

# Making it Work in Denmark

Personal stories about  
starting a new job and  
a new life as an expat.

**WORK IN  
DENMARK**



**Hannes Koopmann**  
Hannover, Germany

**Fabrizio Moroni**  
Milan, Italy

**Maria Pérez**  
Seville, Spain

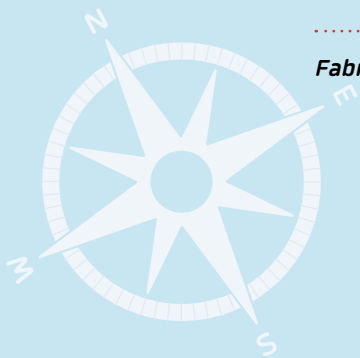
**Cristina Ferreira  
& Pedro Leitão**  
Lisbon, Portugal

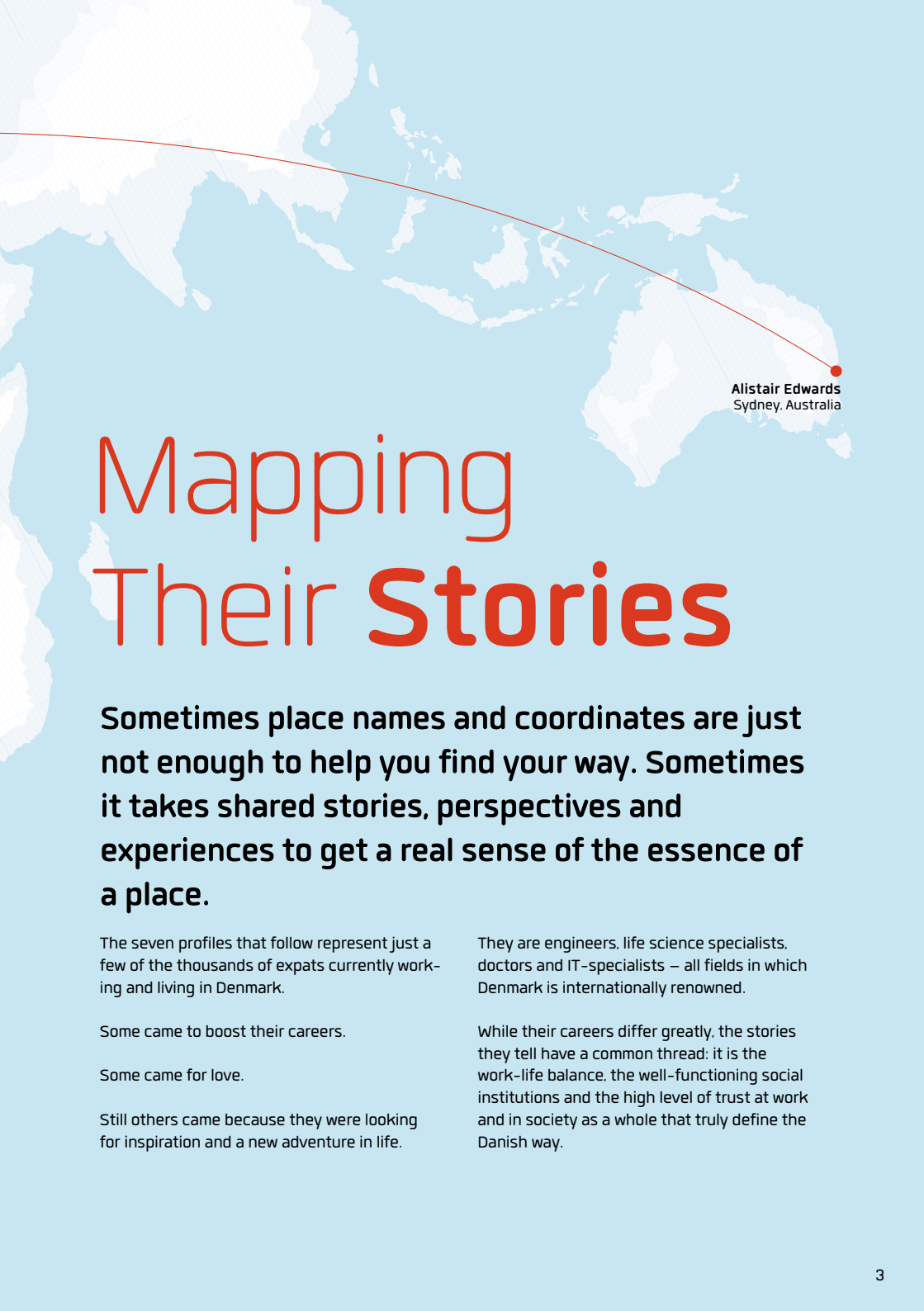
**Martina Slingsby**  
London, England

**Emily McHugh**  
Montreal, Canada

*"I have been really surprised by the fact that things are more relaxed compared to what I am used to, but still very productive."*

.....  
**Fabrizio Moroni**





Alistair Edwards  
Sydney, Australia

# Mapping Their Stories

**Sometimes place names and coordinates are just not enough to help you find your way. Sometimes it takes shared stories, perspectives and experiences to get a real sense of the essence of a place.**

The seven profiles that follow represent just a few of the thousands of expats currently working and living in Denmark.

Some came to boost their careers.

Some came for love.

Still others came because they were looking for inspiration and a new adventure in life.

They are engineers, life science specialists, doctors and IT-specialists – all fields in which Denmark is internationally renowned.

While their careers differ greatly, the stories they tell have a common thread: it is the work-life balance, the well-functioning social institutions and the high level of trust at work and in society as a whole that truly define the Danish way.



**Cristina Ferreira  
& Pedro Leitão**  
Lisbon, Portugal



## Meet Cristina Ferreira, 43 and Pedro Leitão, 42

- Before** ..... Engineers in Metallurgy and Steel Production, Lisbon, Portugal
- Now** ..... Engineers at Dania Iron Foundry, Aars, Denmark



# Forging Their Own Adventure

## Engineering

**After moving from the southernmost part of Europe, Cristina Ferreira and Pedro Leitão found a new adventure in a small town; one that has enriched them professionally and given a “cooler” quality of life.**

In 2013, with her 40th birthday looming, Cristina could hear a little voice in her head.

“It was saying we needed to make a life change – and I felt like it was now or never,” she says. “It was time for us to start a new adventure. And Pedro agreed.

