



BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Located between the North and Baltic seas, Denmark is a flat country with low to gently rolling plains. It consists of more than four hundred islands, of which only ninety are inhabited. Its total area is about twice the size of Massachusetts and covers 16,639 square miles (43,094 square kilometers). The largest landmasses include Jylland (Jutland), connected to the European continent, and the islands of Sjælland (Zealand), Fyn (Funen), Lolland, Falster, and Bornholm. Fertile agricultural land dominates the country's landscape of moors, lakes, and woodlands.

Moderated by the warm Gulf Stream, Denmark's temperate maritime climate is usually cool, humid, and overcast. Winters are windy but mild compared to other Scandinavian countries. In January, high temperatures average about 34°F (2°C). Summers are cool; July daily highs average 72°F (22°C).

History

The Kingdom of Denmark (Kongeriget Danmark) has been a monarchy since its founding. During the rule of the Vikings (ca. 750–1035), Denmark was a great power. The first known king was Gorm the Old, who ruled in the early 900s. His son Harald Bluetooth united the country under Christianity and ruled in the latter half of the 900s. Gorm's grandson, Canute the Great, commanded a vast empire, which included England until 1035. Queen Margrethe I united Denmark, Norway, and Sweden in the Union of Kalmar in 1397. Sweden left the

union in 1523; Norway left in 1814. King Frederik VII signed a liberal constitution in 1849, making the country a constitutional monarchy rather than an autocracy. Some territory was lost to Prussia (Germany) in 1864, but the country remained stable.

Denmark was neutral during World War I but was occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II. Denmark became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 and the European Community (now European Union, or EU) in 1973. During the 1970s and 1980s, Denmark concentrated on maintaining its social welfare system, broadening economic opportunities, and increasing the standard of living. During the mid-1980s, Denmark became interested in environmental protection and has since passed some of the world's toughest environmental legislation.

In 1992, Denmark rejected the Maastricht Treaty, which would have led to a common currency and stronger political ties within the EU. In the following year, voters accepted a modified version of the treaty allowing Denmark to remain exempt from the European single currency (the euro) but still be involved in European citizenship, a unified European military, and the elimination of borders. Danes are somewhat skeptical and fearful that integration will cause small countries like theirs to be overpowered by larger EU nations.

Anti-Danish sentiment broke out across the Muslim world in 2006 following the publication of a series of cartoons, some satirically depicting the Muslim prophet Muhammad, in a Danish newspaper. Two years later, three suspects were arrested for allegedly planning to kill the artist responsible for the most controversial cartoon.

Denmark was an original member of the coalition that invaded Iraq in 2003 but withdrew its troops in August 2007 in accordance with waning public support for the conflict. Denmark's current priorities include balancing the national budget, reducing foreign debt, increasing employment, and protecting the environment. Responding to potential threats to its interests in Greenland and the Faroe Islands, Denmark recently announced its plans to expand its military presence in and around the Arctic. A melting ice cap has made access to this area's natural resources attractive to nearby nations. Hoping to lead the way in promoting greater international cooperation on climate policy, Denmark hosted a global summit on climate change in late 2009. Although the summit failed to achieve a legally-binding agreement among participating nations, it demonstrated Denmark's commitment to developing a worldwide climate policy.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Denmark's population of 5.5 million is growing annually at 0.3 percent. A slight increase in births has occurred over the past few years. Roughly 87 percent of the population lives in urban areas. About one-quarter of Danes live in greater Copenhagen. Most of Denmark's population is Danish. Excellent access to health care, education, and economic prosperity afford Danish men and women many opportunities.

Language

Danish is the official language. Because Danish is a Scandinavian language, Swedes and Norwegians can understand its written form. But spoken Danish is more difficult for other Scandinavians to understand because of differences in pronunciation and intonation. Vocabulary also varies slightly. Members of a very small German-speaking minority live along the border with Germany, but they also speak Danish. English is widely understood and spoken; in fact, it is part of the school curriculum after the fifth grade. German is a popular language to study in school.

