

Getting Hygge With It

By Melodee Currier

Despite raining over 170 days a year and having seventeen hours of darkness a day in Denmark, it is known to be the happiest country in the world which could be attributed to the Danes' Hygge lifestyle.

Hygge comes from a sixteenth-century Norwegian term, *hugga*, meaning "to comfort" which is related to the English word "hug." Hyggelig is an adjective – meaning a feeling of comfort and appreciation for the moment, associated with relaxation, indulgence, and gratefulness.

The concept of Hygge began in Denmark centuries ago, but in 2015, an article written about it for the British Broadcasting Corporation website went viral in Europe and has now made its way to the United States. Numerous books have been written on this subject and it is now so popular that it was on the short list for the 2016 Oxford Dictionary Word of the Year.

Other countries have similar expressions. For instance, Germany has what they call Gemutlichkeit, meaning a sense of well being, great food and drink and good company. But Danes insist Hygge is unique.

It is wholesome and nourishing, like soup. In fact, Danish doctors recommend "tea and *Hygge*" to cure a cold. It can also help ease the symptoms of seasonal affective disorder.

When I moved from Florida to Ohio twenty-five years ago, friends thought I was crazy. When they asked me why I would make that move, I told them Florida never felt cozy or homey to me like Ohio does. Plus, I feel that Christmas in Florida does not have the same incredible atmosphere that Christmas in Ohio does. They just didn't understand. They thought living near the ocean was all you needed to be happy. For some, that may be true, but I wanted something more.

I didn't know then, but I was describing Hygge (pronounced hoo-gah) -- a feeling, an ambiance, a moment that leaves a person feeling content,

warm and blissful. My "Aha! moment" came while surfing the Internet recently when the word Hygge jumped out at me.

The prime season of Hygge is Christmas, when Danes pull out all the stops. Since Danish winters are long and dark, the Danes fight the darkness with their best weapon: Hygge -- with millions of candles.

You can get your hygge on by:

1. Taking time in the morning to light a candle, drink coffee from your favorite mug and meditate a few minutes before the day begins. Or take an early morning walk with a friend.
2. Creating a cozy atmosphere and making every moment special. That means piling on comfy blankets, putting on warm socks, dimming the lights and lighting candles for a calming glow, relaxing and reading a book, knitting or watching a movie.
3. Focusing on building relationships. Entertain more, but keep it simple. It means taking pleasure in other people's company, and avoiding anything that is unpleasant. It's being kind to yourself -- indulging and not denying yourself anything -- even dessert.
4. Slowing down and savoring the moment when eating and drinking. Preparing food, as well as eating, can be satisfying. Food considered to be Hygge are comfort foods like home baked bread, cake and pastries, soup and stew. Also warm drinks like tea, mulled wine, cocoa (with marshmallows) or freshly brewed coffee.
5. Knitting, playing a board game, working on a puzzle and sitting around a fire pit are Hygge type activities. A typical day for me includes writing or working on a project. Sometimes I meet a friend for coffee or lunch or get a manicure or pedicure. In the evening my husband and I spend time talking about our day or watching a movie, sometimes we sit in front of our wood burning fireplace.
6. Surrounding yourself only with things you love. Wear cashmere or knitted socks, cozy, soft clothing. The Hygge wardrobe is about how

clothes feel, rather than how they look. Create your environment so you only have items that you love and that have meaning. My husband and I designed our wedding bands with gems from my mother's wedding band, which is meaningful to us.

7. Uncluttering your home and focusing on things such as candles, comfortable chairs, soft throws, sheepskin rugs, twinkling fairy lights, a warm fireplace and music that creates the perfect ambience.
8. Snuggling with your pet is pure Hygge. My cats enjoy sitting on a warm heater vent or in a laundry basket full of warm clothes just out of the dryer, laying on a cozy, warm blanket or simply basking in the sun.
9. Enjoying a Hyggelig pub experience is best if you find one that is homey with comfortable arm chairs next to a warm fire. It's even better if they have comfort food and a board game or two.

After your basic needs are met, more money doesn't lead to more happiness. Buying more things such as clothes, jewelry or a bigger house will not make us feel more content. When we let go of comparing ourselves to others and stop adding more things, we eliminate stress and are able to focus on what is most important to us.

Some things I will not give up to experience Hygge are my cell phone, my computer, certain television shows and the news. Two things I need to do now to really get Hygge with it are start my long overdue uncluttering project and buy a pair of cashmere socks. I think that's a fair trade.