

What's it with the Germans? A Holiday Review

No Foamed Lattes and Cash Only!

"We only open at half twelve", the woman emerging from the shut kiosk replies harshly. Even though the connected restaurant has just sent me over to get my coffee-to-go here. Awkwardly I check the time on my phone, balancing the baby in my arms. I wait the three minutes to opening time and eventually order my coffee. "No lids or card payment", she says, as she hands me a small paper cup with black coffee from a percolator. It smells nice and strong and I have to add four plastic containers of coffee cream to make it drinkable. Welcome to Meck Pomm*, I think to myself as I return to our spot by the lake shore of the [Fleesensee](#), waiting for the rest of my family to arrive.



Swimming in Chilly 24 Degrees

The surface of the water is smooth. Just once in a while tiny waves ripple towards the edge when paddle boats pull into the small marina. Ducks and seagulls bob up and down in the water,

seemingly enjoying the free ride. I dip my feet into the shallow water, sand squishing through my toes. Behind me, the beach promenade is slowly coming to life. Restaurants are busy taking in deliveries and some joggers are trying to get ahead of the big heat. Back home in Ireland we are spoilt with gorgeous beaches at our doorstep, but not with 24 degrees at 10 in the morning and a water temperature of 23 degrees. Germans don't even bother showing up for a swim at 'chilly' 24 degrees, I was told.



Tourism Hot Spot...

When I walk with the buggy down to the beach again the next day, I notice the well-tended farm-style houses in the red-brick architecture, characteristic for the region. Surrounded by lush gardens and orchards they stick out like gorgeous little islands among the clean, almost sterile, holiday rentals that definitely outweigh them. That makes me wonder what it is like to be one of the 520 residents of [Göhren-Lebbin](#), dealing with ca. 450.000 overnight stays a year. Considering it is the end of the season, it almost justifies the brusqueness we have been experiencing by some locals. But does it excuse an above-average amount of retirees wearing neon pink hair dye or T-shirts with dubious prints? I am not sure.



The resort we are staying in has the character of a village onto itself. Consisting of colourful timber-framed houses with self-catering units, restaurants, children's facilities and several adventure playgrounds including water play and a petting zoo. Our apartment on the ground floor is spacious and definitely designed with a family in mind. There is plenty to discover and do for all age groups. Our terrace is facing the fields, lined by a forest in the distance and is a lovely space to unwind. There are kids everywhere on the compound, bustling about on Go-karts or pulled along by their parents in handkarts. We are absolutely comfortable having our 7- and 4-year old roaming around on their own.



...and Unspoilt Nature

Another morning I bring the baby for a walk on the sandy path right behind our apartment. It is hot as I push the buggy through the dust, welcoming every gentle breeze rustling through the trees. I appreciate their shady patches, giving the dirt track an alternating pattern. I truly enjoy those morning walks, focusing on the regular breaths of my sleeping baby, accompanied by the humming of bees. My destination is Kirch Poppentin, a red-brick church from 1882 with its attached cemetery. Surprisingly I don't encounter a single soul, despite of three big hotels based in the neighbourhood. Eventually I meet two well-gearred up cyclists with friendly faces who ask me for directions. Three indicators that they are not local.



English – Nein danke!

For Sunday mass we locate a Catholic church in the nearby town of [Waren](#). When we arrive, the car park is bursting out of its seams. People are welcoming and friendly, but keep their distance once they hear we are speaking English. An older gentleman is brave enough to approach us for a chat, encouraged by the Southern German number plate of our rental car. When I tell him – in German – that we live in Ireland, he nods friendly and swiftly makes his goodbyes.

It surprises me that the region of Fleesensee advertises itself as the largest Golf resort in Northern Europe and yet we stick out as English-speakers everywhere. Even our holiday resort seems to survive on a German-only policy, apart from Reception. I feel for the staff in the shop who had to explain to my husband one morning – using gestures and hand signals – that the pre-ordered chocolate croissants hadn't arrived.

What is it with the Germans?

As we potter through Waren, an old lady with a zimmer frame (but no pink hair dye) peeks into the buggy. I prepare for another shower of compliments on our baby when she tells me assertively that I am to put socks on the poor child. Baffled, I follow her slow movement as she shuffles on without another word. What is it with Germans getting involved in how we handle our kids? Only the other day a parent told our 4-year

old to not twist her baby sister's arm when she was playing with her on the beach, and I was standing right beside them. Um, excuse me?



