

Summary of «The Little Book of Hygge» by Meik Wiking

Written by Lea Schullery

Learn the secret to happiness and discover how the people of Denmark have achieved greater joy and fulfillment than anyone else in the world.



QuickRead

F R E E B O O K S U M M A R I E S

Go to QuickRead.com/App now to download our app and get access to thousands of free book summaries as both text and audiobooks.

Get the key insights of non-fiction books in minutes instead of hours. Listen to our free audiobooks while you workout or on your commute to work.



Introduction

Where's the happiest place in the world? Well, according to the World Happiness Report the place that consistently tops the list is...Denmark. Often cold, dark, and gloomy, and yet, people there are happier than anywhere else in the world! But why is this? How can a place with consistently gray skies and expensive taxes actually foster happier citizens? Many people have studied this phenomenon and found that not only do the Danish prioritize their social lives and stress less financially, but they also have an amorphous *hygge*.

Imagine a cozy nook with fluffy blankets and pillows near a flickering fireplace. Inside that nook, you enjoy reading a book or simply watching the world pass through the window with a mug of cocoa in your hands. That coziness? That's hygge. But it's more than just creating a space filled with candles and warm lighting, it's an experience. Whether alone or with others, hygge is the secret to happiness and can be achieved by anyone, anywhere in the world. Forget flying to Copenhagen to seek fulfillment and joy, instead, find it right where you are with the people you love.

Why is Denmark the Happiest Place on Earth?

What's your favorite part of the winter months? Maybe it's sitting by the fire with a cup of warm tea, or lighting a few winter-scented candles to make the home warm and cozy. For many, as the days become shorter and the weather becomes cooler, their moods become affected and they may find themselves falling into a seasonal depression. However, when it comes to people of Denmark, they thrive during these months. But why is that? Well, for centuries, the Danish have centered their lives around the idea of *hygge* (pronounced hyoo-guh). So what is *hygge*? If you look up the term, you'll likely find the word "coziness," but *hygge* is much more than just a cozy night sitting by the fire.

When you conjure up images of Denmark, you might visualize cloudy gray skies, and living in a place that doesn't see much sun can't surely be all that exciting, right? However, Denmark is consistently ranked among the happiest nations in the world, ranking first in World Happiness in 2013 and 2016 and third in 2015. So how is this possible? Denmark is cloudy, gray, and gloomy and the taxes are incredibly high. How could anyone possibly be so happy in such a seemingly dreary, expensive place?

Well, two explanations prove how the Danish have mastered the art of happiness. First, the high taxes they pay go towards a generous amount of welfare. This means the Danish have few concerns about paying for education or losing their assets in the wake of losing a job. With fewer stresses over finances, Danes find themselves happier than most. Additionally, Denmark prioritizes their work-life balance and their social relationships. Chances are if you walk into an office in the evening or on the weekend, you'll find a ghost town as most people go home to spend time with their friends and families. In fact, in 1943 American psychologist Abraham Maslow argued that for people to achieve self-fulfillment and happiness, then their basic psychological needs must be met, including social needs. So while generous welfare and busy social lives certainly

contribute to the happiness of the Danish people, perhaps an even bigger contribution comes from their concept of hygge.

First appearing in the early 1800s, the Danish adopted the word from the Norwegians which originally meant “well-being.” It could have even come from the 1560s word *hugge* and its derivative, hug. But the word is more than just coziness and being happy, it’s more of a feeling. It’s creating an atmosphere by dimming the lights, relaxing in a cozy corner, and sharing in simple pleasures with loved ones. Simply put, hygge is the experience of being around friends and family, sharing love, and feeling safe. And while many other countries have adopted similar concepts like the Germans with *Gemütlichkeit* and the Dutch *gezelligheid*, few countries have conquered the concept quite like the Danes.

Wiking states that hygge is “about an atmosphere and an experience, rather than about things. It’s about being with the people we love. A feeling of home. A feeling that we are safe, that we are shielded from the world and allow ourselves to let our guard down.” So it seems that the secret to their happiness is the closeness they feel among their friends, family, and home.

