

BISHOPSTON TRADING COMPANY

Ethical trader celebrates Fairtrade Fortnight with launch of Spring Collection

Ethical retailer Bishopston Trading is launching an expanded Spring Collection to coincide with Fairtrade Fortnight (February 26 – March 11).

Colours in the Spring Collection from Bishopston Trading are based on the colours of Southern Spain - particularly the sun, surf and sand on the Costa de la Luz – and the warm colours of the terracotta houses, flowers and palm trees.

The company recently celebrated 21 years of trading links with a village in southern India where it provides employment for more than 500 people.

Bishopston Trading is headed by businesswoman Carolyn Whitwell with a head office and five retail shops in the west of England, including Bristol, Glastonbury and Totnes. In addition, the company has stockists across the country plus a mail order catalogue.

Carolyn says: “We started off with one shop in Bristol and four tailors in India. It was hard work but we have steadily grown the business and now the company - which is a workers co-operative - employs 37 people in this country and more than 500 tailors, cutters, craft workers and weavers in KV Kuppam, a village in Tamil Nadu.”

Most fabric used by Bishopston Trading starts as a non-GM seed grown organically in the Kutch area of Gujarat in North India. The spun cotton is transported by lorry to South India where it is dyed (using non Azo dyes) and then handwoven at K. V. Kuppam.

The main fabrics used by the company are handloom cotton, denim and calico, certified as Fairtrade by the Fairtrade Foundation.

Carolyn adds: “In the early days, people in India would often say to me ‘It’s not charity that we want, but work,’ and that is what I have tried to provide. Trade is much more valuable than charity.”

The Spring Collection will be available in Bishopston shops, some UK stockists and via the mail order catalogue in time for Fairtrade Fortnight.

This year the company is introducing a range of basic clothes in organic knitted cotton which is being made by a fair trade company in Tirrupur (about three hours south of K V Kuppam).

The overall theme of this year's Fairtrade Fortnight, the annual campaign of the Fairtrade Foundation which encourages people to buy products carrying the FAIRTRADE Mark, is "Change Today. Choose Fairtrade."

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Background Notes: Bishopston Trading Company has five retail shops in the West of England (Bristol, Bradford on Avon, Glastonbury, Stroud and Totnes) plus stockists throughout the UK and Europe and a mail order catalogue.

All profits from the company are used to benefit the people of KV Kuppam through the company's registered charity, the South India Rural Development Trust. This trust has funded an architect-designed factory in the village offering excellent working conditions for the staff.

There is a long tradition of hand-weaving in the village of KV Kuppam, in Tamil Nadu, southern India. The Bishopston Trading Company currently provides employment for more than 200 tailors, cutters and craft workers and 300 weavers. Many of the tailors and hand-finishers are women who can take advantage of the on-site creche at the factory. Employees are offered secure employment and can remain close to their families rather than seek work elsewhere.

The Bishopston Trading Company is a member of IFAT (The International Fair Trade Association) and BAFTS (British Association for Fair Trade Shops) and licensees of the Fairtrade Foundation.