

# Culture matters like

A crash course on life in Denmark is a great help in avoiding the confusion that can accompany relocation

Over the coming two days, you will not learn about health insurance certificates and the Danish tax system,' promises Heidi Rottbøll Andersen as she introduces her crash course on Danish living.

In her comforting tone, she points out that it is learning about how people live in a new country that can considerably improve the relocation process.

Ever since the Mohammed cartoon crisis and the focus it placed on immigration in Denmark, Danish employers have increasingly come to acknowledge that culture is an important element of relocation, Rottbøll Andersen notes. The increasing awareness of the importance of cultural integration has been reflected in the increasing popularity of the courses at her Living Institute.

A two-day crash course begins with an outline of Danish history and constitution. Its facilitator, a lecturer at the Copenhagen Business School, introduces himself as Jeppe Kristensen. 'Not Dr Kristensen, even though I hold a PhD. Titles are not used in egalitarian Denmark,' Kristensen quickly adds.

As a historian, he believes that the structure of contemporary Danish society can be explained by looking at the past.

'After losing vast parts of its empire in the 19th century, Denmark concentrated on becoming internally strong. Danish society relies on its members' equality and has an almost tribal structure, built on trusting each other and the state institutions. That is a great strength of Denmark, but it is also a weakness when it comes to including foreigners.'

Throughout the course, Rottbøll Andersen spares no effort to make the experience as special as possible. The



Kenki Chen from Japan, Icelander David Egilson and Paola Bellini from Italy preparing frikadeller

classes take place at the Icelandic Embassy overlooking Nyhavn, lunch is served at Noma, Copenhagen's only restaurant with two Michelin stars. And after the first day's presentations and practical exercises, the small group of six participants hops on a

water taxi to get a different perspective of their new home-

*'Despite popular beliefs to the contrary, the single greatest barrier to business success is the one erected by culture.'*

*Edward T. Hall, anthropologist*

town. When disembarking again in Christianshavn, a kitchen with wine and traditional Danish recipes for them

to prepare under her guidance.

Even though Rottbøll Andersen and her colleagues go to lengths to show the better side of Denmark, they don't shy away from naming the problems foreign employees face in Denmark. They discuss, for example, that just this month the European Commission's Migrant Integration Policy Index placed Denmark an embarrassing 21st on its list ranking the 27 European Union countries.

'Danish society is still vastly homogenous, with a mentality built on everyone's equality and an aversion for disagreement. Anything unknown still commonly scares Danish people,' Rottbøll Andersen says.

And it is precisely that willingness to bring up the more and less pleasant oddities of the Danish way of living that many course participants highlight as the strength of the Living Institute's courses.

'It helps the insecurities that can accompany moving to Denmark, when someone explains to you where the Danes are coming from,' says Lorna Campbell who relocated to Denmark from Ireland half a

Photo: Lars Colberg