

## No marijuana please, we're Scandinavian

Most Americans probably don't know it, but the use of marijuana is outlawed in the very progressive countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. In Norway, for example, the possession and use of cannabis is illegal under that country's 2018 marijuana laws (it is illegal to possess, sell, transport and cultivate marijuana), though the government did decriminalize personal use of marijuana in 2017. Despite the apparent contradictory laws, an individual can be fined for possession of 15 grams or less, but an arrest with over that amount can prompt the government to prosecute for a presumption of dealing. The fines for first-time offenders for possession for personal use range from \$250-\$2,500. Tourists can be banned from the country for violating domestic marijuana laws. Convicted dealers can face prison terms for up to 15 years.

In Denmark, the personal use of marijuana is officially considered illegal. Possession of under 10 grams will result in a fine (or a warning if you are a 'socially vulnerable person'). Possession of larger quantities (100 grams and over) will be met with a prison sentence. A recent study showed that about 33% of the population has tried marijuana at least once in their lives and a 2016 public poll found the country was evenly split (43% to 43%) on supporting the use of marijuana or condemning it.

Not to be outdone, the Swedes have some of the harshest anti-marijuana laws in Europe. Medical marijuana use is outlawed as is recreational use. No drugs containing cannabinoids are available in the country. Swedish police are trained in how to spot someone acting under the influence of drugs and they have the authority to stop them on suspicion such use. If found guilty, punishment ranges from a fine to six months' incarceration for *minor* offenses, up to three years for *regular* offenses and ten years for *serious* offenses. Perhaps because of these strict laws, Sweden has one of the lowest drug usage rates in the western world, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). *By the way, carrying marijuana on any international transport medium is regarded as an immediate offense against drug laws in both countries. Transportation of drugs across borders is a much more serious offense that could result in stiffer penalties, including jail time.*

Finland has allowed medical use of marijuana since 2008, but that's it. The marijuana prohibition law goes back to 1966 (personal use was outlawed in 1972 though it was reformed in 2001), and if a person is convicted of producing, importing, transporting, possessing or using marijuana he or she can be fined. Getting caught smoking in public will land the offender a fine AND this gives the police the right to search the homes of anyone caught smoking or in possession of any plants, growing materials, paraphernalia or anything else that might give them reasonable suspicion of illegal activities. As one might imagine, those offenses can add up quickly and turn into a large fine, possible jail time, and probation.

Here in New Mexico, the medical use of marijuana has been legal since 2007 when it became the 12th state in the U.S. to do so. There are, understandably, certain restrictions on such medical use. One of them is that a user may not purchase over eight ounces of pharmaceutical grade marijuana within a 90-day period. Recreational (personal use) marijuana is still illegal. The penalties for possession of one ounce or less can result in a \$50 to \$100 fine or even up to 15 days in jail. A second offense conviction could result in a fine of up to \$1,000 or a year in prison. The distribution and cultivation of marijuana is considered a felony in New Mexico and carries a hefty fine and up to 18 years in prison. The upcoming New Mexico Legislative session will, most probably, debate a decriminalization bill that will allow for recreational use of cannabis. Before it goes ahead and opens that door, it would do well to check out the experiences of the Scandinavian/Nordic countries. Drugs and a resulting flight from reality aren't the reason the Norwegians, the Danes, the Swedes and the Finns are happy. We ought to find out why.

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