatility and longevity, allowing brides to repurpose or alter their dresses for future events. Rather than creating a piece that is only "meant to be worn once," he encourages brides to consider bridal gowns with removable layers and adaptable components that will allow them to enjoy these garments more than once.

Dimuthu's approach to design is also rooted in a personal connection with his clients, which adds to the luxury of each of his pieces. He carefully considers each client's lifestyle, personality, and preferences, creating pieces uniquely suited to them.

**Dimuthu is not only focused on creating sustainable luxury but also on nurturing the next generation of designers and artisans.**

## Taking sustainability beyond just a buzzword

In a world where fast fashion often leads to wasteful practices, Dimuthu's approach takes the 'opposite approach', aiming to create "fewer but better" pieces that minimise environmental impact. Dimuthu stressed the importance of sustainable practices in every stage of his design process, from sourcing materials to the final product. Luxury should not come at the expense of the environment, so he avoids overproduction and waste as much as possible.

Dimuthu's commitment to sustainability is evident in his use of leftover materials repurposed into new designs. By recycling offcuts and minimising waste, he ensures that his creations are beautiful and environmentally responsible. This approach speaks to his belief that "luxury can—and should—be sustainable," Dimuthu added. "We must understand what luxury means in a financially crippled country where only 3-4% of people can afford luxury. We have a responsibility in this context to minimise waste.

While custom, hand-crafted pieces naturally carry a higher price tag, he aims to make luxury more attainable by offering diffusion lines—smaller collections of high-quality items produced in limited quantities at a more accessible price point, to reach customers who value quality and exclusivity. Still, he may not have the means to invest in fully custom pieces.



## Luxury is not limited to Western clothing.

Looking ahead, Dimuthu envisions a luxury fashion landscape deeply rooted in Sri Lankan culture, where sustainability is given,n and craftsmanship is held in high esteem. This connection to culture also comes through in his more recent collections, which see strong desi and other South Asian cultural influences.

Speaking on this blending of heritage into luxury clothing, Dimuthu shared that this was simply him growing his worldviews and responding to his customers' needs. "When I first started, the brand was very much westernised, but the older you get, the more you start to understand yourself, your market and your customer base and what they're looking for. I learnt there was a demand for Indo-Western silhouettes - pieces from these silhouettes, like the high-waisted full flared skirt, can be worn in various settings and sell over multiple seasons," Dimuthu said.

"Recently, I even created an abaya collection - something I never thought I would do when I was younger. But the older you get, the more you see untapped markets. When I do bridals, I do a lot for the Muslim market. Brides come in with their mothers, aunts and sisters. Some would say, "Why not consider doing an abaya? Your detailing is so intricate. People buy such abayas in India or Dubai because they're unavailable here." The abaya market has huge purchasing power but minimal local products and nothing relevant to the market looking for fashionable abayas. If you're 'listening', there are many things you can learn and ways to get people to stop spending their money abroad and instead spend it here and empower a local artisan or craftsman in the process."

## The future of luxury

As luxury fashion in Sri Lanka continues to evolve, Dimuthu sees a promising future for sustainable, ethical, and locally crafted luxury items. He notes that customers are becoming increasingly interested in eco-conscious practices and are drawn to brands that demonstrate a commitment to the environment. This shift in consumer values aligns perfectly with his vision for a fashion industry that prioritises quality over quantity and values the preservation of traditional craftsmanship.

Dimuthu is focused on creating sustainable luxury and nurturing the next generation of designers and artisans. Through an internship programme, he mentors young designers, instilling an appreciation for craftsmanship and sustainability. This programme is an extension of his commitment to reducing waste and promoting responsible design practices, as he encourages his interns to explore creative ways to repurpose materials and experiment with upcycling techniques. For Dimuthu, fostering a sustainable future for Sri Lankan fashion means investing in young talent and passing down the skills and values that have defined his own career.

Dimuthu believes that luxury fashion's future lies in creating beautiful, exclusive, meaningful, and responsible pieces. As he continues to innovate and inspire through beautifully intricate and timeless pieces, Dimuthu's artistic creations are proof that luxury fashion in Sri Lanka can indeed be both high-end and environmentally conscious and set a new standard for what it means to create authentic, lasting luxury.









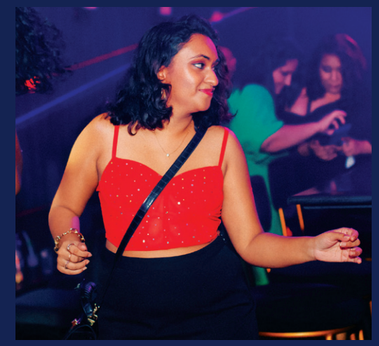


# 25 YEARS OF RHYTHM AND BLUES

Rhythm and Blues (R&B) marked its 25th anniversary with a night of unforgettable celebrations. Guests arrived in style, setting the tone for an evening of excitement and nostalgia. The event took attendees on a journey back to the 90s, where it all began.

Here are some moments from the night.

*Pictures by* ***Ramesh Roshan***























## Steering the next generation of horse riders, owners, coaches and enthusiasts

# A TROT AT PREMADASA RIDING SCHOOL

*By Shanuka Kadupitiyage*

When you think of horses and horse riding, the bustling urban landscape of Nugegoda may not be the first location that springs to mind. Yet, tucked away on Melder Place, just before the flyover on High-Level Road, is Premadasa Riding School—one of Sri Lanka's top spots to explore equestrian tradition.

Suranjith Premadasa opened the stables to the public in 2001. Since then, the Premadasa Riding School has grown and evolved to take on new and ambitious ventures. Besides teaching horse riding to beginners, this family-owned business also supplies horses to cinema productions, photoshoots, horsemanship programmes, equestrian events and riding holidays across Sri Lanka.

We had the opportunity to speak with 'Thilo,' his daughter, and learnt more about their story and what the future might have in store for one of Sri Lanka's best riding schools.

## How It All Started

"Originally, when we started the stable, we had no intention of having a riding school or even becoming an equestrian service provider," Thilo shared. "It all began because of my father's passion for horses and a young man's dream to someday own a white horse."

She recounted the time when she, and her sister, at seven years of age, were at the Nuwara Eliya Racecourse to see the horse races with her family. "My dad wanted to buy a horse, and he was advised about the importance of knowing about horses, before investing and owning a horse. Due to this, we began riding lessons at a small riding school in Wattala as a family. As kids, this was the highlight of our week!"





She and her sister were about 12 years old when her family first got their own horses. "Two ponies were stabled behind our house. Working with them became a daily part of our mornings before school. My father is very passionate about sports, and we are the same."

Thilo revealed that the idea of opening a riding school came some years later when she and her sister had to travel to complete their higher education. "Daily exercise is vital to maintain the horses' fitness, but we weren't around to do it, and back home, my father was also busy with work."

"It was then that someone gave my father the very brilliant idea to start a riding school. We were not in the country at the time, and I remember our parents didn't really make a big deal out of it. The conversation went along the lines of "Oh yeah, we decided to let other people ride the horses." She admitted that they were not prepared for how far the riding school had grown by the time they returned. Their backyard had completely transformed, replaced by an entirely new landscape, with instructors, students and a host of new horses.





## Then And Now

Thilo spoke of how different the equestrian space was in Sri Lanka, compared to how far it has advanced today. "Access to information, and the amount of available information was one of the biggest differences," she shared. Sri Lanka was late to adopt the internet, and even then, it was only dial-up. At the time, books and what someone else taught were the only sources of information. Because of that, the understanding of horse care and equestrian culture at the time was also limited.

