

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

AT SHAMBALA

The last few years have been a wild ride, defined by seismic events that have revealed structural inequalities now more widely understood in the public consciousness. The grinding halt of our beloved live events industry, coupled with globally resonating events such as Black Lives Matter protests, gave us space, time and urgency to focus our energies on how to make Shambala more accessible and welcoming for all.

What we did...

- We want to achieve true representation across our line ups and activities. Our crew, creative programmers and bookers have taken part in a panel discussion with some awesome, forward thinking organisations such as [Black Artist Database](#), [Black Lives in Music](#), [Unlimited](#) and [Girls to The Front](#).
- We surveyed historically marginalised segments of our audience to better understand what we are doing well, what we need to do better, and how we improve their experience with us. The 3 groups were as follows:
 - 1. Shambalans from ethnic minorities**
 - 2. Disabled, D/deaf & Neuro-diverse Shambalans**
 - 3. LGBTQIA+ Shambalans**
- We gathered qualitative data from these survey responses and used that to inform our Diversity & Inclusion action plan.
- We then invited the survey respondents from these three groups to join us in community focus groups, hosted by Mo Murat from [Shangri La](#) and [Community Resolve](#) to run these focus group sessions.
- Coming from an understanding that education often rests on the shoulders of the marginalised and repressed, we paid everybody who attended these focus groups, for their time and emotional labour.

What we learnt...

We were heartened to learn that the majority of underrepresented folks that come to Shambala reported that their experiences with us are far more positive and welcoming than 'the real world', or at some other events, there are some clear areas where we as organisers, and you as our audience, could be making improvements to help the entire Shambala community feel more welcome and included.



WHAT WE ARE DOING

To make Shambala even more welcoming to ethnic minorities*.

We have rebranded and redesigned venues which haven't quite been hitting the mark with décor and theming – such as Kamikaze, which will return as Kaleida - same badass beats– brand new name and décor focussed around a kaleidoscope of whirling, technicolour lasers and projections.

We will have a dedicated person on site responsible for handling any complaints around racism, discrimination harassment and microaggressions.

We will also ensure the existing channels for making any of these complaints are better publicised - the reporting channels are as follows: via a steward who will take details and pass the incident on to the dedicated individual; at the campsite hub (found in every campsite); via a member of security; through the Shambala phone app feedback function; on the emergency phone hotline (as listed in the programme, app and essential guide).

We are asking our audience to be mindful of the costumes they choose and not to bring along or wear items that have cultural significance to historically repressed minorities or cultures that are not their own. Examples would be Indigenous headdresses, bindis or afro wigs. Stewards and festival staff will be briefed on this to give them the confidence to challenge this when seen on site.

We will be educating our audience on microaggressions make people feel tokenised and uncomfortable.

Whilst ethnic minorities have always been represented on Shambala/Kambe Events' board of directors, we will be prioritising diversity within the year round staff team when recruiting, by working with recruitment platforms which support those from under-represented communities) to reach further afield than the 'usual' festival industry suspects.

Wherever possible, we prioritise applications from Food Traders who are cooking the authentic food of their cultures.

**By ethnic minority, we are referring to UK ethnic minorities - however it should be noted that this group is the global majority rather than minority.*

What we need you to do:

Do your research when you're planning your costumes. We appreciate that a festival is a fantastic place to 'try on' new versions of yourself and wear beautiful, flamboyant clothing that you may not feel comfortable wearing in 'the real world' but if your freedom steps on the freedom of others, is it really freedom at all?

Do NOT bring Indigenous headdresses, bindis or afro-wigs to Shambala (unless of course these items are from your actual culture).

Be mindful of behaviour that (though you may think are coming from a positive place) makes people feel othered or tokenised.

You do not need to touch anybody's hair.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

To make Shambala even more welcoming to D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse folks:

We offer a wide array of Accessibility support services at Shambala but it's clear that not enough people know about them. We will ensure all of our Accessibility services are clearly sign posted in the app and the Essential Information guide for Shambala 2022.

We will also be producing a dedicated Accessibility video filmed on site in 2022, which we can use to effectively showcase everything our Accessibility team offers, to future attendees.

We'll provide a calm, safe space (located in the medical and welfare area) for those who have experienced sensory overload or are feeling panicked and overwhelmed by the festival experience.

We pledge to ensure all stewards, security staff etc are fully aware of the Accessibility facilities we offer - including 'secret' entrances/exits to venues.

We will ensure each venue description in the phone app includes information on whether viewing platforms etc are available.

We will also ensure that invisible disabilities are covered in detail as part of the crew briefing, to avoid people being put in awkward situations/ being questioned when attempting to access accessibility services.

