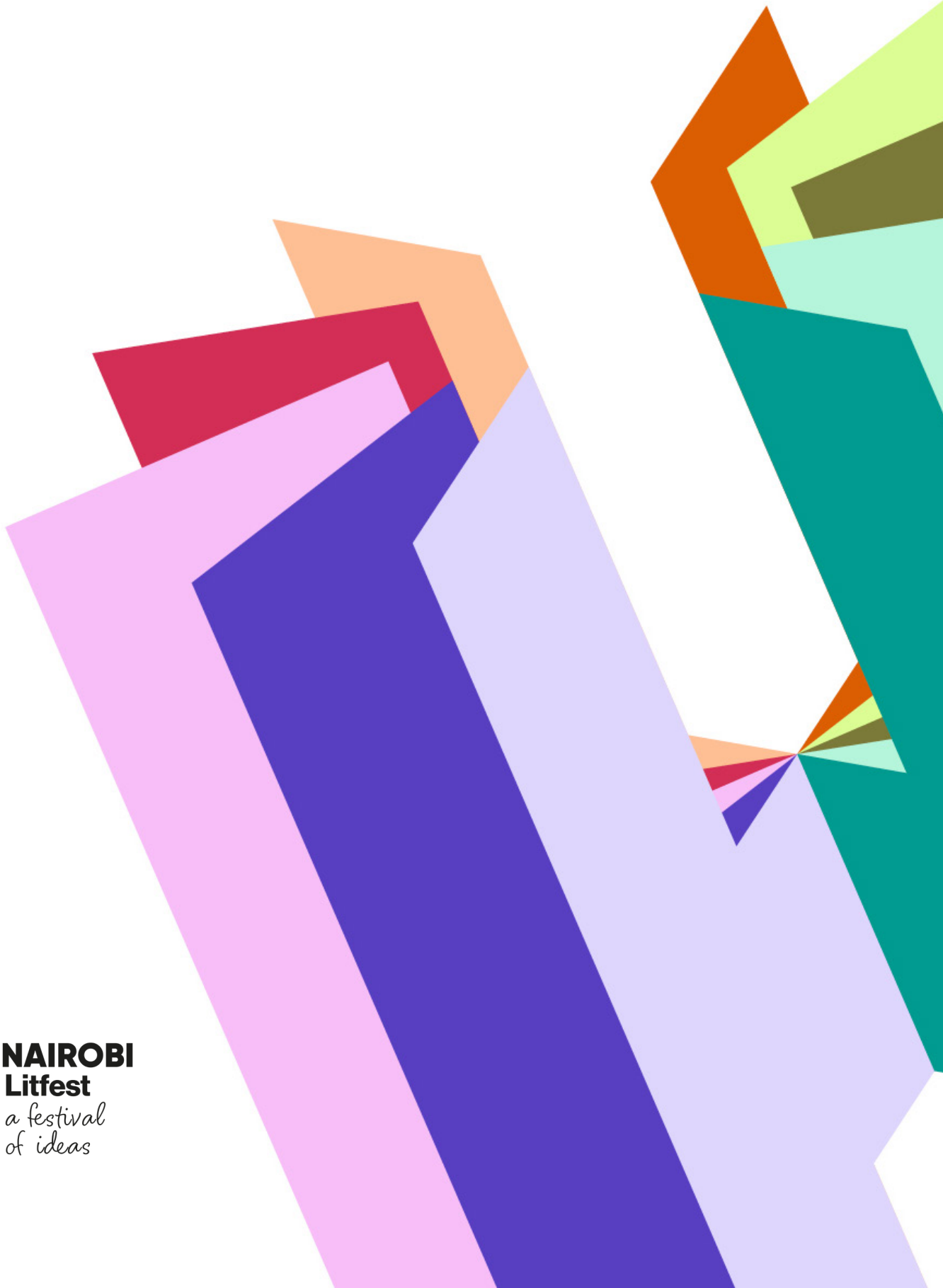


Hay
Festival
Global



Report
2025



 **NAIROBI
Litfest**
*a festival
of ideas*



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Introduction

Hay Festival Global and Book Bunk are proud to have celebrated the Nairobi Literature Festival (Nairobi Litfest) 2025, taking place 26–29 June 2025 across three historic public libraries; McMillan Memorial Library, Kaloleni Library and Eastlands Library. Now in its fourth edition, the festival returned with a robust programme of **53 sessions** featuring over **60 thinkers, writers, poets, artists and educators** from across Africa and the globe.

Since 2024, Hay Festival and Book Bunk have joined forces to expand the festival’s journey, presenting collaborative editions. This partnership seeks to increase the festival’s international presence and expand its audience reach.