"Horse books were treasured commodities to accumulate knowledge of a passion that had little outlet in our country. Now, everything is just better, and the knowledge we have access to is so much greater than before."

## Pioneering Equestrian Culture

In that backdrop, the Premadasa Riding School was a driving force in elevating equestrian culture in the country. As the school continued to grow, so did their operations and the number of horses in their stables.

"We began with two ponies and a few thoroughbreds, then expanded to a stable of around 50 horses at one point, stationed at many locations in the country. Currently, we have 15 horses with a small breeding programme for our stable," Thilo shared.

This includes, them importing the very first Marwari, Kathiawari and Sindi horses to Sri Lanka in 2002, the result of a collaboration with the Indigenous Horse Society of India. "You could say we changed the landscape of the Sri Lankan equestrian industry with this. Pinto and white horses are now part of the equine industry in Sri Lanka because of this introduction into the field," she said.

Organising equestrian events was also a mainstay in their programme, including beach derbies and horse shows, which Thilo notes were quite popular. "Currently, we focus a lot on natural horsemanship-based club-level events at the stables, focusing on the horse and rider relationship. Our core has always been to provide riding lessons here in Nugegoda. We still offer training scales for riders as young as six (6) years, with junior riders and stages 1-4, classifying them in horsemanship and progressing towards coaching levels."

The riding school has also been a key supporter of the local cinema industry in the past twenty years, providing support for many local movie productions, featuring their horse stars. Equine photoshoots are another service that the stable provides. In the past, they had also partnered with hotels to offer equestrian facilities. "We supplied horses while taking full responsibility for their care and maintaining their condition at our stables across the island," she added.



"I think the most exciting thing we've ever done is initiating Riding Holidays in Sri Lanka. With this, you get to discover Sri Lanka on horseback. We have gallops on the beaches of Kalpitiya, discover the jungles of Dambulla;, trek the tea plantations of Nuwara Eliya and explore the outback of Tissamaharama. Of course, trail riding is offered at other locations such as Mount Lavinia Beach and Bentota Beach as well."

## Looking To The Future

A lot has changed in Sri Lanka's equestrian culture, with the riding school leading the way. Thilo shared that although there have been challenges in the past, the future looks much brighter. "We're so happy to see that there are other stables starting up and offering a vibrant equestrian culture. Equestrianism cannot grow without more information being accessible to people, and its growth is something to celebrate."

"Currently there is a large number of young Sri Lankans working and competing abroad under the Sri Lankan banner. There's now a growing interest amongst youth in the country for horse riding."

Although horse riding and looking after horses properly can be expensive and difficult, she points out that mini stables are cropping up around the island, driven by a passion for horses, and interest continues to grow. "What we want to do is offer our expertise and knowledge, with a foundational syllabus for all horse enthusiasts to engage and develop with. We are driving the next generation of horse riders, owners, coaches and enthusiasts."

"Horses, like most animals have an amazing ability to heal. Our programmes are attractive to children and adults who are looking to connect and engage in the theraputic ways of horsemanship as well as learn to ride. Everyone deals with challenges and stress, and horses have ways of helping people to deal with traumatic experiences."

Thilo concluded by sharing that horses have a unique way of connecting with humans that's on a different level. "A lot of their communication is non-verbal, making them experts at reading body language and facial cues. Horse riding requires a partnership that does not exist in any other sport. We were so fortunate to have the horses with us growing up, and it's something I am always thankful for. Working with horses is a privilege and joy!"

# HAMEEDIA UNVEILS The Global Groom WeDDing Collection

Sri Lanka's leading menswear brand, Hameedia, celebrated the launch of its latest wedding collection, 'The Global Groom.' This collection takes a bold step in redefining groom fashion, ensuring grooms shine just as brightly as brides on their big day.

With looks for every wedding style, from beach and garden ceremonies to traditional and destination weddings, Hameedia's collection offers a range of outfits; including Western suits, modern Nationals, Indian ethnic wear, Jodhpuri suits, Shalwars, and more. The collection boasts over 300 unique fabrics from top brands like Albini, Thomas Mason, and Loro Piana, showcasing premium materials sourced from Italy, Europe and Asia.

Here's a peek into the glamorous runway showcase and stylish guests at the event!

*Pictures by* ***Ramesh Roshan***

Fouzul Hameed




# SCARNIVAL HALLOWEEN

The Steuart by Citrus - &Co Pub and Kitchen brought an evening of spine-tingling fun to life with their 'Scarnival Halloween' Ladies Night. Guests were greeted by a truly ghoulish atmosphere, where the night's revelry was infused with eerie charm and Halloween spirit.

The night unfolded with lively beats by ACE that kept the crowd moving and grooving. The themed cocktails were nothing short of hauntingly delicious, with a dash of mystery and magic in every sip. From chilling vampire-inspired drinks to concoctions bubbling over with fog, the beverages captivated everyone.

The costumes were another highlight, with guests going all out in their Halloween best. From wicked witches to spooky skeletons, each outfit added to the spine-chilling ambience, making the night both thrilling and Instagram-worthy.

Here's a peek into the hauntingly fun night!

*Pictures by* ***Lahiru Perera and Umesh Dilshan Mendis***











# SPOOKTACULAR FUN AT PEGASUS REEF'S HALLOWEEN

Pegasus Reef, Wattala embraced the Halloween spirit in full swing this year, delivering an evening of spooky delights and festive fun for the little ones. The hotel transformed into a hub of Halloween excitement, welcoming kids to a magical night filled with thrilling activities and cheerful camaraderie. From witch hat ring tossing to creative face painting sessions, the young revellers immersed themselves in the playful atmosphere.

Here's a glimpse of the spooktacular evening.

*Pictures by* ***Vimukthi Hewajulige***



















# Yevan David RACING TO GLOBAL GLORY

## Keeping the Sri Lankan Flag Flying High

*By Haritha Athapattu*

At just 17, Yevan David has already etched his name into motorsport history as the first Sri Lankan to compete in the prestigious Euroformula Open, and he wasted no time making his mark by winning his debut race at Monza. On a damp, challenging circuit, Yevan displayed skill and composure that belied his age, taking the victory and raising the Sri Lankan flag high on the international racing stage. In an interview with Pulse, Yevan reflected on his journey, his recent milestones, and what drives him in the high-speed world of racing.

### A Journey Fueled by Adrenaline

Born in the UK and currently based in Dubai, Yevan's connection to Sri Lanka remains strong. "Most of my family is in Sri Lanka; my parents, myself and my siblings are all Sri Lankan," he shared. His journey began early, with his first taste of speed coming at just six years old. He described his entry into racing as a natural progression fueled by a love for adrenaline. "When I started, I just loved the feeling of speed and adrenaline. Everything about driving made me want to be the best,"

he recalled. From his initial karting days in 2013, he committed to honing his skills, practising every weekend from 2014 onwards, never looking back.

## Challenges Beyond the Track

While Yevan's talent has propelled him forward, his journey has had its share of challenges, especially given his age. Balancing an intense training schedule with schooling hasn't been easy. "I think one of the hardest challenges is balancing racing and school," he said, adding that his education has been online for the past three years, which allows him to study on the go. However, this lifestyle also came with sacrifices, particularly in terms of maintaining a social life. "I don't have that big of a social group like others my age, but I'm lucky to have close friends who understand my schedule," he shared. Moreover, Yevan shared with Pulse that he tries to spend quality time with his parents and siblings whenever he has time, which compensates for the lack of a big social group.

