

011110 **Have fun at J Day, but be home by midnight**

Last Friday (9 Nov) was called J Day here in Copenhagen. J Day is the day that the Carlsberg brewery releases its Christmas Beer and in Copenhagen it was as if it were a national holiday. People all over Copenhagen piled into bars and clubs to be there when the beer was released at 21:00. I heard rumors that free beer was given out at this time, but these are unconfirmed. J Day used to be on a Wednesday, but the high school teachers used to complain because their students would come in the next day hung over. So basically, every bar was crowded including the S-Hus (student house) where I went.

I arrived a little after nine and wound up queuing for an hour and a half before I could even get into the bar. No beer is worth that, but I was to meet people inside of the bar. The beer itself is the color of cola, but with a serious kick. Alcohol content is generally much higher in Denmark than in the US, around 5 % but the Christmas beer has 6.5%.

Life in Denmark these Days

We have had our first dusting of snow as the temperature continues to drop here in Copenhagen. It is not actually that cold yet, usually between 0 and 10 degrees. But, the snow and ice on the ground made the morning bicycle commute to school a bit more interesting. Plus, the sun rises at about 7AM and sets at 3:30, meaning that you have to keep your bike lights handy since the sun sets before I set off from class and I ride home in the darkness.

As the days become bleaker, I am realizing that a lot of the initial novelty of living here in Denmark and going to school at DTU has now worn off as time has gone by and the workload has increased. I believe that I experienced this sort of “slump” when I was living in China as well, but it was more pronounced. In China, most of the other volunteers and I would experience dramatic highs and terrible lows with very little middle ground. Whether it be China or Denmark, living in a new culture can wear on you as you begin to lose patience with the differences from your own culture or the way that you are used to doing things. At first, I think that it is easy to brush off the differences because of the novelty of the new place. But, then there is a point when the ignored differences begin to pile up and you need to make the conscience effort to decide that you are going to put up with the differences and overcome them.

For example, my relationship with my landlord Tove. Tove is very nice and has been very generous with inviting me to dinner with her family. I like her and we can get along well. But, she has what has been described to me as the Danish way of remaining silent, but grumbling in the face of something that does not fit in with the Danish order.

I pay Tove rent on the first of each month for my room. When I arrived in Copenhagen, I paid her my rent for September as well as my security deposit. I was so excited and besieged by the newness of my surroundings that I didn't even think about the handful of days in August when I occupied the room. It actually only occurred to me a few weeks

ago that I should have paid for those. I brought it up with Tove and it turned out that yes I should have paid for those days. Tove was well aware that I had not paid and was apparently waiting until I finally did so, but had not mentioned it to me. Once I asked, I found a note the next morning that yes, I did need to pay for those days. It is always brief notes found early in the morning which is a method of communication that I loathe and avoid whenever possible. So in that sense, living here can be like delicately walking on pins and needles as I try to feel out what is the acceptable and unacceptable way to act and when I am offending someone. And that begins to wear on you over time.

In China as well as here, I find myself reminiscing about my kitchen in St. Louis (I love to cook) or just random things from the US in general. Things that don't make sense because I am enjoying my time here and my life here is overall quite comfortable. I am being paid to live here and to learn and to experience so much. It is quite serendipitous. There is nothing which is prompting the thoughts of home other than that I would not have to deal with the cultural differences any longer. So the thoughts just creep in like dry rot in an otherwise good situation, which in itself becomes tiresome sometimes.

I don't know if any of this makes sense. Maybe my friends and fellow expats, Bina in Japan, Jess in Ecuador, Michele in Germany and Lisa from China have experienced something similar or understand what I am trying to describe. I guess it is just a phase where the newness of the world around me is wearing off and I am beginning to see the tarnishes that I had not before and it surprises me. Not that I am going anywhere because this is a small hurdle that I can overcome. Life as an expat is a struggle and there are costs, but as these emails have hopefully shown, the rewards that you get in return are plentiful. I will continue to write along this line again in the future since I for one am curious to see what happens next.

