

Let's Go North! – A Bear On Rügen

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Prologue:

A 4-week vacation – our longest so far. Why did we need 4 weeks for a trip to the North of Germany? Well, when I started planning a trip including seeing a few musicals in Hamburg, the lovely Hanseatic cities along the coast of the Baltic Sea and ending with a week of relaxation on one of Germany's most beloved islands Rügen (famous for its chalk cliffs), I thought 2,5 or 3 weeks would be sufficient. But when I started the detailed planning I kept discovering more and more fantastic sights to visit so the length of our journey grew. Especially when a friend reminded me that the Serengeti Park lies right on the way to Hamburg. ;-) So then; 4 weeks. Read for yourself why we enjoyed and cherished every single day and were glad that we didn't have one less! ☺

Preparing for take-off:

We had originally planned to start on Sunday, but about 2 weeks before our trip Thomas discovered a newspaper article about the fantastic science center Phaeno in Wolfsburg so we quickly decided to add a day to our trip so we could visit it. This was only possible since we didn't get any choir guests after all, who otherwise would have stayed with us from the weekend before our departure until Wednesday. They would have stayed in the guest room where my closet is meaning I wouldn't have been able to pack. But since the choir festival didn't need our help as hosts this year (we got our free concert tickets anyway ;-)), we packed the weekend ahead and departed very early Saturday morning.

Day 1 - Saturday, May 21st – Early birds and closed hearts

We left home at 6 a.m. after having packed most of the car the evening before. Our first stop was in Fulda, which lies 4 hours north of us and where we spent only one day. That's why I wanted to arrive there around 10 a.m., which worked out perfectly. Fulda is a beautiful baroque city with two romantic castles. We started with the guided tour of the Stadtschloss. Then we strolled through the castle park where we saw more than one bridal couple taking photos and had fun in the maze. There is a 7 mtr. high statue there that was made out of only one piece! For lunch we shared a delicious pizza. Then we visited the Cathedral of Fulda and a very lovely Romanesque chapel nearby (where taking photos was unfortunately not allowed). There was a marathon through town in the afternoon with live music and blocked roads. In the afternoon we wanted to visit the Kinder Akademie where they have an oversized replica of a human heart you can walk through but unfortunately they're closed on Saturdays in the summertime. So we had plenty of time to relax in the shade with a delicious home-made ice cream before we visited the Schloss Fasanerie, which claims to be the most beautiful castle of the state Hesse. I haven't seen them all to be able to fully agree but it was certainly very lovely and very worth visiting! ☺ Unfortunately photography wasn't allowed inside.

On the way to our first Airbnb room in Braunschweig (another 2,5 hours further north so that we only had a 30-minute drive to Wolfsburg the next morning) we looked for a supermarket to buy some breakfast for Thomas. But in the large mall we stopped at the supermarket was currently closed for renovation! ;-) At least there was an Italian there where we could eat a small dinner snack. ☺

Day 2 - Sunday, May 22nd – Couchsurfing in Wolfsburg

We spent the entire day being fully fascinated by the science museum Phaeno where you can experience more phenomenons than the opening times allow (see photos + videos). We didn't even have time for the shop! ;-)

Due to the added day to our trip we needed an additional accommodation in Wolfsburg. I had already booked all the other rooms mostly via Airbnb (except for Serengeti Park, the small apartment on Ruegen and 1-2 small boarding houses in towns where there were no Airbnb hosts or at least none that welcomed guests for only one night). In the meantime I had also registered with Couchsurfing so I tried my luck there and we ended up staying with a nice teenage girl and her lovely parents. It was our first Couchsurfing experience and of course quite different from Airbnb. Instead of collapsing into bed after a day full of scientific impressions we had a nice long chat on the terrace. It was certainly a nice atmosphere but we were also quite tired, so I can fully understand that Thomas is generally not so keen on Couchsurfing but prefers some peace. I assume it's more interesting when travelling in a totally different culture. Pricewise it's totally unbeatable of course. And the breakfast buffet we received the next morning was the most delicious most fantastic of our entire vacation! Unfortunately I failed to take a photo of it. ☹

