

A Year in Denmark

Rhiannon spent a year studying at the University of Copenhagen. A year away from family, friends, Aussie summers and shopping malls.

No amount of reading a Lonely Planet Guide can prepare you for living in another country. Once you realise that there is no way you can be fully prepared for a year abroad, it's just a matter of sitting back and enjoying the ride.

Looking back, I was naïve and idealistic. In all honesty, being halfway across the world with not a single person you know is the best way to experience a different country and culture. I got to know Copenhagen because I didn't have the choice to go home or retreat to the familiar. It made everything that little bit more exhilarating and scary.

Copenhagen

You may know Copenhagen as the city of Princess Mary, Hans Christian Andersen and the Little Mermaid; and you may know Denmark as the country of Lego and Vikings. Denmark is a small wealthy, western country and Australia is also a small wealthy, western country. The two countries have nothing else in common. The weather, the culture, the cities, the people, the food, the entertainment, the housing and pretty much anything else you can name are worlds apart.

Copenhagen is a city of bikes, incredible shopping, months of snow, summer picnics, discount supermarkets, no Sunday shopping, cigarette smoke, beer, cobble stones, castles and canals. I felt I was living on a movie set. Very different to bright and brash Sydney.

In Sydney it's cars, in Copenhagen it's bikes. They are everywhere. People riding bikes, special bike lanes, bike traffic lights, bike stands outside stores and supermarkets. After a few weeks it became apparent that to live in Copenhagen I needed a bike. I got a sleek black number with a basket at the front. You don't need any kind of licence and you don't even need to wear a helmet. Just stop at the lights and keep right unless over taking. Try doing that in Sydney!



Weather

Denmark is about weather extremes. My first night in Copenhagen was bright and sunny! I had read that daylight hours were long in summer but I didn't expect to be able to go out and get a tan at 9:30pm. Thanks Qantas for the eye-masks. I came to love those glorious long summer days but the dark spectre of winter was lurking. It got colder and colder, then freezing, sleeting and snowing. All this in a matter of weeks in November. Winter had begun and I wasn't going to be warm again till July. Another reality check!

Winter in Copenhagen does have its appealing qualities. It started snowing on Boxing Day and didn't stop till March. Snow is incredible; it makes a beautiful city like Copenhagen a fairytale movie set. There is something truly unique about walking through the snow covered city in the darkening afternoon with the smell of roasted nuts coming from small street stalls. Christmas carols make so much more sense once you have experienced winter in Copenhagen.



Lasting Impressions

When you visit a city, you see the sights, stay in a hotel and gain most of your knowledge from a guidebook. When you live in a country you must contend with the day to day differences, from the weather to the supermarket. What was weird and different about Copenhagen when I first arrived became normal and familiar by the time I left. Copenhagen may well be a world away from Sydney but somehow they now both feel like home.

(Adapted from a feature article from *Student Traveller*.)