

Katrina Peterson

-Århus Universitet, Denmark (from) University of Wisconsin, Madison

-Participated in study abroad academic year 2010-2011 (this survey is for Fall semester 2010)

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### 1. Why/Where

I decided to study abroad in Denmark because I went to an immersion language camp as a child and learned some Danish. Ever since, I have been very interested in Danish culture, and have continued to learn the language. I decided to go to Århus instead of Copenhagen because I wanted to be a part of a more international community and meet a lot of Danish students as opposed to being in a program with some 700 Americans. I honestly didn't realize how many exchange students there would be here, and thought I would be more immersed in the language than I have been. I prepared to study abroad by working as a counselor at the Danish language camp the summer before I moved to Denmark and taking the highest level Danish course offered at my school. I could have improved my preparations by deciding what classes I wanted to sign up for.

### 2. Arrival

I have lived in Dania kollegium the last 6 months and will be here the rest of my time and love it. If every exchange student had a chance to be here, that would be great, unfortunately there are only 5 rooms reserved for exchange students every semester. It is a private dormitory with single or double rooms. I live in a two bedroom unit. I have my own (very large room) and share a kitchen and bathroom with an exchange student from Australia. The dormitory has a fantastic weight room with a treadmill, two elliptical machines, and erg and weight machines. We are a 10 min walk/5 min bike ride from the AU campus – and also the business school (which is in the other direction.) The center of town is about 10-15 minutes bike ride down the hill and there is a shopping center with a grocery store across the street. There are also three other cheap grocery stores within 10 min walking distance. It is very quiet here though, as the rooms are private there are not too many parties and we are close to residential areas. Since we have our own private apartment though, we have had 15 or more people over for dinner gatherings. We are also about a 5 min walk from Studenterhus, the center of exchange activity. I can't say enough good things about Dania, oh our rent is only 2000 dkk a month, too. The only problem is that it is nearly impossible to get into. I was supremely lucky, I have a Danish friend who is number 63 on the waiting list, and she signed up a year and a half ago. So if exchange students request Dania specifically, as I did, they may be lucky enough to live here.

The introduction week I didn't find to be too helpful, but I was here two weeks before that for Destination DK, the language program in August. In those two weeks I met almost all of the exchange students who would be my good friends for the semester, learned how to navigate the city, and saw some cultural things. The first two weeks were key for me. My exchange friends found the language courses

very helpful, too. I came in with a lot of knowledge of the language, but the program overall is probably one of the reasons I feel so comfortable in this country.

ScanDesign was not a part of my arrival at all, since they are centered in Copenhagen.

## 2. (again) Academics

Class registration was slightly annoying here as I am used to doing it all online at home, where I can choose my own courses. Danes take their bachelor's courses in a certain sequence, so they do not have to sign up for classes, but are assigned them. AU's website to choose classes is easy enough to use though. There are just a few more e-mails and office visits required to actually register. The classroom structure was great. I enjoying having one 3 hr class a week. There is more work to do on one's own, but there is only one grade, the final exam. This gives an exchange student ample chance to explore Europe while they are here, and I skipped a few weeks of class, but never fell behind.

Student/teacher relations were fine. There are not "office hours" but if a student has a problem, they can meet with the teacher by appt. (which I did several times) and the professors are very helpful.

Grading is on the weird 12 pt Danish scale, but within that, my exchange friends and I found it to be surprisingly fair. Or we were all just happy with our grades.

Administration was helpful as at any university.

