



CAKE

+

COMFORT



In uncertain times, we need all the comfort we can get, which is why the Danish art of *hygge* has never been more relevant than it is right now. VegNews Travel Editor **Aurelia d'Andrea** invites you to explore this Nordic approach to cozy living, vegan style.



THE DANES HAVE IT PRETTY DARN GOOD.

Besides getting credit for Danish pastry, *The Little Mermaid*, and our collective obsession with mid-century Scandinavian design, Denmark also claims bragging rights as one of the happiest countries on the planet. With low crime, universal healthcare, and average household financial wealth per capita ringing in at nearly \$55,000, it's pretty easy to see how joy might manifest on a national level.

The country of nearly 6 million is not without its problems, however. The insular nation has struggled to adapt to its shifting demographics following an influx of refugees from Syria and Iraq, and winters in this Northern European outpost are long, dark, and bitterly cold. But Denmark has a secret weapon that helps buffer it against life's tribulations and uncertainties, and it's one we could all benefit from: *hygge*.

Cozy culture

Type "hygge" into Pinterest and up pop images of chunky knitted blankets, roaring fireplaces, candlelit tables, and foam-topped lattes. To the uninitiated, it looks more like an interior design concept than a real-life philosophy practiced by millions. Pronounced "hoo-gah," its etymology is traced to archaic Norwegian, and translates loosely as both the noun "well-being" and the verb "to embrace." Metaphorically, that's how *hygge* makes us feel: cared for, snug, and content.

"Hygge is about an atmosphere and an experience rather than about things," says Meik Wiking, the best-selling author of *The Little Book of Hygge: Danish Secrets to Happy Living* and the founder of the Copenhagen-based Happiness Research Institute. "It is about being with the people we love, the feeling of home, and the feeling of being safe."

It also gives us permission to experience comfort in all the

ways that are available, whether that's an end-of-the-day glass of pinot noir or staying in bed until noon on Sunday and losing ourselves in a juicy mystery novel. If it feeds our spirits and supports us through another day's news headlines, it falls under the *hygge* umbrella.

Though practiced all year round, wintertime is *hygge*'s sweet spot, and the season when those cozy clichés fully manifest into soul-soothing reality. If it had its own slogan, it might be, "You deserve it." So go ahead and put another log on the fire, pour yourself a mug of hot cocoa, and dial the *hygge* vibes up to high.

Sugar and nice

To say the Danes adore sweets is a grave understatement. After their Nordic neighbor Finland, Denmark is the most sugar-obsessed country on the planet, with per capita consumption tallying in at roughly 18 pounds per year—more than twice the European average. Is it any wonder? With each bite of banana nut bread, our brains are flooded with dopamine, the feel-good chemical that compels us to go back for more. "Hygge is a thing that is supposed to be and feel good for you," says Wiking. "And that means if you want to eat some cake, eat some cake."

Creating a sense of pleasure needn't be over-the-top indulgent—or sugar-oriented; you can cultivate *hygge* by shopping for fresh produce at the farmers' market and

HYGGE

pronounced [hoo-gah, 'hʊgə/] *noun*

The Danish practice of enjoying life's simple pleasures with friends and family while feeling content and cozy.



HYGGE AT HOME



Bring this Danish concept to your domain in just three easy steps.

Berlin-based blogger and vegan lifestyle expert Jenny Mustard doesn't just blindly follow the hygge trend; she was raised with it. Borrow these tips from the Swedish-born media maven and bring some comfort into your life.



Sip something soothing

There's nothing more hygge than enjoying a warm mug of tea. Mustard is partial to *genmai cha*, lapsong, and fresh ginger tea, but whatever elixir you choose, brew up a pot and take the time to savor the aroma, the flavor, and the warm feeling it gives you with every sip.



Dial up the cozy

Creating a space in your home that's dedicated exclusively to relaxation and small pleasures is a hygge fundamental. Clear out the clutter, and cozy it up with pillows, soy candles, and a throw blanket. For optimal hygge, use this space for enjoyment only—never for paying bills or homework.



Commune with nature

Getting outside for a daily walk and observing the seasonal nuances, whether in your own neighborhood or out in rural isolation, is a great way to connect with yourself, your companion animal, or your partner. Walking solo? Use this alone-time to listen to your favorite audiobook or podcast.

transforming it into a savory pot of winter vegetable stew, by taking a hot bath and tossing in your favorite bath bomb, or curling up with the cat under a warm throw blanket and watching *Love Actually* for the 43rd time. When in doubt, aim for a formula that couples simplicity with intention, add an element of pleasure, then subtract guilt.

Happy together

Life in the 21st century can feel especially isolating, when our communities are so often virtual and our primary communication with friends is through social media. Engaging with others, in the flesh and in small groups, is the Scandinavian antidote to technology overload, and also happens to be something that science says supports our mental, spiritual, and physical well-being.

"Hanging out with people that you can be completely yourself with is very hygge," says Jenny Mustard, a Swedish-born vegan YouTuber based in Berlin. Mustard says gatherings needn't be fussy affairs that require planning or extra expense. What matters is simply taking the time to be in the company of people we like. "I like cooking a homemade meal for us to enjoy together," she says. "Something simple and comforting, like congee or noodle soup. I don't need more than that to have a hygge night."