Religion

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is Denmark's national church. Its members, who comprise about 95 percent of the population, are automatically enrolled; they support it through taxation. Membership is expected and not considered a choice by Danes unless they belong to another religion. Tolerance is extended to most other groups, including other Christians (3 percent of the population), Muslims (2 percent), and atheists.

The Lutheran Church and its value system permeate daily life in Denmark, although with little visibility. Danes generally do not attend church outside of Easter and Christmas, when attendance is high. Although most Danes still participate in religious ceremonies such as baptism, confirmation, weddings, and funerals, less than 5 percent of the population attends Sunday meetings. The Lutheran influence on Danish values, public school curricula, and everyday life has been partially credited to N. F. S. Grundtvig, a 19th-century Danish bishop and poet who

revitalized the Danish church and founded a movement called *Grundtvigianism*, or "the happy Lutheranism."

General Attitudes

Denmark's high standard of living reflects a progressive attitude. Danes try to create equality by supporting weaker members of society. Because of their respect for every citizen's right to a good life, they are willing to share responsibility for their nation's social welfare through heavy taxes. This attitude has also encouraged their contributions to developing countries, especially in Africa. Danes see the government as the benevolent supporter of all of its members and know they can count on access to a high level of social services. They are extremely proud of their country's achievements. A foreigner's criticism of national institutions such as the royal house, the system of government, and the state church is likely to be taken personally.

A love for understatement, rather than exaggeration, prevails. Entrepreneurial endeavors are often avoided or are impossible because of bureaucratic restrictions and the stigma associated with "failure." To many, the idea of not trying is more acceptable than trying and failing.

Danes are known for their tolerance of other people and for their diverse points of view. They admire individuals who have a friendly attitude, a sense of humor, intelligence, personal stamina, integrity, and an open mind. They also appreciate those who do not take themselves too seriously. Their European neighbors perceive them as socially progressive, self-confident, relaxed, friendly, and liberal. Danes are considered to be less formal and more outgoing than other Scandinavians. They are also well educated and respected for their accomplishments in science, art, literature, and architecture. They appreciate and try to maintain the environment; more than 80 percent of all Danish paper comes from recycled sources.

Personal Appearance

Clothing worn in Denmark varies according to the season. However, the windy and rainy climate makes waterproof clothing (and sturdy shoes or boots) essential year-round. As the saying goes, "There is no such thing as bad weather. You just have to dress right." From late fall to early spring, wool coats and knitted sweaters are important items in the Danish wardrobe. With the arrival of warmer temperatures and brighter days, Danes enjoy wearing lighter fabrics and jackets.

In general, Danes wear relaxed, casual clothes and avoid flashy dress. Even at the most elegant restaurants, men are not required to wear a jacket and tie, though most do. Danes follow general European fashion trends. Businessmen wear suits. Professional women are expected to dress fashionably; jackets and skirts or dressy pants are acceptable. Dressing up for special occasions is expected.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Although usually informal, Danes shake hands when

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introduced to strangers, at the end of business meetings, and on formal occasions. However, this gesture is not considered necessary when greeting friends. Young people and close acquaintances usually greet each other with a nod or a wave and say *Dav* (pronounced "dow"), which is like saying "Hi." The youth also say *Hej* (pronounced "hi") when greeting or parting. The term for "Good day" is *Goddag*. Using a person's first name is common. Only in rare formal situations do people use last names. Even managers and university professors are usually addressed by first name.

Gestures

Danes appreciate courtesy in all interactions. Eye contact is important during conversation. Danes generally do not use many hand gestures. The few gestures used include "thumbs up" to signal "well done" or a circle formed with the thumb and index finger to indicate appreciation. Yawning or coughing without covering the mouth is impolite. Keeping hands in one's pockets during conversation is also considered rude. Displaying affection in public is accepted to a certain point. It is considered polite to give one's seat to pregnant women or the elderly. Most women allow men to open doors for them.

