



# ESEA Lit Fest

The UK's award-winning East and South East Asian literary festival

## Sarah Howe, Nicola Dinan, Kenji Morimoto and Xiaolu Guo to appear at ESEA Lit Fest's third flagship festival at Foyles

After two sold out day festivals at Foyles, ESEA Lit Fest returns to Charing Cross Road on Saturday 20th September for a day of conversations, workshops, book signings and a lunchtime bake sale hosted by Polly Chan's Bakehouse fundraising for [Sesame Organisation](#). Marking the UK's sixth ESEA Heritage Month, the festival spotlights a range of East and South East Asian speakers, from award-winning novelists, memoirists and poets, to journalists as well as art, cookery and non-fiction writers.

Presented in partnership with the Bagri Foundation and supported by Hachette UK and their employee network THRIVE, the day opens with a Scribner creative writing workshop led by Ian Russell-Hsieh and the presenters of Eastern Hunnies, and features panel events exploring themes including ambition, silence and domesticity with some of the brightest stars of the ESEA literary landscape. For the first time, it will also feature a fermentation masterclass, led by Instagram sensation Kenji Morimoto.

- **Jeremy Atherton Lin** - author of the National Book Critics Circle Award winner *Gay Bar: Why We Went Out*; his latest work is *Deep House: The Gayest Love Story Ever Told* (Allen Lane)
- **Khairani Barokka** - writer and artist from Jakarta, whose work centres disability justice as anticolonial praxis; author of *Annab, Infinite* (Tilted Axis Press)
- **Polly Chan** - chef leading our lunchtime fundraiser for Sesame Organisation, a charity that supports and protects the wellbeing and mental health of East and South East Asians in the UK
- **Nicola Dinan** - Polari First Book Prize-winning author of *Bellies*; returns to ESEA Lit Fest with her second novel *Disappoint Me* (Doubleday)
- **Katie Goh** - author of *Foreign Fruit: A Personal History of the Orange*; her award-nominated writing has appeared in *Port*, the *Guardian*, *i-D* and *Dazed* (Canongate)
- **Xiaolu Guo** - described by Deborah Levy as 'one of the most valuable writers in the world', her latest novel *Call Me Ishmaelle* reimagines *Moby Dick* from a female perspective (Chatto & Windus)
- **Suyin Haynes** - journalist who has written for the *New York Times*, *Al Jazeera*, *CNN*; lecturer in journalism at City St George's, University of London
- **Sarah Howe** - multi-award-winning poet whose debut *Loop of Jade* won the T.S. Eliot Prize and the *Sunday Times* Young Writer of the Year Award; her new collection is *Foretokens* (Chatto & Windus)
- **Juhea Kim** - international bestselling author of *Beasts of a Little Land*; her second novel *City of Night Birds* is a Reese's Book Club pick (Oneworld Publications)
- **SJ Kim** - author of *This Part Is Silent*, longlisted for the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction (And Other Stories)
- **Isabelle Landicho** - image-maker, storyteller, and co-host of Eastern Hunnies; featured in *Vogue*, *Another*, and the *Guardian*, and exhibited in the Barbican and Design Museum

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- **Melissa Legarda** - writer, producer and photographer specialising in travel and culture storytelling, published in *Vogue Philippines*, *Refinery29* and *Time Out London*; co-host of Eastern Hunnies
- **Kenji Morimoto** - master fermenter and Instagram sensation; author of *Ferment* (Bluebird)
- **Emma Nanami Strenner** - her debut novel *My Other Heart* was a *Stylist* Book of the Month (Hutchinson Heinemann)
- **Deepa Paul** - author of *Ask Me How It Works: Love in an Open Marriage* (Viking)
- **Ian Russell-Hsieh** - author of *I'm New Here* (Scribner)

The festival's 2025 activities culminate with a pop-up at Cheltenham Literature Festival's VOICEBOX on Sunday 19th October, featuring:

- **Jemima Wei**, author of *The Original Daughter* (Orion), in conversation with her former creative writing tutor **Tash Aw**, Booker Prize-nominated for the third time for *The South* (4th Estate)
- Visiting from Korea, author **Park Seolyeon** and renowned translator and author **Anton Hur** will discuss her Hankyoreh Literature Award-winning novel *Capitalists Must Starve* (Tilted Axis Press)
- **A. Y. Chao**, the #1 *Sunday Times* bestselling author of *Shanghai Immortal* (Hodderscape), will be interviewed by **Melissa Legarda**, co-host of the Eastern Hunnies podcast

**Maria Garbutt-Lucero, ESEA Lit Fest co-founder, says:** "2025 has been a whirlwind of activity for ESEA Lit Fest as we went national for the first time and co-founder Joanna Lee was rightly championed as one of the *Bookseller's* Rising Stars. Fresh off of a successful day festival at Southbank Centre and pop-up events at Edinburgh International Book Festival, we couldn't be more excited to be returning to our old friends Foyles for the third edition of our flagship festival. We are forever grateful to our partners the Bagri Foundation for helping us grow with ambition, and for the continued support of Hachette UK and their employee network THRIVE, and to Harry and the team at Foyles for building this festival with us."

**Chelsea Pettitt, Director, Bagri Foundation, says:** "We're thrilled to continue supporting ESEA Lit Fest at Foyles. As the Bagri Foundation expands our community of partners who share our mission to platform extraordinary talent from Asia and its diaspora, we are pleased to see some bright new voices alongside the greats of East and South East Asian literature. We look forward to joining fellow passionate readers for the 2025 programme, which will no doubt inspire, shift perspectives and foster connection."

**ABOUT ESEA LIT FEST:** Featured in the *Guardian*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Elle*, ESEA Lit Fest is a joyful, thought-provoking celebration of East and South East Asian literature and culture that's open to all. Launched in 2023 by Maria Garbutt-Lucero and Joanna Lee, co-founders of the ESEA Publishing Network, in partnership with Foyles, it sold out two years in a row and has become an essential fixture in the UK literary events calendar, with events at the Southbank Centre, Edinburgh International Book Festival and *The Times & Sunday Times* Cheltenham Literature Festival throughout 2025. Sign up to the newsletter for updates via [www.esealitifest.com](http://www.esealitifest.com) or follow [@eseapn](https://twitter.com/eseapn) on X and Instagram.

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