

From the basketball courts to the study halls of CU Boulder

The Danish born CU star women's basketball player Frida Formann shares her own experiences of studying abroad and provides tips to any CU student considering following in her reverse footsteps and trying a study abroad experience in Denmark.

Recently, Chris Gustavson, Workforce Innovation Director of CU Boulder and Morten King-Grubert, a former college professor in Denmark, now a Danish entrepreneur living in Colorado, met on CU campus with Frida Formann. Although it is difficult not to talk basketball with Frida, the context was everything but basketball. Not even the impressive 2 consecutive Sweet 16 appearances by her Buffs team were mentioned. Rather, what transpired was a heartfelt conversation on the personal growth Frida feels she has gained from living and studying abroad, while also providing a unique personal insight to Danish life and culture.



On Campus. From Left to right Morten King-Grubert, Frida Formann, and Chris Gustavson

Starting life in a new country

Frida arrived in Boulder during the COVID-19 pandemic and spent most of her first year taking classes on Zoom and living in a hotel. But just as she remembers walking into the locker rooms and scoring her first 3-pointer for the Buffs, she also clearly remembers setting her feet on campus as a student for the first time with a feeling of being overwhelmed. The sheer number of buildings, thousands of students, and the scale of everything was a stark contrast to Denmark's smaller, more spread-out universities. It took time to adjust, but once she did, it became an exciting environment to navigate. Furthermore, moving halfway across the world meant stepping into a place where no one knew her. Back home in Denmark, she was part of a familiar social fabric; in the U.S., she had to rebuild that from scratch while also communicating in a new language. But over time, Frida found fulfillment in establishing herself in this new setting. The experience offered a sense of a "clean slate", allowing her to be present in the moment.

"You come from a place where everyone knows you and knows what you are about – then you come to a new place and they have no idea of who you are, and you are speaking a new language. It takes a while for your personality to come across – once I got to that point, it was very fulfilling to know that I was able to establish myself at a new place." Frida Formann

Studying abroad has been a transformative experience for Frida, shaping her personal growth beyond academics and basketball. It has given her independence, open-mindedness, and a new perspective on life. Meeting students from different backgrounds has made her more reflective about her own values, given her a unique perspective and outlook on life, as well as helped her to see her own upbringing in a different light.

With time, Frida reflects, she has become more open-minded and less judgmental. At first, she found herself reacting to cultural differences with a sense of detachment. But gradually, she developed a deeper understanding of why people are the way they are. This shift in perspective has broadened her worldview.

Adapting to cultural differences

According to Frida, one of the biggest differences between studying in Denmark and the U.S. is the campus lifestyle. In the U.S., being a Buff is an identity that fosters strong alumni connections, especially in sports. In Denmark, there is less of a deep-rooted alumni culture, and university life is smaller and more independent. The education system also differs. Frida quickly noticed that testing was done somewhat differently and more frequently, which she needed to adapt to and found a bit stressful in the beginning. In addition she was used to a more self-driven student experience in Denmark, whereas the more advanced U.S. support system and practices to keep students on track was new yet beneficial to her.

Denmark - per Frida's own experience - focuses more on applying knowledge, whereas in the U.S., students are tested first and then apply what they learn. Additionally, studying in Denmark

is largely self-driven, while in the U.S., frequent assignments keep students on track, which can be both beneficial and also stressful.

Social life also differs between Denmark and the U.S. The concept of 'hygge' (a quality of coziness and comfortable conviviality) in Denmark revolves around deep, structured social engagements. To truly integrate, one must actively seek inclusion in social circles. In contrast, the U.S. has centralized student spaces like recreation centers and malls, making it easier to meet people. Americans excel at including others, even if they're just a friend of a friend. On the contrary, Danes like to keep closer friends circles often going back to childhood, and as a newcomer it can be harder to fit in.

Thinking of life in her home country, Frida circles back to simplicity and making every day activities more of an experience. Whether it's public transportation, parks, or a cozy café, there is a focus on making everyday experiences pleasant. In contrast, the U.S. prioritizes efficiency—meals for example are quicker here in the U.S and less of a social, which has its conveniences, but sometimes, she longs for the slower, more intentional way of life back home:

"What I miss most about Denmark is the intentionality of everyday life. Everything is small, accessible, and designed with quality in mind. There is care about the experience in itself." Frida Formann

Tips to a CU student going to Denmark

Frida arrived on campus for the interview like a true Dane: On her bicycle. She states that if a CU student were to visit Denmark, and she were to play tour guide for the day, she would immerse them in the local experience - walking, biking, or taking the train instead of driving. A visit to Copenhagen would highlight how close everything is, with stops at bakeries for that special Danish pastry or simply having a meal together as a way of experiencing the culture. She would introduce them to her friends to give them a genuine sense of Danish social life.

Danes typically grew up together and have remained friends since childhood. So when you are a newcomer, breaking into that circle may not be as easy as Frida has felt it has been for her in the U.S. Her tip is clear; a CU student should ask to be part of what the Danes already are doing. Be bold and literally ask for an invite, she recommends.

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Frida now has two places she calls home, and sees many differences between those two places. Yet her mind is pretty clear: if you like Boulder, you will also like Copenhagen. That may be her biggest tip to fellow CU students of them all:

"If you like being in Boulder, you will fit right into life in Copenhagen. You will replace the mountains with the ocean, but to me, both elements symbolize that infinite feeling and outdoors lifestyle that I cherish." Frida Formann

Author's note:

This article was written as part of the preparation for the inaugural Talent Bridge Colorado-Denmark event on Feb 25, which is a collaboration between CU and Science Hub Denmark.

If you want to learn more about educational and professional opportunities in Denmark as well as what life is like living, studying, and working in a Danish context do [sign up](#) to attend:

- Who: All Students interested in living and studying abroad in Denmark
 - Where: C4C N301 Flatirons Room*, University of Colorado Boulder [Center for Community](#)
 - When: February 25, 2025 4:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. MST
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