



## Create a Hygge-filled Life

The Danes might hold the secret to happiness for all of us

BY KAREN ASP

**T**ravel to Denmark, and it's not out of the question you'd hear something like this: Put on your *hyggebukser*, settle into your *hygge* and have a *hyggesnak* with a loved one.

Confused? Of course, until you realize that Denmark's cultural DNA is driven by something called *hygge*.

"Hygge (pronounced hue-guh) may be to Danes what freedom is to Americans," says Meik Wiking, author of *The Little Book of Hygge* and CEO of the Happiness Research Institute in Copenhagen. "It's also something that we seek out, as we plan for *hyggelige* (comfortable) times and reminisce about them after."

## How hygge benefits you

Although hygge has been described as “the art of creating intimacy,” and “cocoa by candlelight,” there’s an easier way to understand it. “The true essence of hygge is the pursuit of everyday happiness, and it’s basically like a hug without the physical touch,” Wiking says. “You’re focusing on the small things that really matter.”

Some of the key ingredients of hygge are togetherness, relaxation, indulgence, presence and comfort, which is why it should be no surprise that the biggest benefit of hygge is happiness. Start with togetherness, for instance.

“When happiness researchers analyze the common denominators among those who consider themselves happy, a pattern emerges that these people have meaningful and positive social relation-

ships,” Wiking says, adding that hygge fosters a special way of being together with loved ones.

Hygge also promotes gratitude by emphasizing the savoring of simple pleasures and making the most of the moment. Studies have shown that people who feel grateful aren’t only happier than those who don’t feel grateful, but are also more helpful and forgiving and less materialistic, Wiking says.

Finally, the focus on the everyday gives hygge its ultimate happiness boost. As Wiking explains, it’s the closest you can

arrive to happiness after coming home from a long day’s work on a cold rainy day. “Hygge is about making the most of what you have in abundance: the everyday,” he says.

## Add more hygge to your life

Fortunately, you don’t have to move

to Denmark to live a hygge-filled life. No matter where you live, you can add hygge to your day. A good place to start? With candlelight.

The University of Richmond in Virginia plans to adopt Danish ways of life — hygge included — during its International Education Week this November. A candlelit walk across campus will be one of the main events.

“It’s important for everybody, not just our students, to learn how to take deep pleasure from genuinely simple things,” says Martha Merritt, the school’s dean of international education, adding that too many Americans feel guilty about doing pleasurable things. “We need to learn how to feel great about sitting down with a good book or listening to a guitar concert and not thinking this time is borrowed from something else, like work, that’s more virtuous.”

To follow suit, just light a few candles wherever you are. Wiking suggests adding candles to a hygge “emergency kit” that should be complete with high-quality chocolate, tea, a blanket and your favorite book.

You can also find new ways to be together with family and friends. For example, when Wiking wanted to see his friends more frequently, he suggested they form a food club. To maximize hygge, they cook together so nobody has to host and be the only chef. “That’s where the hygge is,” he says.

Of course, now that you’re versed in hygge, you’ll know what to do when you arrive in Denmark and hear that funny sentence. You’ll simply slip into comfy pants you wouldn’t wear in public (your *hyggebukser*), settle into your favorite nook (*hyggekrog*) and have that cozy chat (*hyggesnak*) with a loved one. Consider yourself a hygge master after that.

## COZY UP

To find out why some societies are happier than others, visit the Happiness Research Institute, [happinessresearchinstitute.com](http://happinessresearchinstitute.com)

