

Press release: 19 December 2022

TUI Academy trainees in Sri Lanka celebrate their achievements at graduation ceremony

Young people from vulnerable communities in Sri Lanka have graduated from the TUI Academy – an educational programme by TUI Care Foundation, run by Aitken Spence Institute of Hotel Management, in partnership with the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance.

Whilst political unrest and the national financial crisis put pressure on the trainees, as families struggled to fulfil their daily needs, 27 trainees celebrated their graduation yesterday, determined to build a better life for themselves and their families. This comes at a time when over one in five young people globally are not in education, employment or training,¹ and youth unemployment in Sri Lanka is rising, with 26.1% of young people not in employment.²

The programme includes both classroom training and practical experience utilising the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance's Employability Programme model. Participants are supported throughout the programme, learning core employability skills such as English language, life skills and hospitality knowledge, before going onto experience a variety of roles within 2-4 months practical training at a hotel, giving them the skills and confidence to start rewarding, lifelong careers.

The graduation ceremony took place at the Heritance Ahungalla hotel, and was attended by graduates, family members, Aitken Spence Hotels representatives and hotel managers from across the hotels where trainees completed their practical experience. These were Heritance Kandalama, Heritance Ahungalla, Heritance Tea Factory, Heritance Ayurveda, Turyaa Kalutara, Amethyst Passikudah, RIU Ahungalla, Araliya Hotel Unawatuna, Anantara Dubai, and Avani Hotel Bentota .

As a result of their commitment and hard work, 21 graduates have already secured employment, many of whom have taken up full time roles at the hotels they trained at after excelling within their practical experience.

One graduate, [Kaveesha](#), began the programme with no hospitality experience, and after throwing himself into practical experience at the Aitken Spence Hotels' Turyaa Kalutara hotel, went onto to secure a full-time job at the hotel.

Kaveesha said: "After taking part in the training programme, I noticed a drastic development in myself. In the initial months I was nervous about talking to guests, but now I feel very confident. I learned that I have a 'never give up' attitude and am very capable of tending to guests needs, even during the busiest times. This was recognised by my supervisors, which I am very proud of."

Manoj Perera , General Manager , Turyaa Kalutara, said: "Kaveesha quickly became one of our most valuable team members. He distinguished himself as a fast learner, capable worker, and brilliant young person. He is honest, dependable, and incredibly hard working. Kaveesha is a truly valuable asset to our team and always thinks positively."

Glenn Mandziuk, CEO of the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, said: "Due to the achievable entry levels and variety of roles offered by the hospitality industry, hotels are in a unique position to support young and disadvantaged people in building fruitful, lifelong careers. I am so pleased to be

¹ ILO (2020), Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020, available from www.ilo.org

² ILOSTAT database (2022), as quoted by The World Bank, available from www.worldbank.org

able to make this a reality, through our collaboration with NGOs and hotels. I'd like to extend a huge congratulations to each and every graduate and wish them all the best as they continue to develop their careers."

Alexander Panczuk, Executive Director of TUI Care Foundation, said: "Using the potential of tourism to open up new opportunities for vulnerable young people is key to the TUI Academy programme in Sri Lanka and in many other places around the world. Despite the recent external challenges, the TUI Academy trainees in Sri Lanka have graduated successfully. This will pave their way to a bright and self-determined future. With their passion and motivation these young people are an inspiration to us all."

Stasshani Jayawardena, Director Aitken Spence PLC, Head of Tourism and Leisure, and Chairperson of Aitken Spence Hotels Management said: "As a responsible hospitality company, we take great pride in this initiative led by Aitken Spence Institute of Hotel Management alongside TUI Care Foundation to support livelihood development of underprivileged youth in Sri Lanka. Coming from vulnerable communities, we truly believe that our efforts in inspiring these youth will have a long term effect on the development of the local and national economies as well. Our hotels have been opened alongside our skilled resources to not only empower the livelihood upliftment of the youth but also to cater to the skilled professional requirement within the hospitality industry. Together, we look forward to inspiring many more dreams and creating diamonds from the rough."

To find out more about the TUI Academy Sri Lanka, visit <https://sustainablehospitalityalliance.org> or www.tuicarefoundation.com

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Notes for editors

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About the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance

The Sustainable Hospitality Alliance brings together the hospitality industry and strategic partners to address key challenges affecting the planet and its people, local destinations and communities. They develop practical free resources and programmes to create a prosperous and responsible hospitality sector that gives back more than it takes.

Their members make up almost 40% of the global hotel industry – totalling 7 million rooms – and include world-leading hotel companies including Marriott International, Hilton Hotels & Resorts, IHG Hotels & Resorts, Hyatt Hotels Corporation, BWH Hotel Group and Radisson Hotel Group, as well as regional brands.

Through their Employability programme, in collaboration with hotels and local NGO partners across India, Kenya, Nigeria and Sri Lanka, the Alliance have supported over 6,000 young. The programmes see trainees undertake 100 hours of soft skills training, focusing on English language,

life skills and hospitality knowledge, followed by 2-4 months of practical training at a hotel, and finally support in finding employment.

For more information, please visit: www.sustainablehospitalityalliance.org.

About TUI Care Foundation

Building on the potential of tourism as a force for good, the TUI Care Foundation supports and initiates projects which create new opportunities and contribute to thriving communities in tourism destinations all over the world. Connecting holidaymakers to good causes, it supports education and training opportunities for young people; drives the protection of natural habitats and the marine environment; and helps local communities to thrive sustainably and benefit from tourism. The TUI Care Foundation builds on strong partnerships with local and international organizations to create meaningful and long-lasting impact. The independent charitable organization was founded by TUI, the world's leading tourism business, and is based in the Netherlands.