

SPIEL Essen: World's largest board game fair breaks records once again

- 230,000 visitors across a record 81,200 m²
- New offerings strengthen the gaming world's international hotspot

SPIEL Essen 2026 has surpassed all previous records: it was not only the largest board game fair in its history, but also set a new visitor record. From 22 to 25 October, 230,000 people from all over the world flocked to the venue, 10,000 more than the previous year. Even with additional tickets, SPIEL was sold out on all four days. With Hall 8 open for the first time, all halls at Messe Essen were available. Due to high demand from exhibitors, the exhibition space grew to 81,200 m². In total, 997 companies from 53 countries presented over 2,000 new products.

New hall creates room for growth

"The exhibitors are beating down our doors!" jokes Carol Rapp, Managing Director of the organising Merz Verlag, part of the Spielwarenmesse Group. Following the addition of Hall 7 last year, surging demand required the opening of the final available hall. Many exhibitors expanded their stand sizes, and new companies joined the roster. With the additional space, more tickets could also be offered without compromising the quality of the visitor experience. By occupying the entire exhibition centre, SPIEL has reached maximum capacity. "We are aware that we are fully utilising Messe Essen. But to dispel the rumours immediately: a relocation is not planned. We are now focusing on further developing SPIEL at the Essen location in the coming years," says Rapp.

Working together with the city

A first step in this direction was the new joint project "Essen spielt!" (Essen plays!). Together with the City of Essen and Messe Essen, Merz Verlag offered a programme that brought the excitement of board games to life outside the exhibition halls. In addition to discounts at 13 partners and a special cocktail in participating restaurants, there were three special game nights at Essen Town Hall, at the Red Dot Design Museum on Zollverein, and aboard a White Fleet ship on Lake Baldeney. The free offer, available via a prize draw, proved highly popular. The organisers are already considering expanding the concept in 2027.

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A programme filled with experiences, awards and a new ambassador

In addition to discovering, testing and buying games, SPIEL offers new experiences year on year. "Warhammer 40,000 Laser Tag" celebrated its premiere, in which teams of twelve competed against each other. The SPIEL.talks, live on stage in Hall 4, also attracted numerous visitors with diverse topics and further established the stage concept introduced in the previous year. Another highlight was the presentation of the "Golden Demon" award by Games Workshop. More than 1,000 painted miniatures were submitted in 14 categories. Maxime Penaud from France won first place and the coveted trophy in the shape of a sword. Furthermore, Merz Verlag, together with Card Sports League and Hana Sports & Entertainment, presented the "TCG Awards" for the trading card games industry for the first time. At a gala, prizes were awarded in 13 categories – voted by the community and an expert jury. The "Deutscher Spiele Preis" (German Games Prize), Germany's largest community award for board games, was also presented. Board game enthusiasts from Germany, Austria and Switzerland voted for their favourites from the current year. The winners:

1st place: "Artengarten" by Mathias Wigge, Feuerland Spiele

2nd place: "Boss Fighters QR" by Lukas Zach and Michael Palm, Pegasus Spiele

3rd place: "Galactic Cruise" by T. K. King, Dennis Northcott and Koltin Thomson, PD-Verlag

Best children's game: "Toriki: An Island Full of Adventure" by Wojciech Grajkowski, Mirakulus

American artist and illustrator Peter Mohrbacher also contributed to the fair's success as its third ambassador. He is widely recognised for "Angelarium", a fantasy world of his own creation and illustration. Mohrbacher embodies the world of art and illustration, an element that is essential for board games.

After SPIEL is before SPIEL

Florian Hess, Managing Director of Merz Verlag and Member of the Executive Board at Spielwarenmesse Group, emphasises the growing importance of the fair: "We are very pleased about the development that SPIEL is taking. On the one hand, it is becoming increasingly diverse and attractive for players, on the other hand it is becoming an increasingly important forum for games professionals from all over the world." Together with Spielwarenmesse and the Game Inventors Convention in Nuremberg, SPIEL is an important

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part of the international offering for the board game industry. Merz Verlag has already begun planning for the next edition (21–24 October 2027) to further develop the fair in its current location in Essen and to continue creating a special experience for board game enthusiasts and industry representatives.

Images are available at www.spielwarenmesse-group.com/media.

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SPIEL Essen

SPIEL Essen is the world's largest consumer fair for board games, bringing together over 220,000 passionate gaming fans from all over the world with national and international exhibitors in the heart of the Ruhr region. The fair has existed for over 40 years and presents thousands of new releases from exhibitors representing over 50 nations. The focus is on togetherness and community play, as the new titles can be tested directly on-site at the booths at SPIEL Essen.

Spielwarenmesse Group

Versatile and internationally oriented: **Spielwarenmesse Group** brings together all the international activities of **Spielwarenmesse eG** under one corporate brand. Portfolio highlights for the toy industry and other consumer goods markets include two world-leading trade fairs: **Spielwarenmesse** in Nuremberg is the leading international event for the B2B sector, as is **SPIEL** in Essen for the B2C field. Also part of the portfolio are **BRANDmania** – Europe's largest B2B networking festival for licences and collaborations in Essen – and the exhibition programme **World of Toys by Spielwarenmesse**, which opens up new markets for manufacturers through joint activities in **Hong Kong, Tokyo and New York**. The portfolio also includes **Kids India** as a stand-alone event in Mumbai. Subsidiaries in key locations in both **China** and **India** provide the relevant local expertise in their respective countries. With its concentrated know-how and global network, the organiser is a catalyst for the industry and trend scouts. The 60-member team operates from "ToyCity" Nuremberg and is supported by representatives in over 100 countries. Through both events and online activities, Spielwarenmesse Group is active all year round (www.spielwarenmesse-group.com).