Day 3 - Monday, May 23rd – Volkswagen-Currywurst in Car City

We spent our second day in Wolfsburg in the VW Autostadt (Automobile City), which was our reason for adding it to our road trip in the first place. It was Thomas' request to go there and the day just flew by! ☺ We started at 10 a.m. with a short stroll through the first exhibition area including a cinema presentation. Then at 11.20 a.m. we had a guided tour of the two 60 meter/200 ft tall glass silos (AutoTürme) that are used as storage for new Volkswagens. The tour guide gave us a tip where to get the creamiest yoghurt ice cream on the premises and it was so good we had a second one later! ☺ From 12.30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thomas booked a drive with a VW Touareg over an off-road course that had a lot of fun elements including forging a stream, driving over tree trunks and even a seesaw! First we did the track with a professional driver at the steering wheel explaining to Thomas how to master the various obstacles and then it was Thomas' turn. I was on the back seat. ☺ Later at 2 p.m. we had a tour of the factory during which I had a short afternoon nap. ;-)

We spent the time between our booked attractions visiting the museum of fancy and famous cars as well as the pavilions of the different car brands that belong to the Volkswagen Group (see photos). Volkswagen have even created their own currywurst which we had for lunch of course! ;-)

At 6.15 p.m. we left for the Serengeti Park which was 1,5 hours' drive away. I had checked that the dinner buffet we had booked along with our room was open long enough. ;-)

At the dinner and breakfast buffet they always had the same CD on repeat and although it wasn't that loud Thomas and I couldn't get the park's catchy theme song out of our heads – for the rest of our vacation! ☺ Later we would start singing it with the words: "We're not... in Serengeti Park". ;-)

Listen to it here:

<https://www.serengeti-park.de/anfahrtsbeschreibung-serengeti-park/morgens-frueh-gehts-los/>

Day 4 - Tuesday, May 24th – Thomas' Birthday with monkey party on his head!

We had set an alarm since we'd planned to start off as soon as the park opens at 10 a.m. But unable to part from our comfortable bed we ended up getting up an hour later. ;-)

It was unfortunately raining slightly so we began with the car safari where you drive through the animal compounds. We did the round twice in three hours and the rain luckily stopped sometime halfway. ☺ I was especially impressed with the beautiful tigers that crossed the road right in front of our car more than once. (We parked there for a while. ;-)) To see the lions making love about every 7 minutes was also quite interesting (see photos). ;-)

Then we visited the monkey compounds where you move freely among the monkeys. The ring-tailed lemurs are especially curious and love to sit on the visitors' shoulders. Thomas first had two monkeys on his shoulder who discovered how deliciously salty his hat tasted! This led to two more monkeys joining them and all four of them wildly licking away at his hat until it was totally drenched! ☺ He always kept a hand on his hat so that they couldn't take off with it. ;-) Needless to say I took loads of photos the whole time through! We spent a total of about 3 hours with the monkeys until it was time for dinner. ☺

We had a special room with a terrace looking out at a mixed animal compound but it was unfortunately cold and rainy in the evening. Later Thomas fell asleep on the sofa. ☺

Day 5 - Wednesday, May 25th – Riding the tiger

The day had an amusing start when the ostriches were let out of their night cage and raced across the compound including one tripping and falling and the unsettling of all the other animals. ☺ Since we had a total of three days in the Serengeti Park (the third day is free when you book your room with them also, ;-)) we didn't have a hectic rush in the morning to be there early but got ready and ate breakfast slow and relaxed and therefore weren't in the park until 10.45 a.m. Today we started with the Adventure Safari part that includes all kinds of fun and quite adventurous rides on most of which you get very wet. Since it was still quite chilly we had our rain coats and pants on. It simply wasn't the kind of summer weather when you would welcome being drenched in cold water. ;-) We started with a small train that runs around the park but were quite frustrated since it was so slow! Thomas kept making jokes whenever we crossed the tracks (and for the rest of our vacation) that I should be careful that the train doesn't hit me by surprise: "Ding, ding, ding, ding – crash!" ;-) We enjoyed the cute frog rollercoaster and on the nostalgic carousel I rode the tiger! ☺ We had fun with the crazy bikes (see videos), bumper cars as well as on the Quad Safari. On the Aqua Safari you race over a lake with an original Florida-Airboat. When we arrived at the open water area there was another boat there full of small children that had had a breakdown. We had to wait for them to be rescued onto another boat before we could enjoy the fast action on the open water. We saw a fun diving show, rode the ferris wheel, enjoyed our rain clothes on the log ride and on the Black Mamba which is a ride in a Speedboat (which we always called Knightboat = a "Simpsons"-Insider ;-)). We got so wet despite our rain clothes that my hair was all drenched and I therefore treated myself to a waffle (see photo). ☺ I dried a bit on the free fall tower (see video) before we enjoyed a burger for a late lunch (we didn't go to the dinner buffet today). We climbed the jungle gym to the highest platform and then spent the last 2 hours with the small monkeys again. The salt the monkeys had so eagerly licked off Thomas' hat the day before had been from his natural sweat. Since it had been so much fun for him as well as for me he had now purposely salted his hat with the salt shaker from dinner. ;-) But it must have been a birthday special after all that the four monkeys visited Thomas since none of the ring-tailed lemurs were interested in his salted hat today. One of the small brown monkeys that are much shyer eventually was interested in his hat after Thomas had coaxed him a bit (see photos). ☺