## Victory at Monza: A Defining Moment

Yevan's breakthrough victory at Monza marked a historic moment for both him and Sri Lankan motorsport. The season had been anything but smooth, with ups and downs testing his resilience. "It's been a tough season, with lots of challenges, but to win my first race in Europe, especially at Monza, meant everything," he said. The achievement was not only a personal triumph, but a symbol of Sri Lanka's growing presence in the global motorsport arena. He described the emotional moment of raising the Sri Lankan flag on the podium: "The most special feeling was holding up the Sri Lankan flag and hearing the national anthem. It was just incredible."

## Overcoming Adversity

For Yevan, the journey hasn't just been about speed but also resilience. The season's early struggles required mental strength and persistence. "There were a lot of questions about why things weren't going well, but I had to trust the process and keep focusing on myself," he shared, This focus, paired with the support of his close circle—his family, coach, manager, and a few trusted friends—has been instrumental. "These incredible people around me throughout have seen all my hard work and have been there through everything. They're my biggest support," he shared expressing his gratitude to everyone who has helped him. "I also want to thank my media sponsor - Mercstop - back in Sri Lanka for continuing to support me, and working to keep the momentum going"










## The Car Behind the Victory

In the world of Euroformula racing, the technical detail of the car, just like the racer's talent and experience, plays a highly critical role in performance. Yevan described the nuances of his car, highlighting its aerodynamic advantages and efficiency. "The Euroformula car is lighter and has significant downforce, which allows it to carry more speed through corners," he explained. These features, along with 240 horsepower, make it an agile and competitive machine, and Yevan has clearly mastered its intricacies to perfection. Anybody who watched the race at Monza should have witnessed how Yevan's car flew forward like thunder. That level of speed, control and of course, confidence comes only when the technical expertise and excellence blend with personal talent.

## A Vision for the Future

Looking ahead, Yevan's ambitions are firmly set on Formula 1. "In six years, I see myself in Formula 1, hopefully at the top," he stated with confidence. He knows the journey to the highest level of racing is a steep climb, but his determination is unwavering and surfing, interests he enjoys whenever he has a rare break from the racetrack. "It is seldom that I get to engage in those. It is when I am in Sri Lanka for the winter break or summer break that I get time to surf and play.

## Lessons for Aspiring Racers

When asked for advice for young aspirants, Yevan's message was clear: focus on what you can control. "If you focus on what you can control, you don't feel overwhelmed or overthink. Just do your thing," he advised. This wisdom, grounded in experience, reflects a maturity beyond his years and a mindset honed by the challenges and demands of his sport.

Yevan David's two victories at Monza are more than a personal achievement; it's a beacon of possibility for Sri Lanka in the world of motorsport. As he continues his ascent, his journey embodies dedication, resilience, and an unrelenting drive—qualities that promise to take him to even greater heights.

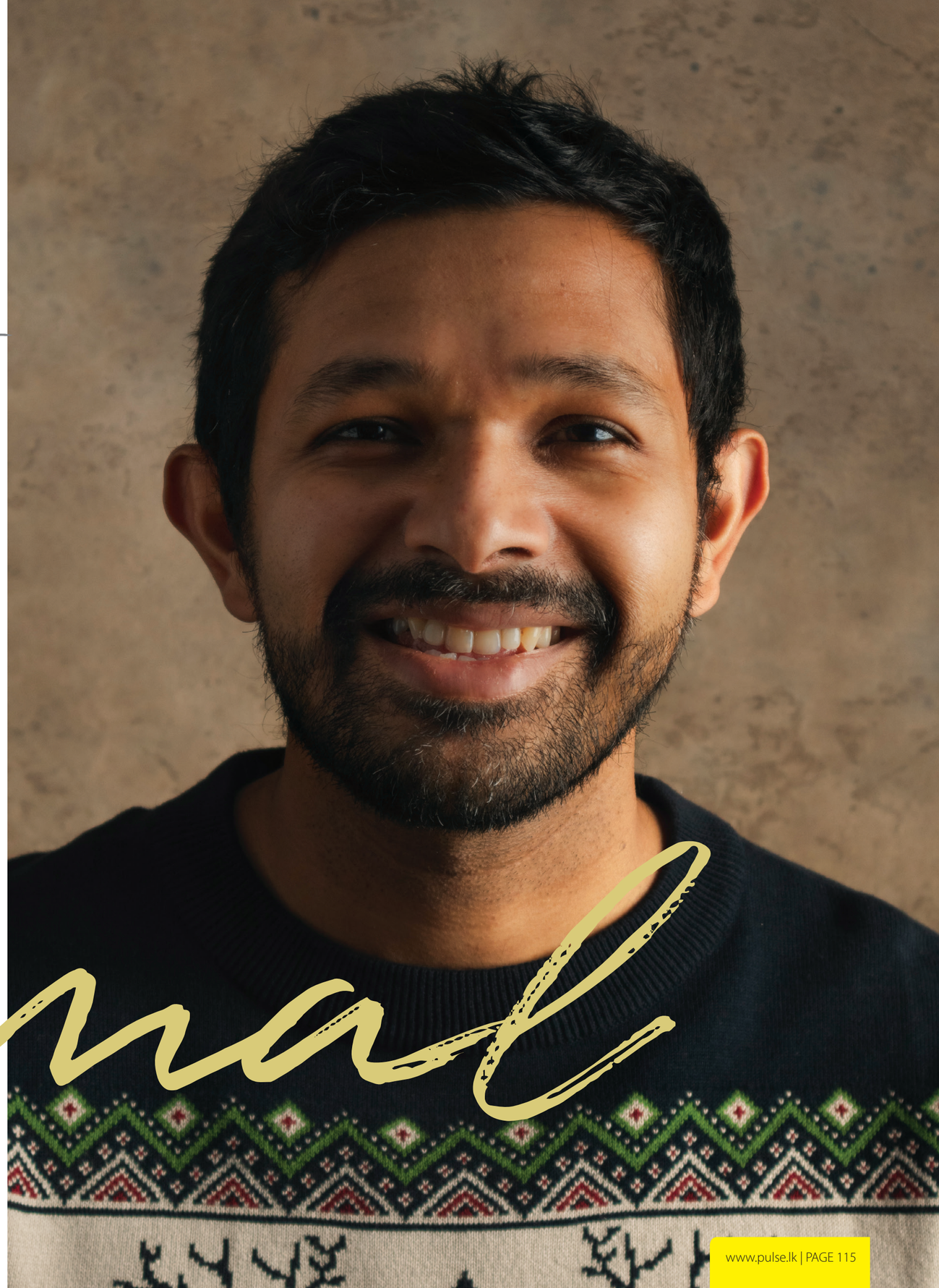
# Variety IS THE VERY SPICE OF LIFE

## Amal

**Blending roles of a finance professor, a culinary enthusiast, a food photographer, a lover of classical music and the sensational 'Thunapaha Diaries' to give all its flavour!**

*By Haritha Athapattu*

From the bustling world of finance to the aromatic embrace of spices and slow-simmering curries, Amal, the mind behind Thunapaha Diaries, has carved a uniquely bold path. By day, he's deeply embedded in the structured world of finance academia, but come evening, he's back in the kitchen, blending spices and flavours for his Instagram page, Thunapaha Diaries. What began as a casual pursuit; cooking for family and friends, evolved into a hobby with a twist. Sharing his self-taught dishes with a growing online audience, Amal's culinary journey has become an authentic expression of creativity, where each post reflects a love for both flavour and the stories behind each ingredient. Amongst his busy schedule, Amal found time to share his experience with Pulse. He is a professor of finance, a culinary enthusiast, a food photographer and a lover of classical music too.



