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Why and where

While deliberating on whether to study in Denmark or Switzerland, I kept thinking about how long I had wanted to experience Scandinavia. Everything I read suggested Copenhagen was Europe's hidden gem. After comparing course offerings at Copenhagen Business School (CBS) and the University of Zurich, CBS seemed to approach education somewhat differently, and I was interested in experiencing that.

My pre-exchange research led me to believe that Danes are somewhat reserved initially, and that it might even be difficult to build friendships as a result. I thought, well, I'm pretty much the same in that regard. It turned out that I met a handful of Danes that I have become and will continue to be good friends with.

Beforehand, I read quite a bit about Danish culture and the process of obtaining a student visa, which I secured. While it is not necessary, it is required if you plan to work while abroad. You might find it helpful to plan in advance and allot yourself plenty of time to think about what you want to get out of your time abroad. Or, you might have a personality that simply likes to hit the ground running and figure things out on the fly.

Arrival orientation

I attempted to rent an apartment on my own while still in the US, and failed. It is not the most difficult undertaking, but you must be persistent, have ample time to search, and be patient. Unfortunately, due to extenuating circumstances, that option did not work for me, and I ended up leasing a dorm room brokered by CBS.

The University of Washington's (UW) Global Business Center held an orientation meeting several months in advance of my time abroad. Also, there were mandatory orientation meetings held by another UW division. CBS held orientation workshops and events the first week or so before classes began. From my perspective, all of CBS's events could have been held in a single day or simply posted online. It was nice to have an English speaker accustomed to the Danish education system answer questions, however.

Topics covered included: what to do with free time, exam schedules, expectations for coursework, and other worthwhile information.

Academics

For me, the Danish approach to education struck me as strongly focused on theory as opposed to application. One hundred percent (100%) of my course grades were comprised of only final exams. While instructors attempted to engage with students and have a dialogue in-class, this almost never happened. Instead, the instructors lectured, and students took notes. When asked to share insights, the classroom was virtually radio silent. Instructors were not that interested in having conversations outside of class. I did find the instruction to be quite rigorous, expectations demanding, and substantial amounts of reading as compared to my US experience.

One word of advice: Do what you must to keep yourself motivated. Since there are no assignments due during the semester, I shudder to think what “cramming” must be like in the Danish system.

Housing

Housing is tough to secure in Copenhagen. As I mentioned, I elected to lease an apartment through a third-party landlord.

Exchange site

CBS’s campus is in a great location (Fredriksberg) with great facilities.

Cultural aspects

One of the great things that CBS set up was a buddy program with current CBS students and incoming exchange students. Beyond that, I built friendships with classmates and other people I met out.

Financial

The generosity of the Scan|Design Foundation was really empowering from a financial perspective. As a result, I was able to adhere to my budget while also making the most of my time in Denmark. As you might have guessed price levels in Europe are, on average, higher than in the States, and Copenhagen is no exception. There are easy ways to maintain a budget, some of which include: don’t eat out, don’t buy drinks out, and think about how you travel from place to place.

While that might not sound like much fun, trust me, Danes follow those points pretty well themselves. Most things in the grocery store are priced similarly to items in the US with meats alcohol being exceptions. CBS had amazing breakfast and lunch options at extremely affordable price points (\$3-5 for lunch). It was not at all like food at US education institutions; instead, it was food you’d really want to eat. Also, some of my flat mates would come together a couple nights a week and cook meals together, which is another good way to get to know people and keep costs down.

My monthly expenses were roughly \$1,500.

Scan|Design fellowship administration

The Scan|Design crew has been incredible! Great people planning and executing events and administering funding. My experience has just been fantastic!

Individual type

Like anything in life, you tend to get out of something what you put into it. Conversely, it is difficult to extract anything of value if you are not willing to adapt and allow yourself to be somewhat vulnerable. Traveling is something I have found to be overwhelming at times, but I think it goes somewhat hand-in-hand when I have put myself in an unfamiliar culture or situation. It isn’t all necessarily fun at the time, but if you’re open to change, then change will come and I think you will be better off as a result.

Overall experience

The experience was great on so many levels! My expectations were realistic and the Scan|Design Program allowed me to see a country and culture that I might not have seen otherwise. The financial assistance is only a part of the support Scan|Design provides. I also appreciate the inclusion of Scan|Design alumni in events and outings.

I think the most interesting thing I took away from my time in Denmark is the Danish approach to life and business. It is quite efficient and for a nation of only 5 million people, they have and will continue to quietly make their mark on the world.