I then drove to Hamburg where I visited the Corrs concert with a friend from Taizé. It was simply sensational to see and hear them live again after over 10 years! ☺

Day 6 - Thursday, May 26th – "In Waves"

We didn't get to the park until 11 a.m. again (they open at 10 a.m.) and began riding all the fun wild rides again. We even did the boat rides twice! ☺ We got so wet it even went a bit through our rain clothes! And my hair was a complete mess! *g* Then from about 1 – 4 p.m. we did the car safari again. Afterwards we had a last visit to the small monkeys till dinner at 5.30 p.m. Afterwards we drove 2 hours up to the coast of the North Sea to Cuxhaven.

In the very black-humored action movie “Deadpool” at the final kiss scene you hear the song “Careless Whisper” from Wham! and only shortly later you see that the hero is playing it himself from his smartphone which he’s holding up while passionately kissing the love of his life. ;-) Needless to say Thomas and I found that very amusing! Now there’s a fierce metal song by the band Trivium called “In Waves” that we discovered sometime last year and that we really like. During the planning of our vacation I had the fun idea that when we reach the ocean we should stand there and bang our heads to “In Waves” from my smartphone – which we did of course! *g*

Day 7 - Friday, May 27th – Crossing the North Sea on foot

Today we crossed the North Sea on foot: we walked approximately 10 km (3 hours) through the Wadden Sea (= Unesco World Heritage Site) to the Island Neuwerk. We didn’t have time to walk back though before the tide came in and the last horse carriages had also already left the island. So we had a 3-hour wait until the water rose high enough for the ferry to take us back to the mainland. It was cloudy when we started off through the endless open landscape (see photos), but luckily the sun came out a bit later on and we enjoyed warm, dry weather on the small peaceful island. Since there are no cars on the island you only hear the wind and the birds (and Mouse ;-)).

After returning to the mainland we had a taste of the sunset in our roofed wicker beach chair (= Strandkorb; see photos). ☺

Day 8 - Saturday, May 28th – The Phantom strikes back!

Today we did a very informative 14 km guided tour (round-trip) through the Wadden Sea to the sea lions including a tide creek crossing where everyone got wet to the waist except us! My smart Bear found a shallower crossing further along the creek. ;-) I wore my beach socks in the Wadden Sea which were quite good since they didn’t get stuck in the mud like my sandals and they also keep you warm a bit in comparison to going barefoot. Unfortunately I got very painful blisters on both of my little toes though. ☹

We then had a very quick shower and were off to Hamburg (2,5 hours’ drive) where the Phantom of the Opera strikes back in “Love Never Dies”! ☺

Day 9 - Sunday, May 29th - Sunday, Rainy Sunday

We visited the morning mass with great thankfulness for the perfect weather we had enjoyed so far (especially at the North Sea). We then had a fun and furry afternoon in the Tropical Aquarium (see photos) followed by a very magical evening with “Aladdin” (*glitter glitter*)! ☺

Day 10 - Monday, May 30th – It’s a small world after all!

