

Fog Holler in Europe – travel blog #2

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Fog Holler at Buchholz Saloon in Atlandsberg, Germany (near Berlin)

[Fog Holler](#) is a young bluegrass band from Portland, OR with a modern approach to this traditional art form. Or as they like to say, *It's a new shade of grass.* They include Tommy Schulz (guitar), Lillian Sawyer (fiddle), Noa (bass fiddle), and Casey James Holmberg (banjo). As they continue an extended European tour, the band has agreed to share their experiences in a travel blog, available exclusively here at Bluegrass Today. Kianna Mott-Smith, the band's manager, will be our tour guide.

Look for recurring contributions from Fog Holler for the next several weeks.

It's been a little while since we last caught up, so why don't you tell me the news....

(Five Fog Holler Gold Stars if you can tell me which Fog Holler song those lyrics are from!)

It's been a packed few weeks since you last [got an update from us](#), and we have been BUSY! Last we checked in, I was writing to you from the upper floors of an old grain mill in Switzerland. The band played one last show in Switzerland after that, this time amid the rush and bustle of Zurich's city center. Many of the folks at Gotthard Bar were getting ready for the DJ set later in the evening, or preparing to go clubbing down the street, so it was a rowdy bunch. We slept over the bar that night, and we felt the sub-bass rumbling up into our bones until the early morn, when those Friday night party-goers took the sunrise as their cue to finally go to bed.

Since then, we've traveled back to Germany to play a delightful house concert series in Wuppertal, followed by a matinee in Mannheim, a city that evokes the oxymoron "bucolic metropolis" – it feels as though you can't turn a corner without encountering a well-kept park strewn with fresh spring flowers and tinkling water features.

Lillian's thoughts about Mannheim:

"After our show in Wuppertal, Germany, the gang woke up bright and early and set off for Mannheim. We all got coffee and croissants (quickly becoming our typical European breakfast) and hit the road. On the way out of town we drove alongside the infamous Wuppertal Schwebebahn – a single rail suspension railway where an elephant, falling

nearly 40ft, fell out of a railcar during a circus publicity stunt. Unfortunately, due to our tight schedule, we weren't able to check it out much further. Onwards and upwards!

Arriving in Mannheim, we met with the promotor Bernhard Kreiter, and he showed us into the park, and to the amphitheater that we would be playing that day. The parks in Europe are cool, man! This one had several animal enclosures open for public viewing. I was especially interested in checking out the Royal Palm turkeys they had on display, but by the time we finished our set they had all turned into their houses and gone to sleep. I was very disappointed!

During the band's set break that day, we were approached by two men, one younger and one older, dressed to the nines in classic beige 1940s American suit and ties. Nick and Toni were their names, and they were all about vintage Americana. They had come out specifically to see the band play. At the end of the show, we signed some CDs for them and took some pictures with them.

By this point, the band was pretty wiped and thankfully we had some nice hotel accommodations in Mannheim – the hotel even had a sauna! Finally, before turning in for the night, the band chowed down on some schnitzel and contented themselves with a nice meal.”

We remained in Germany for most of that week and had the pleasure of staying with a friend for multiple nights, which is always a treat when you're on the road and meeting new people most days. Fog Holler originally met our friend Leo in 2019 at their residency at Amnesia in San Francisco, a venue that is now sadly closed. It was a trip – in more ways than one – to hang out with him again halfway around the world. Leo is also a musician, and the gigs that week were very close together, so the band got their first opportunity to jam a little. They played some musical chairs with their instruments; Casey strummed the guitar, Lilly gave herself some blisters on Noa's bass, and Tommy ripped it up on some old-time fiddle.

Tommy, our resident herbology aficionado, has been having a blast identifying the various plants and herbs we've encountered along the way – they study the ancient European school of herbology, or TEM (Traditional European Medicine), which stems from the ancient Greek school of medicine. A lot of these plants are less available back in the western United States, so encountering them where they grow locally has been lighting up his brain. Leo let us try a delicious allium growing as a weed in his garden, which Tommy identified as garlic chives (Fog Holler highly recommends – it was *really* good).

Getting from Leo's to the next gig was a rough experience. We had to leave in the wee hours of the morning to complete a five-hour drive before a morning performance at a country saloon. Casey had been taking all the drives until now, and had been, perhaps, too stoic about it. He often occupies a steadying role in the band – the ship's compass when turbulent waters set us off course. Noa, sensing that Casey was going to drop if he continued to get no breaks from driving, took it upon himself to learn to drive stick in one day, with effectively no prior experience. They were successful, and so it was Noa who got us from Leo's house in Witzhausen to Buchholz Saloon, just outside of Berlin. Teamwork makes the dream work!

It was Ascension Day in Germany, which the locals explained meant lots of drinking, bike riding, and, occasionally, deliberate brawls (praise Jesus?). After a raucous morning, we started another long drive back to the Netherlands, and it was soon clear that the health of our party was going to take a hit from the loss of sleep. Noa's seemingly infallible sense of humor and positivity may have been the only thing keeping us going that day.

Scooters, a bar in Leeuwarden, Netherlands, had a rowdy energy to rival Gotthard Bar. Despite all five of us managing to contract a hefty head cold at the same time, the band

rallied for their Friday night gig. The morning after offered a few brief hours of downtime, and Noa took the opportunity to go shopping. They had flown to Europe armed with a collection of clothes that they felt would help them be, effectively, invisible. Before embarking on this trip, Noa felt that blending in was the safest option for them. Other queer folks venturing to places they've never traveled before may also understand this sentiment. But, after several weeks on the road, and knowing our little traveling family would keep them safe no matter what, they decided to get themselves a wardrobe that affirms who they really are.

Tired and somewhat bedraggled, Saturday found us in a tiny country town called Baars, where we were warmly greeted by our lovely hosts, Hank and Anna, and their very sleepy cat. Kitty pets, a homecooked meal, and gorgeous country vistas did a lot to lift everyone's spirits. The audience in their beautifully refurbished barn continued to help, listening so quietly and intently you could hear a pin drop, and enthusiastically calling for multiple encores. Tommy met some fellow herbalists at this show, a couple who fortuitously ended up being our hosts for the evening. In addition to extensive discussions on the various benefits and uses of lemon balm, nettle, cleavers, and burdock root, these rad folks turned out to be collectors and preservationists of old-school Americana music ephemera. They showed us their fully functional Victrola from the 1920's, and played tunes from their vintage jukebox while we ate snacks before bed. There was hardly a room in the house without a wall that had been converted into record storage. Between the uplifting show and the amazing hospitality we received afterwards, we were thoroughly charmed by these Dutch country folks.

After playing a listening room located in a bike shop in Belgium, we made our way back to the Netherlands, which is where I'm sitting now, writing to you about our adventures. Last night the band played De Melkbus, a small venue in Dordrecht, passionately and expertly run by a man named Marc Burger. The band has played his venue before and was looking forward to coming back – he made us feel right at home and well cared for from the moment we arrived. From his musical taste to his choices running the band's sound, to the folks he draws to his venue, Marc continually demonstrated that the band was in very good hands.

We have one more night here before we have to move on, and we are taking advantage! Marc is putting us up in his little creek-side cottage, complete with a small kitchenette and a grill outside. As I write this, Lilly is cooking rice on the stove, and Casey is grilling some marinated chicken thighs (for the folks who've seen Fog Holler live recently – yes, they are bone-in). This will be the first opportunity we have to cook for ourselves on this trip, working together like a little family to make sure everyone is happy and cared for. Truly, we're nourishing our souls as well as our bellies.

Well, I'm getting waved to the table now, so it's time for me to sign off. Bon appetit!