

WORDS TO WOODS: A LIT FEST IN THE HILLS

In a first on the books scene in the country, the Kumaon Literary Festival aims to bring together the best of literature and local culture from the hills

BOOKS

Bhutan isn't the only country that can boast of a literature festival in the mountains now. India will witness its very first edition of a lit fest in the hills this year, and word-lovers can experience everything from poetry reading in oak forests to sessions from leading authors, film celebs and thought leaders.

The Kumaon Literary Festival (KLF), to be held from October 23-27 in Dhanachuli — a quaint little village near Mukteshwar — aims to combine the best of literature with local culture. The sessions, spread over five days, are experimental in format. Speakers and attendees will interact by going for walks; poetry would be read in orchards and the

surrounding woods near the main venue — a hill retreat called Te Aroha — and doors of over two dozen summerhouses will open to participants. On the last day, the fest will travel to Nainital.

"KLF is designed as deep in content, high in profile and experiential in format. It will be a retreat festival. I am humbled by the overwhelming support I have received from the planning board, publishing houses, authors and other partners," says Sumant Batra, festival founder and noted lawyer.

Apart from participating authors such as Advaita Kala, Anuja Chauhan, Siddhartha Gigoo, Sudeep Sen and actors Olivier Lafont, Tisca Chopra and Danish Husain, the fest has a planning board which includes Priya Kapoor, Janhavi Prasada, Sujata Prashar, Kiran Manral, Saif

Mahmood and Rishi Suri.

"We generally travel to be able to read and write at peace, so it's great that we finally have a lit fest in the hills," says Anuj Joshi, 22, a book lover in the city.

What's also making young literature lovers in the city look forward to the fest is its many social and interactive aspects. For example, 30 students from schools of mountain villages will be selected to participate through a competition, and be part of workshops to develop their English and Hindi reading and writing, poetry and story writing skills. What's more, 20 young editors of college magazines from Delhi and beyond will chronicle the first edition of the fest, which will be an annual affair.



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Top: The film memorabilia museum, Chitrashala, where cinema-related sessions will be held; Above: the fest will spill over to the hills. Right: Israeli poet Amir Or during a previous writers' retreat