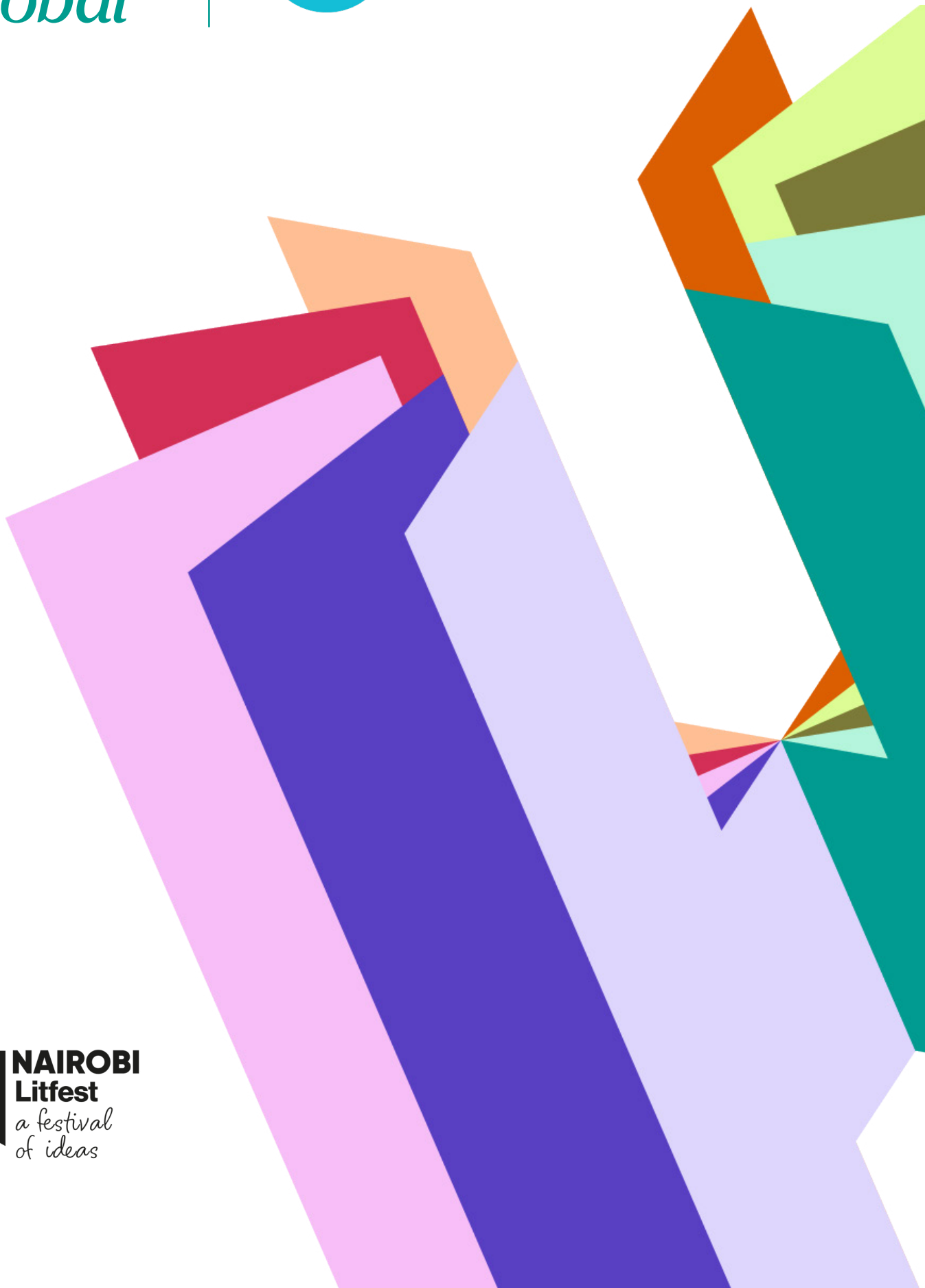
Hay Festival Global

book bunk.