Our creative bookers/programmers will prioritise acts with disabilities where possible. We have passed feedback on to our talks/workshops bookers that more content around dealing with mental health and neuro-divergence would be welcomed.

What we need you to do:

Remember that not all disabilities are visible. If you see somebody using an accessibility service (such as a disabled toilet) and don't think they 'look' disabled, that's not for you to comment on - leave them be.

Make way for folks with accessibility needs, whether that means not crowding somebody who is using a wheelchair, or just making space for somebody who is overwhelmed and needs to escape the venue and get to a quieter spot.

Not everyone can easily sit down (or get back up again). Be mindful of this and avoid asking people to sit on the floor so you can get a better view.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

To make Shambala even more welcoming to the LGBTQIA+ community:

The LGBTQIA+ community at Shambala is big and we were very happy to find that during our focus groups, they overwhelmingly sing our praises as a welcoming space. The general consensus re LGBTQIA+ content on site is 'more please, and bigger!'

However, we do have room to improve regarding the use of inclusive language, and some of our content needs tweaking...

What's wrong with 'hello everyone'? Nothing. Which is why we'll ensure all venue managers brief all performers, artists, hosts and comperes to ditch the binary when speaking to our audience.

There has been a call for more explicitly queer friendly/queer orientated content, outside of our LGBTQIA+ clubhouse, The SanQtuary. We're listening and our programmers are on the case - watch this space.

We also understand that it's important to have LGBTQIA+ folks on the team, programming the spaces and running the venues, as well as performing on stage - we're on the case with this also and have welcomed new teams to the family this year.

We also took a deep dive into one Shambala institution, that we believe deserves it's own section!

Let's talk about Freedom Friday:

Fridays at Shambala have long been known as a time to play with the gender binary and experiment, from beards with ball gowns, to flat caps with fishnets. Originally known as 'Fruity Friday', those of you who have been with us for a few years may remember we back in 2018, we changed the name after digging into the history of the word 'Fruity' and it's negative connotations over in the states.

Our feedback from our focus group on Freedom Friday has been a mixed bag. Many responses acknowledge its potential as a positive and fun space for gender exploration - indeed, some respondents recall Freedom Friday being the time they discovered their love for 'free dressing' and got the confidence to experiment with their gender presentation in the 'real world' - which is truly wonderful to hear.

However, some respondents felt that the day posed a risk for those who had to manage being misgendered in their day to day lives.



Unsure how to proceed, we decided to speak to folks from the trans community who had never been to Shambala, to get an objective opinion.

We undertook paid consultancy with Gendered Intelligence – a trans-led grassroots organisation with a wealth of lived experience, community connections and a depth and breadth of trans community knowledge.



The general consensus they could see from looking at our community feedback around Freedom Friday was lots of positivity, but some uneasiness, which, whilst not perfect, shows Freedom Friday has promise!

They advised there is no need (just yet) to move away from Freedom Friday, especially as some have reported the 'safe space' for them to dress how they really feel has been monumental in changing their gender presentation in 'the real world' ... but there are improvements to be made.

What we're going to do:

Better training and guidelines for our comperes/ hosts around ditching the binary, not assuming gender and checking pronouns.

Mindfulness of the language used in all our copywriting and comms around Freedom Friday. Hooking it all under the 'drag' umbrella (as we have done on occasion in the past) is not right – it's not drag if you're exploring your gender presentation for real.

Keeping in touch with our LGBTQIA+ community in post event surveys for the next two years, to see how Freedom Friday is landing.

In two years, having tried all the tactics above and checked back in with our audience on how it's landing, if we're not at a point where this is hitting the mark, we'll be kissing Freedom Friday goodbye and trying something new.

If you love Freedom Friday and want to see it continue, here's what we need from you:

We also don't want Freedom Friday to be just a form of 'stag do' style dress up, focussed around men dressing as outdated, misogynistic stereotypes of femininity. Think less fake boobs jammed into 'naughty nurse' outfits, and more playing with fashion, getting creative, wearing what you'd always wanted to wear but wouldn't feel confident/comfortable doing in the real world.

Watch your language! Don't assume anybody's gender. Be mindful of congratulating somebody on a 'costume' that may not be a costume at all. Don't comment on people "looking trans" or "passing", there is no one way to be trans.

If anything that occurs as part of Freedom Friday makes you feel uncomfortable or you have feedback to share (particularly as a trans person/ non-binary person/free dresser) – please get in touch and tell us.

... IN CONCLUSION

We have learnt that we have a truly fantastic community that really values Shambala, and off the back of this process we feel truly galvanised to further develop the festival into a genuinely inclusive, safer space.

We would like to say a huge thank you to everybody who took part in this process, from our panellists to our consultants, our facilitators, our survey respondents and all the Shambalans that took part in our focus groups.

