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Spring 12
University of Copenhagen
Major: Environmental Engineering

If you are reading this then you are either thinking of going to Copenhagen on exchange or you have no idea where to go. I can tell you that going to the University of Copenhagen (KU) was the best decision I have ever made. Period. Part of the reason I enjoyed my semester abroad so much was the international community present throughout the university. Because of this I strongly encourage those of you considering DIS as your exchange program to change your mind immediately (or stop reading). To be honest I don’t know much about DIS other than it is an American program designed solely for American students. If you are going abroad you should do yourself the favor and get out of your comfort zone, live with people from different countries and cultures. To waste an entire semester only befriending American students would be a shame. Ok so enough bashing on DIS, the only reason I feel this way is because if I had chosen DIS over KU my exchange experience would have been completely turned upside down.

The morning after I arrived in Copenhagen I realized two things; it was dark, cold and windy (I believe sunset was before 4 in the afternoon) and that I would be a miserable wet human being if it were not for my raincoat and boots. Seriously, the two best investments I made were the raincoat and boots. January turned out to be the worst month in terms of weather, but that does not exactly say a whole lot... Rarely was it warm enough to wear nothing but shorts and a t-shirt (even in June). Even though it never got hot while I was in Copenhagen the winter compared with Ithaca was slightly warmer and much less snowy. This comes with a big tradeoff as Copenhagen is by far the windiest place I have been which comes as a real kicker when trying to ride your bike.

Finally! I’ve mentioned bikes. I’m sure you have heard something about Copenhagen being the cycling capital of the world blah blah blah. The two best parts about Copenhagen were: 1. My living situation (which I will talk about later) and 2. Cycling everywhere. Cycling is the easiest way to get around the city. The metro does work perfectly; however, it is extremely expensive (welcome to Scandinavia). You think that the city is small and then you get a bike and realize “Wow I can go to the opposite side of town in half an hour.” If you do not get a bike when living in Copenhagen then you aren’t living in Copenhagen. Biking is a part of the city culture (the best part) not to mention it is extremely safe. Most of the bike paths are raised a few inches above the road separating them from cars. And if you are worried about the drivers don’t sweat it Copenhageners are probably the most aware drivers I have ever seen. Accidents do occasionally happen, but more often than not they are between two cyclists. It is fairly easy to purchase a second hand bike from previous students, just be careful to lock up your bike as bike thieves are commonplace (Mine was stolen with more than a month left of my exchange despite locking it up...). Possibly the one regret I had in Copenhagen was not purchasing a one month metro pass to use while searching for a good used bike. I spent more money on metro tickets in 3 weeks (while searching for a bike) then I would have if I had bought a monthly pass. I believe you can purchase a monthly metro/bus/train pass at the airport or at the central station.

So what about my living situation? The faculty of LIFE Sciences (now just called the Faculty of Science) has numerous apartments for rent throughout the city. I made contact with them during my application process and even though I was late in requesting housing, they still managed to find me a place. The housing department will either set you up in a student dorm or an
apartment. The dorms consist of other international students as well as Danish students. From what I have heard of the dorms they are not the most social living situation. Apartments range from your own flat in the middle of an all Danish building to 5 floors of 5-7 strictly international students. I had the latter, but each floor was a separate flat so you were technically only sharing 1 kitchen, 1 common room and 2 bathrooms with 6 others. Maybe I lucked out living with very social students, or maybe it was that we were all international students that made us social, but either way the entire building (30 or so of us) became really close. The entire building felt more like a family than anything else. I would strongly encourage you to try and live with international students as finding your own housing is extremely difficult in CPH and Danes are not the friendliest of people (by US American Standards). Don’t get me wrong, Danes are the nicest people I’ve ever met when you need help with directions on the street and things of that nature, it is just that they are hard to form a strong relationship with. You can become close friends with the Danes; just expect it to take some time and a lot of work. I would say that I was “friends” with many Danes, but I did not have a strong friendship with any of them.

Don’t worry if you end up getting stuck in a dorm when you asked for an apartment. I think that LIFE is the best faculty in terms of offering social events for international students, so no matter where you live you get plenty of chances to meet (nearly) everyone in LIFE. Events include a weekend trip/extravaganza at the beginning of the semester, movie nights, games and parties, and of course A-Vej, the student bar. A-Vej is the place to go on Friday nights. Loud music, cheap beer, and practically every LIFE student shows up. All in all it’s a great place to meet new people and hang out with friends.

As for the city itself... if you are looking to do a lot of European traveling by air then CPH might not be the city for you. The airport is nice, but expensive. The nearby Swedish city of Malmö (30 min away) does offer Ryan Air flights, but you have to pay for the train/bus ride over. If you find yourself in Copenhagen and get the traveling itch I would suggest traveling around Denmark. Skagen, Møns Klint and Bornholm are all spectacular. Within the city there are plenty of areas to see, hang out and drink a beer, or fall asleep in the sun (when the sun peaks its head out). Copenhagen is by no means a big city, but I was never once bored there.

I’m sure you want to know something about the classes offered at the University. Yes, they do offer courses taught in English. Many courses offer excursions where you can get some hands on experience in whatever it is you are studying. But the only thing you need to know about classes is that you should not be worrying about the difficulty compared with Cornell. Sure, only your final exam counts as your grade in Denmark, but I found classes at KU (University of Copenhagen) to not even come close to the ones I’ve taken here at Cornell in terms of difficulty.

One last piece of advice that I would give you is to do yourself the favor of enrolling in the pre-semester Danish language program. Why? You get to meet tons of international exchange students right away. The program offers many excursions and get-togethers much lower than normal costs.

You do not need to know any Danish to get around in Denmark. All Danes speak English perfectly, but knowing a little bit of Danish really enhances your experience. Even if you go somewhere else than Denmark I highly recommend taking a class in the local language while you are there.

Do it. Go study abroad. If you are having any doubts then stop. You may not have the ultimate experience of your life while abroad, but I will guarantee that it will be worth it. And don’t be afraid to immerse yourself in the local culture, being abroad is a time for trying new and being outside your immediate comfort zone. If you have any questions or are interested in anything else about my exchange experience then don’t hesitate to contact me at mwp45@cornell.edu

Thanks for reading. I hope your exchange is even more awesome than mine was!