## Necessity turned passion

Amal's culinary evolution was, in many ways, organic—a simple fondness for cooking blossomed into a captivating visual diary of flavours, textures and inspirations. His page doesn't merely capture recipes but invites his audience to savour the journey behind each one. In fact, Amal's journey into the culinary world happened when he first arrived in the US as a graduate student. "Honestly, I didn't cook back in Sri Lanka; everything was done for me," he admitted. "But a friend suggested I learn to cook Sri Lankan food to avoid homesickness. On the other hand, my aunt, who lived close by and would always share her food with me, moved to a different part of the country, cutting off my food supply. So cooking was imperative for me. Initially, I did it out of necessity. And then, I realised I actually enjoyed it."





However, for Amal, baking came a little later, inspired by none other than The Great British Bake Off. "It's incredible – seeing ordinary people create beautiful bakes inspired me. Baking became my way of de-stressing during grad school," he explained, adding that he looked forward to experimenting in the kitchen every weekend. "I didn't invent recipes initially," he shared. "I learnt the basics by trying things I saw on The Great British Bake Off, reading books, and following other bakers on Instagram." Gradually, as he honed his skills, Amal began experimenting and adding his unique touch to traditional recipes.

## From the Kitchen to the Camera

But how did all of this end up on Instagram? "Oh, that was thanks to a couple of friends," he chuckled. "I used to send photos of my dishes to friends on WhatsApp, and two of them kept encouraging me to start my own page. I had no clue about Instagram back then, but I decided to give it a go." In 2017, Amal started his Instagram handle with the name Thunapaha Diaries, which deeply resonates with his cultural roots.

Soon, he found himself immersed in the visual storytelling aspect of the platform, evolving from casual snaps to carefully curated food photography. "Instagram was very visual back then, all about photos," he recalls. "So, I started learning more about food photography and made an effort to take better pictures." These efforts culminated in his passion for food photography and made him pursue it too.

While food is undoubtedly his passion, Amal's love for photography is equally strong. "I'm a classical musician – I play the violin – and music inspires my photography style," he reveals. "I like my photos to have a dark, moody, almost vintage vibe." This artistic direction gives his photography a unique, recognisable aesthetic that sets it apart from other food pages on Instagram. "It's about making even the simplest dish look beautiful and artistic," he explains. For Amal, photography is a blend of creativity and discipline, and it's an essential part of his creative journey.

## Connecting Communities with Food

Though the majority of his followers are Sri Lankans worldwide, Amal's content has crossed cultural lines, drawing interest from food and photography enthusiasts globally. Even as Instagram's algorithm shifted towards video content, Amal stayed true to his passion for static photography, focusing on quality and creativity over trends. "When Instagram's focus shifted to videos, I tried reels, but it didn't feel authentic for me," he says. "I decided to keep doing what I enjoy – creating visually appealing photos." His audience appreciates the choice, finding comfort in the aesthetic he's perfected. This decision has allowed him to cultivate an authentic community that appreciates his unique style. "I am grateful for the community I have created thanks to my Instagram presence. I get the opportunity to connect and network with like-minded people, share ideas and enjoy things together. It's amazing," Amal added.

## Balancing Both Sides of the Bar

Balancing life as a finance professor and a food content creator is definitely not an easy task. It requires careful planning, particularly when you have to deal with an academic schedule as well. Amal explained how he finds time for his passion in food and photography, amidst a busy academic schedule and hits a balance between the two. "It is difficult now, honestly. With the amount of work I have, I can't make as much content as I used to, but I don't give up. I try to plan ahead – maybe two big projects a month for Instagram," he said. "Even if I don't post everything I cook, I make time to bake and photograph what I love," he furthered expressing his deep attachment to cooking.

# The Friendship Meter

## With Matthew and Kyle

***A heartfelt dive into the lives of two brothers who transformed sibling rivalry into becoming Sri Lanka's swimming stars, their Olympic journey and enduring friendship***

*By Jerusha Palihena*

***Be it a father-son duo, siblings or colleagues, a sense of friendship is always associated with any kind of relationship. In this segment, we tackle the ins and outs of close-knit relationships and test the limits of the Friendship Meter.***

If you Google the best swimmers of Sri Lanka, you will undoubtedly find Matthew and Kyle's names on the top of that list, alongside their oldest brother, Andrew.

The brothers are well known for representing our small island in some of the world's biggest pools, such as the Olympics, Commonwealth Games, and Asian Games, but that's not all they do.

When the two are not swimming, they are busy coaching the next generation of record-breakers at Killer Whale Aquatics.

We caught up with them to see what they get up to outside of the pool—and to find out whether friendly sibling rivalry is their secret weapon.

**How did swimming become such a big part of both your lives? And, was there ever a time you thought of taking different paths?**

***Kyle:*** I started swimming because my older brother swam. I just kind of fell in place. I never thought of taking another path because we've all been good at swimming since we were young, not me as much as my older brothers were, but I just didn't want to do anything else because that's what they did. And I basically wanted to do whatever they did.

***Matthew:*** Same thing for me. I have an older brother. I'm not the oldest, so there's another brother; we started swimming simultaneously even though he's older than me. It was just about being safe in the water for my brother Andrew and me. My dad was not a good swimmer; my mom didn't swim. So, it was different from a legacy thing. We just wanted to be water-safe. There were times when I hated swimming, which is prevalent among elite-level swimmers. But, in terms of wanting to do anything else, no.

# *When the two are not swimming, they are busy coaching the next generation of record-breakers at Killer Whale Aquatics.*

**What's the best and worst part of training and competing with each other?**

***Kyle:*** The best part is that I have someone to look up to. There aren't any bad parts. The worst part of being a coach's son is that you take home all the stuff you have to go through at practice with you, which is not great at times. But there's nothing bad about having Matthew as my training partner.

***Matthew:*** I don't view this as a bad thing; it's just that we are so competitive that arguments happen in practice at times. We're all very opinionated and willing to hold each other accountable. Some people may not see that as a good thing or may not like to have that relationship with their brothers. Still, I know I would never have turned out to be the swimmer I was If I hadn't had that kind of competitiveness and sometimes argumentative relationships with my brothers.

**Who will most likely hit the snooze button on an early morning training session?**

***Kyle:*** Me now, for various reasons, but I wouldn't say either of us would hit snooze back in the day. We're equally likely to forget to set the alarm in the first place.

***Matthew:*** I'm notorious for hitting snooze on my naps because I always say in my head that I'm only going to nap for 45 minutes. I will take a power nap so that it will be 45 minutes or an hour. And then it always drags to 2 or even 3 hours, especially if I had training right before because I love naps. But in the morning, I never sleep.

**What would it be like if you could trade one quality, skill, or habit with another?**

***Matthew:*** Jokingly, I would take his height, but seriously, I have ADHD, so I'm a huge procrastinator, like a very huge procrastinator. But once I sit down and start a task, I'll finish it. I will get up once it's done, but it can sometimes take me days or weeks to start the task. And he's very good at getting stuff done on time, so I would take the ability to not procrastinate from him.

***Kyle:*** In terms of swimming, I would take his kick. I would be a much better swimmer if I had it.

**If there was a team sport that you guys could play professionally outside of swimming, which one would that be?**

***Kyle:*** Probably cricket for me. I've always loved cricket. It's a toss-up between cricket and basketball. I wouldn't have been very good at basketball, but I've always been good at cricket.

***Matthew:*** So I've always said I'm not just a swimmer, I'm an athlete. This is not a team sport, but I think I could return and try another sport. I would still pick swimming, but hypothetically, I think I would've been an outstanding wrestler. I feel that I have the body of a wrestler, and I just happen to be a swimmer.

