

The Magic of Nordic Europe

In the early hours of May 10th Thursday morning, a group of Indian delegates (10 students and 2 teachers) arrived at the airport in high spirits. Finally, the day had arrived! After months of pre-planning, planning and coordination-the students and teachers of St. Mary's School were few hours away from immersing themselves in the magic of the Nordic European countries-Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden.

Our first destination was the capital of **Netherlands-Amsterdam!** The city known for its artistic heritage and architecture amazed us on the arrival. The first stop in Amsterdam was the Tulip Garden.

Keukenhof Garden or commonly referred as Tulip Gardens are seasonal gardens with 800 varieties of Tulips. The experience is unique and unforgettable!

The next day was spent sightseeing, the beautiful architecture and streetscape of North Netherlands or often known as North Holland. Due to time constraints we could only catch a glimpse of the famous **Van Gogh Museum** and the **Rijks Museum** which houses paintings from the renaissance era of painters like Rembrandt and Frans Hals. The afternoon was spent in the **Anne Frank Museum**. The building is located near a canal called Prinsengracht. The place is a must visit for anyone who is visiting Netherlands because of the way the building is preserved, it leads you to a sensory and phenomenological experience based on its material, form and function. To recall and relive how the family hid in the secret annexe was a truly moving moment. To reel ourselves back to reality, we took a canal ride. The day ended with some shopping and local sightseeing.

Our flight arrived at Copenhagen on the afternoon of Saturday May 12th. We met the school coordinator Incharge for the Exchange program, Mr. Henrik who escorted us to the bus that would lead us to our main destination **Aarhus!**

After a 3 hour journey in the bus, we were greeted by the host families on our arrival.

The group along with their host families visited the **Moesgaard Museum** on Sunday morning. The most iconic thing about the museum was the way the sloped roof met the land.

The exhibitions consisted of a series of unique finds from Danish prehistory. Among these are two Iron Age finds: the c. 2,300-year-old Grauballe Man, the world's best preserved bog body; and, a number of exceptional weapon sacrifices from Illerup Ådal. The building was a powerful visual landmark and we were fortunate enough to experience the entirety of the space by having a shared lunch on the roof of the museum.

Day 1, Monday was our visit to our host school the "**Århus Statsgymnasium**". We were welcomed with big beautiful smiles and post introduction were escorted to Mr. Thomas Linds classroom, where the weeks agenda were explained. A healthy discussion pertaining to the different political systems of India and Denmark was taken up in the class conducted by Miss Heidi Nissen and Mrs. Maria Jakobsen.

The evening was filled with preparing sumptuous amounts of Biryani, Raita and Gulab Jamun. The students of St. Mary's performed a dance and made the "Bhangra Beats" an instant hit in the community. Not a day was spent when the Bhangra music was not played in the cars.

The Danish students were extremely helpful and brought along with them different exotic desserts. All in all great momentum was geared up to continue with the trip!!

Day 2 at the host school was spent participating in classes of three different subjects: Chemistry, Mathematics and English. It was interesting to see how Mrs. Mia Christensen took the math's class. A worksheet consisting of 13 questions was handed out to students in the class, the system is such that around 5-6 questions would be coming from the said worksheet in their final exam.

The English class was very interesting, the students as teams had to listen to each other's recorded narratives and then critique upon the content, voice modulation and pronunciation. The activity was an interesting way of bringing the class together yet allowing each student to formulate a sense of opinion and individuality at a tender age.

The evening was spent visiting the Aros Museum and seeing the infamous installation, "Your Rainbow Panorama" by Olafur Eliasson on the roof. We also visited the Aarhus City Centre with Mr. Lind and his students.

Day 3, we visited the primary school students and faculty and presented a short movie on, "**Perspectives and Realities of Indian culture.**" The movie was followed by a presentation by the Danish students highlighting the life of a teenager in the country. The afternoon was concluded with a questionnaire and a better insight into the different cultures of the world. The evening tea time was made more exciting with a game of cricket. Danish students were taught the rules and the girls and boys indulged in a healthy round of teamwork and sportsmanship.

Day 4 discussions were on the religious differences in India and Denmark. Students and teachers interacted to get a better perspective on how religion is perceived and taken up in different cities and countries. We even visited the Aarhus cathedral. The church with its beautiful ceiling, stained glass windows and spiral staircase led us to a window that has a striking view of Aarhus city!! Standing there with the students and reflecting over the city, we could only feel a great sense of gratitude for being given this opportunity.

The **last two days** were spent individually with the host family. The students and the teachers indulged in recreational activities and trips with their families respectively.

21st morning our trip to the school and Aarhus came to an end and we were supposed to take a bus back to Copenhagen. Parting away from the families was tough but with the hope that we would be seeing them again in a few months, we continued our exploration trip.

Copenhagen is the city of art and architecture, food and sustainability. Amongst the places that we visited, the one we could draw some similarity too was the **Pedestrian street**, it is a no-vehicular movement zone, something akin to the Raahgiri in CP. The other places that we visited were the **City hall square**, **Tivoli amusement park**, **Nyhan** with its infamous canal rides and **Rundetaarn** which is a 17th century astronomical observatory.

The last day of our trip was spent in **Sweden**. We took a morning train and arrived within 25 minutes! A bit of sightseeing, a bit of shopping, collecting tidbits for back home. A trip to Sweden was our last 24 hours in the beautiful scandinavian Europe. The students and teachers of St. Mary's then visited the **Sankt Petri church (St. Peters Church)**. Another

beautiful church enriched by its gothic architecture. We also visited the **Oresund Bridge**. The history and the vastness of this bridge which was conceived during the time of World War 2 but only constructed in 1995 was enamoring.

On the same day we returned back from Sweden to Copenhagen. After a nights sleep, we packed our bag as it was finally time to go back home.

The trip has been a highlight of 2018 for the students and the teachers and we thank Ms. Koshi ma'am, the school and the management for giving us the opportunity to experience the beauty of European culture and education. There was much to learn, to think about and to implement. We are grateful for the perspective.