Friendliness in Disguise

On our last day, I stroll down the foresty path to Lake Fleesensee one more time. As I drop into the village store, I open with a comment on the weather as you would when entering a shop in Ireland. Not expecting a huge response, I am all the more surprised when the girl behind the counter pours her heart out to me. When I finally leave, I smile to myself, remembering how curt she was the first day I came in.

Down by the lake I decide to give the woman in the coffee trailer a second chance, too. Judging by her still grim facial expression, I fear to get told off for changing my order half way through. Instead I get a "no problem" and a hint of a smile. Delighted I toddle off with my *Bulette im Brötchen**, excited to introduce this typical German snack to my family.

The Charm of Mecklenburg Vorpommern

I am no stranger to the 'Nordic charm' as I would call the 'friendliness in disguise' in Mecklenburg Vorpommern. In my twenties I spent four years in Stralsund, studying Leisure and Tourism Management at the local university. And despite some raised-eyebrow-moments during our vacation, I knew that people weren't intending to be rude. However, having lived in Ireland for over ten years has changed my perception of my fellow countrymen, [to being a tourist in my own country](#).

Fleesensee doesn't strike me as a big international player in the resort business. It rather feels like a rural holiday destination with charming flaws, representing the innate culture it is surrounded by: straight forward and down to earth. I value its authenticity over an all pleasing service industry. Although a few more friendly faces around could do no harm. The all prevelant cash payment adds to the holiday feel and so does not having a stable 4G connection at all times.

The natural beauty of the area and its amenities are great for a fun and activity-filled holiday, complemented by pretty towns with its regional architecture. That is what makes Fleesensee attractive to us as a family of five. The [BEECH Resort Fleesensee](#) is the ideal place to combine all our interests and give each of us their own little space to relax. We will be back for sure!



***MeckPomm = Short for Mecklenburg Vorpommern: One of Germany's 16 federal states. Located in the North East, it was part of the former GDR. Bordering the Baltic Sea it also features extensive lakelands inland.**

***Bulette is the name for a meat snack, similar to a burger patty, in Berlin and the North East of Germany (from French "small ball"). It is usually served in a roll. Its name varies depen.**

Vacation with a One-Year Old

Bye bye Spontaneity, Hello Planning

Planning our first summer vacation with a one-year old was a new experience for me. I was never exactly a globetrotter, but travelling to me had always been adventurous rather than luxurious. I preferred a tent over a Spa hotel and cycle tours over long haul plane trips. Pre-booking was rare as I enjoyed waking up in the morning, curious to where the journey would lead me. Admittedly, I am not a very spontaneous person, but on vacation a loose plan was the way to go.

Not when you are going on vacation with a one-year old. Being organised and well prepared became inevitable. Wanting to combine our family vacation with visiting my family in Germany narrowed down our choices. And whilst the prospect of free childminders was tempting, we wanted to spend some time on our own too.



New Territory 'Package Holiday'

Before we became parents, we stayed well clear of package holidays and above all places with kids entertainment. That had changed now that we were planning our first vacation with a one-year old. Browsing through offers, I still felt myself drawn to charming, quiet places. But my husband John pointed out that we should opt for something with plenty of family outdoor and indoor activities. Self-catering was a must as we were going to be confined to our room after baby's bedtime.

We settled for a holiday village at the [Lakelands Mecklenburgische Seenplatte](#), about two hours North of Berlin. To my delight it *did* look quite charming for a family resort. And it came with all the amenities we had been looking for. It was also not too far from the airport and my parents' house, promising manageable travel times. Last but not least it was set in a gorgeous nature reserve with an abundance of sightseeing and day trip opportunities.

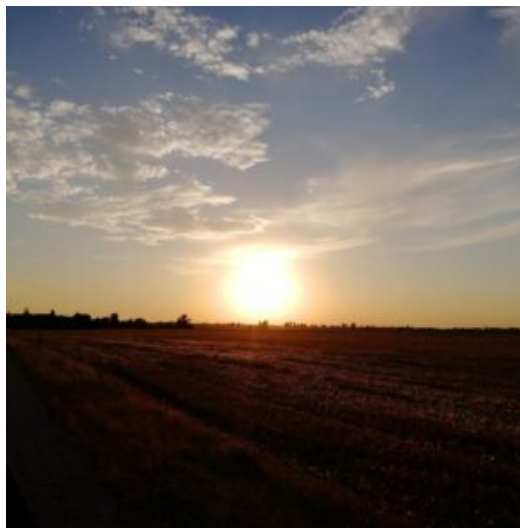


From Backpacking to Bag-packing

Travelling light had always been my forte. I took pride in requiring very few clothes on vacation and even more in my skill to pack them like a Tetris master. So whilst *I* was absolutely fine with a small suitcase for two weeks, I needed twice the space for our little one. Running through our daily routine in my head helped me to work out what to bring on our first vacation with a one-year old. Knowing I was able to wash stuff in my parents' house put my mind at ease. And the fact that John said "There is nothing we can't buy in Germany". Sometimes that is all it takes to stop a mother's irrational thoughts from racing.