**Do you think your bond as 'brothers' has impacted your swimming career in any way?**

***Kyle:*** Yeah. Without my brothers, I wouldn't be the person I am today. And that goes beyond swimming. My path as an athlete has been typical, and the last four to five years have been difficult for me; in 2020, I was severely overweight. They got me to Ohio, where Matt and Andrew lived at the time. And they helped me lose almost 15 to 20 kilos over about 3 or 4 months, and then they helped me regain self-confidence. And that is the only reason I could start swimming again in the first place.

***Matthew:*** Without the competitiveness, I learnt and developed through my brothers, video games, swimming, milk chugging competitions, and whatever it was. That competitiveness allowed me to get my hand on the wall all those times. If I hadn't had them, many of those gold medals would have been silver ones, and you may not be sitting here today interviewing me. So, everything is because of that.

***We caught up with them to see what they get up to outside of the pool—and to find out whether friendly sibling rivalry is their secret weapon.***



Scan the QR code watch the full video



*Location – **Excel World Entertainment Park***
*Pictures by **Sassanda Liyanaarachchi***

## Shop Local, Share Joy!

# BEST PLACES TO BUY GIFTS THIS Holiday Season




## FROM ELEGANT HOMEWARE TO LUXURIOUS SELF-CARE AND TIMELESS JEWELLERY

*By Venessa Anthony*

If there's one thing Sri Lanka does beautifully, it's blending cultural heritage with modern-day charm. This holiday season, embrace the spirit of giving by exploring some unique gift spots that embody our local artistry and craftsmanship. From elegant homeware to luxurious self-care and timeless jewellery, here are five delightful places to discover gifts as special as the people you're celebrating!



### Paradise Road



Step into Paradise Road, and you'll find yourself transported into a world of Sri Lankan elegance, where tradition meets contemporary design. Founded by Udayshanth Fernando in 1987, Paradise Road has grown from a simple retail shop into a celebrated design brand known internationally. Its flagship store is filled with gorgeous homeware, distinctive decor, and curated objets d'art – everything you need to find a meaningful gift. Each item reflects the creativity of Sri Lanka's artisans, as local craftspeople collaborate with Paradise Road to keep Sri Lanka's art scene flourishing.

And when the shopping's done, unwind at the in-store Paradise Road Cafe, where you can catch up over a delicious all-day brunch. Even if you're not a shopaholic, the cafe's charm is reason enough to stop by!





### Spa Ceylon

Everyone loves a bit of pampering, and Spa Ceylon delivers luxury with a Lankan twist. Known for their lush Ayurveda-inspired products, Spa Ceylon has become a household name in Sri Lanka and beyond. From calming essential oils to indulgent skincare sets, you'll find something to suit everyone's relaxation style.

Not sure which products to choose? Gift vouchers are available across their locations island-wide, making it easy to give the gift of a rejuvenating experience. Whether it's a friend who needs friend who needs to be spoilt or a family member who could use a spa day, Spa Ceylon's gift options make wellness feel extra special.




### Heritage Sapphires



If you're looking to gift something timeless, Heritage Sapphires at One Galle Face has you covered. This legendary jewellery house, originally established by Don Theodoris Weerasiri in 1865, has been crafting exquisite jewellery for generations. Under the skilled eye of Buwaneka de Silva, the family legacy continues, with pieces that range from classic sapphire rings to custom-made pendants – each a work of art.

Known for its royal heritage and exceptional craftsmanship, Heritage Sapphires offers truly one-of-a-kind creations. It's a gift that comes with a piece of Sri Lanka's history – and maybe even a bit of sparkle for the holiday season!











## Poms Island



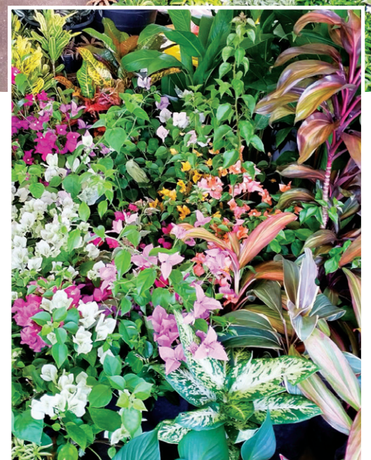
For gifts that inspire imagination and bring magic to playtime, Poms Island offers beautifully handcrafted, one-of-a-kind wooden toys. Lovingly made by a family team, each toy is painted with 100% non-toxic finishes, ensuring they're safe for small hands (though not suitable for teething). Every piece is made with care—from sanding to painting to packaging—using eco-friendly materials, so there's no plastic in sight!

If you're looking to make the gift even more special, just request their simple, earth-friendly gift wrapping. You can find this charming small business on Instagram at @poms_island or place an order via Etsy. Poms Island's enchanting creations are perfect for bringing smiles to your littlest loved ones this holiday season!

## Diyatha Uyana

At Diyatha Uyana, you can find a variety of small potted plants, from herbs and succulents to vibrant flowering plants, all at budget-friendly prices. A small potted plant makes a lovely gift that keeps giving, and many nurseries in Sri Lanka sell herbs, succulents, or small flowering plants at low prices. These plants not only brighten up any space, but also promote well-being. Adding a handwritten note with care instructions can make it even more special - a thoughtful, low-cost gift idea for plant lovers.





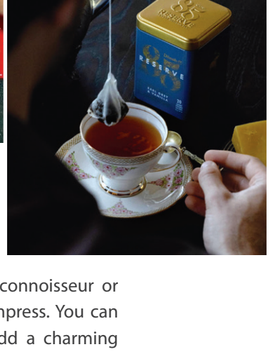








## Dilmah Tea Boutique



There's nothing more quintessentially Sri Lankan than a cup of Ceylon tea, and Dilmah's Tea Boutiques offer a luxury tea experience to bring home, without breaking the bank. The boutiques, located at select stores in Colombo, are filled with beautifully packaged single-origin teas, exotic infusions, and elegant tea gift sets. Whether your recipient is a tea connoisseur or someone just beginning to explore Ceylon tea, these blends are bound to impress. You can even place an order online via their website for those last-minute gifts! Add a charming tea accessory like a ceramic teapot or a tasting kit to make it a complete experience.

# Foundation of Goodness – A Gift that Gives Back



Looking for a unique and meaningful gift this holiday season? Consider gifting a personalised voucher from the Foundation of Goodness. This allows you to directly contribute to the upliftment of underserved communities in rural Sri Lanka. Simply contact the Foundation by calling their general line at 0112 586 344 or emailing them at ***foundationofgoodness@foguc.org*** to arrange a voucher, specifying the area you'd like to support. Your gift will make a tangible difference in the lives of those in need, making it a truly special and memorable present.

They also currently have a school supply kit donation programme ongoing, which helps bring hope to rural Sri Lankan children with essential school supplies for the 2025 school year! Every pack you sponsor provides a school bag, books, pens, and a shoe voucher - all for just USD $18. Support rural education essential school supply packs. You can reach out to them or check their socials for details on how to donate.

From supporting a child's education to empowering women's skill development, each donation makes a real difference. It's a heartwarming way to celebrate and share Sri Lanka's resilience and sense of community.

As you explore these beautiful stores and causes, remember that the holidays are all about giving gifts with thought and love. And there's no better way to show that than by supporting our local talent, traditions and communities.

***Happy Gifting - A Galore of Eyecatching Gifts to Keep Recipients Smiling!***



A Journey Through Xizang

# MUST-VISIT DESTINATIONS on the 'Roof of the World'

01

From sacred temples to untouched wilderness, unravel the mysteries of a destination that touches both the sky and the soul

*By Shafiya Nawzer*

Xizang, popularly known as Tibet, earns its name 'Roof of the World', with its awe-inspiring altitude averaging 4,900 metres above sea level. Nestled within the embrace of the majestic Himalayas, this extraordinary region offers a sublime mix of stunning natural beauty and profound spiritual heritage, making it a dream destination for adventurers and spiritual seekers alike.