Report 2026



NAIROBI Litfest
a festival of ideas



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Introduction

Hay Festival Global and Book Bunk proudly celebrated the Nairobi Litfest 2026, held from 8–10 May 2026 across three historic public libraries: McMillan Memorial Library, Kaloleni Library and Eastlands Library and with selected sessions also available online. Now in its fifth edition, the festival returned with a robust programme of over **30 sessions** featuring **34 thinkers, writers, poets, artists and educators** from across Africa and the globe.

Since 2024, Hay Festival Global and Book Bunk have partnered to co-present Nairobi Litfest, creating a new chapter in the festival's journey. Over the past two editions, the partnership has brought together more than 120 writers and artists across 75 events, reaching an audience of over 3,000 both in person and online. This collaboration continues to expand the festival's international presence, connecting Nairobi audiences to global conversations and ideas.

"We are delighted to partner with Book Bunk as co-hosts of this year's Nairobi Litfest, continuing our impactful work together in new and engaging ways for audiences in Nairobi and around the world. As an international charity, we reach millions of people every year through our one-of-a-kind Festivals, Forums, programmes, and digital platforms – it's a joy to share this experience with our partners."

Julie Finch
CEO Hay Festival Foundation Ltd

"Nairobi Litfest celebrates the best of local and global literature, inviting artists, writers and dreamers to share their stories and explore new perspectives. These spaces have never felt more important and the growing collaboration between our teams continues an exciting new chapter for us in Kenya and around the world."

Cristina Fuentes La Roche
Hay Festival Global International Director

"Nairobi Litfest is a festival built by many hands and sustained by a shared belief in the power of sharing ideas. Each successful edition is a result of our guests, audiences and partners showing up for each other, for their communities and for storytelling. It is a true labour of love and we can't wait to share NBOLitfest 2026 with you!"

Wanjiru Koinange
Book Bunk Co-Founder and
Nairobi Litfest Co-Director





The programme in detail

This year's theme explored **how speculative cartography and South-to-South connections make visible new worlds**, inviting audiences to rethink boundaries, imagine alternative futures, and engage with ideas that traversed geographies, disciplines, and perspectives. Across the programme, the festival remained in continuous dialogue, questioning representation and reconfiguring reality through decisive action, bold dialogue, and fearless organisation.

The 2026 programme features masterclasses, panel discussions, performances, and a dedicated children's festival.

Masterclasses

Masterclasses spanned fiction writing, autobiography, poetry, curatorial practice, and indie publishing, led by acclaimed practitioners including **Lina Meruane** (Chile/Palestina) Premio Iberoamericano de Letras José Donoso and Guggenheim Fellow; **Dr. Nick Makoha** (Uganda/UK) Brunel International African Poetry Prize winner and TS Eliot Prize shortlist; **Ellah Wakatama OBE** (Zimbabwe) Chair, Caine Prize for African Writing; **Ciku Kimeria** (Kenya) Bloomberg Opinion columnist and author, **Richard Oduor Oduku** (Kenya) BSFA longlisted; and **Dr. Portia Malatjie** (South Africa) Adjunct Curator at Tate Modern and UCT Emerging Researcher Award.

Film and curatorial practice

Film and curatorial practice were also spotlighted, with **Moussa Sene Absa** (Senegal), **Maia Lekow** and **Chris King** (Kenya), **Dr. Portia Malatjie** (South Africa), and **Lola Shoneyin** (Nigeria), highlighting how creative work remaps knowledge, culture, and possibility across borders.

Panel discussions

Panel discussions brought together leading international voices such as **Alain Mabanckou** (Congo), **Natasha Brown** (UK), **Lesley Nneka Arimah** (Nigeria), **Safiya Sinclair** (Jamaica), **Inua Ellams** (UK/Nigeria), **Pol Vouillamoz** (Switzerland/Spain), **Mahmud El Sayed** (Egypt/UK), **Marta Peirano** (Spain), **Yvonne Owuor** and **Nanjala Nyabola** (Kenya), exploring imagination, identity, social change, speculative futures, and the intersections of literature, technology, activism, and ecology.