For Cristina and her husband Pedro, both engineers in the steel industry, that adventure brought them from the big city of Lisbon to the Danish hamlet of Aars (population: 8,105), where they both work today at the Dania Iron Foundry. As much a professional adventure as a personal one, they say the move has helped them both become more specialised in their careers and improved their overall quality-of-life.

“I took the job because it is my area of expertise and I have always wanted to work with more specialised production,” says Cristina.

“Denmark has a lot of specialised industry like this and I think that is a very good environment for my professional and personal improvement.”

She says she has been particularly impressed by the level of training and expertise of the foundry’s workers, especially those on the production floor, from whom she has learned tremendously.

“I visited the local technical school not too long ago and I was blown away, they are at such a high level, too, and I think the Danish educational system really takes care of that. It is just a culture that exists all the way through,” Cristina says.

For Pedro, moving from a city with well over a million inhabitants has also meant much shorter commuting times – He and Cristina live a short bike ride from their office – which means more time for taking photos and spending time with new friends.

“The biggest surprise for me has been that Danes were so open,” he says. “Everybody told me beforehand that Danes were so cold. I have not experienced that. I remember that after my second week I already had an invitation to dinner. So I say to my friends now that they are not cold... they are cool.”



● **Maria Pérez**  
Seville, Spain



## Meet Dr. Maria Perez, 40

**Before**

M.D. General Practitioner,  
Seville, Spain

**Now**

General Practitioner,  
Grindsted, Denmark

# Speaking Her Patients' Language

## Healthcare

**Learning Danish isn't easy. But for foreign doctors like Maria, intensive language training while working in a clinic has made learning Danish a surmountable barrier.**

When Maria visited her first Danish clinic, one contrast between southern Spain and the middle of Denmark was obvious.

