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1. Why and where

For the past couple of semesters I have been enrolled in a Danish language class and have been working towards earning a degree in the Scandinavian Studies department at UW-Madison, so prior to my abroad experience I was already quite sure of at least the country I was going to study in. My choices were between Aarhus and Copenhagen, but ultimately I chose Aarhus due to several factors. I wanted to live in a similarly sized city to the one I had been living in (Madison) and wanted to experience more 'Danish' culture during my time, with regards to Danes and exchange students. My goal for the semester was to immerse myself into Danish culture and learn as much as possible from the Danes while detaching myself from the lifeline of fellow American students.

2. Arrival/Orientation

Prior to my arrival I had already been to Denmark on another ScanDesign sponsored program and had made friends with a Danish boy living in Aarhus. So, my arrival was quite different from other exchange students because I had a place to stay and store my luggage. Since I did not need my mentor to pick me up from the airport/train station, I actually never met and did not have any contact with my mentor, which was disappointing as many other exchange students had very involved mentors who closely advised them. I however did not experience this. The orientation program at the host university was quite comprehensive and lasted multiple days. The orientation itself was not extremely helpful in outlining the university and explaining daily functions we were expected to fulfill as students, but it was a great way to meet other exchange students and did help in getting us better orientated to the campus and surrounding areas. The orientation held at UW-Madison was much more concerned with presenting possible difficulties that might arise in any exchange program, outlining basic UW-Madison policies. It was not specific to my program, although we did break down into smaller groups. The combination of the two orientations, while not extremely thorough, did provide a good base and gave me confidence prior to studying abroad and the beginning of the semester.

3. Academics

Many students before going abroad assume the classes, course load, and expected work is much less than at their home university, which may be the case with some exchange programs, but I certainly did not feel that Aarhus University was much of a step down, if at all. The classes were much different in regards to the classroom environment and what was expected from students, but it was different not necessarily easier. I actually quite enjoyed my classes in Denmark because of the hands-off approach towards learning. Students are expected to do work outside of class in order to be

prepared to discuss the material in class. Classes were rarely run as lectures, but operated much more like discussion groups, with the professor merely asking questions and provoking thought, while the students lead much of the discussion and debate. Homework was not mandatory, as 100% of the term's grade was determined by an oral or written exam at the end of the semester. This type of learning style took me and many other exchange students a while to get acclimated to, especially since American students are quite used to constant grades with homework, midterms, and finals. Like many other exchange students, my grades remained fairly constant in comparison to my home university. However, like I said the workload was not necessarily less, just distributed differently (I have never spent so much time working on just three finals...).

4. Housing

The housing I received was found through the host university. The two options are to allow the university to find housing for you or to do it yourself. If you aren't satisfied with the location, price, etc. of the housing the university locates for you, you then have to find an alternative on your own. For the most part, all of the university housing (the place I stayed at and my experience from visiting other living communities), going through the university is the best option. My kollegium (living community) was relatively inexpensive (around 2400 DKK, ~\$425/month). Although it was located on the outskirts of town (about a 10 minute bike ride from campus, 30 minutes from downtown), the people (I got to live with mostly Danes), the amount of space (single room with private bathroom), and the proximity to necessary facilities (laundry, grocery stores, etc.) made life at the kollegium great. I don't think my experience in Denmark would have been the same had I lived in an apartment away from other students or even with other exchange students. It was a great way to make quick and quality friendships, not to mention the ease of obtaining it, considering I didn't have to participate in any part of the search for housing.

5. Exchange site

As I stated earlier, I did my exchange in Aarhus, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Aarhus is a great city, both small and large at the same time. The city itself (size and population) is not large, but the cultural activities both in the community and through the university. On a regular basis I would visit the art museum (which I would recommend getting a season pass if you intend on visiting more than once), go to the canal to hangout, or bike through the botanical gardens. There were many seasonal activities (an art exhibition located along the sea, going to Den Gamle By, the U21 Euro competition, etc.) that keep people busy and outside as much as possible (obviously weather permitting, which is not very often in Denmark). Altogether, living in Aarhus was a great experience. I think by living in a smaller Danish city, I was able to successfully access the "Danish" way of life as much as possible. I was very satisfied with my time in Aarhus, but miss it already, which is probably the mark of a good city to live in.

6. Health and Safety

I think it is important to preface this section by saying I have never felt safer than during my time in Denmark. The country as a whole is incredibly safe and crime is something I never had to worry about. With that said, there are obviously exceptions and one should still remain cautious in observably precarious situations. In regards to health and receiving health care, Denmark provides efficient and quick care. I didn't run into an extreme health care needs while in Denmark, but I felt confident I would have received the proper care with a quick response time. I only went to my doctor once (for a minor flu concern) and was seen within 24 hours of my request. The only pain was actually getting my CPR card (which allows you to go to the doctor), but this is not a flaw of the health care, more of an issue of bureaucratic red tape with the immigration administration.