Children's sessions

Children's sessions featured storytelling, music and movement, chess, puppetry, and painting, alongside interactive "make and take" activities, led by facilitators including **Tunde Onakoya** (Nigeria) and the Kenyans **Muthoni Maina**, **Orpah Agunda**, **Michael Mutahi** and **Prisca Ojwang**, creating playful and engaging experiences for young learners.

The Festival in numbers

days **3**

artists **34**

events **30**

atendees **1,067**

stages **8**

live digital event views **2,250**

press mentions **40**

web page views **11.8K**

content views across festivals

Facebook
1,072,889

Instagram
6,944,537

TikTok
27,368

YouTube
1,853








Hay Festival Global
NAIROBI
Litfest
a festival of ideas



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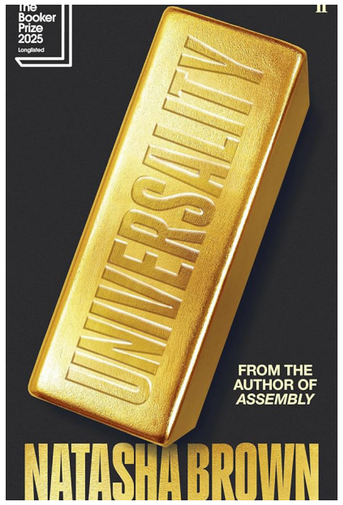


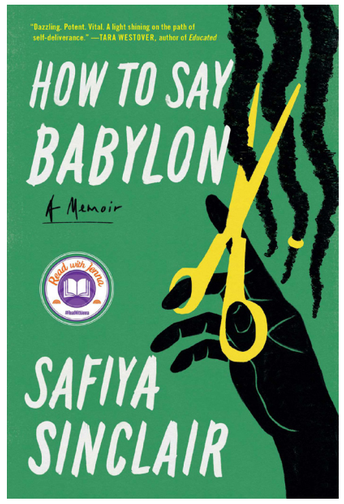


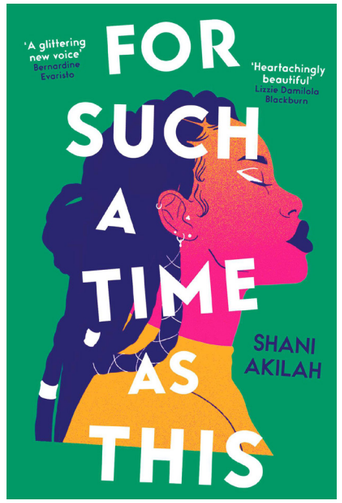
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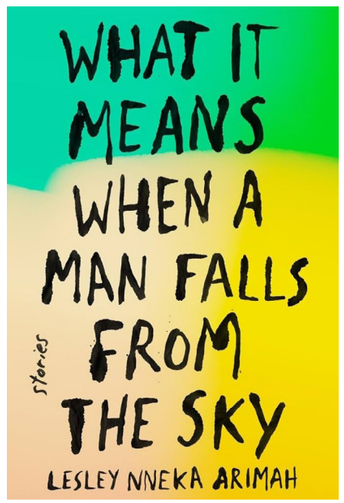