We spent the entire day in the amazing Miniatur Wunderland (see countless photos + videos) including a very intriguing guided backstage tour (= big eyes Bear). ;-) Then in the evening we went to the musical “Das Wunder von Bern” that tells the heartwarming and dramatic story of Germany winning the world championship 1954 set around a family where the father returns after 12 years of war imprisonment (= wet eyes Bear). ☺

Day 11 - Tuesday, May 31st – Brick Gothic galore

Today we visited our first Hanseatic Brick Gothic city: Lübeck (= Unesco World Heritage Site; 1 hours’ drive from Hamburg). We did a city tour per iGuide that I had downloaded in advance. I love individual city tours where you get interesting information but on your own schedule including breaks for drinks, food, shopping and/or museums whenever you’re in the mood. ☺ We had audio recordings to listen to at the various sights of the lovely town but felt quite haunted by excessive city noises whenever doing so. It seemed whenever we

wanted to listen to a track a truck started its engine nearby or a jackhammer started rumbling! ;-) We visited a lovely museum in fancy rooms that also had a beautiful painting by Caspar David Friedrich whose style I really like. ☺ We enjoyed a sunny day until the late afternoon when clouds pulled in quite suddenly; unfortunately just before we arrived at the main sight: the Holstentor. It then also started raining but we decided to go up to a church tower look-out nonetheless. How could we have guessed the rain would stop only an hour later? ;-) Lübeck's specialty is not only the famous delicious marzipan (almond pastry) by Niederegger, where we had to shop twice after devouring our first purchase almost immediately. ;-) (They have a museum full of large and life-size marzipan figures upstairs, e.g. the small Holstentor -> see photos.) The city center is also filled with many quaint small and narrow alleyways and courtyards such as the one our Airbnb hosts lived in (see video). ☺ Our picturesque attic room in their adorable fairy-tale like house was one of the nicest of our entire vacation (including a very comfortable mattress)! ☺ After all day on foot I was too tired to join Thomas as he went back out for a very successful night photo tour (see photos). ;-)

Note: Thomas and I normally don't like marzipan at all, but we definitely tasted the difference of the high quality of the products in Lübeck. I also only chose mixed products such as orange, nougat and/or chocolate marzipan. ;-) But please don't give us marzipan as a present, we would only give it away. ;-)

Day 12 - Wednesday, June 1st – A little more Lübeck + Travemünde beach

In the morning we first visited St. Mary's Church (= mother of all Brick Gothic churches) where we found the small mouse described in my travel guide (see photos) – with help though! ☺ After a short stop in the picturesque fishing village Gothmund (see photos) we spent the rest of the day at Travemünde beach enjoying perfect beach weather. Despite sunshine and blue skies it was very windy though; as almost always at the German coast. ;-) We got a bit wet when attacked by a crashing wave, enjoyed some yummy fish and then set out to visit the museum ship Passat (= a four-masted steel barque). Had we known that we would twice spend 20 minutes walking from the ferry to the ship due to a current construction site, we probably would have declined. ;-) We ended the wonderful day with a lovely walk along the coast to a look-out point before we drove 1,5 hours to our next destination Schwerin.

Day 13 - Thursday, June 2nd – Schwerin's beautiful castle

Today we started early in order to manage the 7 km city tour with perfect timing arriving at the dome just for opening time at 10 a.m. (end of the world rain and thunderstorm while in church) and later reaching the castle just in time for the guided tour at 11 a.m. during which the sun came out for the rest of the day! :-) For lunch we had delicious burgers at Hans & John's. Later as we sat in the pedestrian zone Thomas complained about having to walk so much and I replied: "Well, they don't have a trishaw tour." Just in that moment a trishaw rode by (without passengers!) but we were both too shocked to react in time! ;-) So we continued on foot as we strolled through the lovely palace gardens where we had a lot of fun with a picture frame (see photos). ☺ Then we split up into Museum-Mouse and Café-Bear. Afterwards we were able to end our city tour (including ice cream break) in perfect time for our dinner reservation at the TV tower (= romantic surprise for Bear) from which we had a fantastic view of intimidating clouds and a beautiful sunset (see photos)! We then went on a night photo tour together (see photos). ;-)

Day 14 - Friday, June 3rd – Sunbather under surveillance

We started late to our next destination Wismar, which was luckily only a half hours' drive away. By the time we had maneuvered through the extremely uneven cobblestone streets and checked in at our boarding house it was time for lunch. ;-) Afterwards we started exploring the picturesque old town which is also a Unesco World Heritage Site. With 10.000 m² it has one of the largest market places in North Germany. We had a private (due to lack of other tourists), very interesting and somewhat odd tour of the 80 m high tower of St. Mary's Church that took an entire hour and gave us a good view of a young woman sun bathing on her roof (see photos). The tour guide was quite infatuated. ;-) We spent the rest of the lovely warm day strolling

through the pedestrian zone where the first Karstadt department store was founded (= famous department store chain in Germany).

