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Emirates Airline Festival of Literature 2026 to take place on January 21-27

The line-up includes many recognisable names and returning fan favourites

Last updated: November 26, 2025 | 22:11

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Dubai: The Emirates Literature Foundation revealed the line-up and programme highlights for the 2026 Emirates Airline Festival of Literature at an exclusive event at the Theatre of Digital Art (ToDA) in Souk Madinat Jumeirah. The morning celebrated shared stories, the human journey, and collective hope for the future, all through the rich lens of Emirati traditions.

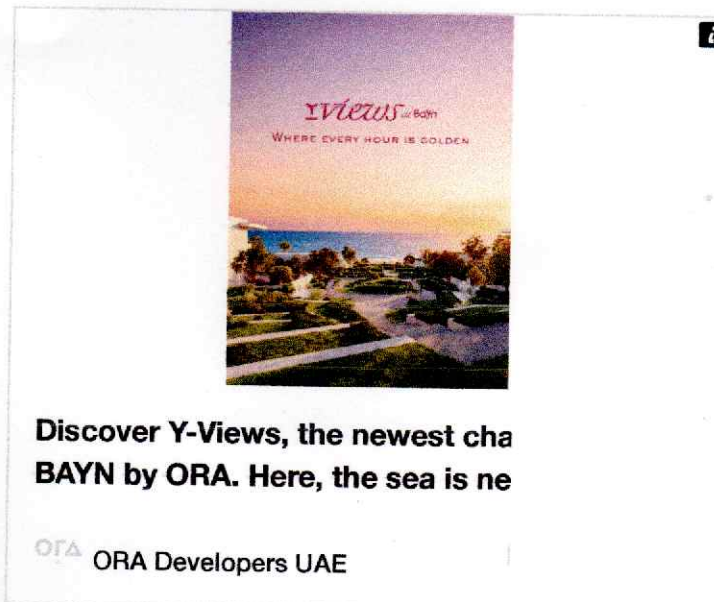
Held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai, the 18th edition of what is considered one of the world's top ten literary festivals will take place at the InterContinental Dubai Festival City from 21-27 January 2026. The festival will host a VIP panel to celebrate the book 'Life Taught Me' by Sheikh Mohammed.

The line-up includes many recognisable names including RF Kuang, New York Times bestselling author of 'Yellowface'; crime writer Ruth Ware, whose novel 'The Woman in Cabin 10' has been adapted for Netflix; Samantha Shannon, the fantasy powerhouse behind the bestselling 'The Bone Season' series; Ezzat Elkamhawi, contemporary Arab author and recipient of the Naguib Mahfouz Medal; Omar Taher, Egyptian novelist and poet; Dr. Shahla Ujayli, winner of the Jordan State Literature Award; Rachel Clarke, Women's Prize for Non-Fiction winner; Caleb Azumah Nelson, British Book Award winner for Debut Fiction; writer Curtis Jobling whose young adult series 'Wereworld' has been adapted into the Netflix show 'Wolf King'; Ali Al Mazmi, celebrated Emirati poet and recipient of the Silk Road Literature Prize; Plestia Alaqad, award-winning Palestinian journalist; Big Manny, science powerhouse turned TikTok star; MC Grammar, rapper and Global World Book Day Ambassador; and Asma Khan, London-based restaurateur, and Netflix's 'Chef's Table' star.

Returning to the LitFest stage are fan favourites Shamma Al Bastaki, Salama Bint Hamdan Emerging Artists Fellow; Oyinkan Braithwaite, winner of Crime and Thriller Book of the Year; Hoda Barakat, first female winner of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction; Jalal Barjas, Katara Prize for Arabic Novel winner; Saud Al

Sanousi, multi award-winning Kuwaiti novelist; Badriah Albeshr, renowned Saudi journalist and media personality; Salha Obaid, Al Owais Creative Writing Award winner; Shashi Tharoor, former diplomat and recipient of France's highest civilian award; and Oliver Jeffers MBE, Blue Peter Book award-winning illustrator and author.

