

MY AU PAIR STORY: THE MAXI COMBO OF WORKING, STUDYING, AND HAVING FUN



At 22, I decided being an au pair for the first time. I've just graduated from my university in Indonesia and started to begin a new phase. I wanted to go from my comfort zone and ran away from home. Took a risk and hoped to print big steps in Europe are actually not what my parent wanted. But I wasn't ready to be an employee and working in the office at that time. I wanted to break for awhile after struggling from 5 years being a detainee in a subject I disliked. So, when I found a family in Belgium, I just wanted to pack all the things and flew!

Everything seemed so perfect in the very beginning. It was my first time living far from home for long period and I was so naive at that time. I still had to adapt and handle the situation which was different from my home country. Working as an au pair is actually far from perfect, well perfect as I expected. It's not only about partying, playing with kids, or traveling easily here and there, but more complicated than that.

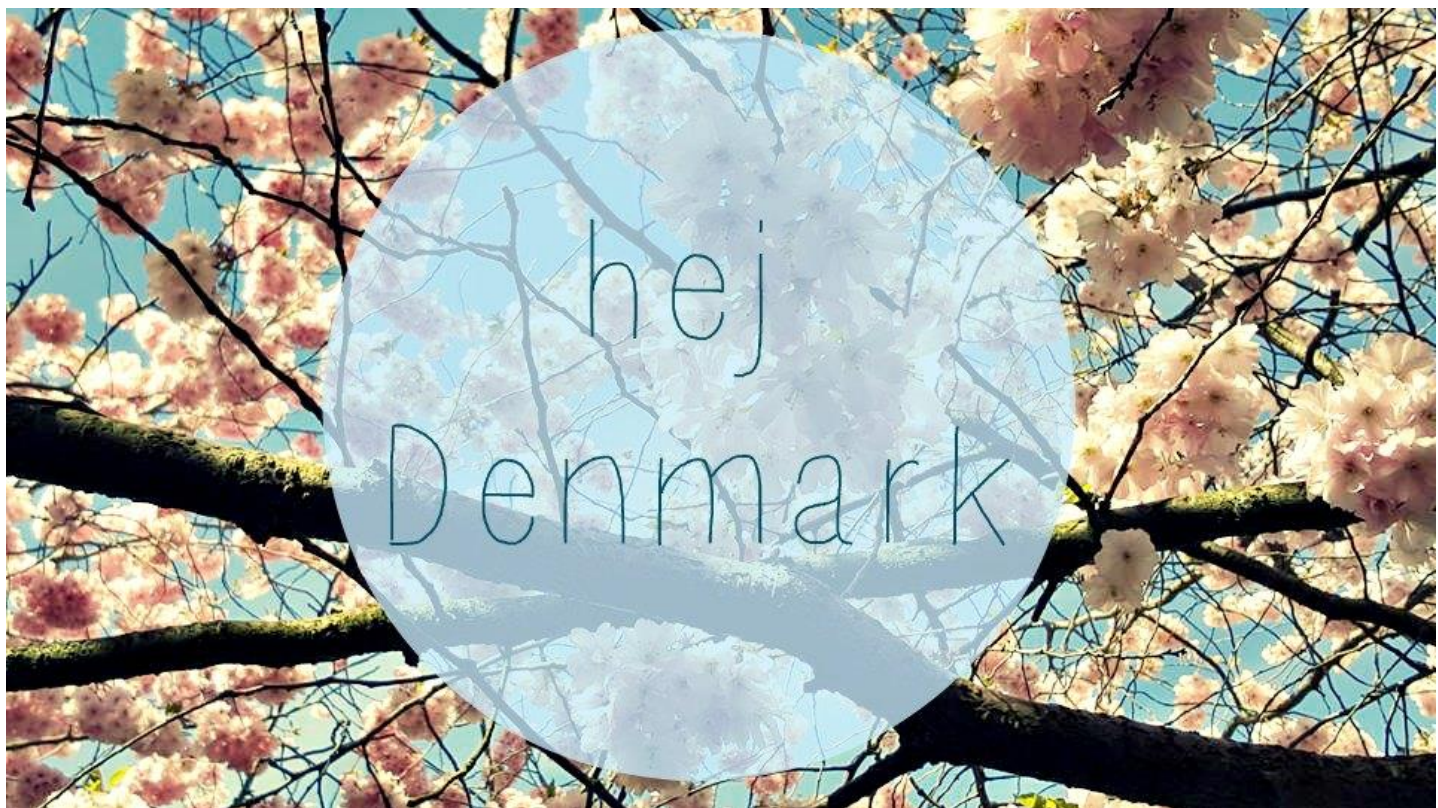
Unfortunately, some problems occurred in my second week in Belgium. It was so tough. Kids were more and more difficult. Host family didn't care about what is in the contract anymore. Tasks were seriously kind of joking. And another kind of empty and loneliness feeling I've felt. I

even had to move to another family because mismatched with the first one. But another problem came out again. I had a serious miscommunication problem with this new one. I was still comfortable with my culture to keep silent when we're in trouble. It doesn't mean we're afraid. But we tend to watch our mouth and lead us to be vague.

Well, everything could happen. Going home wasn't a choice, and it lead to me to keep staying. Fortunately, I had au pair friends from Indonesian also. We met up regularly, shared stories, traveled together, and of course cared each other. They were my best buddies who always there for me when I'm alone and need them.

One year in Belgium made me get to know myself better. Meeting some good friends from same country is also incredible feeling when you're in a foreign land. But I didn't know why I felt like missing something. I didn't learn the language too much, mingled with my Indonesian gangs all the time, and wasted time and money for no reason. To be honest, I was regret in this first year. That's why I was thinking to be an au pair twice. Not to mention being a maid or nanny again, but I want to get the experience more than I've got in Belgium.