Renowned for its breathtaking landscapes, Tibet boasts enchanting lakes with crystal-clear waters, towering snow-capped mountains like Mt Everest—shared with neighbouring Nepal and a serene plateau that feels otherworldly. Beyond its natural wonders, the region is steeped in unique cultural and historical richness, home to ancient monasteries, vibrant festivals and the deeply rooted traditions of Tibetan Buddhism.

With its allure now drawing global attention, Tibet is a must-visit for those yearning to explore a land where nature's grandeur and cultural depth blend seamlessly. Whether you're captivated by the promise of soul-stirring scenery or the allure of spiritual enlightenment, Tibet is bound to leave an indelible mark on your heart.

Tibet isn't just a geographic marvel; it's a lifeline for nearly half of Asia. Known as the Water Tower of Asia, the region cradles the headwaters of mighty rivers like the Yangtze, Mekong, Brahmaputra and Yellow Rivers. These rivers sustain millions of lives and shape ecosystems across the continent.

What amazed me the most was Tibet's pristine water quality; you can drink the tap water here! This purity is a testament to the region's largely untouched environment, where the waters remain as clear and life-giving as they have for centuries.

When the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Sri Lanka invited me to join a youth delegation to Xizang, I couldn't believe my luck. Alongside 11 other delegates from eight countries, I ventured into this mystical land hosted by the Foreign Affairs Office of the Xizang Autonomous Region and China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Overwhelmed by its splendour, I discovered a world so unique and enchanting that it left me in awe. Through my journey, I found places and experiences that deserve a spot on every traveller's bucket list.

Here's a look at the must-visit destinations in Xizang, as seen through my eyes.

## 01. The Potala Palace

No visit to Tibet is complete without standing in awe before the Potala Palace. Perched atop Marpo Ri Hill in Lhasa, this fortress-like palace is an architectural marvel and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Once the winter residence of the Dalai Lamas, the palace is now a museum housing centuries of Tibetan art, relics and history.

The palace is divided into two sections: the White Palace, which served as the Dalai Lama's residence and administrative hub, and the Red Palace, dedicated to religious study and prayer. Wandering through its halls, you'll come across ancient murals, sculptures and the tombs of past Dalai Lamas—all radiating an aura of profound spirituality.

Standing here felt like touching history itself. The Potala Palace isn't just a building; it's an architectural marvel and gateway to Tibet's soul.

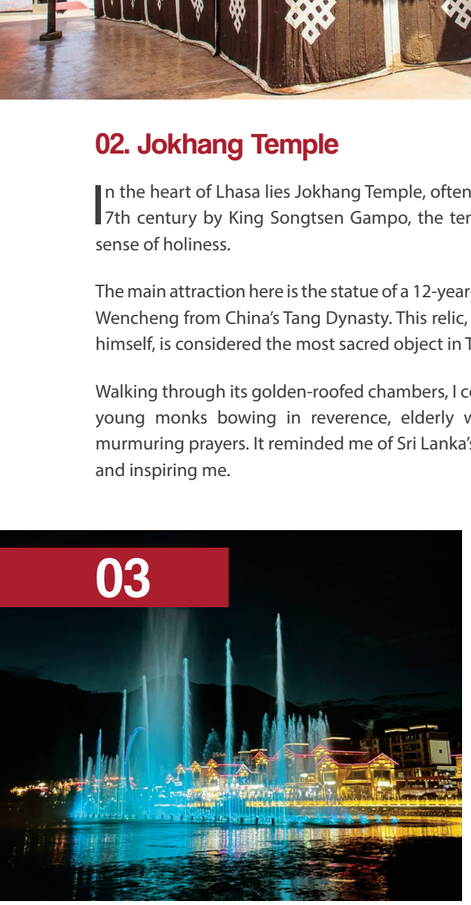



## 02. Jokhang Temple

In the heart of Lhasa lies Jokhang Temple, often described as the spiritual heart of Tibet. Built in the 7th century by King Songtsen Gampo, the temple is a sacred sanctuary with an almost tangible sense of holiness.

The main attraction here is the statue of a 12-year-old Sakyamuni Buddha, brought to Tibet by Princess Wencheng from China's Tang Dynasty. This relic, believed to have been consecrated by Lord Buddha himself, is considered the most sacred object in Tibet.

Walking through its golden-roofed chambers, I couldn't help but feel a connection to the devotees—young monks bowing in reverence, elderly worshippers spinning prayer wheels and pilgrims murmuring prayers. It reminded me of Sri Lanka's deep reverence for Buddhist traditions, comforting and inspiring me.

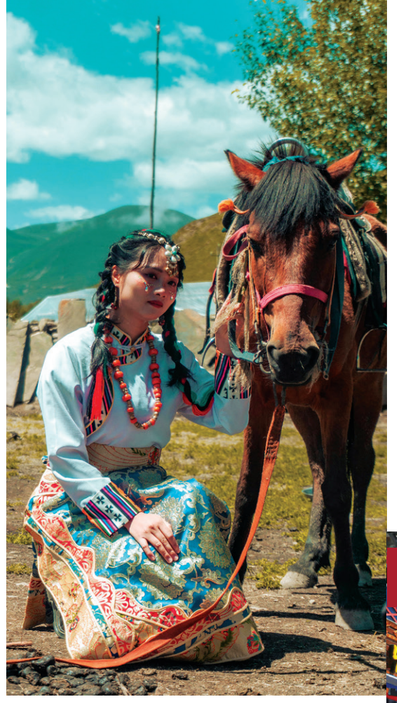



## 03. Gongbu Park

Tibet isn't all ancient temples and towering mountains; it also has its share of surprises, like Gongbu Park in Nyingchi. This isn't your average park—it's a vibrant mix of modern design, natural beauty and futuristic charm.

Set along the Niyang River, Gongbu Park features colourful markets, lush greenery and a jaw-dropping Ferris wheel that lights up the night sky. Watching the water show unfold around this giant illuminated wheel felt like stepping into another dimension. Picture this: jets of water shooting over 100 feet into the sky, illuminated by vibrant lights. The mesmerising water and light show was like stepping into a sci-fi movie.

With its blend of nature and modernity, Gongbu Park felt refreshingly different from Tibet's ancient charm—a perfect reminder of how this region balances tradition and innovation.



## 04. Yani National Wetland Park

Yani National Wetland Park, located where the Yarlung Zangbo and Niyang Rivers meet, is a paradise for nature lovers. Spanning over 8,700 hectares, the area teems with wildlife, including rare birds like the endangered black-necked crane.

Once a barren wasteland, this park has become a lush ecological haven. Walking along its turquoise waters surrounded by misty mountains, I felt like I was in a European nature reserve with a uniquely Tibetan charm.

The wetland is home to more than 500 species of wild plants, and 200 species of animals also call this place home. Walking through the park felt like stepping into a painting, with pristine waters reflecting the surrounding mountains and greenery. It's a place where nature thrives and conservation is prioritised.

The park's beauty is matched only by its significance. Its restoration rejuvenated the landscape and breathed new life into the local community. It's a testament to Tibet's dedication to preserving its natural heritage.

## 05. The Qinghai-Tibet Railway: The World's Highest Railway

Taking the Qinghai-Tibet Railway is an adventure in itself. Known as the highest railway in the world, it reaches a staggering altitude of 5,072 metres and winds through some of the planet's most awe-inspiring landscapes.

