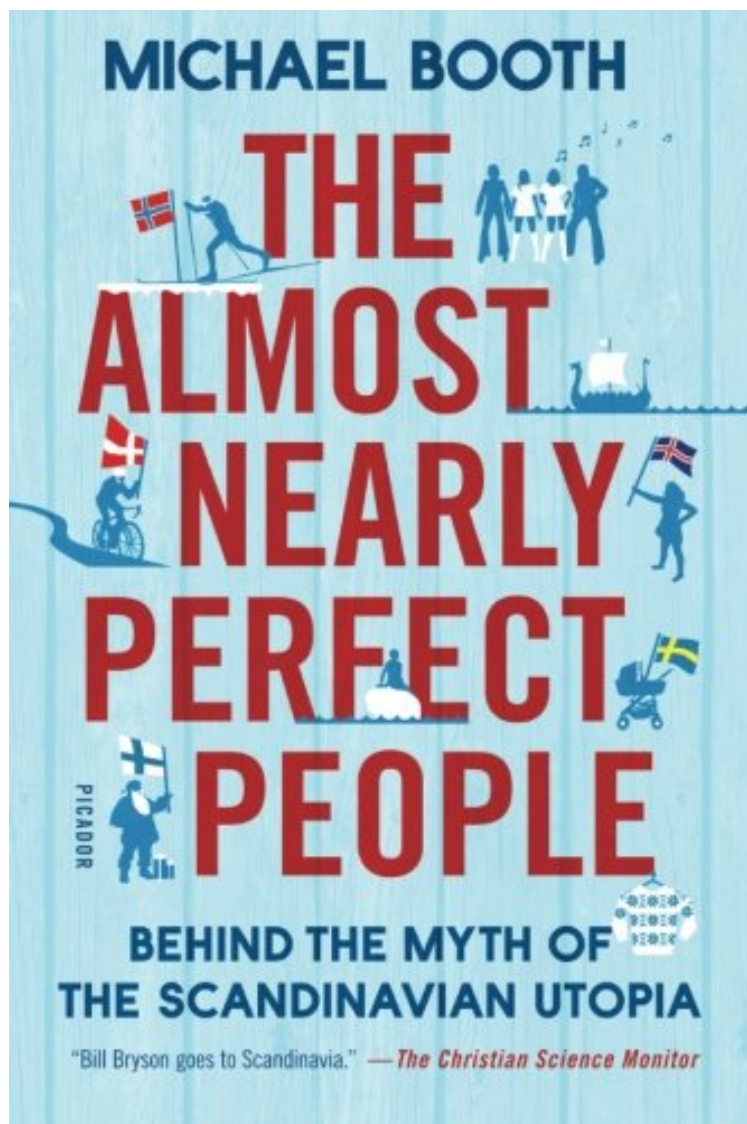


## The Almost Nearly Perfect People: Behind the Myth of the Scandinavian Utopia

Michael Booth

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#15824 in Books Booth Michael 2016-02-02 2016-02-02 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.29 x 27.81 x 5.451, .0 #File Name: 1250081564400 pages The Almost Nearly Perfect People Behind the Myth of the Scandinavian Utopia | File size: 54.Mb

**Michael Booth : The Almost Nearly Perfect People: Behind the Myth of the Scandinavian Utopia** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Almost Nearly Perfect People: Behind the Myth of the Scandinavian Utopia:

38 of 38 people found the following review helpful. Tour of the Nordic CountriesBy AndrewThe Nordic countries

