

# The Blue Bear

Newsletter #6  
September 2022



Greetings from Duke in Berlin!

Ignore the winter jackets in the photo above - we are enjoying lovely, sunshine-filled late summer days here in Berlin. So why the wintery photo? Well, even though we just started our new semester here in Berlin with a lovely new group of seven Duke students (who will be featured in the next issue – stay tuned!), we first wanted to look back on the spring semester that ran from January to July 2022 and share with you what Emma Evans-Nolet (Class of 2024), Jacob Becker (Class of 2024), Isabel Rask (Class of 2023), and Lindsay Dial (Class of 2023) have to say about their time in Berlin.

We hope our newsletter will inspire you to join us in Berlin in Spring 2023 or for our 6-week summer program in May & June! Or maybe you like plotting your study abroad experience more in advance and are already thinking about Fall 2023. Either way, we look forward to welcoming you here in Berlin – come on over.

Mit herzlichen Grüßen

Tin Wegel (Resident Director)

Lina-Sofie Raith (Program Assistant)

“While my experience was only available to me because I was studying there, I would daresay my experience was better described as living rather than studying in Berlin. In seven months, I lived in two drastically different neighborhoods and found the time to discover so many others. I made local friends, developed my own culture relevant opinions, and could hold a conversation on the politics of the city I spent half a year calling home. I became a tour guide for my visitors because I passed the Brandenburger Tor on my way home from Tuesday class, of course I could tell you about it, and the much less renowned Brandenburger Tor of Potsdam, because every respecting city in the East has one. I learned after trial and much error how to say Schlesisches Tor and why obviously all the protests went by Hallesches Tor. After weathering the unfortunate winter climate of Berlin, alongside similarly vitamin-d deprived Germans I got to sunbathe in any number of parks scattered across the impressively green city in the absolutely beautiful June weather. As a commuter student, I experienced life of all ages, children in the public parks, elders on the public transit, students at the public library, and young artists on the streets as they made music for all the public to hear. Even the steady flow of tourists in the city and international students at the university were a slice of Berlin life, and another way to find all the perspective I didn’t know I was missing from the insular community at Duke. Every weekend—and some weeknights too—was an adventure, and with no doubt, worth the risk of making my first trip to Europe a 7-month journey I committed to alone.



*Cliffs in Ireland*  
© Emma Evans-Nolet

DiB was amazing in supporting me in my understanding of the city, my understanding of the language, and my understanding of all the bureaucratic hoops of living under the jurisdiction of German government, but more importantly it provided me with a community where we could discuss what we didn’t understand and

find some comfort in the same longing for home. Lessons on how to walk fast and sort our trash and navigate showers without walls or curtains were a fun and frequent break from the academics we had devoted our lives to on campus, and undeniably a keystone to my Berlin experience.

While known by most Americans for its history, the city will always be known to me as a city of magic, which never sleeps and offers a new adventure around every bend.”

-- Emma Evans-Nolet



*The northern town of Stralsund*  
© Emma Evans-Nolet

Jacob (fourth from the right) joins the shipbuilding students in Bremen for an international Waterbike competition  
© Jacob Becker



“I came to have an amazing time with Duke in Berlin Engineering. I enjoyed it for experiencing a new culture and lifestyle while living a more independent life than at Duke. Additionally, I met so many interesting and amazing people along the way: the DIB staff, my host, and German students.”

-- Jacob Becker

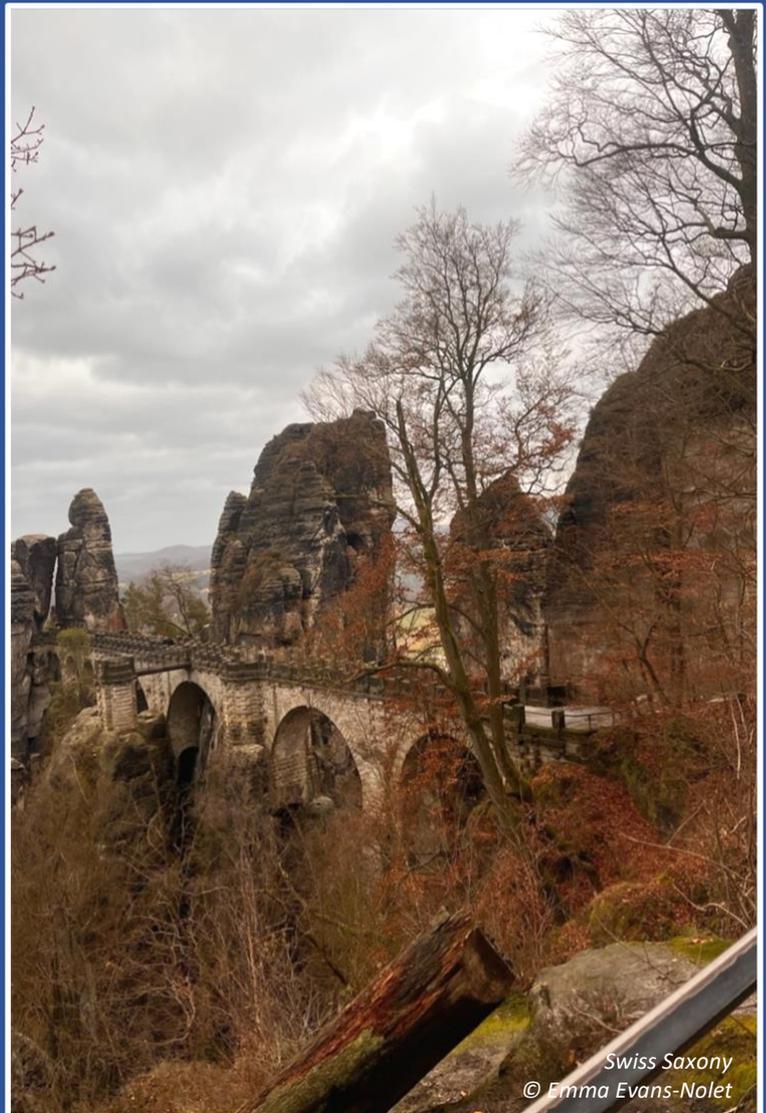
„My name is Isabel and I was part of the Spring 2022 Duke in Berlin program. Going to Germany was the best decision I made at Duke, so I wanted to hopefully convince you to do the same.

