

By Smriti Daniel

Plus

According to my calculations, we have 38 days till The Galle Literary Festival (GLF) kicks off. At this moment, it feels like Christmas has come early this year, for just a peek at the Festival programme has me feeling decidedly cheerful. The list of illustrious participants includes names like Vikram Seth, Shyam Selvadurai, Karen Roberts, M.J. Akbar, Jean Arasanayagam, Alexander McCall Smith, Punyakante Wijenaik, Tim Severin, Gore Vidal, and Jung Chang. While these well known authors will be coming for the first time, we can also expect to see familiar faces like Yasmine Gooneratne, William Dalrymple, Elmo Jayawardena, Ashok Ferrey, Manuka Wijesinghe and Nury Vittachi as well. Certainly, the anticipation won't kill me...but it might just make me a touch lightheaded.

Considering that it is barely a year old, GLF as a literary event is still shiny and new; however, it has already carved a niche for itself as a premier literary festival, not only in Sri Lanka, but on the international circuit. The festival offers lovers of literature a chance to get up, close and personal with their favourite writers and the entire event seems designed to encourage one to indulge almost to the point of excess.



Vikram

Alexander

Karen

Shyam

Sessions begin at 9:30 a.m. and go on till 5:30 p.m. each features a well known author (in some cases more than one) discussing their life and work. It is here that you can listen to Vikram Seth talk about 'A Suitable Boy,' or watch Karen Roberts, Shyam Selvadurai, Randy Boyagoda and Channa Wickremesekera discuss the Diaspora and the impact it has on their work.

Such sessions are punctuated by frequent 'feature events' – exclusive meals created by world famous chefs shared with one's favourite authors are on this list. A few workshops, (notably one on creative writing by Shyam Selvadurai) and tours of the fort are also planned. Even the evenings are taken care of with a variety of entertainment such as poetry readings and movie screenings, much of which is entirely free of cost. The crowning glory, of course, is that it is all proffered in a uniquely beautiful and intimate setting – the U.N World Heritage Site of Galle Fort.

Attending the event - for those who do not live in Galle - is going to take some effort and planning. Mark the days of the Festival – January 16th to the 20th in your calendar. Consider booking your hotel rooms well in advance - many hotels are offering discounts to festival visitors. Four day festival passes for the event are priced at Rs. 10,000 and will give you access to all the main feature events. A day pass costs Rs. 3,500. If that sounds like more than you want to spend consider selecting only a few sessions that most appeal to you from the programme. Each session is priced at Rs. 800. Feature Events like Literary Lunches, Literary Dinners, and Private Affairs must be paid for separately and cost Rs. 5,000. Workshops will amount to 1,500. The Children's Programmes are to be free.

Students (people under 21 or those having a valid student ID card) get the best deals. Four-day festival passes are Rs. 1,750; full day passes are Rs. 500 and individual event passes are Rs. 150.

Everything you need to know to plan your itinerary is available at the festival website: www.galleliteraryfestival.com. The programme can be downloaded and a list of participants accessed. Also do keep an eye on The Sunday Times for more information on the planned events. Tickets are currently on sale at the Barefoot stores in Colombo and in Galle.

Sri Lanka Telecom is the Festival Partner for GLF. The major sponsors for the event are: Sri Lanka Tourism Promotions Bureau, Sri-Lankan Airlines, Jetwing Hotels, Sri Lanka Ports Authority, Wijeya Newspapers, Emirates, Print Care, Amangalla, The Fortress, The University of Melbourne, ETV, The British Council, The Embassy of the United States of America, Dilmah, Hemtours, Penguin India, Taru Villas, Pyxle, The Sunhouse, The Dutch House, Aditya, Barefoot, Boutique Sri Lanka, Favourite group, Intrepid Travel, Rithihi, Water Mart, Six Senses Resort and Spa and Kahanda Kanda.

Beyond the literary

"The Festival lasts for less than a week, however, one of our key aims is to use the profile of the festival to act as a springboard for and to publicise a variety of community initiatives with our friends and sponsors of the festival," say the organisers. Here are few of the initiatives you can expect to see at the Festival this year:

- Workshops in Galle and the Southern Province School with AdoptSriLanka and The British Council.
- Debating and creative writing competitions with Adopt Sri Lanka.
- Celebrating the heritage of the Galle Fort community through an exhibition titled "The world through 80 Fort lives."
- Raising awareness about environmental issues with a beach cleanup project supported by Intrepid Travel.
- An emphasis on recycling, including garbage separation projects.
- Focus on climate change with debates and discussion, and stalls for NGO's such as Earth Restoration, Ruk Rakaganno and Web of Hope devoted to raising awareness on issues related to climate change.