Classes

Cultural differences have also surfaced in my project groups for my classes. Most of my classes include laboratory exercises which you conduct and report as a member of a group of people. I am finding that people from different countries and backgrounds attack the problems in different methods, some of which have surprised me because they have been methods which have been so different from my own. But this may be as much of a cultural thing as that I am a professional student and I have learned what works for me. I mention this now on the tail of the last section, but I am not ready to elaborate on this subject at this time because I need to do a bit more research. It will however be a topic for a future email.

One other annoyance that occurs in the classroom is in regard to the notation that the professors use for equations. Of course, it could not be the same as what is used in the US. Actually, this is more of an acoustics thing than a language or cultural thing. So now, I am learning to adapt to remembering the new symbols in the fundamental equations.

Turkey Day

Almost all of my foreign friends have heard about Thanksgiving and the other major US holidays due to the commercialization of the holidays. For example, Kat from Australia tells me that Halloween is starting to catch on there. Likewise, Michele explained that the Germans don't celebrate Halloween, but the children know that the people from the US who live at the US military base do. In past years, the German kids would trick-or-treat at the base, but this year it was stopped due to security concerns.

Leslie, Micah and I (all from the US) decided that we are going to hold a Thanksgiving dinner next week. However, where to have it is a quandary since I can hold about four people comfortably in my room and there is no way that anything bigger than a small, Cornish hen is getting into my oven. Thankfully, Isabelle has offered the use of the house that she shares with four other roommates. We shall see if one can buy a turkey here in Denmark. Maybe the hens will have to suffice after all. At least desserts are no problem in Denmark and French wine is no problem thanks to Isabelle's private stock.

Holiday Travels

I am planning on traveling home for the Christmas holiday. It's a little dicey at the moment because my return ticket was on Sabena, which as you may have heard is no longer in the airline business as of last week. My ticket is protected and I went to my agent to change the carrier. I will have to pay 200 Krone to have the ticket changed to Swiss Air (which also went bankrupt about a month ago, but is back), which is a lot better than having to buy a new ticket!

I actually have the option of a long holiday if I decided not to take a class in January. In 2000 I traveled in two countries (US and China). In 2001, I traveled in 6 (US, Canada, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Germany). Who knows what 2002 will hold, but I am starting it with a bang. I found an amazing airfare to Beijing from Boston and so I will go to China at the start of the new year. Amazingly, it is less expensive for me to return to Boston and then back to Copenhagen than to just fly from Beijing to Copenhagen.

The trip to China is really important to me because in a sense it will be a closure to my time in Yantai. I had to leave so quickly when I was evacuated out that I did not get to say goodbye to a lot of people or to China. One day I got hurt and the next I was in Boston without time to process or to comprehend what was happening. (For those of you who were not on the China list, there is more detail on my site).

So, this trip will allow me to see my Chinese friends once more. I actually get more emails, letters and even phone calls from Asia (including my friend Bina in Japan) than from the US. I am also looking forward to seeing my students who must have grown like weeds over the past year. I can't even imagine how much the city of Yantai will have changed in just a year since the process of tearing down and building has undoubtedly

continued at the same pace during my absence. I guess this is almost a pilgrimage so that I can say goodbye properly this time, if that makes any sense.

And I am not going alone. I was about to book my ticket when I thought of my friend Jeff from Maine who had wanted to visit me in China last year, but lost his chance once I came home early. So, I called him and left a voice mail that I was going and he was welcome to come if he was interested. I am amazed at how quickly he decided to come since it took me countless hours of planning and deciding before I made my decision. I am excited that he is coming.

I will be leaving for China on the 4th of January and returning on the 21st. I will be back in Canton for a few days before heading back to Europe. My classes don't resume until the 4th of February, but after so many big time zone changes, I want to leave time for my body to reset itself back to European time so that I am not dozing in class. However, I am allowed a free stopover in Germany on my return flight (student tickets are awesome) and so I plan to visit my friend Michele for a day or two. Four countries on three continents and it is only the first month of the new year. Whew!

Have a great weekend!

Jeff

 [Previous](#) | [Next](#)  | [Return to Main Page](#)

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