"It was so quiet," she says, laughing. "When you go into a health center in Spain, people talk and talk – and so loudly. Here it was peaceful, actually."

That first impression stuck with Maria, who is one of the many foreign doctors who have come to Denmark in recent years. Danish Health Authority figures show that the number of foreign doctors has grown by five percent per year since 2006, in response to the country's doctor shortage, and that about 10 percent of the nation's practicing physicians are currently of foreign origin. For Maria, it was an interest in the Danish health care model that led her to apply for a General Practitioner job, and a desire to create a better balance between work and family life that convinced her to accept it.

But, from the beginning, there was one big barrier she knew she had to overcome.

"My biggest concern before coming was definitely the language," Maria says. "I was very worried about that."

Although she already spoke three languages fluently, Maria says she knew her success as a doctor would depend on her ability to master Danish – a language that is notoriously difficult for foreigners.

"When I started learning Danish I thought, maybe that is why the people in the clinic were so quiet. Because the language is hard to speak!" She says. "But when I started to see patients it got easier. It was frightening sometimes and also funny sometimes, but never too much of a barrier."

As part of her contract as foreign doctor, Maria started an intensive language course immediately after arriving. The programme began with five days per week at a language school, before eventually scaling down to one day at language school and 4 days on the job.

After a year in the programme, she says, her Danish is now in place and she will soon be fully authorised to work as an independent physician in Denmark.



# Getting the Most in Medicon Valley

## Life Science

**Alistair came to Denmark in 2011 with his wife and works in the life science industry in Copenhagen, an area known as Medicon Valley. His career is growing, and so is his family.**

California has Silicon Valley. Denmark has Medicon Valley.

Medicon Valley is quickly becoming a global hub for biotech and medtech – a place where scientists, entrepreneurs and venture capitalists are congregating from all over the world. For Alistair, a dual Australian and British citizen who came to Denmark from Sydney in 2011, being a part of Medicon Valley's growing community seemed like a great career opportunity from the start. It was Denmark's lifestyle, though, that sealed the deal.

"There are places like Boston, Silicon Valley or even Switzerland that are great for making a career, too, but the model for the society as a whole here was really the deciding factor for us," says Alistair, a PhD and mass spectrometry specialist who today works as a scientist at Zealand Pharma. "Local life science players recognise the benefits of supporting a robust community and are really putting a lot of resources into it."

Medicon Valley is built up around a core of

pharmaceutical giants like Novo Nordisk, Lundbeck and Ferring and stretches from Copenhagen into southern Sweden. The region includes 12 universities and 32 hospitals and, as Alistair points out, an entire ecosystem of small start-ups and support companies. According to the Medicon Valley Alliance, the largest membership organisation in the region, 140,000 people are employed in the life sciences in Medicon Valley.

"When we first came to Denmark, we lived in Odense, a town of about 150,000 people and I worked at the university there, University of Southern Denmark, as a researcher," Alistair explains. "My position there was an academic one, so after three years it was exciting to get closer to the commercial side of things."

The couple decided to move an hour-and-half's drive east to Copenhagen in 2015, in part to make it easy for Alistair's wife to find work in Denmark's financial industry. Since then, Alistair has found plenty to do – both in Medicon Valley and outside of work.

"Outside of my job, I support start-up companies through providing scientific and commercial advice to help them refine their strategy and execution plans" he says. "And at home, we are expecting our first child. So that is going to keep me busy in the future too, I am sure."



## Meet Alistair Vincent Gordon Edwards, 32

**Before**


PhD researcher at  
The University of Sydney,  
Sydney, Australia

**Now**

Scientist, Zealand Pharma,  
Copenhagen, Denmark

Alistair Edwards  
Sydney, Australia





Martina Slingsby  
London, England



## Meet Martina Slingsby, 31

**Before** : Post Doc in Pharmacology, Imperial College, London, UK

**Now** : Researcher in the Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports, Copenhagen University, Copenhagen, Denmark

# On Research's Bleeding Edge

## Life Science

**Denmark is a leader in the global life science community, which was one reason Martina Slingsby chose to move to Copenhagen from London. After arriving in 2013, she found a research job that she calls a "total win-win".**

Every time she thinks about the name on her office building, Martina Slingsby feels a tinge of pride.

