

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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Cue the happy dance! - August 26, 2023

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SUMMARY

The absolute best thing that happened yesterday occurred late at night. It was a phone call with my sister, Tricia, with her MRI results. They showed that her earlier diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease was incorrect! Instead, it appears to be "Normal Pressure Hydrocephalus (NPH)" which should be treatable. Cue exstatic happy dancing! Today was spent on the Danish island of Bornholm. Our excursion took us through the countryside to the pretty village of Svaneke for a walking tour and beer tasting. - Karen

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DETAIL

Yesterday we were in Poland. Today we're in Denmark. Tomorrow we'll be in Germany. Bing, bang, boom. Over here the countries are close enough that you can do this.

[Important news copied from Karen's summary above, in case anyone ONLY reads this portion of the day's adventures]

The absolute best thing that happened yesterday occurred late at night. It was a phone call with my sister, Tricia, with her MRI results. They showed that her earlier diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease was incorrect! Instead, it appears to be "Normal Pressure Hydrocephalus (NPH)" which should be treatable. Cue exstastic happy dancing!

We're on Bornholm, Denmark, on the island's west coast, in it's biggest city, Rønne. It's hazy and grey, again, but we're hopeful for clearer skies by dusk.

Today's planned excursion is "Svaneke Village and Brewhouse Experience". We clamber onto our bus, it's comfortable like all the others. Kristina, our guide, introduces herself. She has unaccented English, which is a blessing but begs the question as to how that came to be. She's happy to tell us, if we're interested (we are). It turns out she's an American who immigrated here with her husband and family, from the States. Her perspective is very interesting.

As we drive through the small city (14,000 people) into the countryside, she tells us about where we are, what we're seeing, and where we're headed. Bornholm, the island, or really islet, that we're on gets its name from Holm, which means Islet, and Born which is thought to come from name of the people who populated this island early on. Born > Borg > Berg... it's thought that the people of Burgundy, France, the Burgundians, came from Bornholm.

It's called 'The Sunshine Island' because it gets the most sunshine of any place in Denmark. Sadly not today. At least not yet. There's 40,000 people on the whole island and just a couple of policemen. In the summertime, with all the tourists, they 'import' some vacationing police from the mainland. Their primary job, it turns out, is to tell visitors to turn down the music. There's a Police Blotter in the local online paper, apparently, and that's typically what the authorities detail as their interceded infractions.

As always we hear about the local flora and fauna. They have some European bison, but we won't see them. They have hares the size dogs. Given the weather and resulting greenery, I can certainly believe it. In school they teach kids (three year olds in pre-school) how to skin a hare. Useful skill, I guess.

They have deer and a few wild boar, but no foxes. The biggest concern to the people raising chickens are the birds of prey. The solution? Peacocks. They don't take on the raptors, but they do spread their wings and squawk, which is enough to scare them off.

They don't get much snow here. The average summer high is 75 degrees, and in the winter the average high is 41. Temperate due to the Baltic. We're in USDA hardiness zone 8b or maybe 9. Similar to France.

There are ferries to Sweden and to Copenhagen. From Sweden it's fairly quick and often, but to Copenhagen it's a 5.5 hour freight ferry, so locals who have to commute take the 30 minute plane ride.

The island is beautiful. Back in the day it was covered with virgin timber, perfect for ships, until it was all cut down (to make ships) like 100 years ago. The land here, like in all of Denmark, is either privately owned or, if not, it's 'the King's land'. So at one point the King hired someone to replant some of the forests, much to the dismay of locals who were using the land for crops. The end result are huge swaths of handsome, straight, tall trees. The resulting forest will soon be an official National Forest.

In Svaneke we clamber off the bus and walk around. It's a quaint small town. Everyone has an apple or pear or other fruiting tree in their yard. And every one is pack-jam with beautiful fruit. The fig plants are enormous as are the figs, the size of a baseball! There are lots of rose bushes with rose hips the size of a ping pong ball. They're call sea apple and they're invasive! What a problem to have, too many roses.

