

## Episode 39: Copenhagen

### Summary

Nick's English friend Sarah lives in Copenhagen, the capital city of Denmark. In this episode she talks about the life she leads in Copenhagen and why she loves it.

### Transcript

Nick: Today I'm talking to my friend Sarah, and, Sarah, you're English, but you live in Copenhagen, right?

Sarah: That's right, yes.

Nick: And you love living in Copenhagen, right?

Sarah: I do love Copenhagen, yeah. It's my favourite place.

Nick: OK, and so what is it about it that you love so much?

Sarah: So, I think one of the things I love about Copenhagen is that it has everything you would like from a big city in terms of cafés and culture, music, theatre, places to go out, museums, things to see, umm, and it has none of the stress of a really big capital city like London or Paris or Madrid. Umm, it's a place where they discourage using cars, so, umm, so it means it's not polluted, it means that public transport is good. And it's still quite a small city, even though it's a capital city, so you can use a bicycle and still get from one side of town to the other quite quickly. And so it has all the convenience of a slightly smaller town but it has all the excitement of a big city.

Nick: Alright.

Sarah: That's what I like about it.

Nick: So that's kind of the perfect combination. And how long have you lived there?

Sarah: Umm, four-and-a-half years now.

Nick: OK. And you originally went for a job, or you just had a job that you ... you wanted to go there anyway and the job came up?

Sarah: So, a little bit of both, yes. I, umm, I went there for a short-term job and - just for three months - and ... in 2011. And, fell in love with the city, and it happened that a job became vacant where I was working, so I applied for<sup>1</sup> it and got it and moved there to take up my job in 2012.

Nick: Alright, and then if I have this right<sup>2</sup>, you actually hated the job and quit the job, but stayed in Copenhagen.

Sarah: Yeah, that's right. So, umm, the job didn't go very well unfortunately, which was a shame. But, umm, I managed to<sup>3</sup> leave the job and still stay in Copenhagen and make, umm, make a career for myself there, umm, without too much difficulty. So it meant that I could stay there and, yeah, have the life that I designed for myself, really, which is quite a lucky position to be in.

Nick: And so it seems like with these Nordic countries or Scandinavian countries, they have this model which is really amazing in terms of the political system and a city like Copenhagen, you know, every year when they have surveys saying, 'What are the world's most liveable cities?' It's always one of the ... in the top 10, or the top five. Umm, and so, it seems like everybody envies<sup>4</sup> the kind of system that they have, but nobody else seems to copy it.

Sarah: It's true, and that's actually quite interesting. Umm, the system is one where the taxes are extremely high and that's one of ... I think that's one of the fundamental difficulties that other countries and other societies have with it, is that taxes are extremely high. But the services that you get from paying those taxes are extremely good. So, it sort of goes to show<sup>5</sup> that that social welfare system works extremely well, possibly better among smaller countries with smaller populations than it does in big countries. Umm, but, yeah, that's quite interesting.

The other thing that's quite interesting in the Nordic countries is, umm, gender equality, which is, umm, seems to be much better than in other places, umm, even in other places in Europe. Uhh, women are expected to go to work, umm, salaries tend to be more or less equal, uhh, or at least equal pay for work of equal value. Umm, there's a lot more flexibility in working hours for men and women, so there's an equal role in parenting for men and women. Umm, for example, parliament has

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<sup>1</sup> applied for (phrasal verb: to apply for): submitted an application (for a job). The preposition is *for*.

<sup>2</sup> if I have this right (phrase): if I understood correctly, if I'm not mistaken

<sup>3</sup> managed to: succeeded with some difficulty or in a difficult task (in this case, staying in Copenhagen without a full-time job).

<sup>4</sup> envies: is jealous of

<sup>5</sup> (it) goes to show: it proves that something else is true

stopped voting after 4pm because 4pm is when kindergarten and school finishes and everyone is expected to go and pick up their children from school. So, umm, parliament has, in order to encourage young parliamentarians and women parliamentarians, they've stopped voting after 4pm, umm, because they've said, 'If we vote on important things in the middle of the night, the only people who can be there are old men in suits, umm, everyone else has families to look after and children to look after.' So, umm, so they kind of create their society in such a way as to make it easy, umm, for men and women to be equal, to make it easy for, umm, for you to take, umm, ecological friendly transport, for it to be, yeah, for it to be easy to do all of those things that are healthy and, sort of, good for your well-being, which is a lovely situation to be in.

Nick: And do you think that the people who live there or who are from there, they appreciate that or do they realise that it's almost a special kind of place that they have?

Sarah: I think they possibly do from the point of view that they're told about it a lot from high external parties, who say, 'Gosh, this is really interesting and this works.' Umm, I think the people who travel and go and live abroad or work abroad realise that, you know, they have a pretty good standard of living<sup>6</sup> in the Nordic countries. Umm, they have a good work-life balance, which in other parts of, uhh, Western Europe and certainly in the United States, we don't have so much. Umm, yeah, most people finish work at four o'clock, umm, the family is a very, umm, close-knit<sup>7</sup> community and most families spend a lot of time together, whereas I think we find certainly in the UK that that happens less now. People work late, people work weekends, you don't get much holiday time together, children after school will probably go home, everyone will eat their dinner in a separate room, umm, somebody will be watching TV, somebody will be working, somebody will be going out somewhere, whereas (in Denmark) they have a very, sort of, yeah, they have put a lot of importance on family unity which is also quite interesting element of that society.