Travelling from Nyingchi to Lhasa, I passed serene lakes, snow-capped mountains and vast, untouched plains. The journey felt like watching a masterpiece unfold, with each turn of the track revealing another scene of natural beauty.

This isn't just a train ride; it's a bucket-list experience that showcases the grandeur of Tibet's landscape in a way that no other mode of travel can.







## 06. Barkhor Street: A Vibrant Blend of Culture and Faith

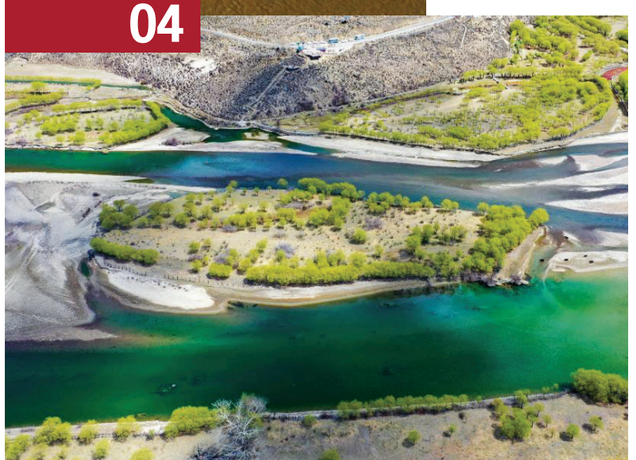
Barkhor Street in Lhasa is a sensory delight—a bustling bazaar, sacred pilgrimage route and cultural hub rolled into one. Encircling the Jokhang Temple, this lively street is filled with shops selling traditional Tibetan artefacts, prayer wheels, colourful textiles and tasty foods.



What struck me most was the mix of old and new. Pilgrims walked clockwise around the circuit, spinning prayer wheels and prostrating themselves in devotion, while locals bartered at market stalls. The energy was infectious, and the sights and sounds transported me back.

For foodies, Barkhor Street is a hidden gem. Every bite reminded me of Tibet's rich culinary traditions, from steaming bowls of noodles to butter tea.











## 07. Hospitality That Feels Like Home

Sri Lankans take hospitality very seriously, and we are undoubtedly the best at it, but Xizang came remarkably close. From the locals' warmth to our hosts' meticulous care, every interaction was filled with kindness and respect.

What makes Tibet truly special is its ability to connect you to something more profound—whether it's the grandeur of its landscapes, the devotion of its people or the serenity of its culture. Xizang isn't just a destination; it's an experience, a journey into a world unlike any other. If you ever have the chance to visit, take it. You'll leave with more than just photographs— carrying memories, stories and a heart full of wonder. Tibet, the Roof of the World, is a place that will stay with you forever.

# A Seasonal Guide to Sri Lanka's South Coast

*By Venessa Anthony*

Sri Lanka's southern coast is more than just postcard-perfect beaches. As the calendar flips closer to December, the region comes alive with a unique blend of tropical vibes and festive cheer. Whether you're craving the waves, yearning for culinary adventures, or just in the mood to savour the holiday spirit in a tropical paradise, here's how to make the most of your December getaway in southern Sri Lanka.







## Beach Bliss with a Holiday Twist

If your idea of a holiday includes sandy toes and sun-kissed waves, the southern beaches are calling. Mirissa, Hikkaduwa and Unawatuna transform into bustling hubs during December, as travellers flock to these shores to escape colder climates. Many beachside bars and cafes along the coast get in the holiday spirit with fairy lights and Christmas decorations, adding a dash of seasonal magic to sunsets and sundowners.

Mirissa's secret? Whales. December marks the beginning of whale-watching season, offering a rare chance to spot blue whales as they migrate through the Indian Ocean. Set off in the early hours, and prepare for an unforgettable experience with the majestic giants of the sea.



## Galle Fort: Christmas in a Colonial Dreamscape

If there's one place that truly embodies the festive spirit down south, it's the Galle Fort. This UNESCO World Heritage site comes alive during December with a blend of historical charm and seasonal cheer. Take a leisurely stroll through the narrow streets lined with colonial architecture, as shops and cafes set up beautiful Christmas decorations, bringing out their best in holiday decor. Festive music filters through from little boutiques, and local vendors offer handcrafted gifts that make perfect souvenirs.

Don't miss the Dutch Reformed Church, where you can join in a local Christmas service or simply soak up the serene atmosphere. The Galle Fort also hosts a few seasonal fairs and markets throughout the month, so you're likely to find everything from Sri Lankan handicrafts to delicious treats.

**Savour the holiday spirit in a tropical paradise and make the most of your December getaway in southern Sri Lanka.**






## Indulge in Coastal Cuisine

December is prime time for foodies in southern Sri Lanka. Seafood takes centre stage, and what better way to savour it than beachside? Many restaurants in Mirissa, Weligama and Tangalle create special Christmas or New Year menus, infusing classic Sri Lankan dishes with seasonal twists. For a memorable Christmas dinner, head to one of the upscale beach resorts, where chefs pull out all the stops, incorporating the freshest catches with a fusion of local spices.

And don't skip the street food! Southern Sri Lanka offers a bounty of snacks to fuel your adventures. Try some crispy hoppers (rice flour crepes), freshly made kottu roti, and juicy tropical fruits from street vendors – especially the mouth-watering mangosteen, rambutan, and mangoes that are in season.





## Christmas Markets and Craft Fairs

While Christmas might look different in Sri Lanka, the festive spirit is alive and well. Many hotels and cafes organise special holiday events, and a few even host Christmas markets where you can pick up gifts, handicrafts, and unique Sri Lankan goodies. In Galle and Matara, you may stumble upon craft fairs featuring local artisans who showcase traditional jewellery, batik fabric, and hand-carved wooden masks.

For a one-of-a-kind Christmas present, look for coconut shell crafts, cinnamon-infused candles, or batik sarongs. These local items make meaningful gifts that capture the essence of Sri Lanka.

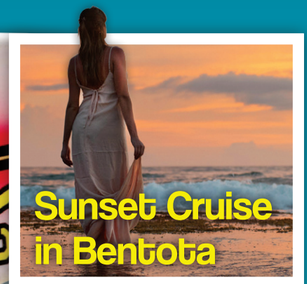


## Surf and Sunshine in Weligama



The holiday season isn't just about lazing around – it's also one of the best times for surfing in Weligama, where waves cater to all levels. Beginners can book a surf lesson or rent a board from the beach shacks, while experienced surfers take on the waves a little further out. As you paddle into the surf, there's an added thrill in knowing that the 'winter months' in Sri Lanka feel like a summer holiday, with warm waters and clear skies stretching as far as the eye can see.

After working up an appetite on the waves, head to one of the charming beachfront cafes in Weligama. They're perfect for grabbing a smoothie bowl or a fresh seafood platter and soaking in the easygoing coastal vibe.



## Sunset Cruise in Bentota



To close out the day in style, set sail on a sunset cruise in Bentota. December skies cast a magical glow over the water, creating the perfect backdrop for a leisurely cruise. Many operators offer private and group sunset cruises, complete with refreshments. Some even organise themed Christmas or New Year's Eve cruises, complete with holiday music, snacks, and even fireworks.

As the sun dips below the horizon, there's no better place to be than on the deck, drink in hand, with a view of Sri Lanka's stunning coastline and the warm breeze.

Need a break from the beach? The Kanneliya Rainforest Reserve, a short drive from Galle, is an often-overlooked gem that's ideal for nature lovers. December's slightly cooler climate makes it a comfortable time to explore the lush trails, exotic flora, and cascading waterfalls. Guided tours can help you spot rare birds, monkeys, and lizards, giving you a truly tropical Christmas adventure.