“As an international charity, we reach millions of people every year through our one-of-a-kind Festivals, Forums, programmes, and digital platforms. We are delighted to partner with Book Bunk as co-hosts of Nairobi Litfest for the second year running, expanding our work in new and engaging ways for audiences in Nairobi and online.”

Julie Finch
CEO Hay Festival Foundation Ltd

“Nairobi Litfest is a space where great minds meet, celebrating the best of local and global literature with artists, writers and thinkers championing new perspectives. Against a backdrop of global challenges, here is an event that champions the spirit of collective inspiration.”

Cristina Fuentes La Roche
Hay Festival Global International Director

“We are excited to once again partner with Hay Festival Global and gather people from all over the world in Nairobi, anchoring critical conversations in the city’s public libraries. This annual festival is a great opportunity to showcase the libraries Book Bunk is restoring as part of Nairobi’s crucial public infrastructure - safe spaces where people can access alternative thinking at a time especially fraught with polarisation. We welcome everyone to these precious Palaces for The People.”

Angela Wachuka
Book Bunk Co-Founder and
Nairobi Litfest Co-Director





The programme in detail

Inspired by Octavia E. Butler’s quote, “There is no end to what a living world will demand of you”, this year’s festival theme, **Alternative Knowledge Systems**, is an urgent invitation to explore radical thought. At a time when the world is contending with crises of inequality, apathy and disinformation, Nairobi Litfest seeks to gather voices that imagine different futures through literature, music, art, governance, and archives.

Across **53 events**, the 2025 programme featured masterclasses, workshops, panel discussions, book talks, performances and a dedicated children’s festival.

Masterclasses

Masterclasses on poetry, podcasting, photography, and writing with luminaries like **Ayanna Lloyd Banwo** (OCM Bocas Prize winner), **Luis Tato** (World Press Photo winner), **Ngwatilo Mawiyoo** (Kenyan poet) and **Chinny Ukata** and **Astrid Madimba** (Independent Podcast of the Year winners).

Media and archival practices

Radical media and archival practices explored through sessions led by **Africa is a Country**, **Ukombozi Library**, and **Panashe Chigumadzi**.

Panel discussions

Panel discussions like ‘The Woman as Free’, featuring award-winning **Leila Slimani**, **Goretti Kyomuhendo**, and **Ayanna Lloyd Banwo**, and ‘Everything is Political’ with **Prof. Tanya Hernández**, **Rosie Olang** and **Ayisha Osori**, examined art and activism as tools for change.

Award winning authors, artists and academics including **In Koli Jean Bofane**, **Prof. Kithaka wa Mberia** and **Joe Sacco** were also share their insights throughout the festival.

Children’s corner

A vibrant children’s corner with storytelling, book giveaways, and interactive workshops featuring authors **Venna Odhiambo**, **Velia Vidal**, and storyteller **Orpah Agunda**.

