FAQs Guest of Honour

Why have a Guest of Honour?
The Guest of Honour appearance ensures that the Frankfurt Book Fair has a different character every year. The presentation is a magnet for the general public and it forms one of the highlights of media reporting about the Book Fair. For the Guest of Honour, the appearance has a twofold significance: not only does the country’s literature and culture get to be centre of attention at the world’s biggest trade fair for books and media, so too does the country-specific book industry.

How long has there been a Guest of Honour?
The Guest of Honour programme, which sometimes also includes whole regions as guests, has been running since 1976. “Latin America” was the first, when the original idea was to have a series of focal themes, once every two years, organised by the Frankfurt Book Fair. The presentation of the Guest of Honour on an annual basis has taken place since 1988. Today, the programme is largely organised and financed by the Guest of Honour itself. To date, 25 countries and regions have appeared as Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

What are the objectives?
The main aims of the Frankfurt Book Fair are to help the publishing industry and the cultural institutions of the guest country to network more effectively on an international scale, to make its literature better known around the world, and to increase the number of translations emerging from the country.

To this end, the Guest of Honour usually sets up a translation support programme. From the point of view of the book industry, this helps to boost the trade in rights and licences, and it helps publishers to develop their international contacts – even after the year as Guest of Honour has ended. The industry also benefits as a whole from the extra attention it receives due to the promotion of its authors and the presence of the publishers at the biggest book fair in the world.

For the readers and the general public, the Guest of Honour appearance enables them to experience the country’s literature and culture, and it also stimulates their curiosity for its politics, history and current affairs. The country experiences a huge upswing in media interest (in 2010, the Guest of Honour Argentina was mentioned in more than 5,000 media reports).

The general cultural programme that accompanies the Guest of Honour appearance helps to create (sustainable) international cultural relations; it encourages cultural exchanges and dialogue, as well as increased tourism, of course.
How does a country become Guest of Honour?
Any country can apply to be Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair. The application is usually made as an approach by the country’s publishers association to the Frankfurt Book Fair. There then follow some lengthy discussions to ensure the necessary preconditions are in place. These include an actively growing publishing industry, support for translations, and adequate budget and organisational structures for managing the programme. The final decision on who to invite as Guest of Honour is made by the Frankfurt Book Fair, in consultation with the supervisory board of the German Publishers & Booksellers Association. The collaboration between the Book Fair and the Guest of Honour is then sealed with a contract, which is commonly signed by the minister of culture of the respective country, or by its publishers association. These contracts are generally signed three years in advance of the appearance.

How is the Guest of Honour appearance organised and financed?
The conception, organisation and financing of the appearance are basically all up to the Guest of Honour itself, which forms an organising committee shortly after the signing of the contract. This committee oversees preparations, which can take around two years. The committee is often attached to a government ministry (for example, the ministry of culture or education) and the national publishers association. About a year before the appearance, the organising committee opens an office for its local contact persons in Frankfurt. At the same time, it commissions a PR agency to handle all the press work and advertising, and to create a website for the Guest of Honour.

What is the Frankfurt Book Fair's role?
From the outset, the Frankfurt Book Fair stands at the side of the Guest of Honour, in an advisory capacity. Two members of the Guest of Honour Team assist the committee with the planning and implementation of the appearance. They act as an interface between the Guest of Honour and other projects within the Book Fair, and with the many cultural institutions and cooperation partners around Germany. Apart from that, the Frankfurt Book Fair supports the country’s publishing industry with programmes and specialist events as part of its networking with the international book and media industry. The Book Fair also provides the Guest of Honour with a prominent exhibition space of approximately 2,300 sq m for the presentation itself – Level 1 of the Forum.