In the evening we went to the harbor where a cruise ship was preparing for departure and being bid farewell by a sailor's choir as well as with the blasting of small cannons. Due to the angle of the harbor we had the only sunset over water of our vacation and Thomas didn't spare photos capturing the magical light transformation. Some of his photos almost look like a Caspar David Friedrich painting. ☺

Day 15 - Saturday, June 4th – Too much ice cream

Today we first drove to the small Island Poel where we enjoyed another lovely sunny beach day in the extremely flat waters by Gollwitz, visited the island church and had a nice stroll and ice cream at another beach on the opposite coast before we drove further in the direction of our next destination Rostock (1 hour distance).

On the way we stopped at a lovely arts and crafts market in picturesque Bad Doberan abbey (currently applying for the Unesco list ;-)) where we enjoyed yummy waffles on sticks and two more ice creams leading me to the realization that three ice creams a day are too much for me! :-0 They had a cute carousel with pigs that was operated by pedaling (see video). ;-)

We arrived in Rostock around 6 p.m. where Bear fell directly into hibernation so I simply joined in. After waking up around 9 p.m. we checked out possibilities of going out only to decide we rather go back to bed early. ;-)

Day 16 - Sunday, June 5th – Chocolate overload

We first went to Sunday mass and then enjoyed another perfect beach afternoon in Warnemünde including scrumptious Czech cuisine for lunch in the Prager Bierstuben, a full chocolate overload with fantastic drinking chocolate and the best chocolate cake ever in the World of Chocolate café, the final game of a beach polo competition and in the evening the new "X-Men"-movie in a 4D cinema that adds lights, wind and if necessary rain to the cinematic experience! ☺ Luckily it only rained once in the movie! ;-)

Day 17 - Monday, June 6th – My new best friend

We spent the entire day with perfect weather in the beautiful Rostock Zoo including many cute little monkeys; one of which insisted on coming home with us (me; = another additional birthday present). ☺

Day 18 - Tuesday, June 7th – Relaxed Rostock

Today we toured Rostock city. We strolled through the pedestrian zone relaxed where we tried on fun hats and bought ourselves a fish-shaped neck pillow, ;-), visited the museum of the former Stasi (= DDR secret police) remand center (= very interesting, especially exhibition about planned, failed and successful escapes via the Baltic Sea) as well as the art and history museum which is in a former abbey. During the day we stopped in two picturesque cafés (both former abbeys) and later we had dinner at the market place before we strolled through the rose garden to the bus station = simply perfect! ☺

Day 19 - Wednesday, June 8th – Serena's Birthday with strawberries till you drop!

Today we visited Karl's Erlebnis-Dorf which is probably best described as a fun farm experience with a large playground area with strawberries as the main product and theme. ☺ The Karl's near Rostock was the first one and is therefore the largest. There are currently 5 different locations; all in North Germany. At the site by Rostock they also have the largest ice sculpture exhibition in Europe which was really breathtaking (see photos)! The topic was the Orient Express with colorful scenes from all over Europe. And they have the largest

farmer's market we've ever seen with soo many strawberry products to buy... as well as pretty little mermaids for our 'Under the Sea'-toilet. ;-) We also had a blast with the catchy tune "Pferdesalbe" (= horse liniment) in which Dr. Hoofbeat explains all the various ailments for which his horse liniment is the best cure (see video). ;-) We didn't get away until 2.30 p.m. which was much later than planned. Oh dear! Will we have enough time in the Ozeaneum Museum in Stralsund (= 1 hours' drive away)? :-0 We arrived at our interesting apartment in former shop rooms at 3.40 p.m., headed straight to the Ozeaneum, were luckily just in time for the right bus and therefore arrived at the museum around 4 p.m. Despite us wanting to see and read almost everything 4 hours were more than enough to experience the fabulous and thought-provoking ocean museum (main topic: Nordic oceans). I especially enjoyed the large room where various whales were hung from the ceiling in life-size (!!!) and you could behold them from comfortable lounge chairs underneath. I changed my position several times to enjoy different views of the amazing sea mammals. ☺ Afterwards we enjoyed pizza for dinner. ☺

Day 20 - Thursday, June 9th – More Meer

We began our second day in Stralsund (= Unesco World Heritage Site) with the Meeresmuseum (= ocean museum) which focuses on ocean life all around the globe. We especially enjoyed seeing the divers in the sea turtle aquarium. We then visited the museum for funny art (Skurrileum) whose current displays' topic was vacation. We followed the tour of the city highlights and then had a quick drink and strawberry cake with view of the beautiful town hall before we rushed off to the Island Ruegen (= 45 minute drive). After checking in to our lovely seaside apartment in the Villa Sirene (= siren; see photos) in the popular resort Binz we had a delicious Mexican dinner before enjoying the spectacular sunset (see photos).

