

CZECHIA AS GUEST OF HONOUR AT THE FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR  
2026

Press newsletter May 2026

## Czech nature as a backdrop for literature



When people think of the Czech Republic, Prague is often the first thing that springs to mind. Yet the country's most beautiful stories are often told outside the cities: in the tranquil forests of the Bohemian Forest, along the Vltava, amongst sandstone cliffs, moorland and old mountain villages, in the beautiful South Moravian valleys with their vineyards and the Moravian Karst. In the Czech Republic, nature is not merely a backdrop – it shapes literature, memory and identity.

Czech literature has traditionally focused closely on landscapes and the people who inhabit them: forests become places of refuge, rivers become veins of memory, and villages become mirrors of social change. Many contemporary Czech books revisit precisely this connection between nature and human experience – sometimes poetically, sometimes starkly, sometimes politically.

The new wave of Czech literature presents nature not in a romanticised light, but as a living space between loss, origin and hope. Jiří Hájček, for example, achieves this particularly impressively in **"370 m above sea level"** (Karl Rauch Verlag, translated by Kristina Kallert). The novel takes us to South Bohemia and tells of life in a village destined to fall victim to a dam. The landscape is far more than just a backdrop: forests, paths and fields reflect the characters' moods and reveal just how closely identity and heritage can be linked to nature. Hájček is regarded as one of the most important voices in contemporary Czech literature, precisely because he describes rural life without romanticising it, yet with great atmospheric depth.

Similarly, **"In the Light of the New Day"** (S. Fischer Verlag) by the Czech-German author Jarka Kubsova combines experiences of nature with a deeply personal search for one's roots and memories. The story centres on Elli Hájek, who retreats to a remote house to write and, whilst doing so, reflects on a story her Czech grandmother once told her: the legend of Viktorka, a young woman who, following a traumatic experience, was deemed mad and lived alone in the Bohemian forest from then on. When Elli learns that Viktorka actually existed, she returns to the country from which she herself fled as a child. The novel impressively combines images of nature with memory, trauma and a woman's search for self. The forests of Bohemia appear not merely as a backdrop, but as a living space in which past and present merge.

Jonáš Zbořil's **"Flora"** (Kommode Verlag, translated by Sophia Marzoff), on the other hand, offers a modern and surprisingly urban perspective on nature. This debut novel combines ecological issues, a dystopian atmosphere and a psychological chamber drama in an unusual way. The story centres on Adam and Sára, who discover a small, enigmatic creature during a night-time walk on the outskirts of the city. They name it Flora and take it to the remote dacha of Adam's late grandmother – in the middle of a cordoned-off area outside the city. Whilst Sára quickly develops a deep emotional bond with Flora and wants to protect the creature, Adam increasingly feels a sense of alienation and unease. As Flora grows ever faster and strange events pile up, their relationship comes under increasing strain.

Anyone wishing to delve deeper into the literary roots of the Czech Republic cannot fail to read **"Babička"** (Vitalis Verlag, translated by Kamill Eben). This classic by **Božena Němcová** remains one of the most significant works of Czech literature to this day. Through warm and richly detailed imagery, the novel depicts 19th-century rural Bohemia – with its gardens, forests and village communities. Nature is portrayed here as a place of security, tradition and cultural memory. To this day, this work continues to shape the Czech Republic's literary identity.

A special addition to these literary explorations of nature is also **"Better to Go Mad in the Wilderness: Hermits in the Bohemian Forest"** (Mitteldeutscher Verlag, translated by Rajja Hauck and Martin Junge) by Aleš Palán, with photographs by Jan Šibík. The book is dedicated to people who have consciously chosen a life away from society – in the heart of the remote landscapes of the Bohemian Forest. It tells the stories of hermits, outsiders and quiet lives in one of the most unspoiled regions of Central Europe. The result is a fascinating portrait of the Bohemian Forest as a place of retreat, a landscape of longing and a borderland between freedom and isolation.

Your press team Guest of Honour Czechia  
Annika Grütznert, Nathalie Weber und Mathias Voigt

Please do get in touch if you would like further information, would like to receive review copies, or would like to arrange an interview!

## Events

13.05.-07.06.2026

[Identität. Die Geschichte des tschechischen Grafikdesigns](#)

BHROX bauhaus reuse, Berlin

03.-06.06.2026

[Comicsalon Erlangen](#)

11.06.2026, 19 Uhr

[Reading: Beate Franck „Bitte ein Pilsen!“](#)

Buchgalerie im Altstadthof in Hof

14.06.2026, 12 Uhr

[Reading: Brückenschlag über den Strom: Iva Procházková, Marek Torčík und Uwe Kolbe](#)

Haus am Dom, Frankfurt am Main

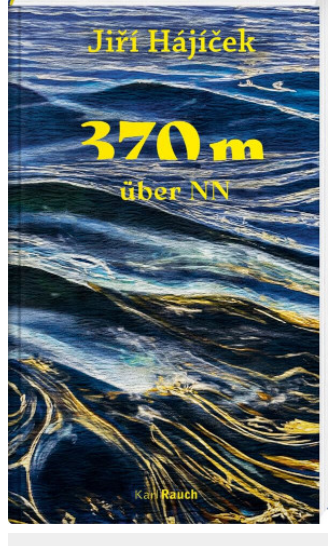
14.06.2026, 19 Uhr

[Staged reading of the play „Onhella OnlyFans“ by Tomáš Ráliš](#)

Grüner Salon, Berlin

## Book tips

Jiří Hájček: **"370 metres above sea level"**  
(Karl Rauch Verlag, translated by Kristina Kallert,  
published on 26 March 2025)



Hana returns to the ruins of her home after 15 years. The village where she grew up had to make way for the water. In its place, a reservoir was created to supply cooling water to the Temelin nuclear power station. However, Hana does not want to visit the ruins of her youth, but rather get to the bottom of an event that tore her family apart back then. Can the blind spots in the family history be brought to light?

