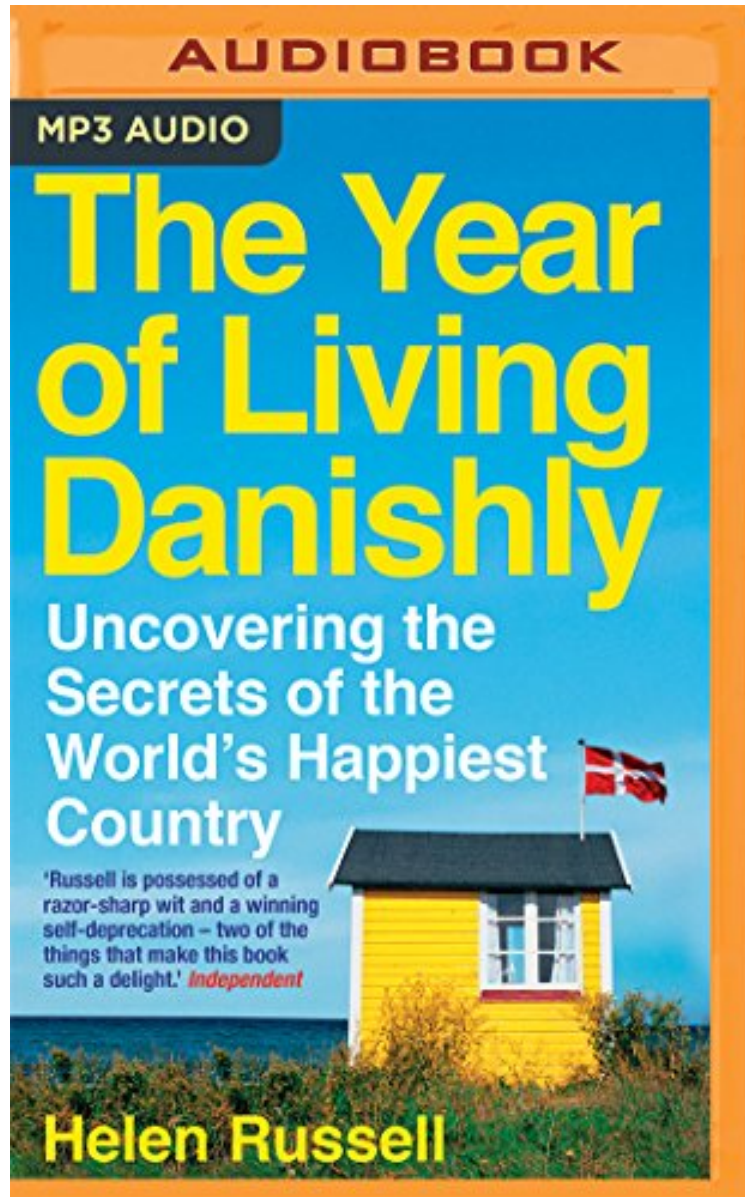


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The Year of Living Danishly: Uncovering the Secrets of the World's Happiest Country

Helen Russell

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Helen Russell : The Year of Living Danishly: Uncovering the Secrets of the World's Happiest Country before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Year of Living Danishly: Uncovering the Secrets of the World's Happiest Country:

51 of 53 people found the following review helpful. A funny, informative memoir that will teach you so much about Denmark

By Novels And Nonfiction
Plot Teaser
London-based journalist Helen Russell was living a career-focused life in the UK, trapped by long working hours and overwhelmed by the many demands of her high-paced life. When her husband was offered the chance to move to Denmark and work for Lego, Russell went from initially skeptical to seriously intrigued once she learned that Denmark has routinely been named as the happiest country in the world. Why were people in Denmark so happy, Russell wondered? In this memoir, Russell captures the adventure of moving to a new country and setting up a new life, while providing lots of interesting insight into what might make Denmark such an ideal place to live in.

