

## 020620 Jysk

Life in Denmark is really quite pleasant these days. One of the most remarkable things is the length of the day. I don't think that I would ever get tired of sunsets at 22:00. The sky then stays light until 23:00, but you can still see until almost 00:00. At first it would catch me off guard because I was not used to having so much light so late. I would be at school or out and thinking it was only 19:00 until I looked at my watch and realized that I was off by a few hours. The sky never actually becomes the full black that so dominated the winter. Instead, there is a faint glow on the northern horizon which lasts until the sun rises at 03:30. Now that I have not gotten used to either. Every morning without fail, I wake up sometime between 04:00 and 05:00. I actually don't mind. I just kind of smile at the light and the realization that I have another few hours to sleep and go back to bed. Micah has pointed out that he feels badly for the students who were here for only a semester and left in the dreariness of darkness when Denmark had only 8 hours of light at best. Denmark is quite a different place during these 21 hour days. It still rains, but not as often as during the spring and most days are bright and in the low 70's Fahrenheit. The abundant oceans around Denmark cool down the evening air and so even though you might wear shorts and short sleeves during the day, you need a jacket at night.

I am writing while on the train to Copenhagen from Bjerringbro where I have spent the past week and few days at my sponsoring company, Grundfos. The visit has been a very good experience for me in a lot of ways. I have written about Grundfos manufactures pumps for all sorts of applications. They make their own motors which is why they are sponsoring my studies here in Denmark. I cant write about what I was doing at Grundfos due to some serious confidentiality agreements which are in place, but I do want to write about working in Denmark and the Danish countryside.

I associate Scandinavia not only with pickled fish, but with sleek and efficient architecture and interior design. I have never been let down in the design of houses and the buildings which housed the company were equally as elegant. First of all, there are laws in place that people can not work for more than a few hours in any room that does not receive sunlight. Therefore, the basements are only used for storage or for long term experiments. Even the machine shops have windows which have ample light.

The working areas are open, rather than a cubicle design. Desks are arranged in clusters by groups and the desks themselves are curved with ways of adjusting them up or down so that you can find the right height. Large spaces were broken up by bookshelves or half walls along the walkways. The design was nice in that it gave the space an open feeling, but it could also be a bit noisy.

One of my friends from home commented that she expected the Danish offices to have mixed sex bathrooms. However, this was far from the case. Rather than to have big bathrooms used by several people at once, it was common to have single rooms. The neatest part of these was the fixtures. The once bathroom had bars of soap which had a piece of metal pressed into it which allowed the soap to hang from a magnet. When you

wanted to use the soap, you just pulled the soap off the holder and when you were done, you just stuck it back onto the magnet.

The Danish workplace is more relaxed than companies that I have experienced in the US. Grundfos runs on flex time which means that people come and go as they please. As long as you get your projects completed, no one checks to make sure that you are working your 37 hours a week. A 37 hour work week and 5 weeks of vacation a year. People from Europe find the 2 weeks of vacation a year that people get in the US to be unbelievable.

The work environment itself is just as relaxed. Before arriving, I asked Jan if there were a dress code. He advised me not to show up in a shirt and tie or no one would take me seriously. The engineers wore jeans and polo shirts or t shirts and I even saw people wearing shorts with sandals on the warmer days (with black socks, of course).

One of my favorite parts was the abundance of coffee machines. These were machines where you put in your cup and chose coffee, espresso, hot chocolate or hot water for tea. The Danes are serious coffee drinkers and so the machines got a workout during the day. The dining hall was nice. The tables had runners under the surface so that when you are done, you pick up your seat and slide it under the table. Therefore, the seat is hanging a few centimeters from the floor which makes cleaning the floor easier.

The company is located in Bjerringbro which has a population of 5000 people. Grundfos employs 4500 people and so employees commute from various parts of Jutland. The town is small, but nice with large parks and lots of community centers and football fields. The downtown even has a pedestrian mall, but it is only about 200m long. However, the downtown also has five large grocery stores within a 400m radius so it appears that most people do their food shopping in town, but buy other goods in the larger cities.