Day 21 - Friday, June 10th – Weather review & forecast

In the first three weeks of our vacation we had about half a day of rain per week, which is absolute dream weather by German standards. ;-)

1. morning rain on Thomas' Birthday during the first half of our first car safari in Serengeti Park
2. rain on most of Sunday in Hamburg which is why we only went to the Tropical Aquarium instead of visiting the entire zoo. Due to morning mass we wouldn't have managed both timewise anyhow and saved the entrance fee as well. ;-)
3. the afternoon shower in Lübeck that only lasted 1-2 hours which we unwisely spent on the church tower look-out ;-)
4. the heavy rainfall in the morning in Schwerin which only lasted about 20 minutes, then it rained lightly for another 1-2 hours before it cleared up completely and the sun came out ☺

We were most of all thrilled that our 4 beach days so far had been blessed with dry and mostly sunny weather.

Our final week on Ruegen wasn't quite as perfect, but close enough. ;-) It was mostly cloudy and overcast with rain forecasted but luckily on most days: it hardly rained at all. ;-) I think it did rain somewhat on the morning of our first island day, but since we finally slept in for the first time in our whole vacation so far we didn't really care. ;-) After getting up around noon we were first a bit indecisive due to the alternating weather (short sunny spell followed by clouds again), but then decided to go on a 8 km walk through the picturesque forest (partly alongside the ocean) to the next village Sellin. It luckily remained dry and the sun even came out though it was extremely windy on the lovely Sellin pier (see photos). On our stroll through town we discovered some cute souvenirs including a new door sign for our small toilet: Shiethus = Low German for ... ;-) We then rode home with an old-fashioned steam train and had a fancy British cab pick us up from the train station. It belonged to the restaurant Oma's Küche (= Grandma's Kitchen) which is a bit on the outskirts of town and therefore picks you up for free when you have dinner there, which is very delicious. ☺

Day 22 - Saturday, June 11th – Where the streets have no name

The weather forecast for today was absolutely perfect followed by a less promising outlook for the rest of the week so we decided to go on a full-day excursion to the car-free Island Hiddensee where we enjoyed absolutely fantastic blue skies and a very clear view of Denmark (60 km distance) as well as very delicious noodles for our late lunch. ☺ It was a complete dream come true! Amazingly beautiful nature that just took my breath away! ☺ While Thomas climbed up the lighthouse to take great photos from above I simply sat and enjoyed the spectacular view over the landscape across the water to Ruegen (see photos).

After taking the last ferry back we had planned to have pizza for dinner at the Surfhostel on the Island Ummanz (connected to Ruegen by a bridge) but it was unfortunately closed due to a private event.

Day 23 - Sunday, June 12th – Three Bear surprises

We first visited the morning mass before we took the extremely rocky roads (uneven cobblestone) to Vilmnitz and Classicist Putbus. Since I had done all the vacation planning on my own most fun experiences were surprises for Thomas such as the ice sculpture exhibition for example. Today he even got three fun surprises in one day, the first of which was an upside-down house in which we were mostly alone so we could take endless funny photos. ☺ The second surprise for Bear was lunch in Captain Nemo's Nautilus (= restaurant that looks like inside of Nautilus submarine; see photos). ☺ Then we had coffee and cake at a cute café by a lake where I even had a quick nap in my chair. ;-) Later we strolled through the castle park where I was also able to obtain a small yoghurt ice cream (= our favorite vacation flavor ;-)). Bear's third surprise was the musical Blues Brothers in the evening. ☺

Day 24 - Monday, June 13th – Play day!

