

Commentary... Edinburgh alive

By Macgregor Hay
Columnist

Slainte! To your health! We are all set for the largest book festival in the world. It's in Edinburgh, Scotland, a world-class event since 1983. It's always in August, this year August 13-29.

I caught up with Frances Sutton, press manager for the Edinburgh International Book Festival, who was kind enough to provide some background and highlights for this event for book-lovers, historians...well, for a wide variety of interests. You will see from her interview it's an event not to be missed

The Nugget: Can you give me an estimate of the number of visitors expected for the 2016 Edinburgh International Book Festival?

Sutton: We expect an attendance of around 225,000 over the 18 days. We will welcome 800 participants this year — writers, poets, illustrators, politicians, journalists, historians, scientists, philosophers and playwrights.

The Nugget: Starting at the beginning of the Festival, what events stand out as memorable?

Sutton: Almost too many to choose from — sometimes the smallest events, with a brand-new author, can turn out to be extraordinary! Some of the big names this year include Jackie

Kay in conversation with Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon; actor Alan Cumming; novelist Jonathan Safran Foer launching his brand-new novel; former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown; 2016 Man Booker International Prize winner Han Kang, Nobel Peace Prize-winner Shirin Ebadi.

The Nugget: How are the presenting authors/speakers chosen?

Sutton: Our director and program team work year-round preparing the festival, and are already looking to 2017. We develop themes that we think will be relevant for the year, stories which will be interesting and topical, and invite authors who fit into those themes. For example, under this year's theme of "imagine better" is a strand on migrant stories — some first-hand accounts of people who have left their homes looking for a better life, as well as books on Scottish migration to Canada in the 19th century.

The Nugget: How can an author/speaker get to participate in the Festival?

Sutton: The program team travels the world, visits other book festivals and meets publishers who pitch books to us.

The Nugget: What countries are represented by the authors/speakers?

Sutton: This year we welcome authors from 55



PHOTO BY MACGREGOR HAY

Edinburgh International Book Festival is set to get into full swing.

countries.

The Nugget: Are there success stories you want to talk about?

Sutton: A lovely success story for this year is the launch of "Sorrows of Mexico." Last year we set up a series of events with some Mexican novelists, poets and journalists whose work had never been translated into English. A publisher attended the events, and was so impressed and moved, he decided to invite seven Mexican journalists to write about life in modern-day Mexico. That book will be launched at the book festival this year with three of the contributors traveling from Mexico to Edinburgh.

This interview with Frances Sutton gives you a flavor of what this event has to offer. The website for the festival (www.edbookfest.co.uk) will provide you with the who, what, where and

when for the 2016 Edinburgh International Book Festival. It's not too late to go this year. If you can't make it I'll be reporting live from the Book Festival covering

the speakers, topics and the people of Edinburgh and the world who have chosen to attend this premier event. Stay tuned! Slainte!

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