Visiting

Proper etiquette when visiting is important in the Danish culture. One is not readily invited to a Danish home, and offhanded remarks such as "Stop by someday" are not considered invitations. Except when calling on close friends, Danes always plan visits in advance; they never arrive unannounced. Most invitations are for dinner or for a cup of coffee, which includes some kind of cake or biscuit.

Because of the weather and the dark winters, Danes take great pride in keeping a nice and cozy home. They enjoy having visitors in their homes and do their best to make guests feel welcome; however, one should not follow a host into other rooms unless invited. Guests should arrive on time and follow the host's suggestions of where to sit. The hostess appreciates gifts such as flowers, wine, chocolates, or inexpensive items for the children. When giving flowers, guests should be aware that red roses have romantic connotations. Leaving directly after a meal is impolite; one should stay after to talk. However, conversing about one's personal life is avoided. Guests thank the host with a card or a telephone call on the day following a party or dinner. Although most Danes socialize in the home, young people enjoy socializing at cafés, which in urban areas are gaining popularity among people of all ages. Socializing is also common at local community clubs known as *foreninger*. Club themes include hobbies, sports, political and professional organizations, etc.

Eating

For many busy families, dinner is the only occasion during the day to meet and discuss family matters. Most families make an effort to have dinner together every evening. Danes eat with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. At family meals, the father and mother sit at opposite ends of the table. Everyone is seated and served before anyone begins to

eat. A parent will often say *Vær så god* (Please, eat well) to begin the meal, especially if guests are present. When passing and receiving food, one might say *Vær så god* and *Tak* (Thank you). Hosts customarily offer their guests second helpings, as it is their duty to see that the guests are satisfied. It is considered impolite for a guest to select food items not directly at the front of a platter. One does not leave the table until the hostess rises. Then, upon leaving, the guest thanks the hostess for the meal by saying *Tak for mad* (Thanks for the meal). In restaurants, a service charge is included in the bill, but some people also leave a small tip.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Danish families are generally small, close-knit, and stable. More than one-third of children are born out of wedlock, often to couples living together. With women comprising nearly half of the workforce, both father and mother usually work outside the home. Government-funded day-care centers are crucial to working mothers. Women in the workforce get a six-month paid maternity leave; men get an optional two weeks. As the mother also shares the burden of earning an income, the father is increasingly expected to share household duties. However, many women still do a majority of the domestic chores. Parents usually are liberal and allow their children a large measure of freedom in making decisions for themselves. As an ethnically homogeneous people, 65 percent of Danes have surnames that end in *-sen* (Hansen, Christensen, Andersen, etc.).

Housing

Since the economic boom of the 1960s, the trend in Denmark has been toward owning, rather than renting, homes. Brick is the most common building material. Most modern Danish homes are built on one level, and the newest homes are all handicap accessible. Older homes are heated by oil, while newer homes use natural gas. To a large extent, the look of Danish homes tends to reflect the Danish temperament. Outside walls are generally practical, and interior decorations are usually based on simple Scandinavian designs. Modern homes are well insulated, and some are designed in a way that incorporates solar power. Fluorescent lamps and other devices aimed at saving energy are becoming increasingly common.

Dating and Marriage

Dating begins by age 15. Youth enjoy dancing, sporting activities, and going to movies. Most young Danes live together before deciding to marry. Although a large number of couples have children outside of marriage, most eventually marry. The average age at marriage is 31 for men and 28 for women. Weddings take place either in a church or in a town hall. Rice throwing and dancing the bridal waltz are important wedding traditions. About one in four Danish marriages ends in divorce.