Research shows that sharing time with others not only makes us feel good, but contributes to our longevity—reason enough to find time to meet a friend for coffee, make space for game night with friends, or visit Grandma to flip through family photo albums together. "The most important social relationships are close relationships in which you experience things together, experience being understood, share thoughts and feelings, and both give and receive support," says Wiking.

Light touch

Want to bring hygge into your home? Borrow a page, literally, from the IKEA catalog. The Scandinavian superstore hasn't just nailed this concept's design aesthetic, but its language, too. Pages are filled with images of small gatherings of happy people sharing pleasurable moments—dining together, sipping champagne, laughing—while the descriptive text encourages us to make our houses a home with the "twinkle of soft lighting" and the "coziest textiles." Is this commerce imitating life, or the other way around?

Getting the light right (or wrong) can make (or break) the experience. IKEA stores opt for strategically placed pendant lamps, which beam soft light onto tabletops and breakfast nooks. Sitting spaces are arranged for optimal reading pleasure, while chairs and sofas are draped with snuggly throws and fluffy pillows. And then there's the candles.

The Danes burn more votives, tea lights, and candlesticks than anyone else in Europe, and they light them not just for special occasions, but for everyday enjoyment. Infusing your own living spaces with the glow of candlelight is the number one way to hygge-ify your home, and it also happens to be one of the most simple and affordable. "It's not about the grand indulgences," says Mustard. "It's more about enjoying the small moment of life, and choosing to live well."

Great outdoors

There's a Nordic saying that "there's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing." Rather than let a little sub-zero temperatures get you down, go hygge by bundling up warmly and heading out into nature, not just for the health benefits of movement and fresh air, but for the moments—a hot bath with essential oils, a mug of coffee spiked with Baileys Almande—that await when you return.

The meditative aspect of being outdoors and marveling at a colorful sunset or spotting a deer on a forest walk reminds us that we are part of the circle of life. Is there anything more life-affirming and assuring than that? Relish the moments spent sitting around a campfire with friends eating s'mores or nestled in a woodsy lakeside cabin while rain beats down on the roof, and tune into the simple, earthy pleasure those experiences bring.

Can't get to nature? Bring it to you. Potted plants, fresh flowers, and even a tree strung with lights during the holidays

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are ways to bring the wonder of the outdoors in. And if you can share the experience of gathering or admiring your greenery with someone you really like, you've just taken hygge to new levels.

Hygge isn't about pushing boundaries and taking risks; it's about honoring your true nature and aligning your actions with your values. Not a party kind of person? Skip the big fundraising gala and use your time at home to plot your goals for the month, or to write donation checks to your favorite charities. Relieving ourselves of external expectations is freeing, and it leaves more room for us to focus on things we care deeply about.

"Self-acceptance and being comfortable in your own skin definitely goes hand in hand with reaching that hygge mode," says Mustard. "Treat yourself and your surroundings in a kind and sweet way, and leave all the harshness and self-criticism at the door."

Take it from the Danes: Hygge isn't just a passing trend, but something to cultivate and integrate into our daily lives to maximize the pleasure of living. And what's not to love about time spent with friends, creating sanctuary at home, and doing things that make you feel good? Increasing your happiness quotient is just one perk; the bottomless cups of tea and warm vegan danishes are added incentive. **VN**

VegNews Travel Editor Aurelia d'Andrea has been hygge-ing all along and never knew it until researching this story.

COZY IQ

Test your hygge IQ and see if you're ready to become an honorary Dane.

1 You're having a dinner party. To increase the hygge value, you:

- Start a political debate
- Offer your guests a post-meal brandy and suggest a game of charades
- Initiate a discussion about the latest animal-rights documentary

2 It's a Sunday afternoon, and you have a one-hour window of free time, so you:

- Pull out the knitting needles and finish the scarf you've been working on for months
- Hop onto Instagram, and scroll through everyone's winter vacation feeds with envy
- Head to the garage to tinker on your old pick-up truck

3 It's your birthday, and you want to do something special, so you:

- Invite 60 of your closest friends over for a birthday bash
- Fire up the Playstation for a solo night of Destiny 2
- Bake a cake from your favorite vegan cookbook and invite a friend over for a slice

4 You're redecorating your apartment. First, you:

- Install new fluorescent light fixtures in the kitchen
- Buy a new space heater for your living room
- Create a meditation corner in your bedroom, and fill it with cushions and candles

5 You're planning your spring-break getaway. Your first choice is:

- Club Med Cancun, here I come!
- Renting an Airbnb cabin in Vermont and hiking with your dog every day
- Vacation? What vacation? There's too much work to do to enjoy downtime right now

Answers: 1. B, 2. A, 3. C, 4. C, 5. B;
4 to 5 correct. Congrats! You're a hygge master.
2 to 3 correct. Keep working on the cozy thing. You'll get it!
0 to 1 correct. Not yet honorary-Dane material, but there's still hope!