

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

GTLF 2026 Announces Line-Up of Writers and Speakers, and Programme Highlights for "*Cosmopolises*"

George Town, Penang, Malaysia – 5 August 2026 – The George Town Literary Festival (GTLF), organised by the Penang Institute, unveiled programme highlights for its 2026 edition, alongside the majority of its participating writers and speakers for the Festival, themed "*Cosmopolises*" this year.

GTLF 2026 will take place from **27 to 29 November** in George Town, Penang, continuing its role as a leading platform for literary and cultural exchange in Malaysia and the region.

The Festival remains largely free and open to the public, apart from selected workshops and programmes.

Confirmed GTLF venues

GTLF 2026 will be held at two main venues in George Town: **Wisma Yeap Chor Ee**, in collaboration with Digital Penang, and **Bangunan U.A.B.**, in collaboration with Think City.

A festival shaped by cities and shared worlds

The notion of "*Cosmopolises*" invites audiences to think of cities not only as lived and flowing spaces for human encounters, exchanges, and coexistence. These spaces differ greatly in their histories, cultural constitutions, and socio-economic realities. Within them, difference is normal, strangers learn to dwell together, and histories overlap rather than replace one another. GTLF 2026 explores the cultural wealth of such shared worlds.

Festival Director Dato' Dr Ooi Kee Beng said the theme "*Cosmopolises*" reflects the vibrancy and complexity of city life, shaped by contact, adaptation, and exchange.

"At a time when identities are increasingly policed and borders harden, this theme invites audiences to reflect on how people live together, navigate differences, and share experiences in cities around the world."

GTLF 2026 reveals line-up of writers, speakers, and thinkers

GTLF is pleased to announce its line-up of participating writers, poets, speakers, moderators, and contributors for its 2026 edition, bringing together **51 voices from Malaysia and beyond, representing 20 countries and territories**. GTLF 2026 features a diverse range of perspectives, including voices from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Palestine, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, Vietnam, and more.

The line-up includes Alice Jolly, Amelie Skoda, Amir Muhammad, Ananya Jahanara Kabir, Anitha Devi Pillai, Asmaa Azaizeh, Bernice Chauly, Cecil Rajendra, Christopher Chu, Evren Sharma, Gaea Schoeters, Hanna Alkaf, Janet Tay, Jeremy Tiang, Josh Stenberg, Kathrina Mohd Daud, Kirsten Han, Kuo Chiang-Sheng, Lo Sirong, Maggie Hoi, Malachi Edwin Vethamani, Martin Vengadesan, Maznah Mohamad, Melanie Katz, Minh Bui Jones, Muhammad Haji Salleh, Normawar Marzuki, Ratih Kumala, Robin Ruizendaal, Sam Sussman, Samantha Chong, San Mon Aung, Sara Kelly, Somnath Batabyal, Tan Twan Eng, Tuan Phan, Viji Krishnamoorthy, Wazir Jahan, Wiley Ho, Xu Xi, and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow.

As the Festival continues to develop, more speakers might be added to the line-up. The Festival retains its established multi-format structure, featuring panel discussions, literary readings and book launches, workshops and student programmes, and performances and fringe events.

Opening ceremony highlight: *"Letters of the Penang Diaspora"*

GTLF 2026 will open with ***"Letters of the Penang Diaspora"***, a special programme featuring readings of personal letters written by Penangites who studied, worked, or lived abroad, exploring themes of migration, memory, and connection across borders and generations.

The public is invited to submit written letters sent home by Penangites who studied, worked, or lived abroad, with selected submissions to be featured during the opening ceremony. Submissions are still open.

GTLF student engagement programme: *"Languages I Live In"*

GTLF continues its commitment to youth and education through its student engagement initiative, ***"Languages I Live In: Student Short Films & Reflective Essays"***, providing a

platform for young students to explore language, identity, and lived experiences through creative expression.

The programme invites students to create short clips and reflective essays that explore their relationships with language and the cities they inhabit, encouraging them to express their ideas through visual storytelling and reflective writing.

With the additional support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Australian High Commission, selected works from the programme will be featured in a special exhibition at GTLF 2026, creating a dedicated space for students to share their stories with Festival audiences. A student reading session will also be held.

Participating schools are St. Xavier's Institution, SMJK Chung Ling, SMKA Al-Mashoor, and Prince of Wales Island International School.

Sponsors, partners, and collaborative development

GTLF 2026 is made possible through the continued support of its Platinum Sponsor, **Greatech Technology**; and Gold Sponsor, **HSBC Malaysia**; whose commitment continues to strengthen the Festival's sustainability.

Dato' Seri Tan Eng Kee, Co-Founder and CEO of Greatech Technology, said:

"Behind every innovation is an idea, and every idea begins with a dream. Greatech's journey was shaped by learning, perseverance, and imagination. As a proud Penang-born company and Platinum Sponsor of the George Town Literary Festival 2026, we are honoured to support a platform that celebrates knowledge, creativity, and cultural exchange, inspiring generations to discover possibilities and pursue dreams of their own."

The Festival also continues to work with cultural, educational, community, and diplomatic partners, including the Australian High Commission, the Embassy of the Kingdom of Belgium, the High Commission of Canada, the Embassy of France, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Embassy of Switzerland, the British Council, the Goethe-Institut Malaysia, Pro Helvetia, and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office.

GTLF also collaborates with state, media, programme, and individual partners, including Penang Global Tourism, Mekong Review, Eksentrika, Aida Redza, Penang Hidden Gems, and Penang Walkabouts, whose support enriches the Festival's programme and helps broaden the Festival's reach, visibility, and public engagement efforts.

The Festival warmly welcomes sponsorship from individuals and organisations that wish to contribute to the GTLF's continued growth, with sponsors enjoying benefits such as guaranteed access to the Festival programmes.

Looking ahead

Further announcements, including additional participants, full programme details, and the official schedule, will be updated on the Festival website and social media channels in the coming months. Registration details will be made available closer to the Festival dates. The Festival continues to collaborate with CloudJoi as its official ticketing partner.

The public is encouraged to follow updates via the official GTLF website and social media channels.

For partnership and volunteering enquiries, please contact Penang Institute at **gtlf@penanginstitute.org**.

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Official Channels:

Website: www.georgetownlitfest.com

Instagram: www.instagram.com/penanginstitute

Facebook: www.facebook.com/PenangInstitute

About George Town Literary Festival

Established in 2011, the George Town Literary Festival is Malaysia's leading international literary festival and the only one in Southeast Asia to have won the London Book Fair International Excellence Award. It is a popular event that brings together writers, thinkers, and audiences from across the region and beyond through discussion panels, book launches, practical workshops, and inspirational performances.

About Penang Institute

Penang Institute, one of Malaysia's leading think tanks, was established in 1997 as SERI and was renamed in 2011 to echo Penang's stature as an intellectual and cultural hub in the region. With the tagline "Making Ideas Work," it fosters bold thinking through research, public policy briefs, literature and cultural events, multilingual podcasts, and its acclaimed magazine, Penang Monthly. Official website: <https://penanginstitute.org/>.

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