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Plus

Meeting, hearing wielders of the written word

An extended cultural party, the Galle Literary Festival is ready to take off with an array of local and international artistes

By Ruhanie Perera

When someone casually mentions something about the Galle Literary Festival, the effect feels something like love at first sight. Just three words that spell out adventure, excitement and the promise of a new experience. Irrespective of whether you are a veteran or a virgin when it comes to the glitzy world of the literati, faced with the distinct possibility of being a part of this four-day literary culture fest, the human person is left agog. The mind races – Galle (a happening place out of Colombo; you could make a holiday out of this), Literary (access to an amazing array of critically-acclaimed writers, both Sri Lankan and international, and their work), Festival (a moment to revel in an extended cultural party!). What a prospect.



Barbara Sansoni

Celebrating Sri Lankan writers and writing, the Galle Literary Festival pencilled into possibly every bookworm's newly-acquired calendar beginning January 10 and ending January 14 is just the 'first steps' stage of a proposed annual event which, with time, the organizer's hope will grow to be a space that will be recognised as representative of English writing in Sri Lanka. Even at its conception stage, the Galle Literary Festival, in its organisation, style and structure is on par with international festivals of this kind like, for example, the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival, Bali, one of the more established literary festivals in the region.

The events

During the four-day period the festival will bring to one space over 60 participants from around the world participating in over 50 festival events, which, as the Festival website introduces includes writing workshops, panel discussions, topical debates, literary lunches and dinners, poetry readings and a comprehensive children's programme focused on education with creative writing, art and eco workshops. Each evening at the Festival is almost certainly going to be everyone's favourite hang-out time with heaps of groovy programmes ranging from poetry slam, jazz evenings, movie nights and debates to art and photographic exhibitions.

Dedicated to the memory of writer Nihal de Silva, the Galle Literary Festival will be launched on the evening of January 10 at the newly restored Law Court Square, Galle Fort, where writer Elmo Jayawardena will make the tribute to Nihal de Silva. The Festival takes place at a time when Sri Lankan writing in English is reaching its peak, with more and more writing coming out of the closet through writers daring to experiment with and make poetry of the printed word, received by a more demanding, discerning and evolving

reading public. It follows then that there is a need for a space – a meeting place – for the writer and the reader, away from the centre, accessible, inclusive and ultra-modern. A marketplace of sorts – where thoughts are bartered, relationships forged and a community made.



Kiran Desai

And so, at this present moment, this is the place to meet the prolific wielders of the written word of our world and our time. Travel through interesting geographical spaces from Lunuganga, Bentota, through the Galle Fort to Samakanda, Galle and enter the mind of the writer in conversation. Choose a day your favourite Sri Lankan writer is featured. Romesh Gunsekera, Pradeep Jeganathan, Afdhel Aziz, David Blacker, Madhubhashini Ratnayake, Ashok Ferrey, Yasmine Gooneratne, Manuka Wijesinghe, Carl Muller, Nury Vittachi, Tissa Abeyssekara – the list is endless. A random search on the Festival website will take you through the line-up beginning with 'A' and



Timothy Seneviratne

spanning the entire alphabet!

Dining with the famous

Always wanted to thrash out your Jane Austen theories? That's not a problem. Or maybe you are a budding writer on the verge of taking the plunge – sit in on a session with writers on their first book. Chat about language, the art of storytelling or discuss a 'latest' book by an author – with the author. Lunching and dining with the famous is no longer the stuff of dreams. An intimate lunch with an author located in a private historical Galle Fort home is an option. Open to only ten people, the event is a very tête-à-tête style private affair where no one is expected to shout over a sea of heads or strain to make eye contact. Relax, and sit across the table with William Dalrymple, Suketu Mehta, Christopher Kremmer, Romesh Gunsekera, Madhur Jaffrey, Victoria Glendinning, Mark Tully – or even Kiran Desai.

Man Booker Prize winner for the year 2006 and author of the book of the hour, *The Inheritance of Loss*, Kiran Desai is also slotted in at the Galle Literary Festival on Friday (January 12) at 5 p.m. for the panel discussion titled 'Telling the Tale: Fact or Fiction' and on Saturday (January 13) at 3.30 p.m. for 'In the Spotlight' where Desai will take the audience through her prize-winning book, while discussing the different influences on her writing. Teamed with a day's programme for children, writing workshops, walking tours, culinary feasts and architectural discovery – the Galle Literary Festival could easily be billed the biggest event of the year.



Geoffrey Dobbs

The names behind the organization of the Galle Literary Festival are Geoffrey Dobbs (Founder), Committee Members Ameena Hussein, Ashok Ferrey, Nazreen Sansoni, Libby Southwell (Festival Director), Rory Spowers and Events and Media Manager Juliet Coombe. The patrons of the festival are Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera, Kumari Balasuriya, Governor of the Southern Province and Mithree Wickremesinghe.



Libby Southwell

Range of tickets

The tickets for the Festival are divided into

different categories so that anyone interested in attending the festival has a range of options to choose from. You could purchase individual passes for each festival event, day passes, four-day festival passes, and separate passes for feature events, literary lunches, workshops and the opening ceremony (see www.galleliteraryfestival.com/tickets.htm). There are three rates – resident, foreign visitor and student and the four-day festival pass works out to Rs.10,000 for residents, Rs.15,000 for foreign visitors and Rs.1750 for students. You can also opt for a day pass working out to Rs.3000 for residents, Rs.5000 for foreign visitors and Rs.500 for students. There is also the option of volunteering at the Festival – choosing anything from volunteering for a day to all four days – which entitles you to a pass for the events free of charge, valid for the number of days you volunteer for. For more information about the Galle Literary Festival 2007, visit the Festival website www.galleliteraryfestival.com, drop an email to info@galleliteraryfestival.com or phone 0779099446. The tickets for the festival are available at Barefoot (706, Galle Road) and Elephant Walk (61, Ward Place), or can be purchased during the Festival from the Festival Box Office at Barefoot (41, Pedlar Street, Galle Fort, Galle).



Nazreen Sansoni



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