Today we slept in again due to the forecasted rain. It was supposedly the rainiest day of the week. Since we were travelling with our car and therefore didn't need to save on luggage we even had our sauna towels, etc. with us so that we could have spent a bad weather day in a thermal bath / sauna (which there are plenty of along the German coast due to our general weather ;-)). Although the weather wasn't all that good today we decided against the sauna since there were so many other places to see and things to do that were also mostly inside and could therefore be enjoyed during rain as well. After all we only had 7 days on Ruegen. ;-) And were once again so lucky that it even stayed dry in the afternoon. ☺

First we took the free cute tourist train to the annual sand sculpture exhibition (7xB: Blöder Binzer Bade-Bär in Binzer Bäder-Bahn = silly Binz' Swim-Bear in Binz' resort train ;-)). From there we strolled along the lake through the park of senses (see playground video). Then we drove to the Karl's Erlebnis-Dorf on Ruegen where we had our fill of strawberries (& pancakes) - again! :-) After that we played 3D minigolf in black light which was quite fascinating fun (see photos)! ☺

Day 25 - Tuesday, June 14th – Südp(f)erd = Southhorse

On Tuesdays and Thursdays there is a large Market on the island where all the regional products are offered. We started early for the almost hour-long drive to the very southeast tip of the island. We were quite shocked by the absolutely endless traffic jam in the opposite direction. It seemed to go the whole way through! Preparing for rain as forecasted I was wearing my baseball cap (since umbrellas are impractical between tight market stands. ;-) It luckily only rained a few drops while we were at the market and was completely dry later for our lovely walk around the southwest peak of the island which is called Südperd which becomes 'Southhorse' when an 'f' is added: Südpferd. ;-) Due to the traffic jam we had decided it was best to go on a walk right where we were instead of trying to drive anywhere else and we were very pleased with our decision. ☺ After circling the entire lovely southwest lobe we had another delicious market snack before we drove back north. In the meantime it was so late we were certain that the traffic jam home must be gone - which it was. ;-)

Although it was late afternoon there was still plenty of time to visit the tree top walk near Binz. It has a very impressive design (see photos). Since it was unfortunately quite cloudy we couldn't see all that far, but at least it was mostly dry. ;-)

Day 26 - Wednesday, June 15th – Ruegen's famous chalk cliffs

The weather for our last two days on Ruegen was supposed to be better which is why we saved the island's highlight for today: the famous chalk cliffs which we beheld by sea and by land. First we took a cruise along the chalk cliffs – with sunshine! ☺ One looks like a crocodile – can you see it? ☺ Then we followed the futuristic pedestrian bridge of Sassnitz to a very delicious chicken lunch before we drove on to the Jasmund National Park. There you can walk through the beautiful beech forests (= Unesco World Heritage Site) directly to the largest chalk cliffs; the Königsstuhl (= 'King's Chair'). We were totally enticed by the interactive, vivid and moving exhibition at the visitor's center so that it had unfortunately started raining by the time we went to the lookout point on the Königsstuhl. Maybe we should have gone there first and then visited the exhibition, especially since the weather forecast had even said it would rain at 4 p.m. *g* But at least this way we had the famous lookout completely to ourselves. ☺ We walked back through the forest in the rain but were luckily partly protected by the grand leaf roof. ☺

Day 27 - Thursday, June 16th – Furthest North Bear ever!

We spent our final day on Ruegen at the northern tip: Kap Arkona where Thomas observed that he had never been further north before! ☺ My most northern point so far was Durness beach in North Scotland. ;-)

Kap Arkona and the fishing village Vitt don't let the 800.000 visitors who come per year enter by car. You have to park 2 km away and can then either walk to the coast (6 km round trip including Vitt) or take the little tourist train (gas drive). We chose the train for the main distances and therefore fully enjoyed the 2 km walk along the coast from Kap Arkona to Vitt. Kap Arkona has two lighthouses from one of which I really enjoyed watching the swallows soaring from the lighthouse platform. Shortly after we arrived the clouds disappeared and the sun came out with surprising warmth. What a grand farewell day! ☺ We had fun rock hopping on the north tip beach before we walked to a delicious lunch in the quaint fishing village Vitt. Afterwards we had a long relaxed break at the seaside before we took the tourist train back. It also stopped at a café and shop with local products where we had just enough time for coffee/tea and cake and the still outstanding purchase of the famous local sea buckthorn juice for us and family. ☺ Luckily the next train came by just as we left the store with our heavy purchases. ;-)

Then we drove to the northwest land tongue named 'Bug' (which is mostly private and therefore non-passable) and looked over to the Island Hiddensee. After which we drove all the way to the south coast town Altefähr to take pictures of Stralsund on the other side (= mainland) with dry weather since rain was forecasted for our departure on the following morning. Back 'home' in Binz I even took a quick and extremely icy jump into the Baltic Sea before the German soccer match against Poland (I thought it might help them win ;-)).

