

BCD Travel Recommends: Copenhagen

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More than a mermaid



Copenhagen is an appealing and disarmingly provincial city comprised of block after block of period six-story buildings, church steeples punctuating the skyline. It's a city that gleams with a contemporary edge, but seems to take you back hundreds of years. Whatever you're looking for – sleek or cozy, traditional or modern – Copenhagen can provide. It's even affordable (in Scandinavian terms).

As with the rest of Scandinavia, summer is one of the best times to visit – the days stretch out until late evening, and the city's many bar and restaurant terraces are packed with natives and visitors intent on soaking up every ray of sunshine.

The sights to see

The heart of Copenhagen is ringed by a series of lakes to the northwest and by the inner harbor to the southeast. The huge Rådhuspladsen (City Hall Square) lies at the western end of the central area. From here, a series of pedestrianized streets (Strøget) extend as far as Kongens Nytorv (King's New Square).

Rundetårn (The Round Tower)

In the streets to the north of Strøget is the Rundetårn, the oldest observatory in Europe. Built by Christian IV in 1642, the building forms part of a scholastic complex that also includes a university library (now an exhibition hall) and student church. A spiral ramp leads to the top of the tower 35 meters (115 feet) above the street, for a great view over the old parts of the city.



Tivoli

Most Danes seem to have an almost prenatal attachment to their capital's amusement park. When it opened in 1843, visitors had a choice of two amusements – a horse-drawn carousel and a rollercoaster. Today, there are 25 rides, as well as games and arcades, two theatres, an open-air stage and a museum. Crowded, pricey and unbelievably kitsch, Tivoli remains strangely appealing, particularly at night when the trees are illuminated with lanterns. Numerous concerts and special events are held here every summer, as well as a Christmas market in December.

Nyhavn (New Harbor)

Brothels and bars serving the visiting sailors once used to dominate this seedy area, but now the multicolored, 17th-century gabled buildings accommodate bustling restaurants and pavement cafes serving traditional Danish food beside a pedestrian thoroughfare and the masts of traditional yachts. Hans Christian Andersen lived at three different houses here and on his birthday (April 2) may still be encountered here, in the form of a person in costume wandering the streets.

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Den Lille Havfrue (The Little Mermaid)

A pleasant walk from Nyhavn along Bredgade to Churchill Park brings you to where the city's most famous bronze resident, commemorating the Hans Christian Andersen heroine, lives. Despite being decapitated a few times and being rather smaller in stature than might be imagined, the mermaid remains perennially popular with visitors.



Amalienborg Slot (Amalienborg Palace)

This palace has been the winter residence of the Danish royal family since 1794. The four identical Rococo palaces face each other across the octagonal Amalienborg Slot, where the changing of the guard takes place each day at noon when the family is in residence.

Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek

The Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, just off the Rådhuspladsen, was built by the Carlsberg brewer, Carl Jacobsen, between 1897 and 1906. Today, it houses a superb collection of Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities, Impressionist masterpieces and Danish and French art by Monet, Gauguin, Renoir, Degas and Cézanne.

Dansk Design Center

Just across from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, the Dansk Design Center showcases Danish industrial design alongside international design trends. The five-story building, designed by senior Danish architect Henning Larsen, features Danish design classics in the basement and imaginative changing exhibits on a variety of design-related topics on the ground floor.



Rosenborg Slot (Rosenborg Castle)

Built between 1606 and 1634, Rosenborg was the chief residence of Christian IV and the main royal palace until the end of the last century. This redbrick, Dutch Renaissance-style palace displays the Crown jewels and other royal treasures. The gardens (Kongens Have) surrounding the palace were laid out in 1606 and are some of the most attractive in the city.

Getting around

Copenhagen is a compact city, easily navigated on foot or by bike. But if you're worn out, or interested in going further afield, buses and trains run daily 0:500 to 00:30. There are additional night buses from City Hall Square (Rådhuspladsen) to the suburbs. There is also a harbor boat-bus service connecting the Royal Library's Black Diamond building on Christians Brygge with Nordre Toldbod, with stops along the waterfront, including Nyhavn. The shuttle operates from early morning until early evening throughout the year (weather permitting) with four departures per hour.

The Metro (opened in 2002) runs from 05:00 to 24:00 from Mondays to Wednesdays, all night on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and then until 24:00 on Sundays. The trains are fully automatic, but that doesn't mean they are unmanned. A Metro steward is on every train, to check tickets, provide information and help passengers.

