

Record breaking visitor numbers at Lunuganga: July 21–23, 2023

Launching the *To Lunuganga* programme in Bentota last weekend, the Geoffrey Bawa and Lunuganga Trusts reported a record-breaking number of visitors, amounting to over 5400 people over the weekend of July 21–23. The programme, which celebrates the 75th anniversary of Bawa's garden Lunuganga, opened with a range of talks, tours, exhibitions, and installations that reflected on the intertwining of ecology, art, and architecture.

Shayari de Silva, Chief Curator of the Geoffrey Bawa Trust, says “We could not think of a better way to celebrate Bawa's 104th birthday, which falls on July 23rd. Spaces like Lunuganga hold a precious and inspiring space for creative thinking and empathy and we are delighted to be able to share it so widely with our community.”

Programme highlights included the 20th annual memorial lecture delivered by Isabela Ono, founder and executive director of the Instituto Burle Marx, Brazil, an installation titled *Fluid Geographies* by Mumbai-based artist Reena Kallat, a panel discussion with artists Reena Kallat (India), Firi Rahmam (Sri Lanka) and architect Sumayya Vally (South Africa) moderated by trustee and executive director of M+ (Hong Kong) Suhanya Raffel and Geoffrey Bawa Trust Chief Curator Shayari de Silva. The Astronomical Research Institute guided visitors through a Star Party and Vimukthi Fernando from the University of Jayewardanapura took visitors through Honduwa Estuarian Island at Lunuganga, where endangered Hog Deer reside. The Geoffrey Bawa Trust is in partnership with the University of Jayawardanapura, for a hog deer research project, and the University of Peradeniya for a project on floral diversity. The Trust is also partnering with the Royal College of Art in London to carry out a 3D-scanning research project to archive the garden using virtual reality. The project is led by architect and filmmaker Clara Kraft Isono, whose film *Bawa's Garden* kicked off the event on Thursday in Colombo.

Tours by Trust Chairperson Channa Daswatte, architect Amila de Mel and Prof. Sarath Kotagama (University of Colombo) were also widely popular as visitors engaged with the garden and its buildings through architectural and ecological lenses. Concluding the launch weekend on Sunday, a series of gardens and greenspaces including Brief, Boutique 87, and Heritance Ayurvedha were made accessible to visitors through Open House Colombo, curated by Geoffrey Bawa Trust Programme Manager Shanika Perera.

With participants joining from India (Reena Kallat), Hong Kong (Suhanya Raffel), the UK (Clara Kraft Isono), South Africa (Sumayya Vally), Brazil (Isabela Ono), and many other countries, as well as several local visitors from across the island, the event signified a positive turn in Sri Lankan tourism, with many guests pledging to return for subsequent events in the programme calendar, which extends over three seasons from May 2023–August 2024. Upcoming projects include an exchange with the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum in New York, funded in part by a grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts (Chicago) and an exhibition on Ena de Silva's botanical interests, partially supported by Art South Asia Project (London).

Channa Daswatte, Chairperson of the Geoffrey Bawa and Lunuganga Trusts, said, “We are delighted to have such a strong show of support from our public, including many artists, students, and academics, at this first event, and we anticipate this engagement to grow over the next 18 months. The Trust’s curatorial team has worked hard to put together a nuanced programme that has many facets and promises many varied and exciting events to come.”

For information about the programme, please visit www.lunuganga.garden.

Curatorial team: Shayari de Silva, Shanika Perera, Aneesha Mustachi, Thilini Perera, Christopher Silva and Sathira Imaduwege.

Interns: Inuri Maheshika, Dhaneesha Tharakie and Matthew Roger.

Press Images

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