



NEIGHBORS

LINEUP FOR 2022 EMIRATES AIRLINE FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE



Ahlam Bolooki, Director of the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature, during an immersive event at Expo 2020 revealing the full lineup for 2022 Emirates Airline Festival of Literature.

‘Here comes the sun’

flyin’ high for a good read

The 2022 Emirates Airline Festival of Literature, one of the top literary festivals in the world and the biggest celebration of stories in the Middle East, will take audiences behind the screen and into the heart of some of the most compelling stories of recent time. Authors of Netflix sensations *Bridgerton* by Julia Quinn and *Chernobyl* 1986 by Serhii Plokhy; silver screen smash hit *House of Gucci* by Sara Gay Forden; the tv show *No Music at Al Ahmadi* by Mona Al Shammari; and superstar animators Mohammed Saeed Harib, creator of *Freej*, and Ken Arto, animator of *Demon Slayer*, are all coming to the Festival, 3-12 February.

The full line-up, which was revealed at an immersive event at Expo 2020 featuring a soulful performance by Emirati singer Arqam, captures the spirit of this year’s Festival theme, ‘Here Comes the Sun’. The majority of sessions will be taking place at its brand new canal-side home for 2022, the Habtoor City Hotels. Other big names in the packed programme include Gary Vaynerchuck, Nadiya Hussain, David Walliams, Iman Mersal, Indra Nooyi, Mark Billingham, Shahad Al Rawi and Omar Saif Ghobash; actor Ben Miller, who starred as Lord Archibald Featherington in *Bridgerton*, with his latest children’s book; YouTuber Ahmed El Ghandour, aka Al Da7ee7; while master thriller writer David Baldacci will be joining the Festival virtually.

Ahlam Bolooki, director of the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature said: “It’s exciting to be at the dawn of a new era – one where we are more aware of our connections to each other and the world around us, as is reflected in many of the sessions. We are thrilled to be able to welcome international authors back in person, and brimming with excitement about our new venue, our phenomenal programme, and as always, the unforgettable stories the Festival will give rise to. We have some very special sessions planned for the coming edition, and I am telling everyone to book early because if you blink, you will miss your chance.”

Special events

Audiences can feel the fear at the special ‘Fright Night’, an evening of thrills and chills with sessions paying homage to horror, crime and all things dark. The Fear Factor panel brings together Hanna Alkaf, David Eagleman, Polly Phillips and Waleed Owdah, who will be spiralling into the deep dark pits of terror.

Celebrating Charles Dickens’ birthday on 7 February, the Festival invites audiences to Miss Havisham’s Wedding, starring special guest Lucinda Dickens Hawksley, the great-great-granddaughter of the man himself and author of many books about women in history.

Not to be missed is the magical evening at Expo 2020 Dubai with stars of spoken word, the incomparable Carlos Andrés Gómez and Dubai’s Dr Afra Atiq, accompanied musically by Nashville-based singer/songwriter Brent Shuttleworth.

Performance poetry is always a hugely popular element of the Festival and this year is no exception, with a stellar international cast featuring Nikita Gill, Noor Naga, Queena Bergen and Sascha A Akhtar, joining UAE talents Danelle Gutierrez, Farah Ali, Zainab Arrefai and Amal Al Sahlawi. The Festival’s signature event, *Desert Stanzas*, returns with captivating spoken word performances from top artists, set against the atmospheric starlit backdrop.

Fiction

Novelists flying in from across the globe include the hottest new talent Brit Bennet (*The Vanishing Half*), C Pam Zhang (*How Much of These Hills Is Gold*), Lucy Foley (*The Guest List*) and Felicia Yap (*Yesterday*). There is also crime writing star Mark Billingham, Alka Joshi (*The Henna Artist*) and

renowned author David Grossman, who won the International Booker with *A Horse Walks Into a Bar*.

Toshikazu Kawaguchi has life-affirming tales of café-based time travel in *Before the Coffee Gets Cold*, Pakistani actress and model Mira Sethi will be talking about her first book of short stories, *Are You Enjoying?* and the former Emirates Writing Prize winner Polly Phillips will be here with her debut novel, *My Best Friend’s Murder*.

The Festival will also host the much anticipated launch of HE Omar Saif Ghobash’s first novel.

Boutros Boutros, Divisional Senior Vice President, Corporate Communications, Marketing and Brand at Emirates said: “This year’s theme for the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature is incredibly fitting with the wonderful opportunities that the event will bring, helping encourage storytelling and in-person conversation, which are at the heart of what makes us human. We’re proud to support an event that gives literature lovers the chance to meet and engage with inspirational authors, and we look forward to helping welcome the star-studded line-up to Dubai. As the title sponsor of the festival, Emirates is committed to supporting the growing cultural, arts and creative industries in Dubai, and we are delighted to bringing people together to discuss some of the biggest issues of our time, and help spread joy and optimism to imagine the world anew.”