Smørrebrød are just the beginning

Eating isn't cheap in Copenhagen. In particular, beware of the wine prices; the mark-up is often exorbitant, pushing your reaction to the bill from an involuntary swallow to flat-out panic. But with credit card in hand, you're in for a treat. Various international cuisines have made their mark on the city, most notably French and Oriental. Allied to this growth has been a recent resurgence in Modern Danish, which uses the freshest local ingredients and infuses them with new flavours.

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Restaurant Ida Davidsen

Store Kongensgade 70

Proving that there is no such thing as 'just a sandwich', Ida takes the Danish smørrebrød (open-faced sandwich) tradition to new heights. Her 200-plus creations include such delightful toppings as smoked salmon, beef tartar and caviar. This is a real Copenhagen institution, with walls bedecked with old family photos.

Peder Oxe

Gråbrødretorv 11, Latin Quarter

Fronting the lovely, tree-lined Gråbrødretorv (Grayfriar's Square), this stalwart of rustic dining offers wonderful Danish country grub. You'll be entranced by the solid wood floors, Portuguese tiles and groovy little system whereby you let the waiters know you're ready to order by flicking on a light above your table. Copenhagen's oldest monastery was built on this site in 1238 and the restaurant's wine cellar retains part of the old stone foundations.



Café Europa

Amagertorv 1, Strøget

Inspired by coffeehouse culture from France to Austria to Hungary, this café specializes in organic and "biodynamic" cooking. It's also got an unbeatable location, tables get set up right on Højbro Plads on sunny days, making it a great place to settle in and do a spot of people-watching.

Madklubben

Store Kongensgade 66

A sleek but unpretentious place with delicious cooking based on pristinely fresh Nordic ingredients – and it's value for money all the way through. The concept is simple: one course for 100 kroner, two for 150 kroner, three for 200 kroner, etc. You can get a basic steak, but you won't regret opting for more inventive variations of Scandinavian cuisine. Try a Danish "risotto" based on barley groats (perlebyg) and Danish goat cheese (replacing Italian standards Arborio rice and Parmesan).

Noma

Strandgade 93, Christianshavn

If price is no object, run, don't walk, to Noma, Denmark's only Michelin-two-starred restaurant. Here you'll find an extraordinary array of Scandinavian ingredients (Norwegian horse mussels, Faroe Island langoustines, Icelandic seaweed and halibut, musk ox and berries from Greenland) subjected to chef Rene Redzepis' careful attention and innovative treatment. The restaurant itself is rawly poetic, with a design that marries oak, stone, leather, water, glass and light.

Shop till you drop

Copenhagen is a shoppers' paradise, with massive stores and tiny boutiques selling contemporary design pieces and fashion, porcelain and crystal, silverwork, traditional Viking jewelry and amber. Not to be missed are the soft goose-down comforters (quilts or duvets to some), or a sexy piece of streamlined Scandinavian furniture.

Running from near the north-east corner of Rådhuspladsen to the two focal squares of Gammeltorv and Kongens Nytorv, Strøget (said to be the longest pedestrian street in Europe) and its side roads contain some of the best shopping opportunities on the continent, from big names like Prada to the best of Danish design. Silversmith Georg Jensen, glass nirvana Holmegaard and Royal Copenhagen Porcelain, among others, gather together under the Royal Shopping banner (6-10 Amagertorv).

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After hours

Copenhagen is a 24-hour party city. For free entertainment simply stroll along Strøget, especially between Nytorv and Højbro Plads, which in the late afternoon and evening is a bit like an impromptu three-ring circus with musicians, magicians, jugglers and other street performers.

Copenhagen Jazzhouse

Niels Hemmingsensgade 10, Strøget

The city's leading jazz spot, featuring top Danish musicians and international performers. The music runs the gamut from bebop to fusion jazz, and there's a large dance floor that usually fills after live gigs on weekends.

Boutique Lize

Enghave Plads 6, Vesterbro

This used to be a clothing store but when it was transformed into this spartan but popular cocktail bar a few years back, it just seemed easier to keep the old name.

"K" Bar

Ved Stranden 20

This tiny cocktail bar features an amazing roster of creative mixed drinks – from lavender margaritas to caipirinhas with carrot, chili and ginger. Their Santa Shot (honey-infused vodka, Cointreau, Campari and beet juice), is guaranteed to warm the cockles of your heart (and just about anything else).