make up five countries located in northern Europe: Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland. As author Michael Booth posits, despite the fact that these countries often rank highest in the world in terms of quality of life (with Denmark almost always being rated the "happiest" country in the world), most people know little about them or what differentiates them. In his home of Denmark, for example, he says that people can discuss the affairs of other countries, but doubts anyone in the U.S. Congress could name the Danish Foreign Minister. Or he challenges the reader to name someone, anybody, from Finland. In this book, he travels around these five countries, exploring their cultural curiosities, and trying to learn a bit about what makes them tick. One of the strongest points of this book is that he explores the different cultures of these countries through his own eyes and writes as such. Because of this, the writing can often be quite funny. Booth shares some lighthearted jokes the residents of one country have at the expense of others. Or his uncomfortable experience of visiting a Finnish sauna for the first time. But, aside from the humor, you get a sense of the pride many people take in their countries. One memorable example is the Constitution Day celebrations that take place on May 17 in Norway where people dress up in ways that invoke a romantic image of the past. Booth notes how immigrants to Norway, despite little to no connection to this history, heartily embrace it. More serious matters are also of importance. Booth dedicates some time at looking at the horrific terrorist attack of the extreme-right wing Norwegian Anders Behring Breivik in 2011 and the effect it had on the country. Surprisingly, as terrible as the attack was, there was not a lot of permanent change. There was no new security put in place and life went on. Booth also explores some of the aspects of the Nordic countries' famous welfare states and how that works. I found the section on Sweden in this regard most interesting. In Sweden, Booth sees a system he refers to as "benign totalitarianism" where the Swedish government heavily intervenes in the lives of its citizens, even interfering in parenting. There is debate if this just creates too much dependency on the state and stifles the individual or if it releases the individual from worries allowing him or her to become truly individualistic. One objective of this book, as the title implies, is looking past the utopian image these countries sometime have. They are not without problems. This was especially apparent in Iceland where years of economic mismanagement culminated in a severe financial crisis in the late 2000s. He also wonders whether the current system of welfare is sustainable in the long run without changes. Denmark and Sweden already have a tax system that most Americans, for example, would find absolutely preposterous. All of these countries also face the situation, as many other countries are also experiencing, of an aging population. In his own home of Denmark he also notes problems in education, healthcare, and an increasingly lazy workforce. Though most of this book is pretty interesting, I do find that sometimes Booth's own opinion is presented too much as fact. Sure, this is fine when looking at the cultural aspects. He is not afraid to express his own opinion of what is great and what he finds is rather odious. However, it seems like he sometimes tries to poke holes in things he learned from interviews with experts. Many times in this book he talks with people associated with universities and other such professionals. Surely there ideas are worth something. He also throws in criticisms of things like right-wing political parties and people he just seems to disagree with. Learning about the Nordic countries is especially prudent today. For example, in his campaign for President of the United States, Bernie Sanders has often espoused the so-called "Nordic Model" as something America should emulate. There are certainly interesting things to learn about what has worked and what has not from these countries. Still, besides the serious content, this is an entertaining look at five European countries and I would recommend this to those looking to learn a little bit about the world around them. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Too bad, because he completely spoiled for me the pleasure ...By Italian Ms. The humor and narrative ability of the Author would earn him 5 stars. The humorless pedantic intellectualistic moral superiority in forcing his political point of view onto the deplorable readers who he accuses of harboring bias and racism, does not allow honest recognition of a problem. Too bad, because he completely spoiled for me the pleasure of reading his book. 8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Good read for Viking History buffs. By D Robb And to think that we all thought Scandinavia is a utopia. Booth does a good job of filling a ton of blanks about the history of the Countries and the probability of the reasons they are who they are today. Each of the five Countries is adequately discussed complete with little "in" jokes about each. I was surprised at the access he had and the number of politicians, experts in ethnic studies and dignitaries. It's a good read and makes me want to go back to "Viking" land to do more exploring on my own.

The Christian Science Monitor's #1 Best Book of the Year A witty, informative, and popular travelogue about the Scandinavian countries and how they may not be as happy or as perfect as we assume, *The Almost Nearly Perfect People* offers up the ideal mixture of intriguing and revealing facts (Laura Miller, Salon). Journalist Michael Booth has lived among the Scandinavians for more than ten years, and he has grown increasingly frustrated with the rose-tinted view of this part of the world offered up by the Western media. In this timely book he leaves his adopted home of Denmark and embarks on a journey through all five of the Nordic countries to discover who these curious tribes are, the secrets of their success, and, most intriguing of all, what they think of one another. Why are the Danes so happy, despite having the highest taxes? Do the Finns really have the best education system? Are the Icelanders as feral as they sometimes appear? How are the Norwegians spending their fantastic oil wealth? And why do all of them hate the Swedes? In *The Almost Nearly Perfect People* Michael Booth explains who the Scandinavians are, how they differ

and why, and what their quirks and foibles are, and he explores why these societies have become so successful and models for the world. Along the way a more nuanced, often darker picture emerges of a region plagued by taboos, characterized by suffocating parochialism, and populated by extremists of various shades. They may very well be almost nearly perfect, but it isn't easy being Scandinavian.