Life Cycle

The main religious ceremonies are baptisms, confirmations,

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weddings, and funerals. Secular ceremonies include celebrations of a person's eighteenth birthday, graduation from high school, and wedding anniversary. In all of them, family and friends get together, socialize, and eat and drink. Festive lunches and dinners last for several hours; there is always an abundance of food, drinks, speeches, jokes, anecdotes, and songs. After eating, people tend to dance or socialize for some time. The hosts customarily signal to their guests that it is time to go by serving them *scrub af suppe* (get-out-of-here soup). Danes are considered children until they turn 12 and become adults some time between 18 and 20 or when they graduate from *gymnasium* (high school).

Diet

Breakfast consists of coffee, tea, or fruit juice, pastries or rolls with cheese or jam, or cereal and milk. For lunch, Danes enjoy traditional open-faced sandwiches known as *smørrebrød*. Pumpernickel bread, known as *rugbrød*, or "rye bread," is the traditional bread used for sandwiches. *Smørrebrød* is often served with slices of salami, *frikadeller* (Danish meatballs), hard-boiled eggs, or liver pâté, and topped with dill, parsley, or cucumber slices. Staple foods include pork, fish, beans, potatoes, brussels sprouts, various fresh vegetables, and breads.

For dinner, Danes enjoy dishes such as *frikadeller* or *hakkebøf* (Danish hamburger) served with gravy, white potatoes, pickled red beets, and a salad. Salads are becoming more popular as a part of dinner. *Bøf* (hamburger steak with a brown sauce and fried onions) and *frokostbord* (a cold buffet of many different foods) are also favorites. Popular desserts include fruit, apple cobbler, ice cream, and sweet waffles or pancakes served with ice cream. Favorite drinks include coffee, tea, milk, beer, wines, soft drinks, fruit juices, and mineral water.

Recreation

Soccer is by far the most popular Danish spectator sport. Danes also enjoy handball, badminton, swimming, sailing, cycling, rowing, and jogging. Among women, gymnastics, handball, and horseback riding are popular. Watching television, going to the movies, and reading are popular leisure activities. Danes like to travel. During vacation, families enjoy traveling throughout Europe by car, camping along the way. They often prefer traveling to warm, sunny destinations.

The Arts

Danes pride themselves on their attention to culture. Music, theater, ballet, and other cultural activities are popular. The Royal Danish Ballet is particularly noteworthy. Well-known Danish writers include Hans Christian Andersen, author of "The Ugly Duckling" and "The Little Mermaid." Music is diverse in Denmark and includes jazz, classical, opera, rock, and electronic music. Copenhagen is home to a large number of jazz artists. Medieval ballads and other songs are important in folk music. Folk dances such as the polka and waltz are accompanied by the accordion, violin, or native instruments, such as the *skalmje* (folk clarinet) or *bytromme* (town drum).

Denmark is known for its architecture, including castles,

palaces, and cathedrals. Danish architects have designed several impressive buildings abroad, including the Sydney Opera House in Australia. Danish furniture, ceramics, and silver are renowned for their design.

Holidays

Danes enjoy many holiday traditions. They celebrate most holidays on their eve, as Americans celebrate Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. To celebrate New Year's Eve, people attend parties, listen to the queen's and the prime minister's annual speeches, wait for Copenhagen's City Hall bells to mark midnight, and then light fireworks to welcome the New Year. Other traditions follow throughout the year. To celebrate the eve of Twelfth Night (5 Jan.), Danes light the Christmas tree for the last time. In February or March, Danes participate in Mardi Gras-type activities during pre-Lenten *Fastelavn* festivals. At Easter, people take a long Easter holiday (Thursday–Monday) to eat roast lamb, drink a special potent Easter beer, and gather as families. Queen Margrethe's Birthday (16 Apr.) is a school holiday, and Constitution Day (5 June) is a half holiday. Although they celebrate Christmas over three days, Danes enjoy Christmas Eve the most. Once the Christmas tree is lit, they sing songs while dancing around it in a circle. They later exchange gifts and eat a special meal, usually goose or pork broiled until its skin is crisp.