What else does the Frankfurt Book Fair do for the Guest of Honour?
Besides the intensive support it gives to the Guest of Honour for the realisation of its programme, the Book Fair also initiates and coordinates its own projects. These include:

- A list of new releases and an overview of publications from the Guest of Honour available in German-speaking countries
- The international book exhibition, "Books on ..." – The Frankfurt Book Fair invites publishers from around the world to exhibit their current titles in the Guest of Honour’s pavilion. This exhibition of around 1,000 books brings together examples of the Guest of Honour’s literature in translation, as well as books about the country.
- A series of specialist events for the Guest of Honour's publishing industry, prior to the Book Fair.
- The hand-over of the Guest Scroll – This is a popular event for the wider public: a literary and cultural event on the final day of the Book Fair, during which the current Guest of Honour passes on the Guest Scroll (an object of art) to its successor
- Rhe readers mug – A commemorative mug produced each year for the Guest of Honour, printed with a literary quotation as well as the Guest of Honour's logo
- The shop window competition – An annual highlight for booksellers, who can obtain decoration materials free of charge from the Book Fair to help them present the Guest of Honour's literature in an engaging way. The most appealing shop windows win attractive prizes.
The Young Designers Competition – Run by the Book Fair since 2006, this is an invitation to students to submit their designs for posters of welcome for the Guest of Honour. The winning designs are used for a poster campaign around Frankfurt prior to the Fair, and are also available as postcards.

The Calendar of Events – All the events staged as part of the Guest of Honour programme, both at the exhibition site and around the city of Frankfurt, are included free of charge in the online and print versions of the popular Frankfurt Book Fair Calendar of Events.

What does the Guest of Honour's programme include?
Of course, the main focus of the Guest of Honour's programme is the Frankfurt Book Fair in October. The Guest of Honour presents itself for five days at its pavilion in the Forum, with authors, literary translations, readings, discussions and other events. It is also represented in other key areas of the Book Fair and at many publishers' stands.

And outside the exhibition site, there is also a diverse accompanying cultural programme that can be seen in Frankfurt and in other locations. This runs throughout the Guest of Honour's year at a wide range of events and literary festivals. Overall, both at the Book Fair and beyond, about 300 events are held each year to mark the Guest of Honour.

What does the Guest of Honour do at the Book Fair?
The Guest of Honour has a significant role from the outset, when it contributes a literary speaker as well as an important political speaker to the official opening ceremony of the Frankfurt Book Fair.

During the Book Fair itself, the pavilion in the Forum is the real centrepiece. Here, the Guest of Honour presents itself with an exhibition of its own design, and provides a varied literary programme using the integrated events spaces. On average, each Guest of Honour brings with it about 50 authors. The international exhibition "Books on ...", which showcases publications about the Guest of Honour as well as its literary works in translation, can also be seen in the Forum.

The Guest of Honour is also present in other parts of the Book Fair: at its publishers' collective stand and perhaps the Agora; it can be found in the Weltempfänger, the Comics Centre and the LitCam; it is there, where the children's books are found, and the audio books; it’s in the education, film and media areas; it’s at the Gourmet Gallery, the Hot Spots, the Forum Dialog and all the other forums; and it is present at the stands of many different publishers and media.

What is the cultural support programme of the Guest of Honour?
For some time now, the Guest of Honour appearance has not been restricted to the duration of the Book Fair in October, or to just a presentation of its many new releases. For its whole year as the Guest of Honour, but above all in the weeks leading up to the Book Fair, each country shines the spotlight on its own particular cultural highlights. In Frankfurt and the surrounding area, and in a large number of other cities, there are readings and panel discussions about politics, literature and current events; there are (art) exhibitions and theatre, dance, music and film performances; there are literary-culinary nights, specialist conferences and parties. A plethora of publishers and cultural institutions pick up on the Guest of Honour theme by including related titles and items in their programmes.

The Guest of Honour usually exploits this huge boost, and it can often be seen beforehand at other trade fairs (e.g. the Leipzig Book Fair and the ITB in Berlin), and at other literature and culture festivals. Reading tours by authors, before, during and after the Book Fair, also help to ensure country-wide media coverage for the Guest of Honour. Thus, even before the actual presentation at the Book Fair, people get to see a differentiated picture of the Guest of Honour's literature and culture, which whets their appetite for the big show in Frankfurt.