



Working life in Denmark

Here you can read more about Denmark as a society, Danish working culture, leisure time and tips on getting to know the Danes quickly.





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Denmark and Danes

Denmark is a modern welfare society with a strong business community.

Modern Denmark

To many, Denmark is best known for Hans Christian Andersen, Michael Laudrup and the Vikings. But Denmark is much more than that. It is a modern country with both traditional and high-technology companies that export products to the entire world.

Agriculture, innovation and design

Denmark has a tradition as an agricultural country producing some of the world's leading agricultural products. But Denmark is also home to one of the largest shipping fleets in the world and features a large industrial sector. In addition, Danish companies have achieved a leading position in the bio-tech and pharmaceutical industries.

Many Danish companies focus on innovation and design. This includes Danish companies that develop wind turbines, hearing aids, satellite equipment, microchips and computer games, as well as companies that produce "Danish design" in the form of furniture, industrial design, clothing and exclusive television and hi-fi systems. Denmark also has a large financial sector and energy sector, and the public sector provides jobs to many people in the fields of education and health care.



Welfare and community

Most Danes see Denmark as a community in which everyone contributes to creating a good society and a secure future. Denmark is a welfare society in which roads, hospitals, schools, universities and libraries are free of charge. Even though people naturally have a responsibility for themselves, there are social programmes that provide everyone with the opportunity to live a dignified life, from cradle to old age. A relatively large portion of income is taxed in Denmark, but these taxes go to funding many public services and benefits.

A dynamic labour market

The Danish labour market is known for its high degree of organisation. Most employees are members of a trade union and an unemployment insurance fund, and most companies are members of an employers' association.

These organisations arrange agreements on pay and working conditions, and they play a significant role in ensuring a labour market that is both secure and dynamic.

Equality and room for diversity

Men and women do not just have equal rights in Denmark. The large majority of Danish women also have a job where they earn the same in pay as their male colleagues. You will encounter many female managers at Danish workplaces and many women who are interested in making a career. Equality also applies in other areas. Nobody may be discriminated against because of their religion, political views, age, handicap or sexual orientation.

In Denmark, it is customary not to let one's personal views interfere with one's work. Religion is also considered a private issue in which others should not intervene. If people have special needs because of their religion, most companies are usually open to finding a common solution.

A flexible solution to issues regarding one's personal matters is usually found through cooperation.



Communication and working culture

Danes are informal and value both community and initiative.

The informal tone at work

In Denmark, the social conventions at the workplace are very informal. It is quite natural that you express your opinion. Of course, this informal tone does not mean that everything is permitted. It is common practice that people speak politely to each other and avoid creating personal conflicts when they disagree. Almost everyone addresses each other with the informal “du”, both to colleagues and managers.

Obviously, it is important to know who can make certain decisions, who the manager is, and who the employees are. But you will probably experience that messages or instructions are rarely formulated directly as orders. They will usually be formulated in a more friendly manner. Instead of saying, “Get this done by Tuesday”, a Danish manager may say, for example, “Could you have this finished by Tuesday?” This means the same thing, however. It can therefore be difficult to decode what a Danish manager actually means if you are not used to this way of communicating with a manager. A piece of good advice is to ask if you are in doubt.

It is expected that employees come to meetings and arrive at work on time.

Managers and employees

Many workplaces provide good opportunities for working across departments in the organisation or for going directly to managers with a proposal. It is appreciated when you take initiatives. For example, you should not wait for orders if you encounter a problem; you should instead take initiative to solve it, either alone or together with your colleagues. Of course, this requires that you can work independently and have a good sense of what is feasible.

Even though the tone is informal and managers and employees can discuss many things, it is important to know that the manager is always the person with the ultimate responsibility and the one who takes the final decisions.