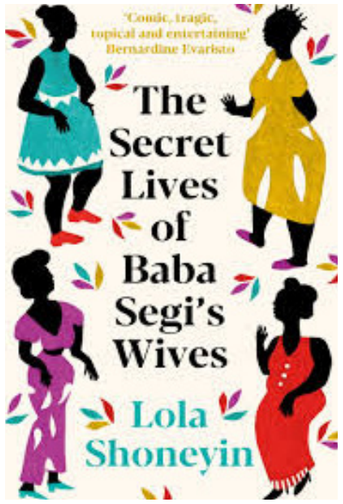






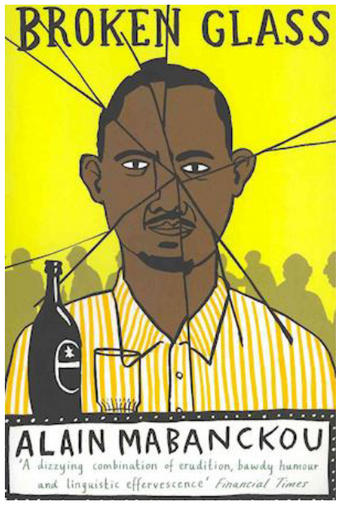












Bestselling books



Overall bestsellers

1. Lola Shoneyin, *Tunde the Chess Champion:*
2. Natasha Brown, *Universality*
3. Safiya Sinclair, *How to Say Babylon*
4. Shani Akila, *For Such a Time Like This*
5. Inua Ellams, *Half God of Rainfall*
6. Lesley Nneka Arimah, *What It Means When A Man Falls From The Sky*
7. Lola Shoneyin, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*
8. Alain Mabanckou, *Tomorrow I'll Be Twenty*
9. Alain Mabanckou, *African Psycho*
10. Alain Mabanckou, *Broken Glass*





The Secret Lives of Baha Segi's Wives
Lola Shoneyin



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ROCK RING


ALAIN MABANCKOU
AFRICAN PSYCHO






The Festival in the media

Press mentions

RFI Kenya

Nairobi Litfest roundup

Capital FM Kenya

2026 Nairobi Litfest Programme Launches with a Celebration of Imaginative Worlds

KBC Channel 1 News

Nairobi Litfest 2026 to highlight storytelling and new narratives

The People Daily

For Love of Books (print newspaper)

The Nairobian

Nairobi Litfest is On (print newspaper)

Nairobi Litfest 2026 Wraps Up In Style (print newspaper)

Writing Africa

Nairobi LitFest 2026 starts May 8

Kenyan Vibe

Rewriting The Rules: Nairobi LitFest Is Back This May

Leisure Collective

Nairobi Litfest 2026: imagination, identity and new worlds across three historic libraries

In Nairobi

The 5th edition of the Nairobi Litfest is taking place from May 8-10, 2026, bringing together a diverse group of local and international writers, artists, and thinkers for a celebration of ideas, literature, and culture.

KBC digital

Nairobi Litfest roundup

Nairobi Litfest 2026 to highlight storytelling and new narratives

Mutoriah to provide live music experience at Nairobi Litfest

Epicpulse Magazine

Book Bunk and Hay Festival Global successfully concluded the 2026 edition of Nairobi Litfest successfully

The Festival in quotes

“Nairobi Litfest is a space where thinkers, writers, and readers come together to exchange ideas that shape how we see the world and deepen our shared sense of belonging. It has been a joy to engage with the children through chess, connect with audiences, and experience the warmth of the people and culture.”

Tunde Onakoya, Convener, Chess in Slums Africa

“Nairobi Litfest created space for honest, layered, and at times uncomfortable conversations to take place openly and without dilution. In a world where conservation discourse is often carefully curated to preserve existing power structures, it was refreshing (and necessary) to engage an audience so receptive to nuance, lived experience, and critical reflection.”

Fiona Tande, Founder and Director of Pridelands Films and Pridelands Wildlife Film Festival (PWFF)

“Book festivals create spaces where people from different backgrounds can connect through stories, culture, and conversation. They encourage us to engage with different perspectives, build community, and foster a sense of belonging.”

Natoya Blackwood, Jamaica Book Festival

“This moment was scared. The words, the voice of honesty in the artist, the silence and the presence of the audience, a delivery tha pierces through the collective.”