The Festival in numbers

days **4**

artists **60**

events **53**

attendees **1,200**

stages **8**

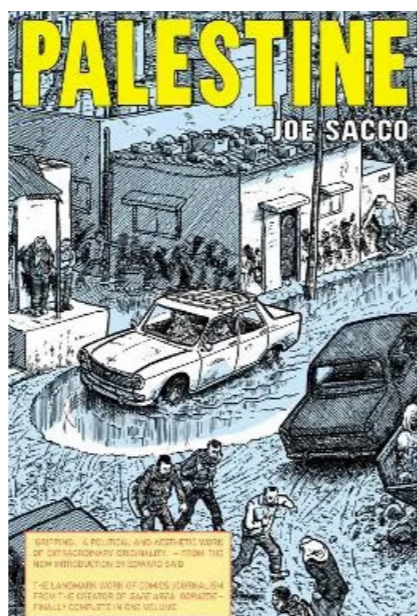
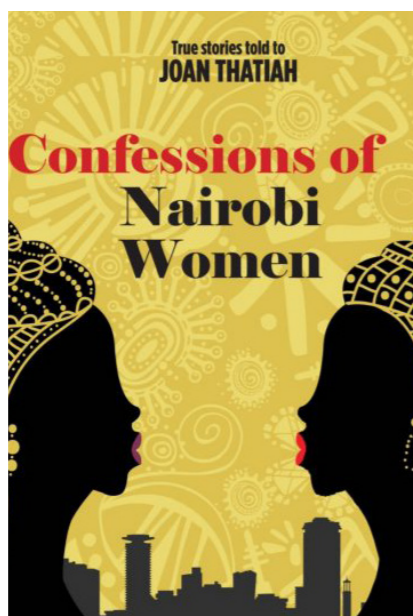
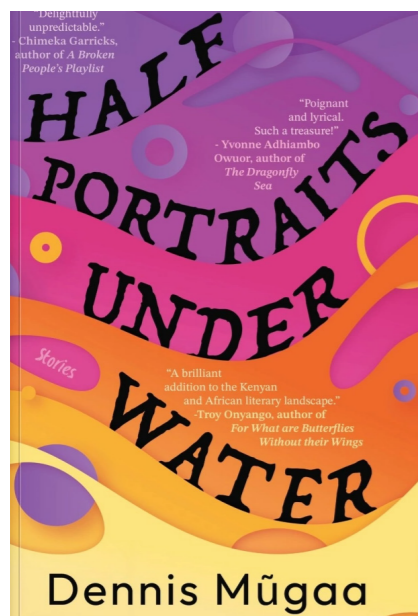
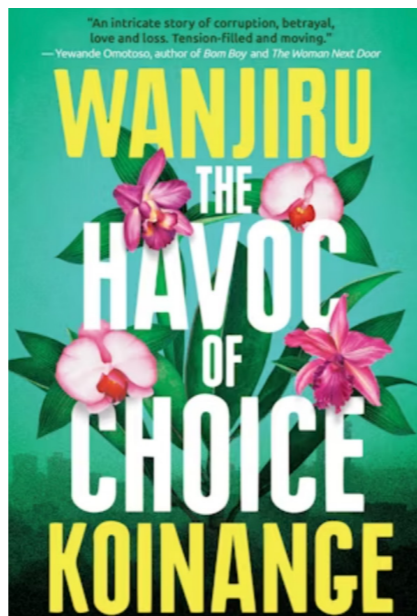
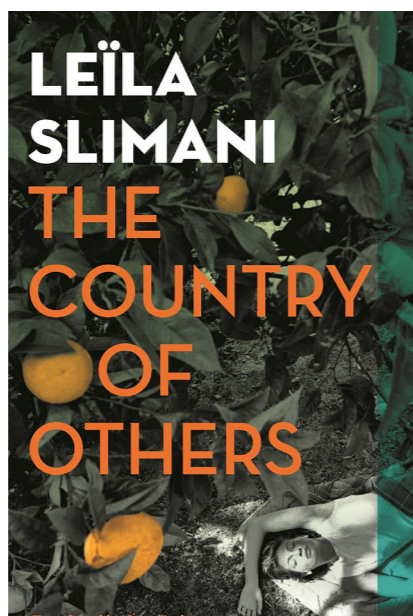
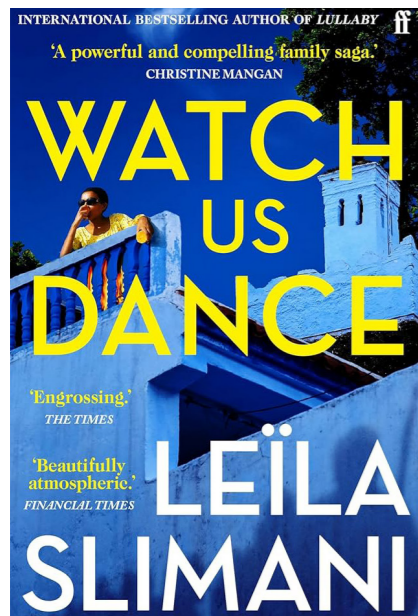
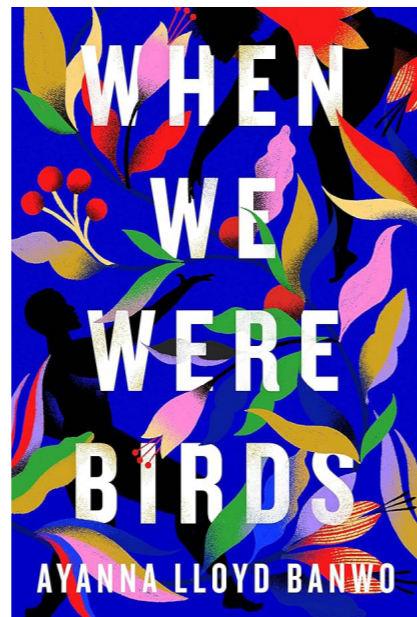
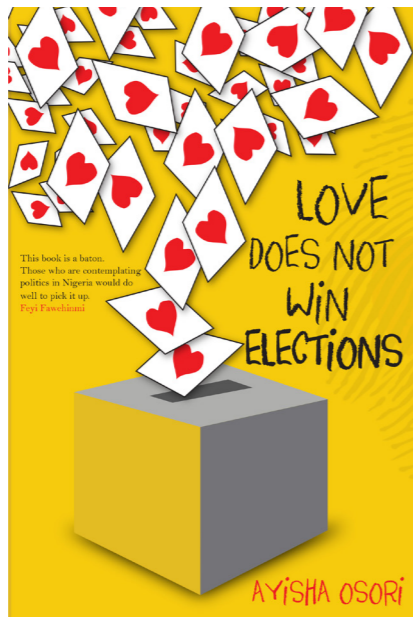
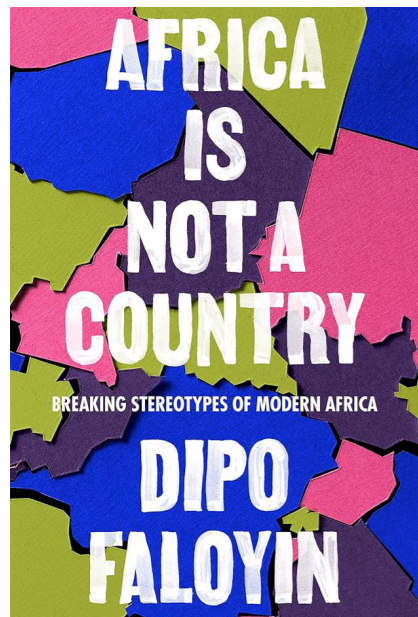
capacity **86%**

