

Welcome to Denmark

Denmark seems to have cemented its position at or near the top of every global quality-of-life survey. Take a look around, and it's not hard to see why.

Happiness & Hygge

It's heart-warming to know there's still a country where the term 'fairy tale' can be used freely – from its most enduring literary legacy to its fine textbook castles. In a nutshell, Denmark gets it right: old-fashioned charm embraces the most avowedly forward-looking design and social developments, and wins it a regular chart-topping place on lists of both the most liveable *and* the happiest nations on earth. You won't have to search hard to find some much-prized *hygge*, an untranslatable and uniquely Danish trait that has a profound influence on the locals' inestimable happiness. *Hygge* is social nirvana in Denmark: a sense of cosiness, camaraderie and contentment.

History & Impact

The world first took notice of Denmark more than a millennium ago, when Danish Vikings took to the seas and ravaged vast tracts of Europe. How things have changed. These days Denmark captures the global imagination as the epitome of a civilised society, and it punches above its weight on many fronts: progressive politics, urban planning, sustainability, design, architecture. Recent global crushes freshly exported from Copenhagen include city cycling culture, the New Nordic culinary movement, and brilliantly addictive TV drama series.

Equality of Life

While many countries are noticeable for the ever-increasing gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots', Denmark seems to be populated by the 'have enoughts', and the obviously rich and obviously poor are few and far between. This egalitarian spirit allows the best of the arts, architecture, eating out and entertainment to be within easy reach of all. Indeed, the best catchword for Denmark might well be 'inclusive' – everyone is welcome and everyone is catered to, be they young, old, gay, straight, male, female, and whether they travel with kids, pets or bikes in tow, or with a mobility issue or handicap. Cities are compact and user-friendly, infrastructure is clean and modern, and travel is a breeze.

The Danish Aesthetic

Denmark's landscapes are understated – pure and simple, often infused with an ethereal Nordic light. Such landscapes are reflected in the Danish design philosophy towards fashion, food, architecture, furniture and art. Simplicity of form and function come first, but not at the expense of beauty. And so you'll find moments of quintessential Danish loveliness on a sandy beach, beside a lake, admiring a Renaissance castle, or in a candlelit cafe that has perfected the art of *hygge*.



Why I Love Denmark

By Carolyn Bain, Author

My first experience of Denmark came as a teenager, living there for a year as an exchange student. My first youthful Danish loves were the pastries, the furniture design and the long summer nights. These days I return with the same passions, enriched with an adult appreciation for Denmark's egalitarianism, its belief that cities belong to people not cars and its endless quest for *hygge*. It helps that everything is easy on the eye – the unfairly attractive locals, yes, but also the architecture, the landscapes and the interior design. I think that secretly, most cities want to grow up to be Copenhagen – and if they don't, they should.

For more about our authors, see page 320.