My favorite part of Bjerringbro was the surrounding countryside. I would take my bike on rides outside of town and within minutes I was surrounded by farms. The countryside had low, rolling hills with sporadic forests and fields that were green with plants that waved in the wind. The sky was a deep turquoise with light, puffy clouds that raced westward. And everywhere were the white wind turbines that spun in the winds that buffet Jutland. I just could not get enough of the gorgeous countryside. However, unfortunately I also discovered during this trip that I have developed an allergy to grass pollen, but my eyes survived the incessant itching and redness.

Several of the people that I know at the company also have farms that they work in the evening. My friend Jan raises beef cattle on a farm outside of Bjerringbro. He has a herd of Limosine cattle which are imported from France. People like to purchase his cattle because they know where the meat is coming from. People buy the cow and then pay to have it sent to the butcher of their choice. Most of Jan's customers are friends or friends of friends. He says that people often have some of his beef at their friends homes and then later ask if it would be possible for them to buy part of a cow as well.

Yes, Denmark has also had its share of the cases of Mad Cow Disease. At its worst, the slaughter houses were only allowed to bring in cows from one farm at a time so that the cattle did not mix. Therefore, Jan would have to slaughter more cattle than he would normally since he had such a difficult time getting cows in one at a time. There is a theory in Denmark and Germany that the disease is being spread not in the feed, but in the milk that the calves are fed. The calves do not receive milk from their mothers, but rather they get an industrial mix which is made in Germany. The mix is designed to put more weight on the cows more quickly. It had been found that the company which makes the industrial milk has been including fat from dead cows. It is believed that this practice has contaminated the milk and is responsible for spreading the disease.

While in Bjerringbro, I stayed at a place called Nørstaad Højskole Jan explained to me that it is a sort of alternative school. The facility was quite large with lots of dormitory rooms, a dining hall, computer labs, a gym, a pool and classrooms. The students can be from all age groups. The classes that are offered do not include grades, but rather it gives people a chance to learn subjects that they might find interesting or a trade. For example, classes are offered about for example Greece. At the end of the class, the students then travel to Greece to see more about what they learned. The demand for the classes depends on the economic conditions. During a bad economy, people might take advantage of a lack of work to learn a new skill. To attract more students, the school adopts new studies. One of the newer subjects currently being offered is training for athletic coaches.

Right now there is not much demand for the school and so the school rents rooms to the surrounding companies for their guests. The accommodations were nice and my room included everything but a kitchen. However, meals were offered three times a day in the kantine as part of the deal. During my first week, there were lots of students staying at the school who were studying at surrounding high schools. But they all left at the start of the second week and a group of elderly guests arrived for classes. Graduation occurred this past week and I saw lots of high school students wearing their school caps. These look like sailor caps which are all white with a black visor. There is a colored band around the cap to indicate what type of school that they graduated from, whether it be an agricultural, technical or regular school. At first the sight confused me. Why are all of these kids wearing sailors caps. But, once it was explained to me it all made sense.

The people of Jutland are quite friendly and reciprocate in the good natured joking that they receive from the people of Copenhagen. They also joke about the numerous German and Dutch tourists who are drawn to the Danish coast and countryside. One friend spoke of how you can tell the German tourists by the cars towing boats and the bicycles on the roofs of the cars. He joked that the bikes are because they have already tried walking back to Germany, referring to the German retreat after Denmark was liberated.

A lot of tourist rent holiday homes along the rivers or the coast. These are small houses, often in communities where people go to relax. To protect their holiday homes, the Danes have a law that you can not own a holiday home unless you already have a house

in Denmark. Since most Germans and Dutch have homes in their own countries, they are prohibited from buying the holiday houses. However, for some reason the EU has a problem with this law and it may soon become a thing of the past.

Jan's family has a holiday home near the largest river in Denmark, the Gudenå. The river itself is quite swift, but a mere 5 meters across. It fits well with Himmelbjerget (Sky Mountain) which is on Jutland and at 147 meters is Denmark's tallest mountain. As Jan put it, everything in Denmark is on a smaller scale.

One final note as I conclude this long email is about the Rebild Festival held at Rebild Bakker park. This is a Danish-American celebration for the 4th of July and is the largest 4th of July celebration outside of the US. The festival has been held annually since 1912 with the exception of the war years. The festival involves square dancing and picnics and has had keynote addresses by the Danish royal family as well as Presidents Bush and Regan.

---

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

---

Copyright © 2002 Jeffrey Mahn. All rights reserved. This or any other written materials from this web site may not be used in part or in whole without the prior permission from Jeffrey Mahn.