

Why I moved OUT of Denmark – 3 reasons that INFURIATED the Danes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WayT7yYdQEA>

Transcript: <http://dontveter.com/ec/el.move.pdf>

In a time where everyone wants to move to Denmark, let me explain why I moved out
Welcome back to House of El.

I started this channel with a video that went viral and I wanted to revisit that video as it generated quite a controversy back then. We're talking about why I moved out of Denmark.

That video resonated with about 700,000 people and I'm grateful for that reach, but it also drew a wave of negative comments seriously negative comments, the sort of comments that make you wonder how Denmark could be the happiest country, which politely put, misunderstood the heart of the message.

So I wanted to take a moment to speak to it again with the benefit of time and reflection. This is not a critique of Denmark as a country. I lived there for 5 years, I learned the language, built a life, got a degree and created memories I'll treasure forever.

I still hold deep affection for the people that I met there and the experiences that I had and I in no way regret my time there, but this is a personal story about why I ultimately chose to leave.

These are my reasons, not universal truths. They won't apply to everyone and that's okay, so if you're open to hearing a lived experience that may differ from your own, I'd love to have you with me.

If you enjoy content like this please feel free to like subscribe and hit the notification bell, it really helps.

Let's dive in. The first reason I left Denmark was the language barrier.

Now let me be very clear, I did learn Danish, about 80% of it. I took classes, I got, po Dan and I surrounded myself with Danish people who supported me in my efforts.

I didn't stay in an international bubble, I made a conscious effort to integrate. I could pronounce things like Smur and ly Hill with ease I wrote a lot of poems in Danish.

I could hold conversations, go to the doctor, take a class, speak to my landlord, get around, I could function just fine.

But functioning isn't the same as thriving. There is a very big difference between getting by in a language and having the kind of fluency that allows you to read the law, understand tax policy, or express your full self in a nuanced discussion.

That kind of fluency takes years, decades even, and it's not always a linear process, especially if you're doing something demanding alongside it.

In my case, I was doing a PhD and I just want to pause here and say if you've never done one, it's very hard to explain how all consuming it is.

A PhD is not a 9-to-5 job, it's a mental marathon with the speed of a sprint, with constant uncertainty, pressure and intellectual isolation.

So, no, I didn't have 3 hours a day to sit down and memorize Danish verb structures after a 40 hour work day.

Also, I want to address something that came up a lot in the comments of my first video.

People saying you should have just learned Danish before moving here and to that, I'd ask how? Should I have spent three years learning Danish in a vacuum without exposure to the culture, the people, the daily rhythm of the language, just to prepare for a PhD that I didn't even know that I'd be accepted to yet.

It's not really realistic. Learning a language in a dry environment without immersion, without context, without everyday exposure is incredibly difficult especially as an adult. You need to hear it, feel it, struggle through it, in real situations to actually make some progress.

And here's another layer, English isn't even my first language, I'm not American even though I know that I sound like it. I use English as a bridge, not as a demand.

It's not like I came to Denmark expecting everyone to speak my native language, I came prepared to work with what was available and that bridge overwhelmingly was English.

But even with support, even with classes, even with social exposure, Danish is just hard.

The grammar is manageable, yes, but the pronunciation can be incredibly tough.

I still can't say ??? properly. I've tried but that one just might defeat me.

And what makes it even trickier is this, even when you do try to speak Danish, people often switch to English out of kindness.

It's polite, but it slows your learning, it reinforces the loop of you trying, them helping and you just not quite getting there.

But while I deeply respect the language and I made a real effort to learn it, that effort didn't translate into full integration and that leads to the next reason, why I left.

By the way, if this is resonating with you, or even just making you think, consider subscribing. I share a lot more about life abroad, adapting, and the emotional nuance that comes with it.

The second reason I left Denmark was the difficulty of social integration.

Now I want to be very clear, this is not about blaming anyone.

I made some truly wonderful Danish friends, people I still cherish, and speak to regularly, people who probably see this video too, and to them, hey I love you all, but overall, integrating into Danish society wasn't easy even though I did everything in my power to make it happen.

I took Danish classes, I went to social events, joined clubs, hosted dinners, went to festivals, joined study groups.

I said yes to every invitation that I could manage. I even took part in drinking games like datto, which, for those who don't know, involves drinking five liters of beer in 24 hours.

That's not exactly in my comfort zone, but hey, I was willing to push myself to connect, and still I often felt like I was on the outside looking in.

There's this narrative that Danes are fluent in English, and many are, especially the younger generations, but fluency doesn't mean that it's effortless.

Several of my Danish friends told me, very kindly, that switching the whole group conversation into English wasn't easy.

It's mentally taxing for them and honestly I really don't blame them, they were willing to do it for me and I appreciated that deeply. But it doesn't come at a zero cost to them.

There is a difference between speaking speaking English well, and thinking in English, joking in English, navigating cultural nuances in English, so, over time, without meaning to, conversations would drift back into Danish.