7. Cultural aspects

As a starting point, Denmark is part of Western Europe, so although I did experience slight amounts of culture shock, I think it was more 'moving shock' than culture shock. Denmark obviously has its own unique and individualized cultural undertones, but as I don't want to ruin the surprise and experience of discovering the beauty of the country, I will just comment more on the approach of learning a new culture rather than discussing the culture itself. In my experience, one's mentality towards integration and willingness to learn is incredibly important. My personal approach was orientated towards soaking up as much as possible, inquiring from the natives on their opinions and thoughts towards anything and everything. By being outgoing and curious about others, you will definitely ensure yourself a good time. Being on exchange is very similar (and actually literally is) to going to another school and starting over again. Essentially, by being open and excited to meet new people your exchange experience will be exactly what you want it to be. You get out what you put in.

8. Finances

Financially, I found the original estimates given by the university slightly out of touch with the reality in regards to the real cost of living in Denmark. If I remember correctly, I was told I would spend approximately \$8,000 during my time in Denmark. After my totally (just after the semester, not including traveling after/during), I had spent around \$10,000. This was before I received the travel grant from the host university (which everyone can apply for and gives up to 1000 euro for travel expenses incurred prior to arrival in Denmark, would suggest applying) and got my housing deposit back (~\$1,500). Food was quite expensive (I spent approximately \$60 a week for myself and was not eating extravagant by any means). I only went out a couple of times to eat, but expected to pay around 150 kroner for a meal (\$30). Going out to bars was by far the most expensive part of the semester, mostly because one beer at a decent bar on the canal was around 30-50 kroner (~\$6-8). I would recommend buying beer located at the kollegiums (each living community has its own bar), Friday bars (located within each academic department), or buying bulk from the grocery store (with cases because you get money back by bringing the bottles back with the case). I

never got a bike because I was able to borrow a bike from a roommate, but I would recommend getting a bike from the student house because it is more like renting, so you don't have to find a buyer at the end of the semester. Also, a good alternative is to look online (on the Danish equivalent of Craig's list) because used bikes are frequently listed. I would not buy my bike from a store or a grocery store because they are usually very expensive or the quality is pretty poor. As for the public transportation, unless you're riding the bus every day, getting a monthly pass is not necessarily the best choice. There are 10-use passes for 2 zones that are available at 7-eleven, which are 120 kroner (~\$24). Regardless, be prepared to spend a lot of money and be prepared to feel like you're spending a lot of money. Unfortunately it is expensive to live in Denmark and getting a job there is improbable if you don't speak the language, so it's better to save up before hand in order to ensure you have enough, and then forget about it and enjoy yourself. Obviously don't become ridiculous with spending habits, but if you're careful and spend wisely normally, there's no point in worry too much about it. Be reasonable, but not overwhelmed.

9. Scan Design Fellowship

The Scan Design fellowship was very important in making my time in Denmark manageable financially. The fellowship paid my program fee, which allowed me to allocate those funds elsewhere, which obviously helped. My one complaint about the fellowship was that being in Aarhus did not allow me to always participate in organized activities, as most people involved in the program were located in Copenhagen. There was only one visit/activity day made in Aarhus, otherwise everything was located in Copenhagen and often on weekdays, so I was only able to participate a couple of times, which was slightly disappointed. However, even though I wasn't able to participate all the time, the times I did were great and Anne did a terrific job of planning fun and interesting activities. It is because the activities were so enjoyable that I was disappointed I couldn't participate more often.

10. Program/student type

While I cannot comment on the Copenhagen experience, I can say that going to Aarhus forced me to be more independent and reach out to others more for help, assistance, and friendship. In Aarhus, there were only a hand full of Americans, which was actually quite nice, as I wanted to branch out and meet Danes and other exchange students from around the world. Also, in general, the Danish academic coordination system amongst departments and other faculties within the university is a little more hectic than what I was used to at UW-Madison, so it is important for exchange students to not be afraid to ask for help. In fact, my pride and self-esteem macho-ness was the first things to go in Denmark. I wouldn't have survived a week if I had remained stubborn and completely self-reliant. Being self-reliant is/was very important, but asking for help is sometimes a difficult thing to do for many people. To sum up, Aarhus is an excellent place to go, but students must be

aware ahead of time finding the proper balance between seeking assistance and independence is key.

11. Overall experience

My overall experience, both my study abroad experience and ScanDesign experience, were excellent and there is really nothing I would have changed. I completely and thoroughly enjoyed my time in Denmark and would recommend it very highly. Studying abroad is an amazing experience that I think everyone should have before his or her college career is over. It is a time for learning, traveling, and discovering new settings, which becomes more difficult as time goes on due to increasing commitment and responsibilities. Explore while you can!