The Festival opens on 3 February 2022 with a dedicated Emirati day, and a strong presence throughout the whole of the ten days from writers based in the region.

Dr. Saeed Mubarak bin Kharbash, CEO of the Arts and Literature Sector at Dubai Culture, expressed the Authority’s readiness to enrich this edition of the festival with several events aimed at celebrating culture and spreading the joy of reading and learning among society members, especially the younger generations, and supporting local and international talents, saying: “We are proud to continue our partnership with the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature on the international scene, which cements Dubai’s position as a destination for the exchange of culture and knowledge among people, and as a model for spreading the values of tolerance and peace among different races and cultures. Through this pioneering festival, we offer a valuable platform to stimulate participation and make literature and culture accessible to everyone as well as encouraging the young generation to make reading a daily habit, to inspire them and instil creativity in their souls and minds, and qualify them to follow the emirate’s comprehensive development process.”

Kharbash added: “Through the dedicated Emirati day that we are organising during the festival, we continue to support and empower local talent and provide them with the opportunity to reach global horizons. This contributes to strengthening the cultural and creative industries in the emirate, within the framework of our vision to cement Dubai’s position as a global centre for culture, an incubator for creativity, and a thriving hub for talent as well as achieve the objectives of the Dubai Creative Economy Strategy, which aims to make Dubai the global capital of the creative economy by 2025.”

The first day of the Festival will feature a strong line-up of Emirati authors of all genres, with sessions of short story readings, poetry, panel discussions on diverse topics from writing for cinema, or women in education, to the art and science of being a collector. An esteemed panel of experts will discuss the stigma of being in the arts, while another panel brings together three impressive Emirati women taking unconventional paths: Fatima Al Mansoori, Hana Al Hashimi, and Alamira Reem Al Hashimi.

Life coach Hala Kazim will share her insights into positivity, wellness and mental health, offering practical steps to acceptance.

Food for Thought

Foodies can join the Great British Bake Off star, mental health campaigner and author Nadiya Hussain, for a slice of cake as she shares how her life has been transformed since winning the hit show. Italian restaurateur and TV personality Alessandro Borghese will bring his unique take on his favourite dishes; Salma Serry founder of @Sufra_kitchen, will be talking about the histories, culture and ephemera of food from the SWANA region, and Zahra Abdalla will be there with modern interpretations of Middle Eastern recipes as featured in Zahra’s Kitchen food range.

There’s also Dr Rupy Aujla, bestselling author of *The Doctor’s Kitchen* and *Eat to Beat Illness*, who explains how to create healthy and delicious recipes for optimum mental and physical health.

Arab World

Novelists from the Arab World include acclaimed Egyptian poet and novelist Iman Mersal, winner of the 2021 Sheikh Zayed Book Award for her novel *In the Footsteps of Enayat Al Zayyat*; Bushra Khalfan, putting the experiences of women in the Arab world centre-stage; founder of *Snob Al-Hasn* and prize-winning novelist, Alawiya Sobh; and IPAF-nominated author Rasha Adly. There’s also Selma Dabbagh, chairing a panel to how the erotic and intimate has been depicted by Arab female writers through the ages and the limits to this expression.

Saudi fantasy writer of the popular trilogy, *Orchards of Arabistan*, Osamah Mohammed Al Muslim will be at the Festival, as well as Egyptian author and legal expert Ashraf Al Ashmawi with his latest work, *Orvanelli Lounge* (2021), and Naji Bakhti with his debut novel *Between Beirut and the Moon*, about a young boy who dreams of becoming an astronaut, but must contend with issues closer to home in post-civil war Lebanon.

Ahmad Alzamam will speak about the relationship between writers and publishers in the GCC, while Jalal Bargas discusses writing politics as an Arab Writer, and Sultan Al Mousa tells of his journey as a young writer specialising in history of ancient religions and civilizations, in a panel on historical fiction writing.

History

Marina Wheeler, an Anglo-Indian with roots in what is now Pakistan, explores the story of her mother’s early years which were shaped by the Partition in *The Lost Homestead*. Raphael Cormack gives a taste of the cosmopolitan counterculture in Egypt during the inter-war years of the last century, while Ukrainian author Serhii Plokhy examines *Chernobyl: History of a Tragedy* in his Baillie Gifford Prize-winning work.

Paleoanthropologist, evolutionary biologist and presenter of BBC2’s *Neanderthals: Meet Your Ancestors* Ella Al-Shamahi brings hair raising tales of her adventures as an extreme explorer in the world’s most inhospitable landscapes.

Art and Design

Art and design take centre stage in many of the 2022 Festival sessions. Find out where graphic novelists and animators get their ideas from with two masters of their art, Fumio Obata and Ken Arto. Jessica Cerasi, curator of the 2019 Venice Biennale asks ‘Who’s Afraid of Contemporary Art?’ based on her course at the Tate modern, while Lucinda Dickens Hawksley discusses *What Makes Great Art: 80 Masterpieces Explained* with Myrna

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editor’s choice