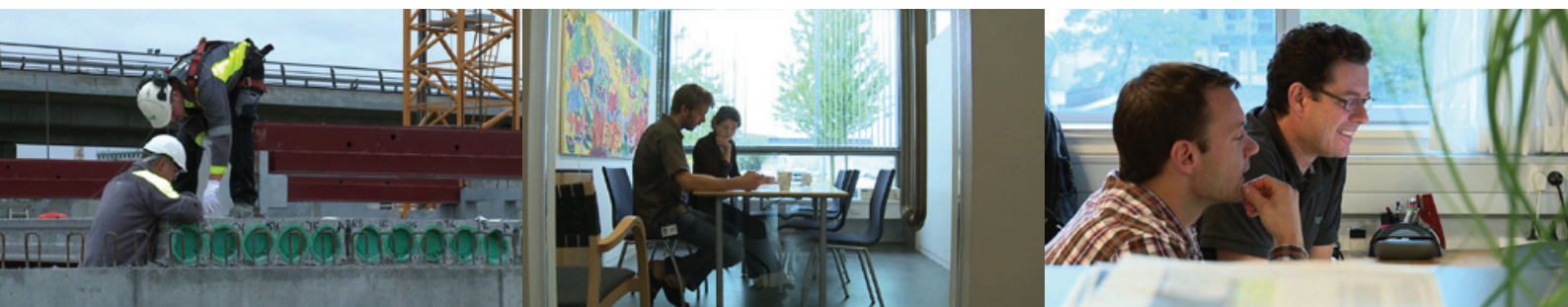
Openness and unity

Danes are relatively open when you show an interest in their life, and they can speak about personal matters in a very direct tone. When people know each other, it is easier to show consideration and understanding when necessary and it increases the sense of unity at the workplace.

It is completely natural at nearly all workplaces that employees work together to solve their tasks. This cooperation entails openness, a willingness to share knowledge with colleagues and assisting each other in all ways possible. You help your colleagues, and they help you in return.

Job satisfaction and continuing education

Danes are very devoted to their work, and job satisfaction is a part of the Danish working culture. The philosophy of nearly all workplaces is that employees should feel comfortable at work and avoid stress. For example, you must have sufficient challenges and responsibility, and you should feel that you are valued as part of the community at the workplace. Many companies offer extensive continuing education options.



Social life at work

Get to know Danes and get involved in social life at the workplace.

You meet Danes at work

You will especially come in contact with Danes at work. It is certainly true that some Danes can seem a bit reserved at first. But this is only until you get to know them. You will easily get to know them if you learn to speak Danish. Even though nearly everyone speaks English, being able to speak Danish is an advantage, as you will be able to participate in all conversations and meetings. You will find that Danes are proud that somebody is willing to learn their language, and they will be glad to help you become even better at speaking Danish.

When you move to Denmark, you are entitled to three years of Danish language instruction.

Social life at work

At most workplaces there are often social events with colleagues. These events are voluntary, but it is expected that you participate. For example, it is standard at many workplaces to celebrate employees' birthdays with a group breakfast before everyone begins the day's work. There are typically also some parties during the year in which all colleagues participate. Many workplaces also hold social and cultural events outside of the workplace and outside of normal working hours.

As a new citizen in Denmark, it is a good idea to participate in the social life at the workplace, as this is where you will get close to Danes, establish ties to colleagues and meet new friends.

Humour and a good atmosphere

Job satisfaction is not just about the professional aspect of work. Humour and social interaction are also important factors. A positive atmosphere is vital to how satisfied Danes are with their job.

It is important that you are attentive to your colleagues and that you perceive them as friends and not just as people you work with. It is alright to ask about your colleagues' lives and families, and it is recommended to ask about the sports or activities they participate in during their leisure time. In this way, you contribute to strengthening unity at the workplace.



Work and leisure time

Life cannot only be about work. There must also be room for oneself and one's family.

Work and leisure time

Family life and leisure time are very important to Danes. Life cannot only be about work. Therefore, the normal working week in Denmark is 37 hours for full time employees. Many workplaces have a family policy and are flexible to the needs of families. For example, many workplaces permit part time work or flexible working hours.