"Within the field of exercise physiology, Denmark is a world leader," she says. "There have been a lot of people, even Nobel Prize winners, who have laid the groundwork for the work we are doing today."

Her building at Copenhagen University is named for August Krogh, winner of the 1920 Nobel Prize in physiology, where Martina is a researcher at the school's Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports. Martina came to Denmark in 2013 because she saw opportunities in the life science sector, and because her husband worked in the wind energy business – where Denmark is also a global leader. She didn't expect, however, to find such a perfect fit for her research.

"In London I was working at the William Harvey Research Institute, founded by Sir John Vane, who won a Nobel Prize for discovering how aspirin worked," she says. "There my focus was investigating the pharmacology of aspirin

and other 'blood thinning' drugs that patients receive after a heart attack."

At Copenhagen University, her focus shifted to studying how these drugs are affected by exercise in everything from lowering blood pressure to improving insulin sensitivity.

"Right now, I am looking at the medicines you get after a heart attack to see how they affect cardiovascular health and reducing the risk of another attack," she says.

Martina explains that Copenhagen University's years of complex physiology research means it has vast expertise in conducting invasive clinical studies. That is important, she explains, when it comes to addressing ethical concerns about testing on humans and makes it possible to do research that simply wouldn't be possible other places in the world.

"The studies here are invasive, but in a safe way. Typically, they involve putting in catheters and that way we can infuse different medicines to study the health of blood vessels on healthy people," she says. "When I came I started testing how the blood reacts to those infusions, so it was a perfect combination of the blood work I did before and the blood vessel work they were already doing. From day one, it was already a win-win."



**Hannes Koopmann**  
Hannover, Germany

# The Workplace is Flat

## Engineering

**When Hannes began working in Denmark, one big surprise was the number of young people in management positions. The lack of hierarchy in the Danish work culture creates unique opportunities for people especially early in their career, he says.**

Being a geologist, Hannes wasn't too surprised by the Danish landscape: Kilometre after kilometre of open fields. Sand dunes. Beaches. And, with an average elevation of just 31 meters above sea level, the countryside is flat.

Very flat.

What he didn't expect was the other kind of flatness in Denmark: the flat management structure so characteristic of many of the country's workplaces.

"If I had stayed in my research position in Germany, the road to a professorship would have been long, but in essence the only career goal ahead. In my current job, though, the next step seems much closer," he says. "I think that is because of the non-hierarchical approach here in Denmark. My department leader is in her early thirties and in spite of her age already has a team of 20 people. That would be nearly impossible in Germany, where leadership positions typically require many years of experience."

Hannes, who is a geo-scientist, works today at COWI, a large engineering consultancy, where he works on international projects with an English speaking team. He says even the process of finding his current job demonstrated how flat and open the work culture in Denmark can be.

"When I started looking for jobs at larger companies it seemed overwhelming at first, because how do you get in touch with big companies and find your way to the right people?" he says.

With some perseverance, however, Hannes discovered it was possible to call companies and ask to be put in touch with the right person.

Hannes and his wife, Nina, own a piece of the flat landscape, too. The couple bought a country home near Billund, right in the middle of the Jutland peninsula, close to where Nina works as an industrial designer at toy-maker LEGO and a half-hours drive from Hannes' office in Vejle.

"Even though we live in the countryside, we feel it is still close to the rest of the world. Because of the number of internationals working at LEGO, we have made friends from all over—there were 20 nationalities represented at a party we held recently! A Danish couple who are one of our neighbours have even become "reserve" grandparents for our daughter, Ida, who was born in Denmark in 2015," he says.