My plan had certainly worked out that the week on Ruegen was much more relaxed than the prior tour of the Hanseatic cities: a perfect conclusion to a perfect road trip! ☺

Day 28 - Friday, June 17th – D-Day = Departure Day

We rose early, left the lovely Island Ruegen and drove to Greifswald (1,25 hours' drive), the hometown of Caspar David Friedrich which is why I had added it to our trip. ;-)

It was unfortunately very rainy; actually the first and only day of our entire vacation with almost only rain. First we went to the museum where I looked at the art exhibition (including many paintings by CDF) and Thomas went to the history exhibit. Then we huddled under our umbrella to walk to the three main churches. Since the weather was so very dreary we didn't spend much time in the pedestrian zone. How lucky we were on all our other city tours! ☺ We had an extravagant pizza for lunch and tasted many strange ice cream flavors afterwards. I couldn't arrange myself with such

tastes as cucumber though. ;-) Then we drove to the Eldena abbey ruins that had often been painted by Caspar David Friedrich.

After which we had a very timely start to Bayreuth (5-hour drive) which enabled a short, spontaneous stop at Karl's Erlebnis-Dorf near Berlin/Potsdam (luckily right near the freeway) for whose ice world our ticket from Rostock/Rövershagen was also valid. ;-) We were once again mesmerized by the imaginative ice sculptures that had the topic Arabian Nights here. In the meantime it had stopped raining so we had a quick run through the labyrinth. Then we enjoyed some quick tea, coffee and ice cream just in time before they closed.

On the further journey to Bayreuth we were overwhelmed by spectacular skies. We drove through scary storm fronts and pink romantic sunset clouds. We came past an extremely bright and fully complete rainbow. It was all absolutely breathtakingly and amazingly beautiful! :-)

Day 29 - Saturday, June 18th – Wagnerians?

Today we were up early again since there is so much to see in Bayreuth. ;-) For our stops upwards (Fulda) and downwards (Bayreuth) I only planned a day each before even informing myself what each city has to offer specifically. Since both of them aren't as far away as the Baltic coast it's easier and much more likely that we will pass through there again. ;-)

First we strolled through the city and visited its churches. Then we arrived at Wagner's home and museum Wahnfried which we found very highly interesting. Not because we particularly like his music (we were quite bored to death with the 6 hours of "Tristan und Isolde" we saw in Dresden in 2009) or because we could even faintly agree with his political opinions (his descendants were very strong supporters of Hitler from the very beginning and therefore first brought him together with the financially strong upper class), but because his crazy life story and the historical impact he and his family had in music and politics totally intrigued us. And within the museum we also discovered Wagner music that we know and like, e.g. the "Ride of the Valkyries" which was featured in Bugs Bunny cartoons as well as in "Apocalypse Now". ;-) I doubt that makes us true Wagnerians (= Wagner fans), but we would actually consider giving one of his operas another chance. ;-)

After lunch we had a quick stroll through the castle park since dark clouds were just pulling in and were safely inside the castle (Neues Schloss) as it started raining. ;-) By the time we had finished the fascinating tour it was already 5 p.m. so we'll save the tour of the other two castles for our next visit to Bayreuth. Besides one of the main attractions, the Unesco World Heritage Site, the Opera House, is currently under renovation until 2018 giving us another good reason to return to beautiful Bayreuth once it re-opens for visitors. ☺

In the meantime the sun had come back out so we enjoyed a final vacation ice cream before we drove to the rock garden Sanspareil (= another surprise for Bear) where we spent about two hours discovering the many tremendous rock formations. We started homewards at 8 p.m. and arrived back at our lovely apartment in Marktoberdorf at 11.30 p.m.

Epilogue:

What a trip! But now: there's no place like home! :-)

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Serena Haltmayr

Produced by
Serena & Thomas Haltmayr

Starring in alphabetical order:
Mouse/Maus – Serena Haltmayr
Bear/Bär – Thomas Haltmayr

Music by
Serengeti Park
The Corrs
Trivium
Andrew Lloyd Webber
Alan Menken
Dr. Hoofbeat
The Blues Brothers
Richard Wagner
And many more

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