Bill Bryson goes to Scandinavia. Christian Science Monitor (Ten Best Books of January) Booth's extremely funny character analysis of Scandinavia (which includes the adjacent Arctic-Circle floaters, Iceland and Finland) gives an incisive yet comprehensive overview of each of these reputedly lucky lands...His chapters betray a clear affection for the icy region he calls home, and gradually allow a clearer identity for each country to emerge. The New York Times Book Outrageously entertaining...Like members of a family, each of these five nations, despite a strong shared resemblance, has its own character, and Booth really is the guy you want to explain the differences to you. The Almost Nearly Perfect People offers up the ideal mixture of intriguing and revealing facts. Laura Miller, Salon Booth's project is essentially observational; it aspires to a comic genre that might be called Euro-exotica. The form was well established by the time Twain published *The Innocents Abroad* in 1869, and it has been carried through the twentieth century by writers as varied as S. J. Perelman and Peter Mayle....In this sense, Booth's book is as much about Anglo-American power as it is about the Nordic way. The New Yorker Part travelogue, part cultural history, Michael Booth's book about Nordic countries is crammed with some truly bizarre facts. Entertainment Weekly The result of Booth's ethnographic snooping is this insightful, entertaining and very funny book. Booth also happens to be a terrific ambassador to the often insular and sometimes baffling behavior of the Nordic peoples. Anthropological research has never been this much fun. Chicago Tribune A lively exploration that's part ethnography and part travel guide at its core, *The Almost Nearly Perfect People* is driven by genuine curiosity and appreciation for a singular part of the world most Americans know very little about--and could stand to learn a thing or two from. The Daily Beast (Hot Reads) A humorous deconstruction of the belief that the Scandi nations are each a social paradise while affirming that life in one of the five can be quite congenial. Finally, an answer to the pressing question, how can Danes be so happy while paying such high taxes? The New York Daily News An entertaining, authoritative, and often funny travelogue. Minneapolis Star Tribune It is said that most people can't tell one Nordic country from another. Maybe so, but what they do know is that these nations are exceptional. This collective exceptionalism is worth studying up close and Michael Booth's book is a good place to begin. He writes with irony and charm and in the end, much affection for his adopted home in Denmark. The Huffington Post Booth is often funny, and he keeps us engaged. The Week With his tongue never too far from his cheek, British journalist Michael Booth takes an ironic scalpel to what seems to be the modern obsession with the so-called perfection of life in the five Northern European countries in his *The Almost Nearly Perfect People*....a truly interesting and enjoyable piece of writing. Seattle Post-Intelligencer [Booth's] dry wit permeates the book He has written an immersive, insightful, and often humorous examination of a most curious culture. Publishers Weekly If, like many, you may never make it to Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Finland, or Sweden, this is your book, and Booth is your guide. He is congenial, game, funny, and observant. And he tells it like it was Booklist Booth brings a deliciously droll sense of humor to his mission. BookPage An enjoyable, funny romp through the region. The Telegraph (London) Booth offers an affectionate, observant, engaging look at Scandinavia, where trust, modesty and equality proudly prevail. Kirkus sI laughed out loud . . . A lively and endearing portrait of our friends in the north, venerated globally for their perfectly balanced societies but, it turns out, as flawed as the rest of us--or at least only almost perfect. The Observer (UK) A rollicking travelogue . . . [and] a welcome rejoinder to those who cling to the idea of the Nordic region as a promised land. Financial Times Sorry, liberals, Scandinavian countries aren't utopias. The New York Post Entertaining stuff and very readable. The Independent (UK) Booth is an assiduous excavator of entertaining facts. The Times (London) About the Author Michael Booth is the author of five works of non-fiction, including *The Almost Nearly Perfect People*. His writing appears regularly in *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, and *Cond Nast Traveler* magazine, among many other publications globally. He is the Copenhagen correspondent for *Monocle* magazine and *Monocle 24* radio, and travels regularly to give talks and lectures on the Nordic lands and their peculiar, nearly perfect people. He lives in Denmark with his wife and two sons.