Setting The Mood

Think about the lights in your home. Nowadays, people fill their space with bright lights to create an airy, spacious feeling; however, the Danes believe getting the light right is key to setting the mood. Any light brighter than the temperature of a sunset is seen as torturous and painful. One must set the right atmosphere and the best way to do that is by lighting candles. In fact, the average Dane burns more than one candle a day during the autumn and winter months. That's more than any other country in Europe. They take their candles so seriously that a typical "party-pooper" is called *lyseslukker*, a light-snuffer-outer!

Lighting candles creates a feeling of instant emotional coziness, but the Danes go further than just lighting candles in their homes. They have a long tradition of designing warm, homey lamps to help set the cozy mood and offset the darkness of the winter months. Unlike your typical lamps, the Danes make sure to incorporate lamps that give off the flicker of a candle. The design is important for creating *hyggelig* (hygge-like) lighting.

But you can do more than just set the right mood through lighting. The Danes believe that hygge is best at home, so they enjoy structuring their social lives around their homes. So the furniture you choose is also important for making a cozy spot. For instance, many prepare a *hygge*krog which is simply a nook or corner filled with blankets and pillows where you can sit and read a book, write in a journal, or sip your mug of coffee. Ideally, this place should be near a fireplace to get the full cozy effect.

The Danes don't stop at just preparing a *hygge*krog, they extend the warmth and coziness by decorating their homes with things made of wood, animal skins, or anything that gets them closer to nature. While other Nordic countries participate in winter sports and get out into nature during the cooler months, the Danish would rather bring nature inside. Additionally, they will decorate their space with cozy items like vintage lamps, chairs, or anything that evokes a feeling of nostalgia and comfort.

You can also evoke this feeling by simply adding a bookshelf with your favorite novels, especially the classics which are seen as the most hyggelig as they are lasting and timeless. Most importantly, take your time as you turn the pages and contemplate what you just read as you unfold the story.

Finally, part of the joy of hygge is relishing past experiences, so keep a notebook in your hyggelokrog and fill it with your favorite hyggelig moments that you've shared with your family and friends. Perhaps even make a list of experiences you wish to have in the future. Essentially, hygge is all about creating a space inside your home that makes you want to spend your time there when going outside in the cold is too depressing.

Indulge in Life's Pleasures

What do you do when you spend time with your friends and family? While many people go out and indulge in food and drinks, hygge is all about indulging in life's pleasures at home. Danes particularly enjoy partaking in guilty pleasures like cakes, candy, and hot cocoa. Since they associate anything hygge with sweets, it should come as no surprise that the Danes are some of the largest consumers of confectionery in the world.

Not sure what to do with your friends? The most hygge thing you can do is bake together at home. Create cakes, cookies, or the ever-popular Cakeman! A large gingerbread figurine decorated with candles and flags is a staple for any party or get together. However, more than just baking goods and making hot drinks, the process is important. The food you prepare for hygge shouldn't just be something you enjoy eating, but it should also take time to prepare. You must have a relationship with your food and appreciate the cooking process. This may start as early as picking out the ingredients at a local farmer's market. As your meal cooks slowly, curl up on the couch with a book and glass of wine and you'll certainly begin to feel warm and cozy!

As Wiking stresses, it's more about the process rather than the end product. Take your meal-cooking a step further and invite your friends over to cook with you. Assign each person an ingredient to bring and split the responsibility. As you bond over a meal and curl up with a glass of wine surrounded by your friends, you'll partake in one of the most hyggelig things you can do.

However, no evening with cooking, wine, and friends is complete without a hot drink. A warm cup of coffee or tea not only aids in digestion after a meal, but it is also a critical part of hygge culture. Denmark is the fourth largest consumer of coffee in the world, and enjoying coffee is so ingrained in their culture, they even have a term for it: *kaffehygge*. Cooking a hot meal with your friends, sipping a glass of wine, and ending the evening with

a hot drink and pastry is the essence of hygge. So while the decoration of your home is important, it's also important to surround yourself with the people you love, share a meal and a cuppa joe.

Hygge In All Seasons and Places

You know by now that hygge is more than just a feeling, it's an experience. It's spending time with your loved ones and sharing a meal. But as you'll learn throughout this chapter, you can bring hygge culture in all areas of your life, not just in the winter. For instance, in the wintertime, you might organize a trip with your friends to stay at a nearby cabin in the woods or at a ski resort somewhere. While those trips are certainly hyggelig, you can also extend those experiences into the summertime. Go camping with your friends, organize a sailing trip, or have a picnic at a nearby lake or river. Whatever activity you choose, you can certainly make it hyggelig.

