

## Danish Living

**Denmark is the happiest nation on Earth according to a 2006 survey from the University of Leicester. When American talk-show host Oprah Winfrey visited the country in September, she found that the Danish recipe for happiness includes free healthcare, bicycles and rye bread.**

### **What makes the Danes the happiest people on Earth?**

In September 2009 Oprah Winfrey visited Denmark on a mission to help the Chicago bid for the 2016 Olympics. Although Chicago did not win the nomination, Oprah did not go home empty-handed. She discovered Denmark and spent time visiting Danish homes and meeting typical Danes. She even dedicated a talk show to a portrait of a country where one of the most impressive aspects of daily life is that the social system allows for long periods of maternity and paternity leave. The talk-show host also pointed to the free health care and free educational system for all, concluding that a simple life and a strong social system make Denmark one of the best places on earth to live.

### **Is home where the Dane is?**

Visiting Denmark during winter time you will notice that the daylight is limited to very few hours per day. Ways of living differ appreciably according to where you are located on the world map. In Denmark you will find that living in a country where – in winter – the sun seems a rare visitor, much of the time is spent indoors. Danes put great emphasis on the home, how it looks, where it is situated and how the interior is designed.

Aesthetics are an important part of the average Dane's everyday life. From home to workplace to institutions; from newspapers to street signs, traffic lights and, yes, even below ground you find sewage pumps that have won design awards. But you do not have to go that far to discover the aesthetic sensibility, because as soon as you arrive in the airport you will notice it. Copenhagen Airport was originally designed by the famous architect Wilhelm Lauritzen in 1939, its first terminal representing the style of international functionalism. About sixty years later, the same architectural firm undertook the new terminal (finished in 1998), which has been referred to as one of the world's most beautiful airports. In 2001 it featured in the renowned design magazine *Wallpaper*, which devoted eighty pages to surveying Danish innovation, from fashion, architecture, energy and technology to cinema and food. And it is exactly this very broad definition of design that sums up the essence of Danish design today. Thus, the use of Danish design is a part of the Danes' everyday life – whether in public places or at home spending time with friends and family.

### **What is the Danish concept of “hygge”?**

The Danes have a word that is hard to translate and no foreigner can hope to pronounce, but it is as Danish as pork roast, cold beer and Hans Christian Andersen. The word is “hygge”, and it goes far in illuminating the Danish soul. “Hygge” is a Danish concept which roughly describes that warm and cosy feeling when you are enjoying good food and are surrounded by good company. “Hygge” encompasses many different words – all related to having a good time and being happy. Gather family and friends. Pull the sofas and chairs up close to the coffee table and bring out some blankets. Douse the electricity and light some candles. Serve plenty of food and drink. That is pretty much the feeling of “hygge”!

**How do we ensure education for all – for life?**

Lifelong learning is a key priority in Denmark. Danish society is characterised by a learning culture which is based on individuals desiring to learn and to take co-responsibility for their own learning and personal development. There are no tuition fees for state upper secondary education and higher education, and the state provides educational grants and state-guaranteed loans. Danes have a long tradition of participating in adult education, a tradition that is maintained by the Danish Ministry of Education, which emphasises that there is a shared responsibility to ensure that everyone in the labour market engages in lifelong learning. As a result of that recognition, Denmark has the second highest percentage of lifelong learners in the EU. For instance, Danish Folk High Schools demonstrate an informal and, to many, atypical way of teaching and learning. Here all age groups study a large variety of subjects in a social and democratic environment. Most Folk High Schools are like boarding schools – you eat, sleep, study and spend your spare time together. Today these schools are instrumental in sustaining the concepts of democracy, citizenship and lifelong learning.