The Duke in Berlin spring program is really two separate semesters: the first, where you are taking German and various cultural classes, and the second, where you are directly enrolled at a local university. The first part gave me the time I needed to adjust to the new environment while earning credit. We do a ton of excursions, both in and outside of the city, so by the time you start at the university you'll have a good grasp of the past and present of Berlin.

For me, the second half is what sets apart the spring program from traditional study abroad programs. By attending the German university, I got to experience how a typical student lives... firsthand. While 7 months may seem a daunting amount of time to be away from home, the two parts gave me the opportunity to form real connections and learn firsthand about the culture. I have friends that I still text and communicate with in German, which I would never have met if I stayed in the Duke “bubble”.

The Duke in Berlin program is a supported step outside your comfort zone. Yes, it will feel foreign and yes, you will get things wrong, but the Duke people are always there when you need them. Berlin is an artistic, varied, and enormous (9x bigger than Paris!) city that I'm so glad I got to live in. If you ever have questions or are just curious about the program in general, feel free to email me at [isabel.rask@duke.edu](mailto:isabel.rask@duke.edu) :)

-- Isabel Rask



Swiss Saxony  
© Emma Evans-Nolet

Advertisement for sea buckthorn ("Sanddorn"):  
"Rügen's answer to the kiwi. Try it here for free!"  
© Lindsay Dial



"My decision to go to Berlin was a hasty one. I'd thought for a long time about studying abroad during a summer term, but always pushed away the prospect of doing a full semester away, telling myself I would be missing too much back at Duke if I left. Sometimes, however, your semester just doesn't go quite right—an advertisement for the beautiful landscape of some other country catches your eye, and you think, *After all, why not? Why shouldn't I leave?* Two weeks later, your application is nearly complete, awaiting the last recommendation letter or system verification. Another two weeks and you're in, anxiously making the choice to give the official "yes, I'll go". And then you forget all about it for the rest of fall semester; all that's left to do is wait.

Of course, the second-guessing started immediately. Although my extra-long winter break was nice, packing was a nightmare, the flight was exhausting (missing one of my connections didn't help), and when I arrived, the weather was far colder and windier than I was accustomed to. I didn't know whether I had made the "right" decision, but I also didn't have much time to think about it—I was busy

moving in, learning how to ride the bus, and starting my courses. And my classes were interesting, but being in a new country was overwhelming, and I was already burnt out from a stressful fall semester.

Little by little, though, I settled into the next six months of my life. My room became just as much of a home as any dorm could've been (perhaps more, since I didn't have to share a bedroom with another person), and small things made it worth it: my amazingly kind and generous host, my wonderful professor Tin, a weekend class trip to the island of Rügen. I spent my "spring break" traveling well and truly alone for the first time ever, taking a 12-hour train ride to Florence and visiting museums from dawn to dusk, seeing paintings I'd dreamed about for years. It was the first adventure I'd had in a long time, and I was proud of myself for stepping far outside of my comfort zone.

However, stress hit me again immediately afterwards with the introduction of my courses at the Freie Universität Berlin. As we moved through spring and into summer, I was often overwhelmed at times, thinking I'd made the wrong choice and that I would've been happier staying back at Duke and having a normal spring semester; that I had ruined my life by making the rash decision I did. But at the same time, not all was bad: my course on gender linguistics was fascinating. I made friends with the other Duke in Berlin students, as



Balcony at Lindsay's host family  
© Lindsay Dial

well as students at the FU. I became comfortable with the ins and outs of the city, so taking the bus became meditative. I spent time with my friends from home online, playing video games or D&D. I read *Faust* with Tin and delighted in it.



Lindsay at the Polish border  
© Lindsay Dial

By July, as my courses came to an end, I took more time to explore the city. I visited all the museums I comfortably could in the span of two weeks, opened a library card to have access to the Berlin system's vast stores of books, and began to wonder what the rest of my year would look like. It didn't take long for me to find I was actually *sad* at the prospect of leaving, when just a month or two ago I'd been worried that I'd wasted an entire semester and summer. The moments of stress and doubt melted away, and I realized I had fallen in love with Berlin.

While I am happy to be back at Duke, I still miss the six months I spent in Berlin. Stress and sadness are natural reactions when you're burnt out and uproot your entire life to move to another country. They certainly didn't define my experience, and I'm left with the satisfaction of a spring semester and summer well-spent. My endless thanks goes out to everyone involved with the program, and I'll see you soon, Berlin."

-- Lindsay Dial



Feel free to email us at [duke@international.fu-berlin.de](mailto:duke@international.fu-berlin.de) with any questions about the program or to get in contact with one of our current Duke-in-Berliners.