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Issues in Vendor-Library Relations

The Frankfurt Book Fair: Should You Attend?

by Barry Fast, (VP Sales & Marketing, Academic Book Center)

The Frankfurt Book Fair is, by any standard, a daunting experience. Over 8600 publishers from all over the world exhibit in one of ten huge halls, each the size of a summer ALA convention. The aisles are crowded with thousands of people speaking dozens of languages. Among this throng were a few, a very few, American librarians.

This is understandable, of course, in these times of tight budgets and even tighter work schedules. No one would dispute that attending Frankfurt is a luxury that most people simply cannot afford. Nevertheless, it is an experience toward which most librarians should aspire. For some, it is almost a necessity for their professional growth. I believe that if present conditions prevent attendance in the next year or two, you should still plan to go someday.

If you are involved in the world of books, that book world exists in all its multi-faceted glory at Frankfurt. If you want to find new or better sources for materials from Third World countries, those sources are either at the Book Fair or there are intermediaries who can help you. If you want to see the latest information technology, it is all gathered on one or two floors in one of the halls. If you want to meet with your present foreign suppliers, they are there, either exhibiting or cruising the aisles, available for an appointment. If you want to exchange views with the leaders of international publishing, they are manning their exhibit booths or greeting you personally at evening social gatherings. If children's books are of interest to you, they are displayed in abundance in one hall, devoted exclusively to kiddy-lit in many languages. If art books are your thing, you will be dazzled by the array of titles from the famous and not so famous publishers. If you want to hear authors from many countries read from or discuss

their works, or tackle the intellectual freedom issues of the day, you will find too many of these seminars. Frankfurt is a meeting devoted to the business of publishing, but it is also more than that: It is a celebration of books, ideas, and culture.

How much does it cost? Like most European sojourns, it depends upon you own budget and how you want to live. Air fare is less than \$400 from east coast gateway cities, because you are flying after the summer high season. All Frankfurt hotels are fully booked, and the decent ones cost upwards of \$150 per night, if you can find a room. But the Germans have a wonderful train system, and you can stay in cities like Weisbaden and even Heidelberg, commuting inexpensively, for less than an hour. You will, in fact, enjoy the anticipation during the morning trip and the relaxation as you return to a more pleasant city in the evening. These outlying hotels and Bed and Breakfast establishments cost considerably less than \$100 per night, and some can be had for \$50. Use the usual guidebooks to find these places, (or the Book Fair can help) and book as far in advance as you can. The train station is a ten minute walk from the Fair, or a tram drops you across the street if it is raining.

Frankfurt is not the most charming city I know, and the restaurants are mostly uninspiring and, during the Fair at least, over priced. But armed with a good breakfast, you can easily make it through the day with a brief al fresco lunch at one of the many food stands in and around the halls. These mostly feature sausages, small sandwiches, or salads, and cost around \$5 to \$10.

The Fair closes at 6:00 PM, and most of the larger publishers host some very nice receptions at nearby hotels or mansions. Don't be bashful

about asking if you can attend; you are, after all, a customer and these affairs are intended to entertain and thank customers. The food and drinks are plentiful, the talk is all business and industry gossip, and it is a friendly atmosphere in which to learn and make contacts. You will be pleasantly surprised at how much attention you receive as an American librarian; you will, I believe, even feel valued. All scholarly publishers recognize the importance of the library community, and as a consequence your presence, as well as your views, will be graciously received. Afterward, you might only need to buy an apple at the railroad station to feel both intellectually and physically satisfied.

It costs about \$50 to purchase a full pass for the entire schedule of the Fair, along with the catalog of exhibitors. For most of you I think a three day visit will give you everything you expect. The Fair starts on a Wednesday, and it is only open to the trade (which includes you) until Saturday. Then the public is invited for the weekend. I suggest you attend the trade if you want to make the most of your time. In Hall 6 there is a very pleasant reception area for librarians and book sellers, which includes a snack bar, a comfortable seating area and tables to conduct business or eat. You can use this as a meeting point, and the staff who man the desk will take and give messages for you. There is also a message board. Be sure to bring a luggage cart if you collect catalogs, and wear your most comfortable shoes. You will be hiking.

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