And I don't blame anyone for that, it's completely natural, but it did mean that I was always operating slightly outside the inner circle.

I'll never forget, one moment at work as well I was having lunch with six or seven colleagues and they were all speaking Danish, not out of malice, just habit, and I was the only English speaker.

I sat there, smiling, nodding along, with pretending I was okay, but honestly I could have cried that day. I felt completely excluded, not because anyone was cruel, but because I was invisible, in that moment it was honestly so lonely.

Another thing I noticed was how incredibly private Danish people can be. You can know someone for years, see them at work, or in your social circle all the time, and still never be invited to their home.

Meanwhile, I had hosted many different house parties and invited everyone in my network, trying to create a connection, trying to be welcoming, but it really translated into deeper reciprocity.

That privacy is a part of Danish culture. There's a strong sense of boundaries and in some ways I admire it, but for someone like me, naturally extroverted, raised in a culture where warmth is shown through openness, it was genuinely hard to navigate.

One of my close Danish friends once said something I'll never forget. He told me very candidly that he's usually hesitant to make close friendships with foreigners, they always leave he said, so what's the point?

It kind of hit me like a brick to be honest, and again it wasn't cruel, it was just honest.

It was protective, but it made me realize even when someone is kind and supportive they might be holding something back and that can be very difficult to break through.

I want to emphasize, yes, you can integrate in Denmark, I've seen people do it, but it takes years and it takes so much effort emotionally, socially, linguistically and when you're also doing a PhD which is already one of the most isolating and stressful things a person can do, that effort becomes unsustainable,

So, over time, I found myself giving more than I was receiving socially and slowly, quietly, that kind of wears you down.

The third and most significant reason I left Denmark was the winter. Starting around October and dragging on until March the darkness begins to settle, not with drama, but with a slow unrelenting quiet.

It creeps like fog under a door and while the sun technically rises, you wouldn't always know it. The sky stays low and heavy, pressed down with clouds so dense that the daylight feels more like dusk.

It's like the world is holding its breath almost. Even when the sun is technically up, it's hanging at such a low angle that it barely illuminates anything.

There were days when I would check the time and be shocked that it was noon. It looked like early morning or early evening.

Bear that with endless weeks, sometimes months of rain, mist and wind. It had made for a really difficult atmosphere.

Every single winter felt like something I had to survive, and, yes, of course, I knew Denmark was in the north before moving there.

Of course I knew winters would be dark, but there is a difference between knowing something in theory and living inside it for 5 months straight.

The novelty wears off quickly and what you're left with is a season that presses on your body, your energy, and your joy.

I remember when I first arrived it was January. I didn't see the sun for weeks, the first time it peaked through, my instinct was to grab my phone and take a photo and how sad is that? Like it was some sort of a rare animal that I had seen.

I wasn't excited, I was just startled. That kind of says it all, I really tried, honestly.

I did the check checklist, Vitamin D supplements, light therapy lamps, long walks, scheduled calls with friends or family, lots of candles, leaning into the Huga.

I gave it an honest effort year after year, but at some point I had to confront something very simple and very human. Life isn't meant to be survived you're meant to live it.

And if you wake up every day counting the hours until you can sleep again, something's just not right.

I reflected on this a lot, so much so that I wrote a little ebook called how to survive the Danish winter and keep your soul intact.

It's mostly a humorous take, not a scientific guide, but the message underneath is real. I'll leave the link in the description if you'd like a laugh or cry about it.

Eventually, I sat myself down for a thought experiment. I asked myself if you had the perfect house in Denmark, an amazing social circle, a dream job, financial stability, if every variable in your life was exactly right, would you still want to live there in the dead of winter?

And my answer was no. The darkness was a non-negotiable. I could change my my job, I could improve my Danish further, I could meet more people, but I couldn't change the sky.

And ,so, eventually I made the move to London. Now I know some people on the previous video mock that choice but let me clarify a few things.

London is brighter, it's less rainy than Denmark and it's far friendlier, at least from my experience.

Top that with a more open job market and the absence of a language barrier and it became the winning city for me.

I didn't move because I hated Denmark, I moved because I knew what I needed was to feel alive and and that meant choosing a place that gave me a little more light, both literally and metaphorically.

So those were my three reasons, the language barrier, the difficulty of integrating socially and the long heavy winter.

Again, this isn't a takedown of Denmark, it's a reflection of my journey, what I needed at that point in life and what I learned about myself in the process.

There's so many beautiful things about Denmark. If you scroll through my channel you'll find plenty of videos where I reflect on the positive sides of Denmark too.

I still think it's one of the best places in the world when it comes to trusting governments, social systems, safety and quality of life but it just wasn't the right long-term fit for me.

Let me know in the comments what your experience has been, whether your Danish or have lived there, or are just curious I'm sure we find common ground in some areas and learn from each other.

Thanks so much for watching and take care of yourselves, bye.