## Meet Hannes Koopmann, 32

- Before** PhD at Leibniz Universität Hannover and Bundesanstalt für Geowissenschaften und Rohstoffe, Hannover, Germany
- Now** Geoscientist at Engineering Consultancy COWI, Vejle, Denmark



Emily McHugh  
Montreal, Canada



## Meet Emily McHugh, 30

**Before** : Student Affairs Officer, McGill University, Montreal, Canada

**Now** : Licensing Coordinator, LEGO Group, Billund, Denmark



# From Stepping Stone to Dream Job

## Communications

**Having Danish references when looking for a good job in Denmark is important, says Emily, who used a stepping stone to land her dream job.**

When asked if she has one bit of advice for expats hoping to find a job after coming to Denmark, Emily does not hesitate.

“Try to get some experience in Denmark, even if it is not your dream job at first,” she says.

Emily, who has a master’s degree in library and information science from McGill University, has been down that road. When she came to Denmark in 2014, she says it was difficult to get noticed. But perseverance and a little extra work experience on the c.v. made all the difference for her.

Emily came to Denmark with her boyfriend (now fiancé), who had already secured a job before coming. About a month after arriving, and several job applications later, she accepted a position as a market researcher at an advertising agency – even though it was a departure from her education.

“My references from Canada weren’t so interesting for most, even if it was coming for some of the top people in my field,” says Emily, who is a dual Canadian and British citizen. “But as soon as I could give them a Danish reference it opened doors.” Eight months later, a position as a licensing coordinator with toy maker LEGO opened up. It was her chance to be part of an international team working with top publishing houses from all over the world.

“I am sure having that first Danish company on the c.v. helped, and it really helped catapult me into a great job,” says Emily. “It took some patience, but was all worth it. Once you get a foothold in the Danish job market, it is common and pretty easy to move around.”

And, when asked what makes the new job so great, again she does not hesitate.

“Almost everything. I have flexibility with my job including the possibility to work from home which is great for that work-life balance. And gaining international work experience helps to not only build a stronger c.v., but also develop a more global mindset,” she says.



Fabrizio Moroni  
Milan, Italy

# A New Way of Working – And more time to play

## Engineering/IT

**For Fabrizio, a more focused and targeted work culture in Denmark has meant more time to do the things he never had time for in Italy (like travelling and sports).**

When Fabrizio quit his job with consulting giant Deloitte in Milan in late 2015, he knew he was taking a big leap of faith.

“My girlfriend had landed a job at LEGO and we wanted to experience life abroad, learn a new culture, and to try and do something new together,” he says. “And so we just decided to do it. I didn’t have a job at the time, but we wanted to try it. We were committed.”

When Fabrizio finally took that leap of faith and moved to Denmark in early 2016 he soon discovered it wasn’t just the food or language that made for big cultural differences.

“In Italy I had long work days – often until late

in the evening or even all night. The culture here is quite different. Now I go home in the afternoon and even though the days seem shorter, I still get more done than I did in my previous jobs,” he says.

Fabrizio, who had jobs at various IT consulting houses like Caggemini and Accenture in Italy, established contact with Kamstrup, a rapidly growing company specialising in high-tech water and energy metering systems, a couple months after arriving. He met Kamstrup through Workindenmark’s job database and, he says, after the first interview the process went very quickly.

“I have been really surprised by the fact that things are more relaxed compared to what I am used to, but still very productive,” he says. “Here I work less, but more focused. That is a big difference in work culture. And it has given me more free time, too.”





## Meet Fabrizio Moroni, 33

**Before** : Project Manager, Deloitte,  
Milan, Italy

**Now** : System Integration Specialist,  
Kamstrup, Skanderborg  
Denmark

# Denmark




Maria Pérez  
Grindsted

Emily McHugh  
Billund

Hannes Koopmann  
Vejle

Fabrizio Moroni  
Skanderborg

Cristina Ferreira  
& Pedro Leitão  
Aars



*“There are places like Boston, Silicon Valley or even Switzerland that are great for making a career, too, but the model for the society as a whole here was really the deciding factor for us.”*

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**Alistair Vincent Gordon Edwards**

Martina Slingsby  
& Alistair Edward  
Copenhagen



# Contact Workindenmark

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*All times are in Central European Time (CET).*

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