What I Liked
The humor. There are not many books that can make me physically laugh-out-loud while reading silently alone in my room. This memoir was one of them. The awkward moments Russell finds herself in while adapting to her new life in Denmark are abundant and hilarious. Like her experience during her first Danish language class, when Russell tries to tell her professor that she enjoys watching Danish Drama *The Killing* only to realize that pronounced and spelled in slightly different ways, killing in Danish means alternately kitten, chicken and bitch. Russell has a sharp, self-deprecating wit and often pokes fun at her own inability to assimilate comfortably into Danish social norms, while also wryly commenting on her husband's reactions to the various new and puzzling aspects of Danish society to which they are introduced. The cast of characters that make up Russell and her husband's social life in Denmark – like the neighbors Mr. Beard 1 and Mr. Beard 2 and her friend American Mom – provide funny anecdotes as well.

All the interesting facts I learned about Denmark. Russell divides the book into 12 chapters (one per month for her first 12 months in Denmark), with each chapter having a loose focus on one of the aspects of society/culture/economics that may contribute to the country's status as happiest on Earth. I found the chapters on work/life balance (Chapter 2) and child-rearing (Chapter 8) particularly interesting, though also enjoyed reading about the various other topics that Russell investigates including hobbies, pets, vacationing, food, healthcare, education and more. One of the most surprising facts I learned about Denmark is that education is completely free, and that in fact students are paid to attend college in a varying amount that depends on their choice of field and their family's income. I'm so much more informed about Danish and also by extension Scandinavian culture, and I have to say I'm very very intrigued. Maybe my new 10 year plan should be to turn my blog into a full-time job and then move to Denmark to blog from there. (Sounds like perfect reading weather and a girl can dream).

The memoir aspect. Russell could have written this book as a straight up guide to what life is like in Denmark, but I think her personal story and perspective really contributed to the narrative. I've moved around the world a lot myself throughout my life, and I know firsthand that adjusting to a new country really teaches you so much about yourself. It's the perfect catalyst to some major life changes. Russell was struggling to feel truly happy while living in London. Once in Denmark, some of the depressing personal difficulties she was facing eased and lifted. She goes through a significant life change (no spoilers) while in this new country and she and her husband end up deciding to stay in Denmark longer than the initially planned one-year. I came to genuinely like Russell and ended up rooting for her to be able to find true happiness in her new home.

What I Didn't Like
The iffy research studies cited. I work in research, so I'm naturally more tuned in to potentially spurious studies, as well as conclusions that may show correlation but are presented as causation. Some of the studies cited by Russell about different aspects of life in Denmark sounded more rigorous or believable than others, and I wished I had the time to investigate them further – which was impossible because to her credit Russell mentions many different studies throughout the book. Ultimately, the questionable nature of some of the studies cited by Russell did not ruin my enjoyment of the book. Most of Russell's conclusions about Denmark and the happiness of its people were pretty common sense anyways, and believable in their own right.

Final Verdict
A funny, informative memoir that will teach you so much about Denmark while inspiring you to reconsider aspects of your life that may not be contributing to your happiness.

38 of 38 people found the following review helpful. And this is A Good Thing. ” I wanted a light and fun

By Philippe
“I am not important. If I take a break, no one dies. And this is A Good Thing.” I wanted a light and fun, but deeply interesting read to bring on a summer trip, and this book turned out to be the perfect choice. It offered a pretty entertaining look at Danish culture and society, all through the lens of why they continually rank among the highest countries in terms of happiness. I'm not too hard to please with a good book that takes on the premise of “I'll try this out for a year and then write about it,” and this book fits that description to a tee. The writing is light and engaging enough to make it easy to fly right through its pages, yet contains enough statistics and odd facts to keep you intrigued. Did you know that Danish women can get an ovulation discount for booking their travel around a ripe time for them to procreate? I do now.

After a while you get the formula of each chapter: an anecdote, a few statistics, an interview with a randomly found “expert,” and the constant questioning of various Danes about how happy they are on a scale of 1 to 10. That said, the book manages to be pretty interesting in spite of its persistence upon this formula, so I suppose that's a big win.