social media impressions
via Festival channels **+211,234**

press mentions **50**

web page views **31,213**





Bestsellers



Overall bestsellers

- Lola Shoneyin
The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives
- Dipo Faloyin
Africa Is Not a Country
- Ayisha Osori
Love Does Not Win Elections
- Ayanna Lloyd Banwo
When We Were Birds
- Leïla Slimani
Watch Us Dance
- Leïla Slimani
In the Country of Others
- Wanjiru Koinange
The Havoc of Choice
- Dennis Mũgaa
Half Portraits Under Water
- Joan Thatiah
Confessions of Nairobi Women
- Joe Sacco
Palestine

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The Festival in the media

Features Press:

In Nairobi

Nairobi Litfest Returns: A Festival of Ideas Rooted in Story and Imagination

Nairobi Litfest has launched

Afrocritic

Nairobi LitFest 2025: NBO Explores The Countercurrents of Knowing

Writing Africa

Nairobi Litfest 2025 starts June 26

A Snapshot of Nairobi Litfest 2025

Lithub

War, Confession, Political Reimagining: Five Essential Books by Kenyan Authors

Capital FM

Wanjari Gakuru Curator Nairobi Litfest on 3driveout with June and Martin

The Elephant

Kenya: Progress Unfolded in the Fullness of Time

El Tiempo

Cambiando el mundo desde Nairobi / columna de Cristina Fuentes, directora internacional de Hay Festival

National Spanish Radio RTVE

Mañana más by Sani Ladan

Business Daily

Knowledge diversity and education access can drive Kenya to prosperity

KBC digital

Cross-cultural collaboration to elevate Kenyan creatives as British Council Launches 2025 Season

BBC Africa

BBC Weekend's programme spoke to Wanjiru Koinange, from Book Bunk, for a live interview

The Festival in quotes

“This festival isn’t just about literature – it’s about sparking transformation. By merging creative arts, radical storytelling, and community infrastructure, Nairobi Litfest is a model for how public libraries can become dynamic civic centres. It embodies a powerful local-global blend – rooted in Nairobi, connected to the world.”

In Nairobi, newspaper

“Nairobi Litfest introduced an entirely different side of literature, of thinking, of ideas...something that I have not come across in my life before, but I know that I will be seeing in everything for the rest of my life.”

Aditi Mittal, Stand-Up comedian

“Nairobi Litfest can bring together people who haven’t seen each other for years into the same space out of a passion for sharing ideas.”

Zachary Rosen, photographer

“Through critical conversations, the event affirmed the capacity of literary discourse to inspire collective hope. In this way, the festival not only celebrated the extroversion of its writers and artistes as it has always done, but this time it also positioned literature as a vital site for negotiating and reimagining the broader socio-political realities shaping contemporary African life.”

Frank Njugi, writer and cultural journalist

“The audience has been wonderful, they have been so engaged in every single discussion we’ve had, they’ve wanted to ask brilliant questions this whole time. The Festival has done such a wonderful job in building such a great community around it.”

