

by Benedict Reuschling

My Year of BSD Conference Travels

During one of the talks at vBSDcon in September, I had decided to skip the current talk to spend some time in the hallway, when Colin Percival walked over to me. He started the conversation with: “You’ve been to a lot of events this year.” And, yes, I certainly have been. I showed him the directory on my disk where I keep my travel documents, and it occurred to me that I had been to even more events this year than the year before, which had already exceeded the year before that. All my trips had something to do with BSD and open source, advocating for it, in general, and the OS, in particular. From small events to big gatherings, each event had had its own charm and reason for me to attend.

It started in February with FOSDEM, which is a huge event. A large number of people attended the FreeBSD devsummit on the day before. We also had a significant number of visitors come by the FreeBSD table and to the talks in the BSD devroom at FOSDEM.

 **In March, I flew to Tokyo** to attend AsiaBSDcon, which is one of the big-three BSD conferences (the other two being BSDCan and EuroBSDcon). This was a good opportunity for planning new things for the operating systems and showing the work that had already been done. It also allowed me to enjoy being a tourist in an amazing country for a few days before the conference.

 **The Aberdeen hackathon in April** was new to me as I’ve never been to Scotland and because it was my first event of this kind. Although it turned out to be small (just the three of us, including the organizer, Tom Jones), it was nevertheless productive. I always enjoy going to universities other than my own to see how they are organized in terms of buildings, classes, equipment, etc.

 **A week later, I flew to Graz in Austria** to help out at the FreeBSD table at the Grazer Linxstage. This was a good opportunity for me to reconnect with my mentor, Johann Kois, who taught me everything I know about how to use the precious doc bit effectively. Meeting up with local BSD enthusiasts (no matter how small the group), I was reminded that a dedicated group of people can contribute a lot to the Project. Surely, people’s lives change (family, work, etc.) and they might not have as much time available for FreeBSD as they once did, but the enthusiasm is still there.

 **May was around the corner** by then, and that meant BSDCan. This is an event I look forward to every year and for which I make holiday time available as soon as I know the dates and can request the time. The amount of energy and enthusiasm across all the various BSD projects and people is simply stunning. It’s a very intensive week and it’s over in the blink of an eye (organizers might see this differently), but well worth attending. Allan Jude often talks about recharging your BSD batteries at these events. For me, the awe-

someness of the whole conference is supercharging!

 **The next event I attended** was another hackathon in Vienna, Austria, in June. Over a long weekend, we sat in a room and worked on PRs, committing outstanding patches, and reviewing other people's submissions in Phabricator. I also had the opportunity to do some one-on-one mentoring, which I always enjoy. It doesn't take long, but you can see results almost immediately. Vienna is, of course, a beautiful city and has a lot to offer, which made the trip even more worthwhile.

My only regret this year was that I did not attend the Berlin hackathon at Bally Wulff Games. From what I heard, it was a very productive event. Clearly, this is something I have to plan for next year.

 **I returned to Vienna in August** as a transit stop on my way to COSCUP in Taipei, Taiwan. This was a new location for me and the second country I visited in Asia, after Japan. It was certainly one of the highlights—experiencing a different culture; the friendliness of the people, how easy it is to navigate around as a foreigner, and the very well organized conference all helped me tolerate the 80% humidity of the season.

 **In September, I attended** the aforementioned vBSDcon in Reston, Virginia, and EuroBSDcon, which was held in Lillehammer, Norway, this year. Both were two great conferences, each with its own special style, well organized and well run. They also concluded the year of BSD conference travels for me, as I had to teach my Unix class at the beginning of October. If you want to read more details about any of the events just mentioned, I encourage you to go back to earlier issues of the *FreeBSD Journal* to see the full trip reports from me or other people.

 **2019 turned out to be the year of FreeBSD hackathons.** We talked about doing them more often last year, and luckily people stepped up to organize them. They provided a different venue and a way to get some work done for FreeBSD. My overall impression was that people like this sort of event, having the possibility to sit together with someone and work on something or casually walk over to another person in the room to ask a question. Hackathons are clearly something we should aim to repeat in future years, perhaps even extend. I saw that it worked well when we did not have enough talks to fill two days of devsummit at EuroBSDcon, so we declared the second day a hackathon. People showed up and started working on their own little (or sometimes big) projects without requiring much outside motivation.

Now, is the sort of travel I've just described sustainable? Perhaps not, but I'm happy that I could do it this year and previously. It's perfectly fine if you cannot attend everything, not even all three of the major BSD conferences. If you can just attend one, that's a great start. Organizing even a one-day devsummit or hackathon on your own is not too difficult. Even if there are only a handful of people attending the first time, that's okay. You might get to know people from your own city that you never knew, but who are just as excited about FreeBSD as you are. And if you like this sort of thing, think about doing it regularly as sort of a monthly meetup or BSD user group (BUG).

If you like conferences but don't have the financial resources available, you should apply for a travel grant from the FreeBSD Foundation (<https://www.freebsd.foundation.org/what-we-do/grants/travel-grants/>). We often don't get enough applications from people, so don't be shy about filling out the form if you really want to go to an event. And don't think, "Oh, I'm too new." One of the goals of the grant is that we want to give new people the opportunity to meet BSD folks at these gatherings. And it's not only to charge their BSD batteries, but also to give them the opportunity to engage with the community. We never know what people do with their freshly charged BSD batteries. It could very well be that they'll contribute more to the

Project, which certainly makes it a worthwhile investment of the money people have donated to the Foundation.

Speaking about the FreeBSD Foundation, I want to make it clear to people who think that just because a person currently serves on the Board that their travel is paid for. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have never used Foundation funding to attend an event. If I can't go somewhere because I can't afford it (or if the conference is not paying for me to give a talk), I simply don't go!

Around the world, I can see that people are excited about the BSDs and that there is still a need for more: more advocacy, more support, more people contributing their time in various ways, money, and sometimes a good amount of enthusiasm. Even small levels of involvement matter, especially if you are new.

I received a big package from Li-Wen Hsu at COSCUP as a parting gift for attending and giving a talk. I couldn't quite figure out what it was at first, and I had to sit on my suitcase just to make it fit. When I got home and unpacked, I finally saw what it was: he had given me one of the speaker gifts—big pillow—from BSD Taiwan that he organized a couple of years ago. On one side of it were the words that not only sum up this article, but the whole year for me and the reasons why I do these travels: **Love BSD**.



Benedict Reuschling joined the FreeBSD Project in 2009. After receiving his full documentation commit bit in 2010, he actively began mentoring other people to become FreeBSD committers. He joined the FreeBSD Foundation in 2015, where he is currently serving as vice president. Benedict has a Master of Science degree in Computer Science and is teaching a UNIX for software developers class at the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences, Darmstadt, Germany. Together with Allan Jude, he is host of the weekly BSDNow.tv (<http://BSDNow.tv>) podcast.

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