As far as Denmark goes? I could probably do without the tax rate (although, that comes with some major benefits), cultural homogeny, and the never-ending darkness come November, but there's a lot about the Danish Way that I do appreciate. The lack of self-importance reflected in that earlier quote... I think that's refreshing. And I love the way they're able to enjoy their work. Not to mention the practice of *hygge* and getting all cozy as a sport.

102 of 109 people found the following review helpful. Thanks for sharing, Helen!

By Elisabeth Price
I'm actually still a Dane but haven't lived in Denmark for several years now, so this

gives me an update on current mores that I'd otherwise not get, and it's fascinating! I have known for a long time that I can never "go back to Denmark." What I knew as Denmark has altered almost beyond recognition. I think it's a change for the better: it's a more egalitarian society and very few people are forced into drudgery to stay alive. After 45 years in the United States I'd find it very difficult to live there now, excellent as it is in many ways. Having no Danish background at all, Helen Russell observes the Denmark of today with eyes uncontaminated by distant memories, but prejudiced in favor of the Danes being the happiest people on earth. This makes the book pleasant, interesting and funny to read, as well as quite informative. I really enjoyed it!

When she was suddenly given the opportunity of a new life in rural Jutland, journalist and archetypal Londoner Helen Russell discovered a startling statistic: the happiest place on earth isn't Disneyland but Denmark, a land often thought of by foreigners as consisting entirely of long, dark winters, cured herring, Lego and pastries. What is the secret to their success? Are happy Danes born or made? Helen decides there is only one way to find out: she will give herself a year, trying to uncover the formula for Danish happiness. From child care, education, food and interior design to SAD, taxes, sexism and an unfortunate predilection for burning witches, *The Year of Living Danishly* is a funny, poignant record of a journey that shows us where the Danes get it right, where they get it wrong, and how we might just benefit from living a little more Danishly ourselves. Helen Russell is a journalist and former editor of *MarieClaire.co.uk*. She now lives in rural Jutland and works as a Scandinavia correspondent for the *Guardian* as well as writing a column on Denmark for the *Telegraph*.

'A lovely mix of English sensibility and Danish pragmatism. Helen seems to have understood more about the Danish character than I have! My only worry is that it will make everyone want to have a go and my holiday home area will get overcrowded.' -- Sandi Toksvig 'Russell is possessed of a razor-sharp wit and a winning self-deprecation - two of the things that make this book such a delight.' * *The Independent* * 'A hugely enjoyable romp through the pleasures and pitfalls of setting up home in a foreign land' -- PD Smith * *Guardian* * 'A wryly amusing account of a new life in a strange land.' * *Choice Magazine* * 'if you can't up sticks and move to Denmark... don't despair: here are a few tips and tricks I've picked up for getting a slice of the Danish work-life balance wherever you are.' 'Russell's husband takes a contract with Lego and they are catapulted into rural Jutland, in Denmark. Russell, who is a fast living journalist in London, is at first overwhelmed with the silence, the people, the sheer differences of living in a very foreign country. She then discovers that Danish people have the highest-rated happiness scores in the world... what's their secret? Why are they so damn happy? I'll let you know, it's a lot to do with something called "Hygge".' 'Giving up isn't always a bad thing; being a dropout can even change your life for the better. Helen Russell was a high-flying glossy magazine editor before moving to rural Jutland in Denmark which, despite its long dark winters, is also statistically the happiest nation on earth. While there, Helen soon discovered there's more to Danish life than cured herring and Nordic knits, as she described in her book, "*The Year of Living Danishly*".' 'Ever bought a book for a friend and ended up reading it yourself? I dipped into this and ended up buying my own copy so I could finish it' 'A hugely enjoyable autobiographical account of upping sticks... to the sticks.' About the Author Helen Russell is a journalist and former editor of *MarieClaire.co.uk*. She now lives in rural Jutland and works as a Scandinavia correspondent for the *Guardian*, as well as writing a column on Denmark for the *Daily Telegraph*, London.