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“As we prepare to welcome audiences to the 18th anniversary of the Emirates LitFest, we keep in mind that the vision of our Foundation is a society built on reading and storytelling that supports UAE’s position as a global literary hub,” said Ahlam Bolooki, CEO of Emirates Literature Foundation, Director of Emirates Airline Festival of Literature, and Managing Director of ELF Publishing.

“The Festival continues to inspire curiosity and foster connection, offering something for everyone. In a world that can feel divided or distracted, I invite you to join us and to pause, read, and rediscover what unites us as humans on a shared journey,” she said.

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The Emirates Airline Festival of Literature is held with the support of Title Sponsor, Emirates Airline, and Founding Partner, Dubai Culture and Arts Authority (Dubai Culture).

Boutros Boutros, Emirates' Executive Vice President for Corporate Communications, Marketing and Brand, said: "Emirates believes in the power of stories to connect people, challenge us, and expand our sense of what's possible. It's been gratifying to see this event grow in prominence and provide the many talents in our region with a true platform to showcase their creativity and ideas. Seeing the programme for the 2026 edition come to life – filled with bold voices, fresh perspectives, and writers who are reshaping the literary landscape – is an absolute delight. We're proud to support a festival that continues to inspire readers and ignite imagination across our community."

Dubai Culture is supporting two strands at the LitFest: 'Bil Emirati,' which celebrates the crème de la crème of Emirati creatives, and 'Translation,' which highlights translation as a cultural bridge. It will also be supporting the Literary Luminary Prize, which honours Emirati storytellers whose work in the written and spoken word has played a key role in inspiring young creatives and strengthening the UAE's standing as a global literary hub. The recipient of this year's award will be announced at the Festival's opening ceremony.

Among distinguished attendees expected at the LitFest are Reem Al Hashimy, UAE Minister of State for International Cooperation; Sheikh Salem bin Khalid Al Qassimi, UAE Minister of Culture; HE

Omar Saif Ghobash, Assistant Minister for Culture and Public Diplomacy; Dr Abdulaziz Al Musallam, Chairman of Sharjah Institute for Heritage; Sultan Sooud AlQassemi, Founder of Barjeel Art Foundation; Dr Sultan Al Amimi, Chairman of the Emirates Writers Union; and Ibrahim Al Thahli, prominent Emirati travel documenter. Notable authors and poets taking centre stage at the Emirates LitFest include Shihab Ghanem, Al Owais Creativity award-winner; Nadia Al Najjar, who has been shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction; Reem Al Kamali, Sharjah Creativity Award winner; Fatima Al-Mazrouie, Emirates Novel Award winner; Safia AlShehi, journalist and writer; Emirates Writers Union member Maryam AlZarooni; and poet and publisher Ali AlShaali. The children's genre is also strongly represented with the participation of Hessa Almehairi, Sheikh Zayed Book Award-winning children's writer; Maitha Al Khayat, prize-winning children's author and illustrator; Rawan Alyahmadi, artist, writer, and inclusion advocate; Noura Al Khoori, children's author and translator; and author, educator, and storyteller Ebtisam Al-Beiti.

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Shaima Rashed Al Suwaidi, CEO of the Arts, Design and Literature Sector at Dubai Culture, expressed the Authority's pride in its strategic partnership with the Emirates Airline Festival of

Literature, noting its role in enriching Dubai's cultural landscape and supporting the growth of a knowledge- and innovation-driven economy. She said: "This collaboration with the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature nurtures and empowers emerging voices, strengthens the cultural and creative industries, and advances the fields of publishing and translation, both of which are integral components of the creative economy. Together, these efforts reinforce Dubai's position as a global centre for culture, an incubator for creativity, and a thriving hub for talent."