Pack a picnic, and after your trek, relax by one of the rainforest's natural pools, feeling like you've escaped into another world – a world far from snow but rich in greenery and life.






## Adventure in the Tropics: Kanneliya Rainforest



## Ring in the New Year, Southern Style



Down south, New Year's Eve celebrations are a mix of traditional and tropical. Many beachside resorts host lively events with fireworks, music, and bonfires right on the sand. Unawatuna and Hikkaduwa are particularly popular spots, drawing both locals and visitors for all-night festivities. For a more low-key evening, find a quieter spot along the coast, set up a beach blanket, and watch as fireworks light up the sky, signalling the start of a New Year.

Whether you're seeking thrills on the waves or a quiet moment at Galle Fort, southern Sri Lanka offers a blend of adventure, warmth, and unique holiday cheer in the latter part of the year. So, pack your sunscreen, grab your favourite festive hat, and dive into the ultimate end-of-year getaway on Sri Lanka's southern coast!

THE LATEST
# INDIAN CUISINE SENSATION
IN COLOMBO



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# ITC's PESHWARI

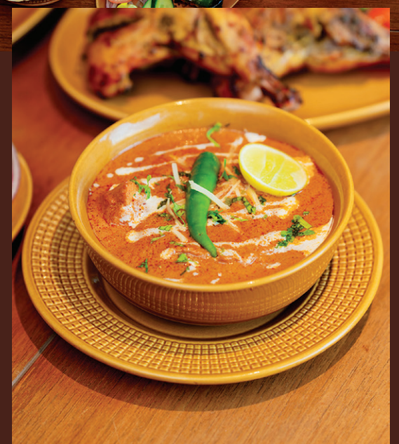




Home to the biggest Naan in Sri Lanka, Peshwari located in ITC Ratnadipa Hotel is the latest sensation in Colombo. This is the first international branch of the iconic Peshawri, bringing authentic North Western Indian flavours straight from chefs trained in India. Perfect for family gatherings, the dishes are made for sharing, letting everyone savour the bold, rich flavours together. Peshawri's menu preserves the magic of its original recipes from 1967. With an atmosphere that feels like an ancient Indian palace, dining here is an experience beyond just the food. If you're a fan of intense, flavourful Indian cuisine, this spot is a must-visit!

## MUST-HAVES:

- KOLAM
- BHARWAN PANEER
- DAL BUKHARA
- MURGH MALAI KEBAB
- MURGH MAKHANI
- NAAN BUKHARA
- GULAB JAMUN



*Pictures by **Iraj Walisinghe***





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# TABLE by nyne

## BRINGING TOGETHER A WORLD OF FLAVOURS



Looking for a one-of-a-kind fine dining experience? Table by Nyne at Lake Lodge Hotel Colombo is where it's at! This spot brings together a world of flavours, blending international gourmet dishes with local Sri Lankan twists. And with an exciting menu of speciality drinks, there's something for everyone! The atmosphere at Table by Nyne is modern, artsy, and refreshingly calm, making it easy to forget you're right in the heart of Colombo. It's the perfect place for a brunch date with the girls, a romantic dinner or even a cosy family gathering.





*Pictures by **Sassanda Liyanaarchchi***

## MUST-TRY DISHES:

- CHEESE SOUFFLÉ WITH APPLE, WALNUT, ROCKET AND POMEGRANATE MOLASSES (V)
- SEARED MACKEREL WITH TOMATO, STRING BEANS, BACOC AND MUSTARD AIOLI
- BEETROOT RAVIOLI WITH RICOTTA, PARMESAN AND CASHEW BURNT BUTTER (V)
- STICKY DATE PUDDING WITH TOFFEE SAUCE AND GOURMET VANILLA ICE CREAM
- SCARLET FIZZ

pulse #LivingIt

COOKING WITH Aunty D.

Aunty D. is a full-time mom working a little magic in the kitchen whenever she's got time on her hands. She brings to you, easy and fast recipes with a twist of Sri Lankan spices and cooking techniques. Get cooking!

# Rudolf Pie

This Rudolph's pie is comfort food at its best! Packed with tender ground meat and vegetables and finished with a crispy, golden top, it will be the star of your Christmas dinner table.
Try out this festive take on Shepherd's pie with Aunty D!

## Ingredients:

- Oil 1 tbsp
- Minced ginger 1 tbsp
- Minced meat (chicken, beef or lamb) 750 g
- Pepper 1 ¾ tsp
- Garlic powder 1 tbsp
- Salt 2 ½ tsp
- Worcestershire sauce 1 tbsp
- Tomato sauce 2 tbsp
- Curry powder ½ tbsp
- All-purpose flour ¼ cup
- Chicken stock ½ cup
- Corn ½ cup
- Green peas ¼ cup
- Lime juice 1 tsp
- Boiled potatoes 250 g
- Butter 1 tbsp

## Method:

- Heat oil in a pot and sauté minced ginger until fragrant.
- Add minced meat, pepper, garlic powder, salt, Worcestershire sauce, tomato sauce and curry powder. Cook thoroughly until the meat browns.
- Sprinkle flour over the mixture and stir until combined. Gradually add chicken stock while mixing to create a thick, flavourful sauce.
- Toss in green peas and corn, then add lime juice. Stir well and remove from heat.
- Mash boiled potatoes with butter, pepper and salt until smooth.
- Spoon the meat mixture into a baking dish, spreading it evenly. Then, layer the mashed potatoes on top.
- Finally, bake in a preheated oven at 200°C for 10-12 minutes or until the top turns golden brown.
- Scoop out a serving for yourself and enjoy a cosy holiday dinner!

Scan the QR code



# Eggnog

Get ready to sip on the ultimate holiday drink!
Creamy, spiced and irresistible, this eggnog recipe is your ticket to a great Christmas

## Ingredients:

- Milk 1 cup
- Cloves 4 nos
- Cinnamon 1/2 inch
- Ground nutmeg 1/2 tsp
- Egg yolk two nos
- Sugar 1/4 cup
- Whipping cream 1/4 cup
- Brandy 1/4 cup
- Egg white two nos

## Method:

- Pour the milk into a pot and add cinnamon and cloves. Heat gently until warm and fragrant.
- In a bowl, beat egg yolks with sugar until the mixture becomes a pale yellow.
- Add the whipping cream to the egg yolk mixture and whisk again until combined.
- Slowly pour the warm milk into the egg mixture while whisking continuously.
- Add in brandy and give it a good mix.
- In a separate bowl, whisk the egg whites until they become light and foamy.
- Gently fold the egg whites into the milk mixture, then stir in ground nutmeg.
- Pour the eggnog into glasses and sprinkle a pinch of ground nutmeg for that perfect festive touch.
- Finally, take a sip and let the holiday spirit take over!



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# Goodbye GALADARI

## A FAREWELL TO 40 YEARS

The Galadari Hotel Colombo recently celebrated its 40th anniversary with a grand farewell cocktail at The Grand Ballroom. The event, filled with nostalgia, brought together guests to honour the hotel's remarkable journey over the past four decades.

As the hotel prepares for its new chapter under the name Radisson Blu Galadari, the evening was a heartfelt 'Thank You' to all patrons and contributors. Established in 1984, the hotel has a rich history, with past affiliations like Galadari Meridian and Marriott. With renovations underway, the hotel looks forward to redefining hospitality in Sri Lanka.

Here are some captured moments from the night.

*Pictures by*
***Malshan Wijayathilaka***

