Extend hygge into the workplace by creating a casual and cozy environment. A few ways you can foster such an environment is by implementing pot lucks where people bring food for one another and share conversation over a meal. Perhaps even implement a bring your dog to work day to create a space of love and happiness as people cuddle their colleague's pups for the day. Furthermore, create a garden where colleagues can work together to grow beautiful flowers and delicious vegetables to share with one another. The simplest form of hygge in the workplace is simply bringing in chocolates or pastries to leave on the desks of your colleagues to make their day.

Forget about luxury and fancy items, hygge is all about sharing little pleasures and things that money can't buy. The more money you spend, the less hyggelig the moment becomes. One of the pleasures the Danish enjoy is simply riding their bikes around the city. In fact, 45 percent of people who live in Copenhagen ride bikes to and from their destinations. With an infrastructure that caters to cyclists and a steep car tax, Denmark encourages citizens to live a healthier lifestyle through cycling to and from work each day. A study done in 2014 reported that people who ride their bike to work are happier than people who use other means of transportation. Additionally, researchers found that those who cycle around can add an extra fourteen months to their life. They also tend to be more

connected to their neighborhood and typically more social and trusting. Riding your bike is a healthy activity, healthy activities release endorphins which in turn, make you happy! So if you can, ditch the car and ride your bike around town from time to time.

So while hygge can be found in all seasons, and all places, one of the most popular seasons for hygge is certainly Christmas. In fact, it doesn't get more hyggelig than Christmas! Since December is certainly one of the wettest and coldest months of the year, Christmas serves to brighten their spirits. But more than just the lights and yuletide joy, the most important part of the holidays is spending time with friends and family. For the Danes, Christmas is about making up lost time with loved ones. Sitting around the table with their loved ones, sharing in heavy foods and pastries, and participating in the tradition of burning the advent candles makes for the most hyggelig time of the year.

Hygge Is All-Around

If you're thinking that you have to move to Denmark and buy a wooden cabin and decorate with luxurious animal skins and such in order to achieve hygge, then you're in luck! Hygge can be achieved by anyone anywhere. You certainly don't have to move to beautiful Copenhagen to enjoy life's pleasures and achieve happiness. You can create hygge from any place in the world.

Hygge isn't something that you can just buy, it's an experience, it's a feeling that involves the five senses. Smell the burning of a candle, listen to the crackle of the fireplace, taste the flavors of your favorite coffee and pastry, feel the softness of the cozy blankets, and admire the beautiful lights around your home. Your hygge experience can change throughout the seasons, but the feeling of warmth you get as you laugh with your loved ones and create memories remain the same. It's the nostalgia you feel as you reflect on past times, but most importantly, hygge is a feeling of safety.

Don't let life pass you by. In today's modern world of chaos, we forget to stop and smell the roses, so to speak. Hygge is more than just indulging in life's pleasures, it's about stopping and sharing gratitude with the world. Savor the moments you find happiness and make a conscious effort to be present at the moment. Those who express gratitude are more likely to be both happier and more enthusiastic, they are also less materialistic and more forgiving, all of which capture the essence of hygge.

The secret to experiencing hygge is to relax, be present, and savor fleeting moments. Being mindful and present means leaving your technology at home, or simply turning it off when in the presence of your loved ones. Recreate a homely experience no matter where you are in the world or no matter how much money you have. You simply need family, love, and a willingness to be mindful and present.

Final Summary

So what's the secret to happiness? While the Danish have certainly mastered the art of happiness with their generous welfare and their dedication to spending time together, perhaps the best-kept secret to happiness is hygge. Despite living in a cold, gloomy climate, the Danish don't let the weather get them down, instead, they create moments of hygge by relishing at the moment and living in the present. Of course, hygge is most associated with Christmas time where people brighten their spirits by hanging lights, spending time with loved ones, and enjoy hearty meals and hot drinks. However, hygge can be created anytime, anywhere. During the summer and even at the workplace, hygge is simply an experience of feeling warmth, love, and safety.



QuickRead

F R E E B O O K S U M M A R I E S

Go to QuickRead.com/App now to download our app and get access to thousands of free book summaries as both text and audiobooks.

Get the key insights of non-fiction books in minutes instead of hours. Listen to our free audiobooks while you workout or on your commute to work.

