

Katrina Peterson: Evaluation of Academic year Abroad 2010-2011 in Århus, Denmark [Evaluation #2, covering the entire year, therefore skipping some material]

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.

The Academics in Århus were superb in all my experiences. The professors were knowledgeable, very well prepared for all lectures, available for help and dedicated to their student's success. The classroom structure was agreeable as well, there was a bit less classroom instruction time than there was in Madison as the professors expected their students to do more work on their own time. Expectations of the professors were clear enough though, and syllabi were given out that explained the readings when they needed to be completed. The one exam format that was worth 100% of the student's grade was new to me, but I think the exam were fair. My only complaints in terms of Academics are in relation to administration. I was extremely frustrated with administration on a number of occasions. Århus University is really not set up for exchange students to take classes in Danish. I was registered for classes in multiple faculties in both English and Danish; this caused endless confusion and frustration for me. Århus does not have one system between all faculties like UW has (Learn@UW) but the Humanities Institute has FirstClass and Social Sciences has AULA. One cannot be registered for two faculties so I did not ever end up getting FirstClass access, which is where all of our assignments important information was posted. I had to use a classmate's password, so that needs to be changed. I also knew other exchange students taking all English classes with this problem. It is also a huge process to turn an exam in at Århus, and must go through the administration, not the professor. The professors did not seem to have any power over daily issues, like if a student wanted to register for a class, and the professor felt there was enough space, the professor themselves could not give the student access to register. Over my year, I found these things very frustrating. The actual classroom instruction was of very high quality, though.

Housing in Århus was very comfortable. I was in Dania kollegium, which was close to everything, very clean and had friendly residents. I chose my housing based on location, and was a 10 min walk from the center of campus and I would definitely

recommend it to any exchange students. The campus in Århus in general is extremely beautiful and pretty condensed into one area. The campus flows right into the city and has a really nice sense of community in general. Århus is similar to Madison in the sense that it is a similar size and is very much a student town in the sense that there is a lot of nightlife and cultural activities to keep young people busy and entertained, but there are also a lot of families in Århus. I believe it is the youngest city in Denmark, not in history, but in population. There are also two forests near the city that are great locations for running and other activities. The entire city runs along the coast, too, it was a gorgeous place to live.

It was also a very safe place. Crime is low, statistically, but it also feels safe. People do not lock their bikes to posts, but just put a lock through the back wheel. Denmark is a society based on trust and it is evident in every day life there. I only had to go to the hospital once; I was in the ER with a hurt thumb. They were very nice to me and the healthcare was free, relatively quick and it seemed organized.

Culturally Denmark was more different than I expected it to be. The culture is a lot more reserved a bit colder to foreigners than Americans tend to be. Though I was in a running club and took classes in Danish with Danes and worked at one of the Danish Friday bars, I still had a bit of trouble making my way into a group of Danish friends. I made some really close Danish friends as individuals. After a year, though it was still hard to get involved in a group of Danes, but I had a group of close friends that were exchange students, which may have also been a factor in hindering coming into a group of Danish friends. So many exchange students come to Denmark for just a semester though, so I do understand the Dane's hesitance to make friends with those that are just passing through. I did sense that Danes tend to be a bit more racist or at least less culturally sensitive to minorities as there are fewer minorities in Denmark than in the USA. I picked up on this through names that were used that would not be socially acceptable in the USA and certain treatment exchange students vs. Danish students. The Student bazaar for example that had separate rooms for the exchange students and the Danes, the exchange students being in a far away separate room with no customer traffic. These were minor events, but I do think they reflect the Danish cultural tendency to put their own people first in their country, which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Financially ScanDesign was essential for my year in Denmark and prevented me from having to take out a significant amount of extra loans for a year abroad. I greatly appreciate the financial help and am not sure I could have done a whole year abroad without it. In Denmark, I opened a Danish bank account as I was going to get a refund for the flight, and I wanted to put it in a Danish bank account. My Danish bank account (DanskeBank) turned out to be relatively useless after I spent the flight reimbursement. The only way to put money into it was to wire it, which costs \$50 every transaction. I think the best way to deal with money in Denmark is to either open a bank account and wire large sums at a time, or just use an American credit card and take out large sums of cash out from an ATM at a time. American credit cards do work in most places, but the fees can get really expensive. Denmark

is an extremely expensive country to live in. One can count on food and clothes being 2 to 3 times as much as in Wisconsin. Rent was actually about the same, \$400 a month and transportation was not an issue for me as I could walk everywhere or take my bike. I would recommend \$700 a month for necessities though. Unexpected costs I encountered were the water/utility bill at the end of the year and various travel costs added up pretty quickly too.

The ScanDesign coordinators were extremely helpful and always available for questions. We did not have a ScanDesign coordinator in Århus, but Copenhagen is a short bus ride away and there was a field trip in Århus that helped a lot.

I think the Århus exchange program is for people who are relatively independent and are okay with figuring some things out for themselves. I think that someone who was a little wary about going to Europe and wanted to be with Americans may be better off in the Copenhagen program where there are more Americans, but Århus is a safe city, and there are a lot of exchange students in the Erasmus program, and the classes are all in English, so I think Århus is a safe bet for most students.

I would rate my overall year experience as a 9 out of 10. My expectations were extremely unrealistic, as I had spent so many years interested in Denmark and learning about it, that I had a very idealized country in my head that did not exist in reality. I was expecting to feel as though I had come home to Denmark, but instead I felt very much a foreigner. It was a fantastic experience nonetheless, but the administration fiascos I had to deal with and the Dane's blatant confusion and bewilderment as to why I had bothered to learn Danish were disappointments. ScanDesign was very helpful though. Second semester I met a couple other UW Madison students through ScanDesign and it was very nice to have some familiarity after knowing virtually no Americans first semester. I would say the biggest challenge of studying abroad was admitting that I was a foreigner and that I may never fit in, that the Danes do things their way and it wasn't necessarily wrong, or right for that matter, but was just a different way of life. It was an important lesson to learn, though.