

Book World Prague 2023 exceeded attendance expectations last weekend

Next year, the festival aims to present literature of German-speaking countries

The International Book Fair and Literary Festival Book World Prague returned to the Prague Exhibition Ground in Holešovice from 11 to 14 May 2023 and was unique especially in terms of its theme. The concept of “Authors Without Borders” emphasized all authors transgressing notional borders and even exceeded the attendance expectations. Over the course of four days, Book World Prague drew almost 60 thousand readers. The festival featured Russian literary provocateur Vladimir Sorokin, Ukrainian literary star Serhiy Zhadan and German crime writer Volker Kutscher. The most popular Czech authors voted by visitors were Alena Mornštajnová, Kateřina Tučková and Michael Žantovský. The Jiří Theiner Award went to Iranian women and men fighting against oppression. Book World Prague presented the new Central and East European Book Market project, the Growing with a Book section dedicated to young readers proved its popularity again and the festival did not ease up on its support for Ukraine and helping Ukrainian refugees maintain contact with their language and literature. Visitors to Book World Prague 2023 were able to find hundreds of exhibitors in all the newly reconstructed Křížík pavilions while the programme part took place at the Prague Exhibition Grounds in tents. The 29th edition will take place on 23–26 May 2024 and will focus on literature by German-speaking authors.

“Book World Prague has again exceeded the attendance of previous editions. We are thrilled that the authors and ideas behind their books are enjoying tremendous and ever-growing popularity. This year, we wanted to cross various borders. We would like to thank all nearly 60,000 adult, young and professional readers for coming on this journey with us and for returning to Book World Prague every year and taking their friends with them,” Radovan Auer, Festival Director, commented on this year’s edition.

This year’s high attendance is also reflected in the sales of the participating publishers. *“The publishers I talked to are very happy, even thrilled. My publishing house, Práh, achieved record sales,”* said Martin Vopěnka, Chairman of the Association of Czech Booksellers and Publishers. *“But what is even more important is the atmosphere of the fair. Every place where something was going on was full of people and the visitors enjoyed the weekend with books,”* he added to the overall evaluation of the event.

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The main theme of the programme of Book World Prague 2023 was **Authors Without Borders**. Therefore, the guest of honour within the 28th edition of the festival was not a specific country but authors transgressing borders and responding to current time when borders, whether physical, cultural, social, sexual, genre or political, are becoming increasingly blurred. The rich programme, discussions and lectures were presented by 602 performers from 30 countries over the course of four days, including popular world and Czech authors, experts, philosophers and literary critics.

Vladimir Sorokin reached out to hundreds of interested people with his programme called *War is Stronger Than Literature*, with his honesty and open attitudes towards the current situation and the future of Russia and the power of literature. The subsequent book signing took more than two hours. **Serhiy Zhadan**, currently the most prominent name in Ukrainian literature, received the same amount of attention on Friday. The Saturday performance of his band **Zhadan and Sobaki** which presented a punk-rock rendition of his poems and lyrics pleased not only the Ukrainian community. The costs of the concert, as well as the Ukrainian presentation at the festival, were covered by the PPF Foundation. All proceeds from the concert, i.e. CZK 248,000, were donated to the Kharkiv volunteer battalion of Chartija. The popularity of the crime genre was evidenced by the interest in **Volker Kutscher**, the author of the best-selling series *Gereon Rath*, adapted for TV as *Babylon Berlin*.

The list of male and female writers, **representatives of Czech literature**, contained dozens of names. Weeks before the festival, visitors sold out the launch of the new novel *Les v domě* by **Alena Mornštajnová** or the programme of **Kateřina Tučková**, who together with artist **Jaromír 99** introduced the limited illustrated edition of her novel *Bílá Voda* to the fans. A lot of attention was paid also to the writer and diplomat **Michael Žantovský** who presented his new work *S prominutím řečeno* in which he describes with exaggeration and humour his experiences with the famous and powerful: from Václav Havel and the British Queen Elizabeth II, through Woody Allen and the Rolling Stones to Pope John Paul II and the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. Many representatives of Czech culture also joined the celebrations of 100 years of broadcasting of Czech Radio and 70 years of broadcasting of Czech Television.

“Each year, the readers show us that they are interested in the festival programme. They want to discuss with and meet their favourite authors and exchange views with other readers. The popularity of all programmes is evidenced by the fact that their reservations were fully booked weeks in advance compared to previous years. Personally, I was most pleased by the interest in the professional forum,” says Guillaume Basset, Dramaturg, when describing the popularity of the festival part of the event.

Book World Prague continued its support to Ukraine. It was possible thanks to the cooperation with the **PPF Foundation**, which decided to cover all the costs associated with the presentation of Ukraine at this year’s Book World Prague including the above-mentioned concert. The PPF Foundation also

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promised to support the first three years of the **Central and East European Book Market** project, which was launched this year by Book World Prague. Book World Prague aims to become a “shopping window” in Central and Eastern Europe within the international trade in book rights.

Book World Prague also includes presenting various important awards including the **Jiří Theiner Award**, which was presented for the twelfth time already and which is newly awarded to those who are the voice of freedom and fight against censorship and democracy. This year, it was awarded to Iranian women and men fighting against oppression. The award was accepted on their behalf by **Tinouche Nazmjou**, the owner of the **Naakojaa** publishing house which has published more than a hundred censored titles in Iran.

In addition to bringing the world of books closer to the general and professional public, the festival endeavours to deepen the love of literature even among the youngest readers, for whom a rich accompanying programme was prepared in the **Growing with a Book** pavilion.

Next edition of Book World Prague will take place on **23–26 May 2024 at the Prague Exhibition Grounds** and the theme will be unique again. “*Next year will mark one hundred years since the death of Franz Kafka and we have decided that the guest of honour will not be one specific country but literature of German-speaking countries,*” said Auer introducing the 29th edition of the festival.

Book World Prague 2023 in Figures:

Fair

Number of exhibitors: 364

Number of booths: 182

Area: 2708 m²

Literary festival

Number of participants: 602

Number of programmes: 424

Number of exhibitions: 14

Number of countries and regions: 30

Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Iran, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, Great Britain, Taiwan

Organizer: Svět knihy, s.r.o., společnost Svazu českých knihkupců a nakladatelů

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Partners: Czech Literary Centre, Moravian Library, National Gallery, National Library, National Museum, Scandinavian House; Auroton Computer, ČSOB, Grasp, Magnesia, Leonardo Hotel

Main media partner: Czech Television

Media partners: Czech Radio, Právo, Echo, Echo 24, Knižní novinky, Host, A2, Deník N, Forum 24, Vltava Labe Press, Revue Prostor, Radio1

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