MY SECOND YEAR LOOKS LIKE



Learning from the previous experience, I'm becoming more tactful and communicative. I always say what is in my head and I don't want to be a reserved girl anymore. Communication is much more important to make everything's clear and better.

After long time looked for a family in Energy Au Pair, finally I found one. I was kinda skeptical at the first time because they have newborn babies. Seriously, two? And also you want me to do lots of chores? Don't kid me!

But I've found out tasks are easier when the family treat you well. My host family in Denmark is super nice. They have 3 kids and my main task is taking care of the two youngest ones. They are twin boys and so cute. They're also easy to handle and so close to me now.

The family respects me to the fullest, give my own space, and always try to make everything easier. They love me and so do I.

One year in Denmark also makes me experiencing all the real things when living abroad. My life is not only about taking care of the kids or keeping home tidy, but also gaining lots of values.

Since I don't meet too many Indonesians in Denmark, so I'm much more open at making friends with foreigners. Most of them aren't au pair, but student and workers. I always learn a lot from them and get different point of view.



Finding Danish friends aren't easy in Denmark. But I already have some good friends who I can call to have fun with. We met in one event in Copenhagen. After that time, we became closer and closer and always plan to do new thing every weekend.

Besides them, I've got some good friends as well from language school. They're really kind people. Even though we try to speak Danish, but it always ends up with English. Due to their responsibilities being a wife or mother and worker, we only meet at school.

Want to have fun in some cool event or festival but don't wanna spend some bucks? Why not try to be a volunteer?! I also do the

same. It's pretty new for me being a volunteer abroad. What I earn from being a volunteer:

meeting new people, practicing my Danish, and also enjoying some festivals or exhibitions for free!! Now being a volunteer is kinda another unpaid-job and hobby I always take every month.

Since I'm also interested to design and want to be a designer someday, I'm also thinking to take any design course this year. I've met some awesome designers through Meetup group a few days ago. They gave me some insights about learning design from the scratch. They also being mentor and now we're team of Copenhagen Studio while bringing cool concepts together. Design course are quiet expensive in Indonesia. That's why, I think I'll take this chance while I have more time and money in Denmark. Nothing to lose!

Because I also don't want to miss any chance to see another countries, I have already got some plans to go to another place. I hope I could do road trip to Norway with a friend from Belgium before I'm back home next year. Riding a hot air balloon in Cappadocia, and/or visiting Russia with a friend are also on the top my list. This year, I think I've been to some places in Europe and will go to some different countries again.

I feel like, my life in Denmark is full of surprise. I learn new things, get insights, and meet inspiring people every week. So, I'm waiting for another surprise a year more. I hope it would be bigger than this! ;)

But hey, I do lots of things while being au pair in Denmark! How can I handle all these things together when au pair is still my main task? Tough indeed, but I'm also manager to myself. Keep the tasks on going and keep going to language school in the weekdays. I always try to look for any volunteering jobs in the weekends only. Meeting and chit-chatting with my friends are a must, and mostly we can do that in weekend evening. If there's cool meet up in the town that happens in weekdays, I will ask for permission to out from job earlier. Well, my host family is very understand and most of the time will say yes.

WHAT TO DO IN YOUR AU PAIR YEAR

Au pair can bring any joy and memorable things that we never forget. To make sure these precious moments are following, let's don't talk about money for a while. You can earn such beautiful things in one or two years au pair period. Let's be unusual au pair!

1. Keep responsible when working, but don't forget to have fun in your free time. **To do:** Let's take a break from home and out for picnic, biking, shopping, or just finding the crowd. Hey, there are plenty good spots are free to pay a visit!

2. Making friends with people outside your country give you another point of view and insights. Speaking English (or another foreign language), won't hurt you though. **To do: be open and warm to every people. Even speaking has its own comfort zone.**
3. Don't be afraid to meet new people. Take a look some meet up groups around the town, be a volunteer in some events, or just join new hobbies. These people always teach you something! **To do: Download Meetup application and sign up to groups based on what you like. Don't be lazy to check out what's hip at town, open their website, and look at volunteering job (don't worry, it's unpaid and legal to do).**
4. Be serious when learning the language. I know you don't plan to stay longer, I know you're suck at learning language, I know learning new language isn't for anybody, but still...be serious. At least, you'll get new friends who have some problem like you. And hey, what are you really doing by just staying at home?? **To do: are you proud of speaking English all the time? I'm not. Watch the news, listen to their music, read local newspapers, and practice with host kids at home. It takes time and commitment indeed. I understand.**
5. Do what locals do. You want to immerse the culture, huh? **To do: eat their food, participate into their traditions, and respect their rules. Must!**
6. Learn how to cure the emptiness and loneliness when you're still feeling okay living abroad. **To do: trust me, I'm even still in this situation sometimes. Call your family, talk a lot with friends from home country by phone or text every day, learn a new thing, find a lover (if you're single), do sport, and just do what you really LOVE (watching series, shopping wisely, taking selfies, snacking cookies, reading, catching Pokémons, planning your next trips, whatever!)**
7. Don't travel too much, you have to save some money ;p But please don't travel too less, just because you want to get free things all the time. Let's explore! **To do: don't forget to discover some golden gems in your host country also.**
8. I know, problem could happen anytime. Face it, be clear, and be brave! Don't make it ruins your time while living abroad! **To do: believe you can do it without run. We're strong enough!**

Cheers!

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