

# Have Yourself a Hygge Christmas: How to Tap Into This Cozy Danish Custom

By Iona Brannon | December 6, 2023 | 0



As the holiday season approaches, the constant hustle and bustle and overwhelming chaos of festivities and social gatherings can leave many of us yearning for a sense of calm. This is where the Danish concept of “hygge” comes into play. Hygge (pronounced hoo-ga) is a cultural phenomenon that embodies a feeling of coziness, contentment and well-being.

Hygge was first introduced to the world on a larger scale through Meik Wiking’s *New York Times* bestselling book, *The Little Book of Hygge*. According to Wiking, hygge can be distilled into 10 ideals: atmosphere, presence, pleasure, equality, gratitude, comfort, togetherness, harmony, truce and shelter.

## What is hygge?

Mads Østergaard, a proponent of hygge and publicist for Visit Denmark, describes hygge’s essence as a “state of mind, an ambience, a feeling or a vibe.” Unlike the simple translation of “cozy,” [hygge is something more abstract](#), encompassing the warmth of a fireplace, the embrace of good friends and a laid-back feeling.

While it’s most well-known as a Danish cultural concept, it’s not solely a Danish thing. It’s a concept that can be seen across cultures, known as “Gemütlichkeit” in Germany, “Koselig” in Norway and “Gezelligheid” in the Netherlands. What sets the Danes apart is their unique use of “hygge” as a verb. Østergaard explains that they actively “hygge” with each other. The term is also liberally employed as an adjective or adverb in Danish conversations to express something as “nice” or “pleasant.”

Østergaard emphasizes that hygge is not about materialism or the pursuit of perfection. It’s about cherishing the small things, like lighting a candle or offering a blanket to a loved one. It’s about creating a sense of warmth within ourselves and for others, something that feels especially necessary during the holidays.

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In daily life, Østergaard says that cultivating hygge is as simple as sitting down with your coffee instead of taking it to go, or it can also be a deliberate choice to create a space for warmth and tranquility in our hectic lives.

“I know this is easier said than done, but instead of trying to forget the world around you by getting on your phone or turning on the TV, try to create an ambience where everything is calm, safe and warm,” Østergaard says. “And stay in that moment. Remember, like other important things in life, it is fine on your own, but much better when you do it with other people!”

## How to have a hygge Christmas and holiday season

As the intangible nature of hygge unfolds, interior designer Audrey Scheck provides insights on how to infuse this concept into your environment.

Scheck explains, “Hygge design focuses on creating spaces that exude a feeling of warm coziness by balancing soft textures and pieces inspired by nature. This philosophy and aesthetic continues to inspire design around the world, given the universal desire to combine function and beauty.”

### Bring softness into the environment

Embrace the tactile and sensory pleasures of soft textures. Invest in plush blankets, cushions and cozy throws to drape over sofas and chairs. Consider swapping out cold, hard surfaces with softer alternatives. Illuminate your space with soft, warm lighting or consider using candles to add a flickering, ambient glow. Soft rugs and carpets can also create a warm underfoot experience. “Try layering a soft, neutral-toned throw blanket over the corner of a sofa or chair with a wooden base. Or simply turn off overhead lights and opt for ambient lighting instead,” Scheck says.

### Add plants for a fresh feel

Introduce elements of nature into your surroundings. Houseplants not only contribute to better air quality, but also bring a touch of the outdoors inside. Decorate with seasonal greenery like pine branches or eucalyptus to add a fresh, natural scent to your space and a festive hygge holiday feel.

### Create cozy nooks

Arrange furniture in a way that encourages intimate conversations and relaxation. Create small reading corners or cozy nooks with soft chairs and blankets. Encourage family and friends to gather in these inviting spaces to chat, lounge or play card games to foster a sense of togetherness.

### Comfort food and drink

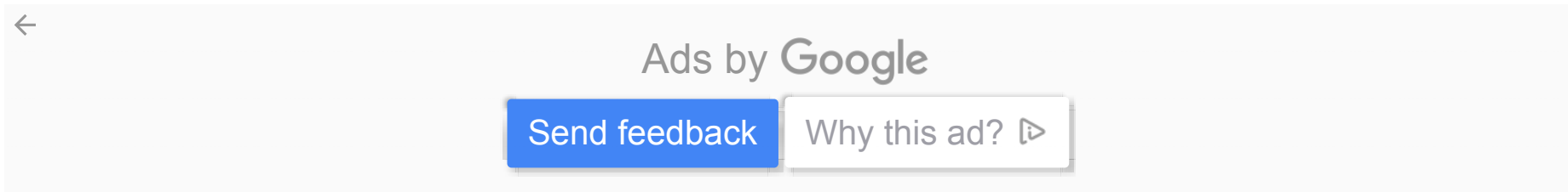
Embrace the joy of comfort foods and warm beverages. Prepare hearty soups, stews and hot drinks to share with loved ones. During gatherings, consider setting up a hot cocoa or [mulled wine station](#) for guests to help themselves. You can also bake or cook traditional holiday treats that evoke a sense of nostalgia and comfort.

## A hygge Christmas is pausing for mindful moments

The days and months seem to speed by during the holidays, with demands coming in from all ends. However, try your best to encourage mindfulness and presence. Whether through a moment of meditation, a quiet walk in nature or sipping a cup of tea, find ways to slow down and [savor the present](#), lingering in the in-between moments.

In Denmark, the holiday season is the epitome of hygge. Østergaard says, “It’s all about taking it slow, being in the moment and remembering that the most important part of the holidays is being with the people you love, sharing food and laughs. Then the hygge will spread naturally!”


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By infusing your holiday season with these hygge elements, you can create a cozy, calming environment that counters the chaos of the season. It’s about fostering a sense of well-being and connection, making the holidays not just a time of celebration, but also a time of genuine comfort and joy.

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Iona Brannon is a freelance journalist based in the U.S. You can read more of her work at [ionabrannon.com](#).

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