The rules regarding overtime work vary from workplace to workplace. Within the public sector, one can take time off in lieu of overtime.

Parental leave, child care and schools

When you have a child, you are normally entitled to one full year of paid parental leave. Parents decide whether and how they distribute this parental leave between them. An increasing number of Danish fathers chooses to take some of this parental leave. Most Danish children are cared for in nurseries and day care centres beginning at the age of ½-1 year until they begin in school around the age of six. The family and public sector both contribute to paying the cost of nurseries and day care centres, whereas schooling is free of charge. However, there are also private schools (including international private schools) where parents pay part of the schooling costs.

Assignments for working life in Denmark

Questions for reading

When you have read the texts regarding working life in Denmark, you can try to answer the following 10 questions. There is only one correct answer to each question. You will find the correct answers on the last page.



1. What do companies produce in Denmark?

- a. Denmark has almost no industry, but mostly agriculture.
- b. Denmark is the home of one of the smallest merchant fleets in the world.
- c. Many Danish companies focus on innovation and design.

2. How many employees are members of a union?

- a. The majority of employees are members of a union.
- b. All employees are members of a union.
- c. The majority of employees are not members of a union.

3. What does it mean, that Denmark is a welfare society?

- a. That it is free to go to school, but costs money to be admitted to a hospital.
- b. You only pay a small amount of tax, but you pay for education.
- c. You pay for many things yourself, but are ensured a dignified life from cradle to old age.

4. How do you address each other in the workplace?

- a. The majority says “sir/madam” to the manager and “du” to their colleagues.
- b. The majority says “sir/madam” to the manager and “sir/madam” to their colleagues.
- c. The majority says “du” to the manager and “du” to their colleagues.

5. What values are typically considered most important in Danish workplaces?

- a. That you attend punctually and do not take initiatives without speaking with your manager first.
- b. That you personally evaluate the right thing to do and are not answerable to your man
- c. That you help each other and preferably take initiative to solve a problem.

6. What languages do you need to know in order to get on in a Danish workplace?

- a. English is gradually being spoken in the majority of Danish workplaces, so being able to speak English would suffice.
- b. The majority of Danes speak English, but in almost all jobs it is an advantage to be able to speak Danish.
- c. You can manage most places if you can speak German or Dutch.

7. What does social life mean in the workplace?

- a. It is important that you participate in social events within and outside of working hours.
- b. It is not so important to participate in social events in the workplace.
- c. The social aspect plays a big part, and in most workplaces colleagues eat breakfast together every morning.

8. How many hours are worked per week?

- a. Normally, you work 37 hours per week.
- b. Normally, you work 40 hours per week.
- c. Normally, you work 35 hours per week.

9. How much holiday are you entitled to?

- a. Normally you have the right to minimum 6 weeks' holiday per year.
- b. Normally you have the right to minimum 5 weeks' holiday per year.
- c. As a new employee, you normally only have the right to 1 week's holiday per year unless otherwise agreed.

10. What is the length of maternity/paternity leave?

- a. The mother and father have the right to 1 year's shared maternity leave.
- b. The mother has the right to 6 months' maternity leave; the father has 3 weeks' paternity leave.
- c. You do not have the right to take maternity leave unless this has been agreed on upon employment.

Assignments to use in teaching



11. Make a job advertisement

Make a job advertisement for a Danish company and give reasons for why you have made it as you have. The advertisement must contain a description of the company, the job and the qualifications which the company finds most important.

12. Make a job application

Make a job application to a Danish company. Base it on a real job advertisement. Give reasons why you have written it as you have.



13. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of strong cooperation

Discuss what teamwork and cooperation mean to a job carried out in a workplace. What are the advantages of cooperation? And what are the disadvantages?

Correct answers:

1: c 2: a 3: c 4: c 5: c 6: b 7: a 8: a 9: b 10: a