

Something for Everyone: a walk down Gandhara Street

✘ Gandhara Street on Stratford Avenue is a lifestyle concept, fashioned to appeal to the most discerning of shopper. It is the kind of place that is meant for indulgent and languorous browsing through its winding stores and fusion of products. From timeless antiques, to home ware, from exquisite collector's items to arts and craftsmanship from across the world, Gandhara has got it all, offered with a personalised touch of class. This personalised touch comes through Gandhara's proprietor Dian Gomes who tastefully handpicks the artefacts on display during his many travels around the world. The variety is impressive, from Peru, to Tibet, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma and even Burkina Faso in Africa, Gomes has put together a concept that is an unparalleled fusion of exotic art and craft in Colombo.

By Thilini Kahandawaarachchi | Photography by Hiranya Malwatta

Having begun as a standalone retail store, Gandhara has come a long way since its inception in 2005. Instead of flourishing on its own, it has helped many others to team up with it and grow together. "When you look at art it is such a vast field. You can't be everything to everybody", says Gomes. Therefore, he has invited the likes of Hermitage and Treasure House to open up stores down Stratford Avenue to cater to the diverse tastes of art lovers, which has proved to be a win-win situation for everyone. His mission is to create an art street similar to the streets in other countries where people can go and hang out and pick up pieces of art and other knick-knacks and he also wants to set up an art village for Sri Lankan artistes with a view of taking Sri Lankan art to the world.

A walk down Stratford Avenue will prove that the Gandhara Street concept expands beyond the scope of an antique or art store. The Street today counts as many as 23 partners, offering a wide range of products and services from designer fashion to chic cafes and a sensuous spa. For the shopaholics, the street offers multiple options on some of Sri Lanka's top designer labels. Choose from

hand painted silks, exquisite batiks and designer jewellery and accessories, it's a fusion of fashion all the way. And it doesn't stop there! The Gandhara street product offering expands to a salon, coffee bar, music store and even an adventure tourism store among many others. Once your arms are full, there are also places to sit back and enjoy a cup of coffee or even hang out with a friend. You would come across young arty people, architects, interior decorators and tourists hobnobbing down Gandhara Road and its many boutiques.

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Among the illustrious list of partner stores at Gandhara Street lie some of Colombo's finest retail stores. Walking down the street, you will find outlets representing top names such as Michael Wijesuriya, Yoland Collection, Hermitage, Cozy Linen, Kathmandu, Zsa Zsa Gallery, Arachchi, Acushla by Sonali Fernando, Salon Sandy, Oak Tree, Borderlands and cafés such as Café Ché and Barista. A stop in the morning is sure to last till late evening, with repeat returns soon after.

Optimistic of the future, Dian Gomes says that in the next two years the Street will have many art galleries that showcase different products from around the world and make it affordable to art lovers. “I think, for Sri Lankans this is a great era. This is going to be a fantastic place in the next five years, and I want to spread my wings”, he concludes.

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