Dipo Faloyin, writer



With thanks

Hay Festival, one of the world's leading cultural charities, was founded in Hay-on-Wye, Wales in 1987, providing audiences with dynamic platforms to come together to share ideas, different perspectives and provoke conversations that can create a better world.

This new collaboration is the next chapter of the Festival's South-to-North programme, forging creative connections across the Global South through events and partnerships. The projects are supported by funding from the Open Society Foundations.

The British Council is supporting the partnership between Hay Festival and Book Bunk as part of its UK/Kenya 2025 season, which celebrates creativity and innovation through the arts, culture and education in the UK and Kenya.

Ford Foundation - Malunga: Network for Global Justice and Hawthornden Foundation support us in different projects around the world.

Thank you

FESTIVAL PARTNERS

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS



Ford Foundation



Hawthornden Foundation



PROGRAMMING PARTNERS



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MEDIA PARTNERS



Nairobi Litfest story

A literary festival synonymous with the city of Nairobi and rooted in its vibrant public libraries, Nairobi Litfest was created by Book Bunk in 2021. Held the same year, the first edition was themed “Writing African Cities”, coinciding with the city’s oldest library’s 90th year anniversary. It highlighted new writing, narratives and ideas about Nairobi; a 90-year journey of the library and 100 years of the city, with the library’s evolution as the main springboard.

This inaugural edition focused on the reimagining of spaces with contested colonial and other histories such as the **McMillan Memorial Library** and was hosted virtually over three days, attracting a total of 835 people to 20 events.

In 2023, a second edition explored cultural memory under the theme of “Mtaa Narratives”, celebrating stories that shape Nairobi and its surroundings. The 2024 edition, delivered in partnership with **Hay Festival Global**, will expand these conversations.

About Book Bunk

Book Bunk is a charitable trust established by author Wanjiru Koinange and publisher Angela Wachuka that transforms public libraries into “Palaces for The People”; vibrant, inclusive community spaces. The Trust has overseen the architectural restoration of Eastlands Library (opened in 1967) and Kaloleni Library (opened in 1969) as well as the restoration and digitisation of archives, arts and skill-based programming as well as the acquisition of over 19,000 book collections.

The organisation is currently fundraising for the restoration of **McMillan Memorial Library** – Nairobi’s oldest library, opened in 1931. Collectively, these rejuvenated spaces are now home to a treasure trove of books and operate as hubs of community engagement, cultural events and learning opportunities.

Nairobi City County owns all three libraries and partnered with Book Bunk in 2018 to drive the restoration of some of the city’s most iconic public libraries.





Hay Festival around the world

Hay Festival Global is a charity providing global festivals of stories, ideas and new possibilities.

The antidote to polarisation, we bring together diverse voices to listen, talk, debate and create, tackling some of the biggest political, social and environmental challenges of our time. Through one-of-a-kind festivals, in unique locations around the world – plus forums, digital platforms and learning programmes – Hay Festival Global celebrates and inspires different views, perspectives and points of view.

In 1987, Hay Festival Global was dreamt up in the booktown of Hay-on-Wye, Wales. Thirty-seven years later, the charity runs events and projects all over the world, from the historic town of Cartagena in Colombia to the heart of cities in Peru, Mexico, Spain and the USA.

Hay Festival Global reaches an audience of millions each year and continues to grow and innovate, earning multiple awards over the years, including Festival of Sanctuary status from refugee charity City of Sanctuary UK and, in 2020, Spain's Princess of Asturias Award in Communication and Humanities.

Coming up...

Hay Festival Querétaro, Mexico
(4–7 September 2025)

Hay Festival Segovia, Spain
(11–14 September 2025)

Lviv BookForum, Ukraine
(2–5 October 2025)

Hay Festival Forum Dallas, USA
(17–19 October 2025)

Hay Festival Arequipa, Peru
(6–9 November 2025)

Hay Festival Hay-on-Wye Winter Weekend, UK
(26–30 November 2025)

Hay Festival Jericó, Colombia
(23–25 January 2026)

Hay Festival Forum Medellín, Colombia
(27–28 January 2026)

Hay Festival Forum Panama City, Panama
(27–28 January 2026)

Hay Festival Cartagena de Indias, Colombia
(29 January–1 February 2026)

Hay Festival Forum Seville, Spain
(February 2026)

Hay Festival Hay-on-Wye, UK
(21–31 May 2026)

Discover a world
of different

ideas

books

perspectives

debates

views

dance

workshops

art

thinking

music

comedy

voices

possibilities

walks

poetry

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news by signing up to the
newsletter or follow on:

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Facebook: NBO Litfest

Instagram: @nbolifest

TikTok: @nbolifest

hayfestival.org/nbolifest