You can find further information about the book [here](#).

Jarka Kubsova: **"In the Light of the New Day"**  
(S. Fischer Verlag, to be published on 26 August 2026)



When Elli Hájek retreats to a remote house to write, she recalls a character her Czech grandmother once told her about: Viktorka, the young woman who was declared mad following a traumatic experience and went on to live alone in the Bohemian forest. When Elli learns that Viktorka really did exist, she travels to the country from which she herself fled as a child. Elli wants to find out more – but deep in the forest, amidst glowing ferns and a rushing river, another task awaits her: before she can discover the truth about Viktorka, Elli must confront her own repressed history.

You can find further information about the book [here](#).

Jonáš Zbořil: **"Flora"**  
(Kommode Verlag, translated by Sophia Marzoff,  
to be published on 15 September 2026)



During a night-time walk on the outskirts of town, Adam and Sára come across a small, quiet creature. The young couple decide to take the creature, whom they name Flora, in for the time being. They take her to the nearby dacha belonging to Adam's late grandmother, which lies in the middle of a dystopian area cordoned off by the city authorities. Sára immediately develops maternal feelings for the rapidly growing creature and wants to stay in the dacha to protect it from the world, whilst Adam feels a growing sense of distance. The little one increasingly unnerves him. As strange things begin to happen, a terrible suspicion stirs within Adam – but what is really behind it all? In his first novel, Jonáš Zbořil relies on the power of imagination. He tells a story set in a present that is only slightly shifted, in which we can no longer grasp who determines our existence, how fundamentally we are altering nature, and how much influence artificial intelligence exerts. And he asks how, as a couple, one deals with one's own parenthood and the conflicting feelings and dynamics that come with it, and how one can, despite everything, develop empathy for a stranger.

You can find further information about the book [here](#).

Božena Němcová: **"Grandma (Babička)"**  
(Vitalis Verlag, translated by Kamill Eben, published on 29 July 2025)



In what is arguably the most important and beautiful classic of Czech literature, Božena Němcová (1820–1862) tells the story of a kind and loving grandmother who is summoned to her daughter's country estate. The wise woman helps look after the children and ensures that all is well in the house and on the farm. The author skilfully combines descriptions of customs and traditions in old Bohemia with memories of her own childhood in the Aupa forest valley, now known as 'Grandmother's Valley', not far from the Křivoklátské Mountains. A standout is the story of Viktorka, the farmer's daughter, who, suffering from a broken heart following a tragic love affair, lives amongst the wild animals in the forest.

Generations of readers associate the little grandmother with the classic illustrations by the Czech artist Adolf Kašpár (1877–1934). His meticulously restored watercolours and pen-and-ink drawings make this edition a bibliophile's treasure.

You can find further information about the book [here](#).

Aleš Palán: **"Better to go mad in the wilderness: Hermits in the Bohemian Forest"**  
(Mitteldeutscher Verlag, translated by Rajja Hauck and Martin Junge, with photographs by Jan Šibík, to be published on 1 September 2026)



Through striking images, journalist Aleš Palán and photographer Jan Šibík tell, in "Better to Go Mad in the Wild", the unique stories of those who have turned their backs on civilisation – far removed from society's constraints and norms. The interviews reveal encounters with a wide variety of people. Some reflect the wildness of nature, whilst others seem unexpectedly familiar, barely recognisable as 'hermits in the wilderness'. They recount their escapes into unbridled freedom, as well as the worries and stress they left behind like baggage from their old lives. Their constant companion is solitude in its many forms, often liberating, sometimes oppressive, but always self-chosen. Their ways of life give us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in other people's stories and reflect on our own. Challenging, free and unadulterated – this is how Aleš Palán confronts us with his book: 'When will we break free?'

You can find further information about the book [here](#).

## About the Guest of Honour

Czechia is the Guest of Honour of the Frankfurt Book Fair 2026. The Guest of Honour appearance is being organised by the Moravian Library in Brno and its Czech Literature Centre section. It is being financed by public funds from the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and is implemented with the support of PPF Foundation. Partner of the Year of Czech Culture and Guest of Honour is Deutsch-Tschechischer Zukunftsfonds / Česko-německý fond budoucnosti. The Frankfurt Book Fair, which will take place from October 7 to 11, 2026, is the world's largest trade fair for publishing. The Guest of Honour presents its literature and culture at the fair, in the city of Frankfurt, and at many other locations in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Czechia's Guest of Honour appearance is themed "Czechia – A Country on the Coast." <https://czechia2026.com/>



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