SOCIETY

Government

Denmark is a constitutional monarchy. The 1849 constitution (revised in 1953) gave the monarchy and Parliament joint legislative authority. The monarch must sign all legislation passed by Parliament, but executive power rests with the prime minister (currently Lars Løkke Rasmussen). Queen Margrethe II presides over the Council of State and performs numerous other duties. She came to the throne in 1972 as the first female monarch to rule since Margrethe I in the 14th century. Between 1513 and 1972, all kings were named either Christian or Frederik. The crown prince's name is Frederik.

The *Folketing* (Parliament) has 179 members, including two each from Greenland and the Faroe Islands, autonomous nations within the Danish Kingdom. Elections are held at least every four years. The voting age is 18.

Economy

Although Denmark has few natural resources, newly discovered oil fields in the North Sea have recently allowed the country to run a trade surplus after years of deficits. The government, however, tightly controls the exploitation of such resources. Denmark also relies on its high-quality agricultural produce for revenue. About 60 percent of the land is arable, but agricultural pursuits employ just 3 percent of the workforce. Meat, beer, dairy products, and fresh and processed fish are shipped around the world. Economic diversification has allowed manufacturing to become the most important exporting sector. Small and medium-sized companies are most prominent, producing furniture, food, medical goods, clothing, electronics, chemicals, and

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machinery. The service sector employs the highest percentage of the workforce (around 75 percent).

Denmark has a high-tech, modern economy with extensive welfare services and dependence on foreign trade. Inflation and unemployment remain relatively low. Although Denmark has chosen not to adopt the euro, its currency, the Danish *krone* (DKK), is pegged to the euro. Danes enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world but also pay some of the highest taxes. For example, taxes and duties on a new car may triple its price.

Transportation and Communications

Although personal automobiles are important, bicycles are also a primary source of transportation for many Danes. Bicycles have been a popular means of commuting to work and an integral part of city life for decades. Most major cities have special bicycle paths along the busiest streets and have traffic lights especially designed for cyclists. In most traffic situations, cyclists have the right of way. Rail traffic, bus lines, and ferry services also continue to meet the transportation needs of the country. Copenhagen has a rapid-transit system for daily commuters. The Great Belt waterway, the bridge-tunnel system connecting the island of Sjælland to the island of Fyn, opened for motorists in June 1998. It is the site of Europe's largest suspension bridge. The Øresund Link, a motorway and railway link between Copenhagen and Malmö, Sweden, opened in 2000.

All communications systems are modern and efficient. Denmark has national and local television stations. Most Danes access television stations in other countries through cable networks or satellite dishes. Denmark has dozens of daily newspapers; the majority of households receive at least one. Almost half of the population uses the internet.

Education

Primary education is free and compulsory for nine years at the *Folkeskole* (People's School). Students must study a foreign language, among other required courses. About two-thirds then choose practical training schools for job training, and the rest choose secondary schools to prepare for a college education. Entrance to universities is determined by a highly competitive examination, but the education is free. Denmark was a pioneer in the community college (*Folkeshøjskole*) concept. Today, resident students are instructed in such subjects as literature, history, sports, photography, and religion; the focus is on personal development without exams. Denmark ranks among the highest in the world in per capita expenditures on education.

Health

Health care is provided through a comprehensive socialized medical system. The system often necessitates long waits for certain operations because costs are contained by rationing services to some extent. Many Danes are frustrated with the system, and are seeking other means of obtaining high-quality service, such as leaving the country for treatment. Each citizen may choose a family doctor to coordinate services, nearly all of which are provided free of charge (paid for by taxes). Medicine is available at a low cost. Some people can

get medicine free of charge.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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POPULATION & AREA

Population	5,515,575 (rank=109)
Area, sq. mi.	16,639 (rank=131)
Area, sq. km.	43,094

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	19 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	2 of 155 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$35,900
Adult literacy rate	99% (male); 99% (female)
Infant mortality rate	4 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	76 (male); 91 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

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