The libraries were a bit more social- places to have group meetings, I miss Law Library, but there are also quiet reading rooms, and the classrooms were really nice. Very clean and simple Scandinavian design, but also high tech, profs never seemed to have problems with the equipment like they do at UW. No complaints though, my job at UW is helping professors with the equipment, so it can stay that way ;)

The quality of the instruction was fantastic, I thought. Since professors only teach the classes once a week, they cut the crap, and expect the student to do a lot of the work on their own – so classroom time feels very productive. Academically, I liked the general feel of the classes. I felt like I was treated as an adult. What I liked least of all were the online programs. Since I was taking classes in two faculties, I needed to versions of "Learn@UW" – an online program where professors can post assignments and readings and such. Since Danes take all of their classes in sequence with the same people, they rarely have students that need access to two different programs. I tried so many times to get onto one of the programs, but finally gave up and used a Danish friend's password. The teachers were understanding, but that is a technical thing Århus needs to fix. Other exchange friends had the same problem, so we all just shared passwords. Luckily assignments did not need to be turned in on the program, it is just where readings were posted.

I took two of my classes in Danish the first semester, but I took a poli sci one called Globalization and International Political Economy with Jørgen Dige Pedersen and loved the class. So I recommend that to any Economy or Poli sci major.

## 3. Housing

There was a website that showed all of the dorms, that is where I decided I wanted to live in Dania. When I arrived in Århus, my mentor met me at the train station and drove me to my dorm and got me settled in.

I think I covered whether I would recommend Dania, it is *so* fantastic, but:

Vilhelm Kiers, University Park and Tandlæge kollegium are three other good ones. I've had friends in all of the above. Vilhelm is a bit further, but not too bad (4k from Uni,) it has a nice set up, with a private bedroom and bathroom for everyone and a shared kitchen between 15 people. There is one exchange student and 14 Danish students on every floor, out of a LOT of buildings, and they have their own bar. My friends that lived in Vilhelm really liked it, and usually met a lot of Danish students as well. University Park is a series of dorms right on campus, but also very hard to get into. Tandlæge is next door to the business school and has the same living arrangements as Vilhelm, though a lot smaller. The people who lived there last semester really liked it as well.

Do not let students live in Skjoldhøj. Skjoldhøj will be the death of one's social life. Skjoldhøj is about 8 k away from campus and is like a giant concrete jail. It is really far away, impersonal and ugly. Everyone I know who has lived there, hates it.

Børglum is also far away and not nice at all, but Kirsebærhaven may be the worst, it is about an hour bus away, half way to Norway, really. If a student gets placed there I would recommend not accepting the housing, and finding somewhere else.

#### 4. Exchange Site

I love Århus in general. It is a great city with a lot of culture, but not too big. There is a very nice downtown area with a lot of cafés and restaurants and shops. The city is definitely buzzing on a Friday and Saturday night, but it still feels like a good place for families. It is very hyggelig, I guess. The campus is right north of the city and really integrates well with downtown. I could see myself living in a city like Århus.

#### 5. Health and Safety

Århus is probably the safest place in the world. It's bad really, I'm used leaving my purse around when I go to the counter at a restaurant, nobody ever steals anything, people forget to lock their bikes, no one locks their bike *to* anything. I'm going to have to be careful when I go back to the states.

#### 6. Culture

I integrated pretty well into the culture. The first semester I spent a lot of time with my exchange friends from all over the world, but as the semester went on, I have met more and more Danish people. I joined karate here, have been active in a running club at the Stadium, and took classes in Danish with Danish students. Now I volunteer at the Scandinavian Studies Friday bar, too. Danes will not go too far out of their way to meet exchange students, but if you are friendly and involved, you will meet people.

I don't find there to be too many significant cultural differences here. Growing up going to Danish American center events and a Danish language immersion camp, there were few surprises for me. In public, people are more formal I think, they dress nicer and have more rules when it comes to table etiquette, but that I think is

true all over northern Europe. Price tag shock was a lot more severe than culture shock for me. One aspect I was actually really worried about was running. A few people told me that no one goes out and runs in Europe. Well, I don't think I have ever been in a city with as many runners in *my life* as Århus. There are outdoor exercise machines in parks, the forests are absolutely crawling with runners, and they have about 10 huge running clubs here. They are still better dressed though.

