

SIX OF THE BEST

Literary festivals

Share tall tales and cocktails with famous authors in exotic climes from Bali to Brazil at these high-minded get-togethers, says HANNAH ROBERTS

1 **GALLE LITERARY FESTIVAL, SRI LANKA**
Colonial seaside town Galle is a jewel of classic Dutch architecture, with dramatic ramparts and exquisite seafood. Man Booker Prize-winner Kiran Desai has already booked her place at this new festival, which is tipped to become a hot date on the lit circuit. Stock up on the world-renowned Galle lace, or take a lesson and dabble in Sri Lanka's little-known but flourishing surfing scene. Stay at the charismatic Sun House, or head to the Lighthouse Hotel & Spa for some of the most unspoilt beaches in the Indian Ocean, backing on to dense tropical jungle. *Galle Literary Festival* (+94 779 099 446; www.galleliteraryfestival.com). This year's event finishes on 14 January. For 2008 dates, contact the festival organisers.

2 **HAY FESTIVAL CARTAGENA DE INDIAS, COLUMBIA**
This exotic festival-cum-carnival, organised by the Hay-on-Wye camp in Cartagena, is becoming a regular feature. Last year, Vikram Seth and a host of Latin American writers revelled late into the night at the party of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe on his private island just off the coast. Meanwhile, Gabriel García Márquez hung out 'backstage', looking pleased as punch. All the literati crashed out at the colonial Hotel Charleston Cartagena and Hotel Santa Clara in the heart of the old town. *Hay Festival Cartagena de Indias* (0870 990 1299; www.hayfestival.co.uk/cartagena); 25–28 January.

3 **WEXFORD BOOK FESTIVAL, IRELAND**
Much of the charm of this event lies in visiting the old-fashioned, meandering Irish town of Wexford, which has long been celebrated for its Festival of Opera. The literary events are quite low-key, but that doesn't stop megastars such as Seamus Heaney from attending regularly. Stay at the Ferrycarrig Hotel, 10 minutes out of town in one of the most inspiring settings in Ireland, overlooking the slate-grey River Slaney. The local seafood is first rate: those in the know eat at the Lobster Pot pub in the nearby village of Carne. Take a boat trip out into the melancholy but poetic bay to see the seals. *Wexford Book Festival* (+353 53 91 22 226; www.wexfordbook.com); 24–25 March.

4 **FESTA LITERÁRIA INTERNACIONAL DE PARATI, BRAZIL**
This four-year-old and thriving festival is situated in the lovely town of Parati, on the heavenly coast between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Ian McEwan, Toni Morrison and Michael Ondaatje are among those who have flocked here for the fishing and what could be the best caipirinhas in the world. All sense of time vanishes as you walk the cobbled streets, and then head home for a dinner of freshly caught fish at midnight. Stay in the homely *pousada* hotels of the old town, where the tide rises high enough to wash your doorstep clean. *Festa Literária Internacional de Parati* (+55 24 3371 7082; www.flip.org.br); 9–13 August.

5 **UBUD WRITERS & READERS FESTIVAL, BALI**
This jungle mountain outpost at the centre of the island makes for a very hospitable welcome. Between ultra-chilled discussions, shop for fresh vanilla pods and exotic spices; or eat alongside writers such as Anita Desai and William Dalrymple at the Indus Restaurant, with its majestic views of Mount Agung's volcano amid wide paddy fields. Everyone who is anyone stays at the peaceful hilltop Amandari resort, and so a bonus to the festival is the choice of spa therapies: massages and treatments overlooking rice fields and coconut trees. *Ubud Writers & Readers Festival* (+62 361 971257; www.ubudwritersfestival.com); 27–30 September.

6 **HAY FESTIVAL SEGOVIA, SPAIN**
This is another success story from the Hay Festival set; no one who was here at last year's festival could forget Bob Geldof's dramatic outdoor concert performed amid the wild winds of Hurricane Gordon. Segovia's magical fairy-tale spires provide a spectacular setting for the festival, and attendees can spend hours between events basking in the sunshine in the Plaza Mayor. Unlike other Spanish literary events, where stern lectures are usually the order of the day, Hay's laid-back speakers prefer an informal discussion approach. *Hay Festival Segovia* (0870 990 1299; www.hayfestival.co.uk/segovia); late September. □