The country is walking a fine line between the aging population that has to be replaced and not wanting new homeowners to be non-Danish VRBO'er investors.

We stop into a charming local brewery and sample three different beers. All delicious. We hear from the (not the) brewmaster about all the things they're doing to make the beer (well, beer making operation) 'green' and organic.

After beer we ask about Kristina being American but having such a European spelling to her name. She explains that she asked her parents about that when she was a teenager. Her father confided that he'd had a favorite girlfriend, back in the day, with that name and spelling, and he really liked it. That was news to Kristina's mother!

Back on the bus we learn some Danish, including a few of the 27 to 32 vowel sounds (depending on who you ask). We drive by houses with 'vibos' in front of them. That means a table with produce, like Chanterelle mushrooms (they're in season), a price, and a phone number. Locals know to take what they want and to use the phone number to pay for them. It's all on the honor system.

We hear about security on the island, about a man who sold his home after fifty years. When the new owner asked for the keys the seller stammered that he hadn't locked the doors in decades and had no idea where the keys were.

We hear about the nationalized healthcare system, where specialist from the mainland will come over for a day to see any patients needing that specialty. If you need a specialist that is only on the mainland, the health service will call and say "We see you have an appointment on the 12th with Dr. So-and-so-sen, which of the following flights would you like to take to get there?". That's not entirely true, they let you choose between ferry and plane. Either way the transportation is pre-paid. They also deposit 20€ into your bank account to cover food for the day you're away, since you're not eating at home.

By magic hour the sky is blue and there's lots of golden sunshine. Dinner is French cuisine and most of it is pretty spot on.

The evening music is two young (early 30s?) guys, in fancy dress, doing banter and music on the piano and cello. One is from the US and one from Europe. It is all virtuoso, but ranges from classical to pop, often in the same song. They do Bach's Toccata and Fugue which morphs into 'Starry, Starry night' into 'Stand By Me' into 'Für Elise' into 'Knights in White Satin'. It is great fun and their kind-hearted bickering banter, back and forth, is hilarious. They're here one more night during the cruise, to our delight.

Photos



Small island of only 40,000 people. Wind was an important source of work. The architectural styling is wonderfully whimsical.



A water tower. You know the designer?
Think Sidney and Opera House.



The Svaneke harbor



Dramatic coastlines r us



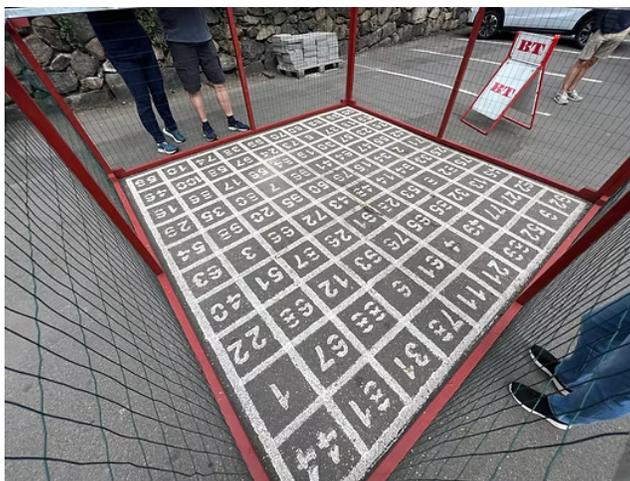
Rose plants everywhere. They're invasive. You know you have it pretty good when your biggest problem is having too many rose bushes! These enormous rose hips are called Sea Apples and are harvested and made into jams, etc.



In the words of Mr. Homer Simpson. "Ah, beer..."



Blondes everywhere here in Scandinavia, even the horses!



"Chickenshit Bingo". Buy a numbered square and if that's where the chicken eventually defecates, you win! Charming or what? Some people think any kind of gambling is bullshit. This kind is chicken shit! Do the birds get ex-lax or chicken-lax beforehand? We'll never tell.



FARNSNIENTE



A round church



Happy sailors (with Rønne in the background)





Rønne at magic hour



The empty pool area in the fading daylight



Branden and James. Is their good natured bickering just an act?!

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