



People's financial situation plays a role in their sense of well-being. Denmark is prosperous, but not everyone feels rich. The day-to-day cost of living is high, yet Danes enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world. This economic well-being comes despite the fact that the nation's sandy soil is not very fertile and the land has few resources. Denmark's prosperity comes from its skilled workers, who turn out world-famous furniture, silverware, foods, toys, and porcelain products.

Many people believe that the Danish people's good feelings stem from a sense of economic security. Danes pay high taxes

and in return they receive extensive benefits throughout their lives. The Danish system of government provides an umbrella that covers all. In Denmark, no one goes hungry or suffers the extremes of poverty. Poor people are given work or assistance. There is no tuition for most college students, and most health care costs are paid by the government or employers. Although some criticize this welfare state, few Danes express any desire to change what they say is an ideal system of government.

Elderly Danes relax in a park in Copenhagen. On average, Danish people can expect to live eighty-one years.





In winter, outdoor ice-skating rinks open in Copenhagen and other cities. Danes are also allowed to skate on frozen lakes if they are deemed safe.

Danes claim that a spirit called *hygge* (pronounced HUE-guh) prevails in the country and keeps them smiling. *Hygge* is a difficult word to define. Some say *hygge* corresponds to the American usage of the word *cool*, meaning calm and rational. Others say it is more like cozy, comfortable, or friendly. Still others claim *hygge* is the Danish way of saying “I don’t get upset easily.” It can also be tied to the relaxed atmosphere that arises from living in a society that cares about the welfare of its people.

Residents and visitors hail Denmark as one of the best-run countries on earth. In Copenhagen, Denmark’s capital city, the streets and sidewalks are clean. Traffic is orderly. Pedestrians

wait for the green light before they cross a street even if it is two in the morning and there are no cars in sight. People obey the rules. Crime is not a problem.

Some Danes do have complaints, however. Taxes gobble up a lot of their paychecks. In recent years, many immigrants have arrived in Denmark. Danes complain the newcomers have come not to seek work but to take advantage of the nation’s generous social benefits. Still, most often, the Danish feeling of *hygge* prevails.

Denmark is a monarchy, a country ruled by a king or queen. In many monarchies, the king and queen live in luxury, far above the everyday trials faced by the average citizen. But Denmark’s current monarch, Queen Margrethe II, is much more one of the people. Walk past her palace and you might see her waiting in line at a bus stop. Perhaps the queen has decided to go shopping. She pays her fare and takes her seat with everyone else. She is probably accompanied by two bodyguards, but they attract little attention. Instead, all eyes are on the queen. It is known she is a fan of funny-looking hats, and people want to tell others about her latest headgear.

Denmark is home to only 5.6 million people, roughly the same number of people that live in the U.S. state of Minnesota. During the summer, when the weather is pleasant, the population swells as tourists arrive from every part of the world. They come to see Denmark’s historic sights, meet its people, and explore the feeling of Danish friendship: *hygge*. For visitors and residents alike, happiness prevails in this tiny kingdom by the sea.

A scenic view of a rocky coastline. The foreground is filled with lush green foliage, partially obscuring the view. In the middle ground, there are jagged, grey rock formations that meet the sea. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, with white foam from waves crashing against the rocks. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

Land and Sea

TAKE A QUICK GLANCE AT A MAP OF NORTHERN EUROPE, and Denmark appears to be a peninsula, a finger of land, jutting into the North Sea. Give the map a closer look and it becomes apparent that Denmark also includes two large islands and dozens of smaller ones hugging the peninsula. Denmark's only land neighbor is Germany to the south. Including all its islands, Denmark spreads over 16,570 square miles (42,916 square kilometers). This makes the nation only slightly bigger than the U.S. state of Maryland. If Denmark were part of the United States, it would rank forty-first in size among the fifty states.

Denmark is the smallest nation in the northern European mainland and one of the smallest in the world. Danes are proud of the fact that their country is small. The Danish poet Piet Hein once wrote:

Opposite: Bornholm, a Danish island in the Baltic Sea, features a jagged, rocky coast.