

International lifestyle concepts are catching on in the U.S.

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Image 1. Hygge is a Danish word for a mood of coziness and comfortability with feelings of wellness and contentment. Photo by: John Fedele/Getty Images

Hygge, the Danish lifestyle concept of cozy, comfortable and quality living, has bloomed over the past three years into a full-blown social and cultural trend. Pronounced "HOO-ga," it was listed as one of the Oxford English Dictionary's most important words of 2016. Hygge quickly became a marketing buzzword to sell cool Scandinavian items, such as tea-light candles, fluffy throw blankets and woven hats.

"Hygge to the Danes seems to be what freedom is to Americans," says Meik Wiking, chief executive of the Happiness Research Institute and author of "The Little Book of Hygge." "It's ingrained in our cultural DNA."

Hype over hygge doesn't appear to be decreasing. There are more than 3.4 million posts on Instagram bearing the #hygge hashtag. Wiking's "The Little Book of Hygge" has become an international bestseller that has been translated into more than 30 languages. In mid-April, Denmark applied to have the word added to the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural

Organization's list of "cultural heritage" trademarks, alongside flamenco from Spain, yoga from India and Neapolitan pizza from Italy.

Its international success has book publishers scurrying to find authors in various parts of the world willing to contribute their country's cultural pearls of wisdom. A slew of pocket-size lifestyle guides has resulted, offering a wide range of mindfulness ideas and feel-good advice.

Why would Americans be looking across the Atlantic Ocean to find prescriptions for happiness? Truthfully, Americans could use the advice. The U.S. recently ranked No. 18 on the World Happiness Report, which is much lower than comparably wealthy nations and down four spots from last year's report. In fact, the U.S. has never cracked the top 10. Denmark, on the other hand, ranks consistently in the top three.

"A lot of people feel that they have gotten richer without getting happier and are looking abroad for new sources of inspiration," Wiking says.

Here are four imported lifestyle concepts that have the potential to reach hygge level in the U.S.

Lagom

The Swedish term, pronounced "Lah-GOM," roughly translates as "not too much and not too little."

This natural, less-is-more mentality is all about living simply, harmoniously and sustainably, which is making products last, and striking a happy work-life balance. It is closely tied to the Swedish cultural and social ideology of fairness, moderation and balance, and places an emphasis on collectiveness over individualism.

How can you incorporate it into your life? Niki Brantmark is the author of "Lagom: The Swedish Art of Living a Balanced, Happy Life," and recommends taking a fika (a break involving a hot beverage or a treat) to recharge your batteries during the day. She also recommends decluttering and creating a section in your closet or dresser of only essential clothes — the ones you wear the most — at home to reduce stress and boost productivity.

For instance, if you live somewhere with cold winters and hot summers, you might store away your winter clothes during the summer. Make the things you use most often the easiest to find.

Ikigai

Ikigai, pronounced "ee-key-guy," which comes from Japan, roughly translates as one's "reason for being."

Forget about slowing down and cozying up by the fire, hygge-style. This age-old Japanese tradition is all about movement, specifically uncovering your life's purpose and going after it. In the West, it is often associated with a Venn diagram with four overlapping qualities: What you love, what you are good at, what the world needs and what you can be paid for. Within the intersection of these four spheres lies your ikigai and recognizing it will help you become more satisfied with your life.

Bring a little ikigai into your life. Do a little soul-searching and think about different careers you might be interested in. What things bring you joy and purpose? How do those things translate to a job or career? What kind of schooling will you need for that career?

Ikigai is about thinking of the things that give you a reason to jump out of bed in the morning. It's never too early to start thinking about a career path that will bring you joy.

Gezellig

Pronounced "heh-SELL-ick," this word, which comes from the Netherlands, derives from "gezel," which means "companion" or "friend."

This Dutch term praises the warm-and-fuzzy feeling of coziness and togetherness you get when you surround yourself with people, places and things that are comforting, relaxing and good for the soul. Like hygge, it exudes warmth and contentment, but at its core is more sociable and less insular.

You can add gezellig to your life by taking time to relax, unwinding and de-stressing with friends. Good food, company and conversation are sure to inspire the warm-and-fuzzies. Likewise, eliminate negative or emotionally wearing individuals from your life.

Friluftsliv

Pronounced "FREE-loofts-liv," the Norwegian term roughly translates to mean "free air life" or "open-air living."

The deeply rooted philosophical lifestyle is centered on the joy and appreciation of nature, outdoor activities and beautiful scenery. It's about embracing the outdoors, improving your relationship with nature and experiencing the pleasure of being outside, either alone or with others.

How do you incorporate friluftsliv into your life? You can camp, hike, forest-bathe (taking in a forest atmosphere through the senses) or incorporate bike rides and strolls into your routine. For kids, this can mean playing outside, developing relationships with the natural world and striking a healthy balance between screen time and green time.



Quiz

1 Read the following sentences from the article.

1. *Niki Brantmark is the author of "Lagom: The Swedish Art of Living a Balanced, Happy Life," and recommends taking a fika (a break involving a hot beverage or a treat) to recharge your batteries during the day.*
2. *Ikigai is about thinking of the things that give you a reason to jump out of bed in the morning.*
3. *You can add gezellig to your life by taking time to relax, unwinding and de-stressing with friends.*
4. *Pronounced "FREE-loofts-liv," the Norwegian term roughly translates to mean "free air life" or "open-air living."*

Which two sentences taken together provide the BEST evidence to support the idea that lifestyle concepts of other countries often involve embracing new ways to find peace and calm in one's life?

- (A) 1 and 3
- (B) 1 and 4
- (C) 2 and 3
- (D) 2 and 4

2 With which statement would Meik Wiking MOST LIKELY agree?

Which line from the article supports your answer?

- (A) Americans are unhappier than other people because they value money too much; The U.S. recently ranked No. 18 on the World Happiness Report, which is much lower than comparably wealthy nations and down four spots from last year's report.
- (B) Americans should let go of their love of freedom if they want to be happier; "Hygge to the Danes seems to be what freedom is to Americans," says Meik Wiking, chief executive of the Happiness Research Institute and author of "The Little Book of Hygge."
- (C) People are learning that money does not necessarily guarantee happiness; "A lot of people feel that they have gotten richer without getting happier and are looking abroad for new sources of inspiration," Wiking says.
- (D) People are learning that hygge is the only lifestyle choice to adopt if they want to be happy; Wiking's "The Little Book of Hygge" has become an international bestseller that has been translated into more than 30 languages.

3 Read the following paragraph from the article's introduction.

Hype over hygge doesn't appear to be decreasing. There are more than 3.4 million posts on Instagram bearing the #hygge hashtag. Wiking's "The Little Book of Hygge" has become an international bestseller that has been translated into more than 30 languages. In mid-April, Denmark applied to have the word added to the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization's list of "cultural heritage" trademarks, alongside flamenco from Spain, yoga from India and Neapolitan pizza from Italy.

What is the MAIN reason why the author includes this paragraph in the article?

- (A) to describe the events that led up to hygge achieving popularity around the world
- (B) to establish that there is large interest in the lifestyle concept of hygge
- (C) to suggest that hygge is currently the best lifestyle concept in the world
- (D) to compare the popularity of a book about hygge with the popularity of hygge on Instagram

Read the section "Ikigai."

What is the MOST LIKELY reason for including the diagram in the section?

- (A) to show that ikigai is a concept that affects a person's life in numerous ways
- (B) to compare ikigai with other qualities that contribute to the purpose of a person's life
- (C) to illustrate that ikigai is equal in importance to other qualities in a person's life
- (D) to show how a person's ikigai is the result of various components in a person's life working together