Nick: Yeah, for sure. And you're a bit of a linguist, umm, so how's your Danish going?

Sarah: Umm, *ikke så godt*, which means 'not so good'. Unfortunately, for me, and my language learning, everybody in Copenhagen speaks really good English, so it's very difficult to practice and it doesn't make sense<sup>8</sup> when somebody speaks really

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<sup>6</sup> standard of living (phrase): level of comfort, facilities, services etc in a society. Can be modified by 'high' or 'low'.

<sup>7</sup> close-knit: tightly connected (regarding relationships between people)

<sup>8</sup> it doesn't make sense: it can't be understood, there's no reason to do it

good English for me to be struggling in Danish when we could have a perfectly easy conversation in English.

Nick: Yeah, it's umm ... yeah, no, it's interesting in that way. Sometimes ... you must also be mistaken for<sup>9</sup> a Danish person, uhh, when you go into a shop or something like that.

Sarah: Sure, because I kind of look ... when I first moved there, my hair was blonder than it is now, umm, for not natural reasons. And so I did look even more Danish than I look now but, umm, blue eyes, fair<sup>10</sup> skin, and, umm, so people sort of look at me and they're not sure. But the problem with Danish language is the pronunciation is quite special and as soon as I open my mouth to speak Danish, it becomes immediately obvious from my pronunciation, however hard I try, that I'm not Danish, and so they switch instantly into English.

Nick: OK, and so if you had a weekend in Copenhagen when you had no plans, what would be the kind of things that you would like to do?

Sarah: Oooh, OK. Well it would depend really on whether it was winter or summer, because you get two very different experiences. But if it was the summer, umm, I would take a canal tour, a boat tour, which goes round the harbour and round the canals around Copenhagen, and you can see all the sights from the water, which is a different angle than you would see them, umm, walking around town. I would rent a bicycle and I would ride, umm, around the centre of town, because that is mostly pedestrianised and closed to cars, so you can ride your bike but, umm, you can't drive around there. I would go to the royal palace and see the changing of the guard at lunchtime because that's quite interesting. Umm, and then I'd probably go for a Danish pastry because, umm, the, umm, the pastries and cakes in Denmark are particularly special. I'd go for a swim because you can swim in the very centre of Copenhagen, umm, there's a wonderful, umm, part of the harbour where you can just jump straight into the water in the middle of town.

Nick: Wow.

Sarah: When you've done your shopping, you can go and have a nice swim. It's quite cold but if it's a sunny day then it's a refreshing experience. Umm, I would go for, umm, a Smørrebrød, which is the traditional Danish open sandwich. Umm, it's a very traditional, umm, meal, that they have at lunchtime, uhh, with rye bread and herrings or smoked salmon. It's quite a light lunch but it's, umm, but yeah, it's a tasty lunch.

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<sup>9</sup> (be) mistaken for: wrongly thought to be someone else

<sup>10</sup> fair: light, used especially when describing hair or skin (as in this example)

And if it was the winter, I would probably go to the opera house, because the opera's open in the winter and they do some fantastic, uhh, performances, and the Christmas markets which are also really special.

Nick: OK, so thank you very much for telling us all about Copenhagen.

Sarah: You're welcome.

## Comprehension Questions

1. What is the main general reason that Sarah loves Copenhagen?
2. Why did Sarah move to Copenhagen in the first place?
3. Which two types of food does Sarah like eating on a summer day in Copenhagen?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. Let's all go together in one car. \_\_\_\_\_ for us to take three different cars to the same place.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ in China is much higher than it was 40 years ago. People have become wealthier and the infrastructure has greatly improved.
3. She studied Chinese every day and became fluent quite quickly. It just \_\_\_\_\_ that if you work hard, you can succeed at anything.
4. \_\_\_\_\_, we should arrive soon. No, wait, I made a mistake, we still have a few hours to go.
5. She went back to university part-time and \_\_\_\_\_ get a Master's degree despite working full-time and taking care of her baby daughter.
6. That football team is a very \_\_\_\_\_ group. All the players trust and love each other and will do anything to help the team win.
7. British people tend to have very \_\_\_\_\_ skin, and that means that they can get sunburned very easily when they go to sunnier countries.
8. I \_\_\_\_\_ a lot of jobs last week but I don't think I'm qualified for any of them.
9. Nick often gets \_\_\_\_\_ an American by people when they first meet him because he has lost his Australian accent.
10. He \_\_\_\_\_ his neighbour because his neighbour has a better job, bigger house and nicer car than he does.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you been to Copenhagen and if so, did you like it? If not, would you like to go? Why or why not?
2. What do you think of the social welfare system in Denmark that Sarah described, where taxes are high but services are good?
3. Sarah describes families in Denmark as doing a lot more activities together than in the UK, where she says family members tend to do their own thing. Is family life in your country more like Denmark or the UK in this respect?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. She loves Copenhagen because it's a small city, but it has everything that a big city has in terms of entertainment and services.
2. She took a short-term job there, which turned into a long-term job.
3. A Danish pastry and a traditional open sandwich (Smørrebrød).

### Exercises

1. It doesn't make sense
2. standard of living
3. goes to show
4. If I have this right
5. managed to
6. close-knit
7. fair
8. applied for
9. mistaken for
10. envies