

Impressions of Copenhagen
By Doug Brandy

From a June, 2018 visit with our niece.



Bicycles, bicycles! Alongside every street there are bike lanes, used by thousands of this city's residents. Pedestrians must move cautiously to avoid two-wheeled vehicles that have the right of way on their designated paths. Bicycles are parked outside every apartment building; hundreds beside office buildings. Although I saw locks, no one seemed to actually use them and few riders wear helmets.



Could we ever see this many bicycles in Ottawa? Admittedly, our climate is not bicycle-friendly 4 months of the year. But, the biggest factor is the private automobile use engrained in North American culture.

At the same time as bicycle use is encouraged, private automobiles are discouraged in Denmark. Want to buy a car? Be prepared to pay a 200% tax. Then there's the cost of a driver's license - as much as 10,000 Danish kroner (DKK). One kroner is about 20 cents Canadian (CAD). Posted gasoline price when we were there: 11.19/L DKK, about \$2.31 CAD. In some outlying areas residents have nevertheless decided a car is necessary and have purchased one to be shared by the group.

Walk, don't walk. Everyone respects traffic signals. I had been tipped off beforehand by a Canadian who lived for some time in Denmark. He once made the mistake of trying to cross a street against the "don't walk" signal but immediately became the target of many disapproving comments from those around him.

Almost everyone we met understood and spoke quite good English, making shopping and traveling easy.

The Copenhagen metro has a feature I've not seen in any other subway. The waiting platform is separated from the tracks by a wall. After a train arrives, doors open in the wall to meet corresponding doors on the train.



There are different trains serving outer areas. Some cars have areas reserved for bicycles. Where there are stairs descending to the trains, grooved metal strips are bolted to the stair edges so you can more easily wheel your bicycle up or down.

After arriving early on their bicycles, children can be seen playing happily by their schools with little apparent adult supervision. Some playgrounds were not fenced. It seems most parents believe their children become more confident and independent if they don't have constant minding.

Danes really believe in the "3 Rs". Our niece's apartment building provides separate containers for organic waste, paper & cardboard, glass, plastic, metal and batteries. When Andrea takes refundable cans or bottles to the supermarket she drops them into a bin which spits out a receipt to use at the checkout. You may have a free kayak ride on one of the many canals if you agree to bring back a full bag of trash collected on the water. A large plant produces power from burning any garbage that can't be recycled. Copenhagen's goal is to become the world's first zero-carbon capital by 2025. When grocery shopping, look for the ØGO symbol on organic products.

I was impressed with Danish honesty. I unintentionally left my backpack on a tour boat but recovered it intact several hours later.

Andrea's husband is an engineer, employed by an international company. I was impressed by his firm's progressive employment practices. The company believes it's important for its employees to be happy and have healthy families. Therefore:

- Employees may choose to work at home. Getting the work done is more important than where it is done
- Once a month the company treats employees and their spouses to a TGIF
- There's a company Christmas party for children

Denmark contrasts with Canada in so many ways.