Jetwing
Building enabling business environments for women to thrive
Commitment to action
About IFC

IFC—a member of the World Bank Group—is the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets. We work in more than 100 countries, using our capital, expertise, and influence to create markets and opportunities in developing countries. In fiscal year 2020, we invested $22 billion in private companies and financial institutions in developing countries, leveraging the power of the private sector to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity. For more information, visit www.ifc.org.

About IFC’s Women in Work Program in Sri Lanka

Women in Work (WiW) is a five-year, $9.5 million initiative launched in partnership with the Australian government in April 2017. It is IFC’s largest, standalone country-based gender program designed to close gender gaps in the private sector while improving business performance. The program, which benefits from multisector program design and works closely with the World Bank on research, tackles women’s access to jobs and assets at the same time. It aims to increase women’s workforce participation in Sri Lanka’s private sector, create more and better jobs for women, and has the potential to increase profits and drive overall economic growth. WiW also contributes to the vision of the government of Sri Lanka where all citizens can achieve higher incomes and better standards of living by 2025.

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One of the largest privately owned Sri Lankan resort and hotel brands, the Jetwing Group of companies is built on strong core principles of sustainable tourism. Founded in 1973 by Herbert Cooray, the company is now estimated at $60 million. Jetwing employs over 3,000 employees, of which 12 percent are women.

**OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES AND PAVING THE WAY FOR WOMEN TO ENTER HOSPITALITY**

Women currently represent less than 10 percent of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka in comparison to the global average of 65 percent. Negative social perceptions and lack of access to vocational training hold women back from entering the industry.

Jetwing’s flagship community outreach initiative ‘Jetwing Youth Development Program’ (JYDP) is designed to empower youth in economically disadvantaged communities, adjacent to locations the hotels operate in, providing free practical and theoretical training in hospitality, soft-skill development and English language proficiency. JYDP participants are equipped with skills to find suitable employment within Jetwing Hotels as well as elsewhere within the hospitality industry.

In 2018, JYDP was updated to address a range of social barriers that prevent women from entering the tourism industry, including by providing sessions on employee facilities and safety. Working at the community level, JYDP works to demystify the tourism sector and provides local communities a transparent overview of the working environment. This is a key step in tackling negative stereotypes that hold women back from entering the sector.

Upon successful completion of the JYDP program, participants are offered positions at the Jetwing Group of hotels. Jetwing works to achieve a 50:50 gender parity target at the selection process, whenever possible. Of new recruits from the JYDP programs held in Haragama and Gurudeniya villages in 2019, 37 percent were women. Jetwing’s Recruitment Policy also commits to hiring locally wherever possible.

**BUSINESS RESULTS:**

- Introduced 50:50 gender targets at selection process of Jetwing Youth Development Project
- 5 Women General Managers
- 100% Maternity return rate
- Only hotel with majority female butler service in Sri Lanka
- Community level engagement in recruitment of women

Women currently represent less than **10%** of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka
Sakunthala’s Story

Sakunthala Deshani Gunesekara, Assistant Butler, Jetwing Kandy Gallery hotel

Two years ago, Sakunthala Deshani Gunesekara would never have thought that she would be working as an Assistant Butler in a luxury hotel.

Sakunthala’s mother had been reluctant for her only daughter to join the hotel industry, when their local Grama Sevaka shared the JYDP invitation letter. The perception in her village was that hospitality was not a ‘suitable’ industry for women. Awaiting her GCE Advanced Level results, with nothing to take up her time, Sakuntala wanted to participate in the training program offered free of charge. As per the instructions by Jetwing to bring an accompanying parent for the inauguration program, Sakunthala convinced her mother to attend JYDP with her.

“The chairman of Jetwing had come down to talk to us and they spent a lot of time telling us and the parents present, about the company policies. They did presentations on the job requirements and the safety guidelines for employees. My mother was happy with the level of responsibility the company showed towards us and gave me her blessing to continue with the program,” said Sakunthala, speaking of her family’s experience overcoming the social prejudices against women joining travel and tourism.

Having undergone an extensive four months classroom training which included English language skill development, Sakunthala was given seven months practical training at Jetwing Yala. “I did not know anything about hotels when I joined the JYDP program, today I know all about customer service and how to work in various departments. Accepting my placement letter from Jetwing was the best decision I ever made!” said Sakunthala who is one of 10 Assistant Butlers, at the Jetwing Kandy Gallery hotel. Jetwing Kandy Gallery boasts the only female majority butler service in Sri Lanka and has made a concerted effort to ensure women are trained and promoted in an area of service, traditionally viewed as male centric.

“I want to be a General Manger of a hotel one day” says 22-year-old Sakunthala, who, with the support of her supervisors, is signing up for further training and succession planning programs offered by the hotel.
STRENGTHENING WOMEN IN LOCAL COMMUNITY SUPPLY CHAINS

The Jetwing Employee Resource Group, launched in December 2018, served as a think-tank for the organization. Focusing on the projects that have been materialized, ‘Thrive’ is one such program which was initiated as a community outreach initiative to empower small-scale suppliers.

Jetwing has a proven history of engaging local communities and extending opportunities for them to become profitable stakeholders of the industry. Jetwing launched a small-scale supplier sustenance program as a pilot at Jetwing Kaduruketha, in Wellawaya. Through the program selected local suppliers are provided with opportunities for awareness, training and financial assistance needed to upscale their enterprises to deliver quality products and services. Among the total suppliers benefitting from the program, 23 percent are women.

MORE WOMEN HOLD LEADERSHIP ROLES

A dedicated Training & Development Team of Jetwing, focuses on growing talent internally through multiple programs such as Jetwing Elevation, Achievers, and Ascension programs – all designed to enrich associates at various levels through interactive leadership experiences that build upon the company values. Succession planning along with training and development programs are geared at grooming associates for leadership roles. Jetwing currently has five General Managers and one Deputy General Manager who are women.

DURING COVID-19

Jetwing Hotels has offered five properties as premium quarantine centers at budget rates for repatriated Sri Lankans. The hotel stepped up to meet a growing need for quarantine centers as those run by the military were beginning to fill up with domestic contacts of infected persons.

During lockdown, apart from the skeleton staff at the hotels, the rest were given paid leave. Depending on the nature of the work, head office associates were given work from home facilities. With lockdown restrictions being lifted within the country, despite the airport remaining closed for overseas guests, Jetwing is restructuring its strategies to target more local tourists.
The IFC-DFAT Women in Work program in Sri Lanka, partnering with leading private sector companies, aims to demonstrate that corporate performances can improve from closing gaps between women and men in the private sector.