## 7. Finances

ScanDesign has made it *possible* for me to study abroad here. All the little things are so much more expensive, and it adds up. At the very least I wouldn't have been able to travel and see Europe at all if it weren't for ScanDesign, I don't even know if I could afford to be here though, I definitely notice the 25% value added tax on *everything*.

I set up a DanskeBank account, and Århus Uni put my 1000 Euro flight refund in there, but otherwise it has been useless- as I would have to wire money to it, which is expensive. I just use my American visa here.

Rent is about 1,800-2,500 a month, food about 600, transportation 250, fun money 1000, so about 4000 dkk a month total.

Unexpected expenses.... Hmm well my dad is an accounts supervisor at the U of M so he pretty much went over exactly what I would need over here, so I'm at an unfair advantage.

I would say going out and clothes, actually. The little things are significantly more and end up adding up really quickly. I know friends who went out a lot, bought new clothes, and drank a lot and all of a sudden they were broke, so pay attention to how much you are spending.

Rent is the same, food and clothes are a bit more. Going out is a lot more. So students should take advantage of Studenterhus, Friday bars, anything hosted by the Uni will be a lot cheaper. Be careful with drinking, it is easy to go on vacation on exchange and party away, but I have seen some students not only empty their wallets, but gain the exchange 15, and that's in kilos.

## 8. Admin

My ScanDesign coordinators are fantastic. I didn't really talk to them before I got here, as I didn't have any problems, but they have organized some awesome trips for us. I wish we did a bit more in Århus, though. I missed a lot of cph outings ☹️ The Uni's admin offices are equal to that of UW I would say. They can sometimes have annoying red tape they need to follow, but are usually very helpful, and try to do all they can to help.

## 9. Type

This program is for students who don't want anyone to hold their hand. The logistics and academics require students to be assertive and active. Denmark in general expects students to take action if they have a question or if there is a problem. No one will ask if you are understanding, are ok, ect. I have made great, supportive friends, but the programs lets us do what we want. If we want to be social, and involved in activities we need to go out and figure out how to do that. If someone

wants to sit in their room the entire time, no one will stop them. There aren't "required" activities exchange students have to do. I personally love it this way, I get really annoyed when I feel like I am in a kindergarten class. I spent a day with my friend studying abroad in CPH, and it was one of the first days of their DIS program and I *hated* it. They had scavenger hunts for them, it was like a middle school field trip. There were Americans everywhere. I, on the other hand did not have one American friend here last semester (it was awesome!) So if someone has never been to Europe before and is a bit nervous and wants to feel very comfortable, send them to CPH. I, on the other hand am extremely independent, and like figuring out things on my own, so this program is great for me.

10. Overall

11 of 10 stars

My expectations were pretty realistic, and I knew ScanDesign would help, but being able to travel while here and not having to worry about money (too much) has enriched this experience immensely.

Greatest benefit of exchange: has been networking with people from all over the world. I don't like the word networking though, I feel like I have made incredible friends that will last a lifetime. And living in Dania, that has been a highlight.

Another aspect that has made this trip really fun is that is just so happens I know about 15 people from home that are studying abroad in Europe this semester, so it has been fun to go and be able to stay with friends all over. I would have felt alone back at UW this year.

Comments:

I couldn't be more excited to be here another semester. I am now really feeling comfortable in Århus, and am really becoming a part of my class in Scandinavian Studies. The Danish students are inviting me to stuff, and my Danish classmates are turning to *friends*. Exchange students are thrown together in the same situations so they click right away, but befriending the natives takes time. I knew this would happen, and I never even considered doing only one semester, but I am glad it's happening, it will be awfully hard to leave.

Also, (promoting myself here a bit) read my blog if you get a chance.

<http://katrinesdanskeventyr.blogspot.com/>

I have been writing it with awareness that my audience is my relatives, people my parents work with and professors back at home, so I keep it relatively professional ☺ There is also an account of all the trips I've done while here thus far.