Practical Advice

Visa
A student residence permit for Denmark will cost around $500 total. It took me about 2 months to get my residence permit approved, which is standard.

Packing
I didn’t bring my good rain boots, and in November/December those would’ve been nice to have because early winter gets rainy and soggy. I brought a nice dress just in case I had a nicer event that I might need it for, but I never did.

Arrival/Orientation

Dealing with Denmark’s immigration system was kind of frustrating. The offices are only open for a few hours a day (like 8-noon) with maybe one day a week where they’ll be open later. I went to one office on a Monday that the immigration website seemed to indicate I should go to in order to register for my Danish ID, was told to go to another office that’s only open late on Thursdays, then at that office was told I was at the wrong municipality office for immigration and would have to wait til Monday again to go to the correct office, when it would be open late. I signed up for a peer mentor from UCPH but never actually saw him, nor was he of much help. But! Most of my flatmates also had mentors who were extremely helpful when they were first moving in, so I think I just got unlucky.

The orientation program didn’t take place until 3 weeks after I had arrived, because I was taking a pre-semester Danish language course. It wasn’t all that helpful, but fortunately I got to talk to a staff member later in the semester about improving it a bit.

Academics

The University
Københavns Universitet has 4 campuses across the city of Copenhagen. The most “central” campus is located right near the city center. There are some administrative buildings spread among the churches and cafes, and a campus area located in a former hospital. That campus houses the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The Faculty of Science is (mostly) located on the Nørre campus in Nørrebro, about a 10-minute bike ride from the central campus. This campus is where Heisenberg came up with his uncertainty theorem, for the physics enthusiasts. Physics, chemistry, and many biology courses are based here. The Frederiksberg campus, another 10-minute bike ride from either the Nørre or city center campuses, houses the Vet School and Faculty of Life Sciences, which is undergoing a reorganization with the Faculty of Science to sort out where exactly biology should go. Many of the plant and animal science professors are based on this campus.

The Amager campus, about 15 minutes’ bike ride from the city center, houses the Faculty of Humanities. This is the newest campus and is where my Danish Language course is taught.

Each campus has a library, computer lab spaces, eduroam wifi (you can log on with your Cornell NetID and password!), and at least one Friday Bar, where KU students gather on Friday nights to drink cheap (but not bad!) university-subsidized beer and socialize.

The academic calendar is organized into 10-week blocks with a week off in between each block. You can really only take 3 courses at a time, because each class is given a 4-hour span of time 3 times a week in which it meets, and your professor may choose to hold class for anywhere from 2 to 4 hours (anything less than 2 is rare). Some classes may span more than 1 block, so double-check that when registering.

Courses
Danish Language and Culture—7.5 ECTS, met for 3 weeks in August before regular session classes started. Didn’t fulfill any requirements, but was a really great way to meet people and get a (loose) grasp of the Danish language (counting, food, greetings, apologizing, etc)
Applied Marine Biology—7.5 ECTS, high bachelor/intro master’s level. Met 3 times a week for up to 4 hours each time.
Frontiers in Plant Science—7.5 ECTS, intro grad level, met 3 times a week for 3 hours at a time.
The Danish Welfare System—7.5 ECTS, course for international students. Met twice a week for 2 hours at a time.

Course enrollment for exchange students is filling out a pdf form and emailing it in, but apparently they’re going to try to upgrade that in the near future.

Final grades for all classes are based EXCLUSIVELY on the final exam, but for my biology-related courses there were projects during the block that you were required to complete in order to be allowed to take the final.

The final exams for the biology courses were also oral, which was very new for me, but I guess it’s pretty standard in Denmark. You spend 10-15 minutes talking to your professor about the course material and maybe one specific subject that is chosen at the beginning of the exam, and then you leave for a bit and come back and they tell you your grade. Once you get over the initial feeling of being TERRIFIED, it’s actually not a bad way to do exams. You’re over and done with in only 20 minutes!

Life Abroad

Living costs—Denmark is SO EXPENSIVE OH MY GOD.

- **Housing**: actually turned out to be less than $700/month, because I was lucky enough to get not-for-profit housing through the Faculty of Science.
- **Food**: around $80-$100/week, depending on your beer consumption (not kidding)
- **Transportation**: BUY YOURSELF A BIKE. It is the cheapest and easiest way to get around Copenhagen. The bike will still be expensive, even if you buy used (I spent about $180 on mine and it’s crappy), but IT’S WORTH IT. The metro will cost you anywhere from $2-$5 one way
- **Books**: Around $150
- **Miscellaneous**: depends on your own spending habits. If you’re big into buying clothing you are going to be spending A LOT. Travel costs will also add up, but skyscanner.com and hosteling international is your friend.

Language

Just about everyone in Denmark is fluent in English, but I’m still glad I took the 3-week-long Danish language course in August. Just knowing numbers and food makes things much easier. I tried using Danish every so often, but I usually got a look like I had 3 heads and then the Dane will switch to English in order to save us both the embarrassment. I did have times when I wished I had learned more Danish (they do offer higher-level courses during the semester), but because I was only there for 5 months and only about 6 million people worldwide speak Danish, it wasn’t really worth putting a lot more time and stress into an additional course. It’s much easier for a Dane to switch to English than for me to stumble through Danish.

Banking

I got an account with Nordea because they operate in all Nordic countries and give free accounts and check cards to youth, and it worked out fine. I don’t think there’s a huge difference between Danish banks if you’re just getting a basic savings account and check card.

Transportation

Again, BUY A BIKE. It’s the quickest, easiest, cheapest way to get around. When you’re not in the mood for biking (too cold, crappy weather, tired, whatever), the metro was most convenient for me because I was right near a stop. The bus system is also pretty dependable, but I only took it a few times.

Housing

I applied for housing through the Faculty of Science and ended up in a 6-person apartment on the Frederiksberg campus with other international students. Looking back I think I would rather have ended up in a kollegium (dorm), because my friends who lived in them had a blast and the environment is much more social than my apartment was (quiet roommates). KU doesn’t have any dining halls, so I cooked for myself for the most part.

Health and Safety

Copenhagen is an incredibly safe city. Even the “bad” neighborhoods never felt that sketchy to me, and I’m from a small town in New York. Just keep your wits about you in touristy areas so you don’t get pickpocketed and use common sense and you’ll be absolutely fine.

As for health, as a student resident of Denmark you get FREE HEALTH CARE! I never had to actually use it, but I was given a health insurance card by the state and any acute health problems I developed would have been treated for free. Prescription co-pays are apparently pretty high (learned that in my Danish Welfare class), and my friends who have had to go to ERs have said they were slow, inefficient, and not in every hospital. So BUY A BIKE HELMET!
Overall exchange experience

The best thing about my semester abroad was: all the amazing people I met! Danes and Germans and Italians and even Americans!

The most challenging thing about my semester abroad was: the first three weeks with not knowing anyone and none of my roommates having moved in yet. I was pretty homesick at the beginning and learned that the best way to deal with that is to GET OUT AND DO THINGS WITH PEOPLE.

How this semester changed my perspective: I learned a lot about how Americans are perceived by Europeans, and a lot of the more subtle cultural differences in Europe, especially in Denmark. I also really appreciated living in a country where inequality is drastically reduced compared to the US and seeing the differences in society that result from the government paying for healthcare, providing generous unemployment, and giving out free university education.

Tips for future students: Learn at least a little Danish, buy yourself a bike, and make a lot of international friends, Danes and otherwise.