

020921 Power Tourists

The past few weeks since my return to Denmark have been very busy. Not because of the workload from my classes which has only lately grown to unmanageable levels. Rather, the past few weeks have been a better kind of busy: playing host to friends who came to visit Denmark.

My first visitors were my friends Sue and GiNESSa from the US. I knew both of them from my contract work at Pollak in Canton, MA during the months before I started my studies in Denmark. Sue and GiNESSa can be described as "power tourists". I met with them for lunch in August, prior to my own departure for Denmark to talk about their upcoming trip. They were asking me about places to go in Denmark and then they casually mentioned that they were also planning on going to Sweden and Norway during their one week visit. They still laugh at my reaction to their ambitious itinerary. Seeing as the list also grew to include Iceland, I think that it is safe to say that they are able to see a lot when they go on holiday.

Sue and GiNESSa arrived in Denmark on Sunday, September 1st after spending a day running around Iceland. They were a bit smarter about their layover in Iceland than I was in that they rented a car to see all of the sites. However, their experience with Icelandair was not as good as my own. Sue's bag was mauled, burned and melted by one of the conveyor belts in Iceland. A lot of her clothes had black burn marks and holes in them where the conveyor belt had ground its way through the bag. However, Sue was a good sport about it and managed to make it through the whole week on what little she had left.

The sites that we saw during their visit were mostly ones that I have already written to you about. We wandered about the pedestrian malls of Copenhagen, ate pickled fish at the restaurant in Nyhavn and of course visited the Tivoli. I had to attend classes at university, but during those times, GiNESSa and Sue went up to Norway where they went on the Norway in a Nutshell tour that I wrote about last autumn. They traveled on Scanrail passes which allow for five days of rail travel in the Scandinavian countries. The flexibility of the pass allowed them to also visit Göteborg, Sweden during their travels north. Göteborg is the location of the Volvo manufacturing plant, but GiNESSa and Sue were a bit distracted by the famous Poseidon statue which you can read about in short in the Rough Guide to Scandinavia. They also traveled in Denmark to Helsingør (Hamlet's Castle), Roskilde (Viking Museum) and to see the Little Mermaid. We also rented bikes and spent a few hours riding through Deer Park where we saw the huge herds of deer wandering the park.

The one place that we visited which was new to me was the castle, Frederiksborg Slot in Hillerød. The castle is the most impressive one that I have seen so far in Denmark. The structure is Dutch Renaissance with the elaborate use of towers and spires as well as gothic arches and window ornamentation. The castle sits on an island created by a moat and a lake and was built in the early 17th century by King Frederik II and expanded by his son Christian IV. However, the castle was ravaged by fire in 1859 after which the royal family, unable to afford the cost of the repairs, gave up the property. Fortunately, the Carlsberg beer baron, Carl Jacobsen stepped in and spearheaded a campaign to restore the castle as a national museum.

A tour of the first few floors of the castle reveals room after room of ornate paintings and furniture. However, two rooms dramatically stand out. The first is the chapel which is home to one of the organs which I wrote about in the last email. The chapel is where monarchs were crowned between 1671 and 1840 and is simply beautiful. The walls and vaults are gilded and embellished which contrasts with the black marble used to make the structure. There are several dozen rows of pews as well as a private box opposite the pulpit for the royals. The chapel has a balcony on the second floor which is home to the two organs as well as paintings and coats of arms which hang on the walls. The coats of arms are those of the knights of the Order of the Elephant who sat with the king in the 1600's.

The other room that stands out is the Great Hall which was used as a ballroom by Christian IV. The room is actually a reconstruction based upon drawings which had serendipitously been made just before the fire which destroyed much of the interior. The room is impressive due to its size and its amazingly intricate ceiling. The walls are ornate with tapestries and paintings hung upon them. The floor is black, but inlaid with patterns of white diamonds which beckon many a visitor to bust out a few dance moves.

The top floor of the castle is set aside for modern works of art. Included in the displays are collections of portraits of members of the resistance movement who were killed during World War II. There is also a portrait of Queen Margrethe II which made waves when it was unveiled because the portrait was made true to life, showing signs of her age rather than to mask them. Several of the contemporary collection are temporary which allows the structure to be a modern art museum as well as a historic castle.

Located on the castle grounds is an impressive Baroque garden which is a copy of the original garden, built in the 1800's. The original garden fell into disrepair, but was recreated in 1996. The garden is accessed by walkways that climb the stepped gardens and offer a view of the royal crests which have been recreated with shrubbery. Water falls and fountains complete the beauty of the gardens.

Ginessa, Sue and I also attended a dinner given by Isabelle and attended by guests including Santiago from Argentina who has returned to DTU to continue his studies. Sue and Ginessa finished their whirlwind tour on the 9th.

Dinner Parties

On Saturday the 14th, I threw a dinner party for several of my friends from DTU. I have had one other dinner in my small, rented room into which we managed to squeeze seven people. However, this time my guest list was a bit more ambitious and so I held the dinner at the office that I share with the other masters students at my department at DTU. The office worked out quite well. My guest list included many of the usual characters which I have written about in the past. However, the biggest surprise was that my friend Charity from Indonesia accepted an invitation to attend. (Charity has contributed to these emails in the past with a description of the Chinese New Year in Indonesia.) Charity arrived on the Friday prior to the dinner and stayed for the weekend.

Charity and I know each other from Washington University in St. Louis where we both attended services at the Catholic Student Center. We also traveled to India together as part of a service trip in 1997 / 1998.

Charity's attendance is not as far fetched as it sounds because she was in Amsterdam at the time that I sent her the invitation and not in Jakarta. She had been in Europe for several months to look at different universities in the Netherlands to study languages. Her travels in Europe took her all over including countries such as Turkey and Hungary. Unfortunately, without a student visa, she could stay in the Netherlands for only three months and so she left Europe last week with hopes of returning in the new year.

The dinner was a lot of fun and many of the guest brought food from their home countries. We had spring rolls from Thailand, Fish Flavored Pork (wode xihuan) and Moon Cakes from China, a French potato dish, Frikadeller from Denmark and a Mexican dish. (The participants were from eight countries spanning four continents). Charity's visit was also a lot of fun and she was a good sport about helping with the shopping and the preparations for the dinner.

Since I can not do justice to all of what I have described in this email, photos will follow. The photos are courtesy of GiNESSA, Sue and Charity.

Information about the history of Frederiksborg Slot from Rough Guide Scandinavia and the Lonely Planet Denmark.

Jeff

p.s. I don't know if you are aware that Germans just voted for their new Chancellor on Sunday. Gerhard Schroeder narrowly kept his position over Edmund Stoiber from Bavaria. The reason why I mention the election was that Stoiber's platform was anti-immigration. In fact, he proposed the removal of thousands of Muslims from the country. France, the Netherlands, Sweden and now Germany have each had serious contenders for office running on anti-immigration campaigns. In Denmark and Austria, the anti-immigration platform took the candidates into office. Will the anti-immigration platform be allowed to be a legitimate issue in the US elections in 2004? Furthermore, Schroeder has been accurately accused of taking advantage of the raw antimilitaristic nerve in Germany to win his election. I don't know if this is being reported in the US, but the Bush administration should take notice of the unpopularity of a war with Iraq amongst the US allies here in Europe. But, it would appear not to matter since the Bush administration is apparently ready disregard the UN and go it alone in Iraq. Fortunately in Europe, people are able to distinguish between the administration and the population. I have heard several times that people like Americans, but dislike Bush. The question is whether people elsewhere in the world can make the same distinction. 9/11 would suggest not.

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