Al Suwaidi added: "Through our support for the 'Literary Luminary Prize' and the two key strands 'Bil Emirati' and 'Translation,' we aim to provide an innovative platform for the exchange of ideas and to spotlight the contributions of Emirati intellectuals. This work helps create an environment that fosters stronger connections between local writers and their counterparts from around the world, while acknowledging the vital role translators play in fostering intercultural dialogue and building understanding across communities."

Befitting its position as the Arab World's largest celebration of the written and spoken word, the LitFest will pay homage to some of the most renowned Arab awards and prizes. Sultan Bin Ali Al Owais Cultural Foundation will celebrate the centenary of the birth of the UNESCO-recognised Emirati poet Sultan Bin Ali Al Owais. The Sheikh Zayed Book Award will mark its 20th anniversary of recognising literary excellence with a special dinner. The Saif Ghobash Banipal Translation Prize will commemorate its 20th anniversary of honouring exceptional translations with a dinner celebration for its award winners over the years. The Ibn Battuta Award for Geographic Literature will curate a panel discussion encapsulating its journey celebrating Arab and Islamic geographic literature over a quarter century.

The LitFest has rolled out an app for a seamless visitor experience,

from booking to check-in. Users can personalise their Festival journey in an environmentally friendly way, with access to their itinerary, reminders, and special offers in one place.

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The Festival has categorised the more than 200 sessions on the programme into strands and activity types to help attendees choose events based on their interests. State of Now brings together bold thinkers, frontline journalists, and cultural commentators to help audiences make sense of the world in flux. How To offers practical wisdom from the world's leading minds – writers, psychologists, crisis negotiators, and change-makers – ready to share their hard-gained insights. Fantastic Fiction celebrates masterful storytelling in all its forms. Expect plot twists, big ideas, and conversations that go beyond the page. Writers' Corner is a dedicated space for storytellers of every kind, from aspiring novelists, creative illustrators, and published professionals. LitFest Families offers a world of fun and

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Emirates Airline Festival of Literature...



Festival visitors who savour special experiences can celebrate An Ode Tae Robbie Burns with Scottish poets; join the murder mystery

dinner Highrise Homicide, where the intrigue rises with every elevator stop, and enjoy Desert Stanzas with a star-studded line-up of storytellers, poets, and performers.

Ticket prices start at Dh50, and the LitFest is also offering two passes for visitors to enjoy flexible access to a wide selection of events. The Conversations Pass, priced at Dh400, provides entry to a diverse range of sessions in both English and Arabic. This pass is ideal for those who wish to explore a variety of discussions and literary perspectives throughout the event. For those wanting to do a deep dive into the richness of traditional and contemporary Arabic literature and thought, the Bil Arabi Pass, priced at Dh100, offers access to multiple sessions and panel discussions.

Exclusive perks are available for Foundation Friends, members of the LitFest's loyalty programme. These include a 20% discount on all ticket categories, including workshops and special events, as well as priority booking, reserved seating, access to the Foundation Friends Lounge, and invitations to exclusive events both during the Festival and throughout the year.

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The best time for non-members to purchase tickets is from Tuesday, 25 November, to Sunday, 28 December 2025, when they

can enjoy 15% off the session price using the early-bird discount.