Time to Relax

When we arrived at the [Dorfhotel Fleesensee](#) (now BEECH Resort), our expectations were even exceeded. They truly knew how to cater for families and make a stressed out mom on her first vacation with a one-year old welcome. As we pulled our luggage plus child in a handcart across the compound, we spotted lots of things to entertain kids. After a spin on the little merry-go-round we checked into our bright and friendly apartment. I was delighted to see that the set up suited us perfectly and I was looking forward to the week ahead. Afterwards we took a stroll to the sun terrace and enjoyed a cocktail as the perfect start to our summer holiday.



Who let the Cow Out

At the breakfast buffet was the first time we got a feel for what it was like to be on a package holiday with kids entertainment. A massive dancing cow entered the breakfast room, with a bunch of kids in tow. It resonated with our little one though as he started wiggling excitedly in his high chair. Whilst we devoured all the gorgeous breakfast items, mostly aimed at kids, the cow mascot, singing jolly children's songs, came as a minor shock. However we knew what we had signed up for and seeing our baby happy was a win onto itself. Welcome to family vacation with a one-year old.



Childminding included

After a couple of days of settling in, we couldn't wait to try the free childminding service. At fourteen months our baby had never stayed with anyone else before. Not used to grandparents around or any type of childminding, we weren't sure how this was going to go. But we were dying for some couple time and planned to go to the attached Pool & Spa one morning. The Kids Club was a lovely space, located in a lighthouse with a huge indoor area and an outdoor playground. It was quiet that day and we got a one-on-one minding service by a lovely young woman. Junior immediately engaged with the colourful environment and we managed to sneak out for as long as three hours! Good we made the most of it as this was all we got. The rest of the vacation he obviously wanted to spend as a family.



An Unlucky Break

Apart from looking forward to a change of scenery, we had been

anticipating high temperatures and loads of sunshine which we normally wouldn't get back home in Ireland. Of course, now that we were away, Ireland was suffering an unprecedented heatwave with hose bans all over the place. That wouldn't have bothered us, if we had gotten some of that lovely heat over in Germany, too. Here on the other hand, everybody was welcoming the intense rain showers which the dry soil so desperately needed. Bad timing for us I guess.

So with the beautiful Lake Fleesensee right at our doorstep, we didn't get a single day to take advantage of the shallow warm water and sandy beaches. Even though there was plenty of stuff to do, I had seen us going down to the lake every day. I would have loved to take a boat trip and John was dying to do some watersport activities. Nevertheless, we had a great time, doing excursions into the surroundings or just chilling out at the Dorfhotel. We were so used to finding our way around bad weather after all.

The Man Who invented the Potatoes



On our way to my parents' house I wanted to take the opportunity to show John some more of my home country. Passing by Potsdam, I decided that the [Palace of Sanssouci](#) was definitely worth a little detour. My parents had always brought my sister and I when we had visitors from abroad and now I was going to show it to my Irish family. Proud I had come up with the perfect sightseeing stop, we pulled into the

busy car park at Sanssouci. Since we had left the Dorfhotel that morning, the sun was back to splitting the stones. Great, formal terraced gardens with not a single place of shade in thirty degrees.

Anyway, the beauty of Sanssouci captured us instantly. Totally comprehensible why they called it 'sans-souci' which means "without a worry" in French. That was basically all I remembered about its history, obviously very little to impress my inquisitive husband. At least I was able to point him to Frederick the Great's grave that was covered in potatoes. But when he asked me why they were there, all I could come up with was, because he had invented them. It gave us both a great laugh, but was not exactly speaking for my skills as a tour guide. (Read the story about the 'Potato King' [here](#).)



Shift of Priorities

But who expects you to catch up on local history before a family vacation with a one-year old? Priorities totally shifted for me when travelling as a mother. Whereas my preparations used to focus on what places to visit, it was now all about how most conveniently to get there. Rather than bringing a guide book on the plane, I was making sure I had enough snacks and things to entertain the baby. However our first vacation as a family of three was a success. We even got another chance for a date night at my parents'. And whilst I had the same proud feeling showing my husband around my hometown [Torgau](#), I skipped the tour guiding part and we settled for a nice dinner and drinks by the river Elbe

instead.

