

## World Schools Debating Championships 2017 – by Marie Davidsen Buhl 3i

World Schools Debating Championships. Ring a bell? Probably not, if you live in Denmark at least. In layman terms, this translates to the world championships of debating for high school students – an event I attended over the summer. This grand 10-day tournament took place in Bali, Indonesia. Short version: it was one of the greatest, wildest and most exciting experiences I have ever had!

With the Danish national team, I advanced as far as the octofinals, landing ourselves in a final placement of 12<sup>th</sup> best team out of 50 participating nations from around the world. We managed to win the award of “Best Team with English as a Foreign Language”, while Singapore took home the title of World Champions of 2017.

I was selected as one of the 5 members of the team in January, after a year and a half of debate training. From then on, we practiced every week and went to various international tournaments, from Bangkok to Boston. WSDC is by far the biggest event for high school debaters, somewhat like a great sports tournament, minus the great audiences. Even so, with police escort to the venues, media coverage, and fancy ceremonies, it still felt like my 15 minutes of fame.

Competitive debating is, you could say, a “rule-based discussion”, in which two teams compete on arguments, responsiveness, and presentation. There is a pre-set “motion” (a topic/proposal), with one team in favour and another against. These can be released months in advance or just an hour before the debate. Examples from this year include forcing religious institutions to appoint female leaders, NATO presence in the Baltics, and removal of heroic war statues. When all 3 members of each team have spoken, a judging panel selects a winning team based on the criteria of style, content, and strategy.

Debating is extremely intense and challenging. In a round, you need to be hyper-focused and ready to deliver on the spot. The whole process is quite demanding; we spent more than three weeks in Asia in total, training, preparing, and going to tournaments for something like 8 to 10 hours most days. Debate at this level is quite competitive, and there is a certain amount of performance pressure. You have to put yourself at risk. But this is precisely what makes it so rewarding: you get a rush of adrenaline, you are forced to think both quickly and critically, and you learn how to present to an audience. And of course, you get some pretty in-depth knowledge of highly relevant and interesting topics (well, if you care about statues, that is).

Thankfully, WSDC is more than case-writing and performing. A big part of the tournament is cultural and social exchange. This year, we were lucky enough to get a trip to Bali on top of the tournament experience itself. We’ve seen traditional dancing, visited some of the beautiful Hindu temples of the island, and tasted all sorts of strange candy from around the world at “Culture Night”, where all teams got to show some of their national items. I’ve made amazing friends from Peru to Bangladesh, and have gotten extremely close with the other members of Team Denmark. After all this time engrossed in our own little debate world, going home is sure to cause a bit of post-debate melancholy.

For an even better impression of WSDC, here is one of the daily tournament update videos (in which Team Denmark is also interviewed):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBYA2YmedGA&t=185s>

And by the way: Nørre G also has its own debate club! If you think debating sounds interesting, keep an eye out on lectio for the details of our intro meeting. And don’t be intimidated: debating is new to pretty much everyone in Denmark, so we keep it very chill and easy. And (as if debating was not amazing enough to make all of you show up) we eat cake every time!