Reviewer_africanbooks

“Art is more than a creative activity; it’s a space where children can express themselves, think for themselves, and discover new ways of seeing the world. Giving them the freedom to create is one of the greatest gifts we can offer.”

Prica Pjwang, Founder the Art Club Kenya

“A time was had at this year’s Nairobi Litfest. From meeting some of my fvourite authors, getting to interact with the incredible community that is bookish people, the food, the drinks, the vibes- the conversations! The excellent panels! This is my fourth Litfest and it keeps getting better and better. Thanka a bunch to the team for having me as sunday’s host, it was an absolute pleasure.”

Kui Kubala, Festival Host

“A friend put me onto “how to say Babylon” by Safiya Sinclair and I couldn’t find the book in the local stores at the time, so I opted to read-listen to the book on audio and it was a powerful 16 hours. So glad I got to hear this in her voice and meet her at Nairobi Litfest!”

Festival Attendee

“This experience has taught me so much about myself, people and even about the festival and the work Book Bunk does with libraries. It opened my eyes to a whole new world of literature and I challenged myself in ways I never thought I could.”

Festival Volunteer



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.

Library venues are provided as part of Book Bunk's partnership with Nairobi City County.

Thank you

MAIN FESTIVAL PARTNERS

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

BRITISH COUNCIL | THE AFRICA CENTRE
UK/Kenya Season 2025

Hawthornden Foundation

NAIROBI CITY COUNTY

PROGRAMMING PARTNERS

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THE CAINE PRIZE FOR AFRICAN WRITING
Always something new from Africa

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KENYA AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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SOMA NAMI BOOKS

OX MOBILITY Car Rental & Beyond

Jibu

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EXQUISITE EATS

trademark SUITES AT ENAKI TOWN

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TILANG AMBULANCE SERVICES
Our Mission Is Your Health

SR SHOW RUNNERS

KEBEJO CATERING SERVICE

MEDIA PARTNERS

About Book Bunk

Through a partnership with Nairobi City County, Book Bunk transforms dilapidated libraries into creative hubs for underserved communities through architectural restoration, provision of collections and resources, preservation of cultural heritage, and delivery of programmes focused on arts education, skills development and lifelong learning.

The organisation's restoration approach addresses architectural, social, experiential and digital needs through community participation. **Book Bunk has restored two historic libraries, increasing patronage by 250% and in 2024, served 45,326 library users.**

To date, they have digitised **396,849 archives** for public access, served over **39,000 programme participants**, added **19,000 new titles** to libraries and created braille translations of key works by African authors.

How to Build a Library, a documentary film about the organisation's work premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2025. *A Palace for The People*, their podcast series, explores archival materials that connect library restoration work to Kenya's history. Nairobi Litfest, an annual literary festival, is co-presented with Hay Festival Global.





Hay Festival around the world

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

The antidote to polarisation, Hay Festival brings 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 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-nine 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
(4–6 September 2026)

Hay Festival Segovia, Spain
(10–13 September 2026)

Lviv BookForum, Ukraine
(11–13 September 2026)

Hay Festival Forum Dallas, USA
(16–18 October 2026)

Hay Festival Arequipa, Peru
(5–8 November 2026)

Hay Festival Hay-on-Wye Winter Weekend, UK
(26–29 November 2026)

Hay Festival Jericó, Colombia
(22–24 January 2027)

Hay Festival Forum Medellín, Colombia
(26–27 January 2027)

Hay Festival Cartagena de Indias, Colombia
(28–31 January 2027)

Nairobi LitFest, Kenya
(7–9 May 2027)

Hay Festival Hay-on-Wye, UK
(27 May–6 June 2027)

Discover a world of different

ideas
books
perspectives
debates
views
dance
workshops
art
thinking
music
comedy
voices
possibilities
walks
poetry

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Facebook: NBO Litfest
Instagram: @nbolitfest
TikTok: @nbolitfest

hayfestival.org/nbolitfest