There are almost 200 speakers from 40 different nationalities confirmed to appear at the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature 2026. The lineup (in alphabetical order) comprises: Aarvi Paleja, Abdelouahab Aissaoui, Abdulaziz Al Musallam, Abdulla Al Anazi, Abdullah Alkadi, Abdulrahman Alhumairy, Abdulwahab Alhammadi, Affan Adeel, Ahmed Al Saadawi, Ahmed ElMorsy, Ahmed N Barqawi, Alastair Chisholm, Alawiya Sobh, Alex Shaw, Alexander McCall Smith, Ali Al Mazmi, Ali AlShaali, Ali Sparkes, Aloush Alswait, Alwaleed Abdullah Alneyadi, Alwyn Hamilton, Amal Al Marri, Amaryllis Abu, Annabel Kantaria, Asma Khan, Aube Rey Lescure, Aysha Sultan, Badriah Albeshr, Bashayer Alatrouzi, Beatrice Cross, Bettany Hughes, Big Manny, Brent Shuttleworth, Caleb Azumah Nelson, Carlos Andrés Gómez, Chloe Pierre, Curtis Jobling, Dai Rahmi, Danabelle Gutierrez, Diana Darke, Ebtisam Al-Beiti, Eowyn Ivey, Eve Wersocki-Morris, Ezzat Elkamhawi, Fatima Al-Mazrouie, Freya North, Greg McLeod, Greg Mosse, Hafsa Lodi, Hala Alyan, Hamda Alzarouni, Hamdan Al Shehhi, Hamza Kenawi, Hanin Omar, Hannah Gold, Hasan Madan, Hayley Mae Masters, Hessa Almehairi, Hessa Lootah, Hoda Barakat, Inua Ellams, Jalal Barjas, Jamie Smart, Jemima Forrester, Jane Pica, Janette Ayachi, Jeremy Bowen, Jessica Kahawty, Jessica Smith, Joanna Barakat, John Patrick Green, Judy Murray, Kathy Urban, Kelly L Weinersmith, Ken Liu, Keshava Guha, Khalfan Belhoul, Layla Almotawa, Leigh Hodgkinson, Leyth Sharaf, Louise Candlish, Lucy Strange, Lulwa Yaser Al Ali, Mahdi Hanna, Maitha Al Khayat, Manupriam Seth, Mariana Missakian, Marjorie Lotfi, Maryam AlZarooni, Mark Fiddes, Matt Goodfellow, MC Grammar, Meera Almansoori, Meera Yusef Malalla Al Khemeiri, Mehran Gul, Meredith Miller, Michael Pedersen, Mira Sethi, Mirna Elmahdy, Mishaal Asjad, Mohamed Fathi, Mohamed Samir Nada, Mohammad Abdulrahman AlKaabi, Mohammed Hamed Abedin, Mohammed Alhebsi, Mounir Hayek, Mushata Matei, Myles McLeod, Myrna

Ayad, Nada AlShaali, Nadia Al Najjar, Naeema Al Hosani, Naga Munchetty, Nasir Nasrallah, Neil Shubin, Nizrana Farook, Nora Zeid, Noura Al Khoori, Noura Al Noman, Nouri Al Jarrah, Oindrila Chakraborty, Oli Munson, Oliver Jeffers, Omar Saif Ghobash, Omer Taher, Oyinkan Braithwaite, Paul Dolan, Peter Frankopan, Petr Horáček, Peter Mackay, Philip Reeve, Plestia Alaqad, R.F. Kuang, Raafat Hekmat, Rachel Bright, Rachel Clarke, Rashmi Sirdeshpande, Rawan Alyahmadi, Reem Al Hashimy, Reem Al Kamali, Rob Biddulph, Ross MacKenzie, Ruchi Mhasane, Ruth Ware, Rhys Johnston, Saeed Rashed AlMansouri, Safia AlShehi, Salha Obaid, Samantha Shannon, Sammar Shabir, Sara Hamdan, Sarah McIntyre, Saud Alsanousi, Scott Turow, Scott Walker, Saif Al Neyadi, Shahina A. Ghazanfar, Shahla Ujayli, Shamma Al Bastaki, Sharon King-Chai, Shashi Tharoor, Shereen Malherbe, Shihab Ghanem, Shireen Sabanegh, Simon Armitage, Simon Mole, Soukaina Habiballah, Sue Wickison, Sultan Al Amimi, Sultan Al Shehhi, Sultan Sooud AlQassemi, Tarek El-Ariss, Thomas Doherty, Thor Pedersen, Tia Watson, Uttama Kirit Patel.

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