

PRAGUE – City of Literature - factsheet

Capital of the Czech Republic and home to approximately 1.24 million people, Prague lies roughly in the heart of Europe. In terms of trade and culture, this has placed Prague in an often interesting, sometimes calamitous, position. Prague lies at intersecting trade routes, and has for centuries been steeped in rich cultural influences. On the other hand, the city was occupied by Nazis and has only relatively recently shaken off the effects of the Iron Curtain, reviving its culture with the return of democracy in 1989.

Since shedding Communism, Prague has resumed its proud heritage, and spread literature in many exciting forms right to the edge of the city.

Here are some things you should know about Prague:

Grassroots explosion

Since democracy, the cultural scene has exploded in the city with a range of well-funded theatres, libraries and museums developing alongside small non-profit, grassroots groups and art collectives, some of whom have taken over renting previously unused spaces, taking the cultural explosion to unexpected areas of the city.

Famous authors

Prague is home to some impressive literary heavyweights, including Franz Kafka, Max Bod, writer and friend of Kafka, and Rainer Maria Rilke, the internationally acclaimed German-language poet. The satirist Jaroslav Hašek described Prague in sardonic detail in many of his stories, and Milan Kundera, author of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and currently living in exile in France, studied and lectured at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. Holocaust survivor Arnost Lustig was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 2003. Famous names include Václav Havel, face of the Velvet Revolution in 1989, a playwright, author and president of post-revolution Czechoslovakia, and after whom Prague's airport is named.

Publishers

Prague's publishing scene is international in scope, with publishers Litteraria Pragensia and Vlak Magazine a central part of the city's literary life. Prague is also home to international literary journals Prague Revue and Café Irreal. Book design, illustration, graphic design and typography are all fields with long traditions in Prague with their roots in Czech avant-garde and modernist art.

Libraries

The Czech Republic has the densest network of libraries in the world, around 6000 libraries. Prague has about 200 libraries. The Municipal Library of Prague is the biggest municipal public library in the Czech Republic and includes the Central Library, 41 branches and 3 mobile libraries (bibliobuses). This huge institution manages a collection of 2.35 million volumes and makes more than 7 million loans annually and hosts around 5000 programmes and events each year.

Prague also has small independent libraries across the city which host events as diverse as chamber music and theatre performances and even small street libraries are starting to pop up around the city.

Bookshops

Prague has one of the highest concentrations of bookshops in Europe. The city contains a whopping 130 bookshops or thereabouts, about 60 second-hand bookshops, and about 20 literary cafes, making it one of the loveliest cities for bibliophiles to browse in Europe.

Literature Festivals

Prague's festivals celebrate the city's rich heritage and the diverse cultures which make the city such an exciting place. Their literary festivals are no exception. The International Book Fair and Literary Festival Book World Prague runs about 400 exhibitions and attracts around 40 000 visitors.

Their first international poetry festival was held in 2004 and became formalised as the Prague Microfestival in 2009. The Prague Writers' Festival celebrates the Czech Republic's writers, providing a nurturing platform, and the International Literature and Theatre Festival, *Deti Ctete* (Children, do you read?) is one of Prague's most successful festivals, packed out every year.

Komiksfest is Prague's comic festival, championing local creators and celebrating European and international graphic fiction and the Kmihex fair of small publishers is where you can get zines and literary wonders from local creators.

Charles University

Charles University is the oldest university in central Europe (founded in 1348) and one of the most important universities in the Czech Republic. It is a major player in Prague's literary activities and the national literatures of many countries are taught in its various language departments.

Throughout the year it runs public events, lectures, seminars and conferences on issues relating to literature and book culture.

Education

While Charles University speaks of an illustrious tradition of scholarship in Prague, education was only made compulsory in the region in 1774. The Czech Republic now has a nearly 100% literacy rate, thanks partly to the huge success and range of literacy and reading projects run in Prague and across the country encouraging people, particularly children, to read.

Digital Publishing

The Czech National Library became the first library in the world to be awarded the UNESCO/Jikji Memory of the World Prize for their trailblazing work to make their book collections accessible digitally. Prague and Czech libraries joined international digitalization projects, digitizing their valuable book collections for the preservation, storage and sharing of European and global cultural heritage. Documents which might not otherwise have been globally accessible are now freely available.

Literary Awards

There are over 40 literary awards in the Czech Republic with many of those in Prague, including the Franz Kafka Prize. Books are awarded in diverse categories, from translation, poetry and fiction to book design and illustration.

VISIT: www.prahamestoliteratury.cz/en/about