



THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT: Stroget, at 1.2km, is Europe's longest pedestrians-only street; by boat to the Christianshavn quarter.

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT: Beyond this arch, thrills and fun at the Tivoli Gardens; returning chefs have revived the city's once-dull food scene.

ultra-cool Copenhagen

A quick guide for travellers on short stays and big plans.

BY FARHAD HEYDARI >>

If you think Copenhagen is nothing more than just another smart capital city with a penchant for clean design, here's a newsflash: Denmark's capital and Scandinavia's largest city has undergone a bold revolution that has transformed it from clean and straitlaced to a vibrant city imbued with youthful energy and

a welcome non-conformist vibe. It offers an abundance of boho-glamorous boutiques, a clutch of sleek new boutique hotels, add to that the return of nationals who've honed their culinary and creative skills abroad, and you have what is arguably Europe's newest gastronomic destination and hippest polyglot metropolis.

GETTING ACQUAINTED

To fully appreciate Copenhagen's free-spirited vitality and its eco-friendly ethos, you should bike it. Most hotels offer bikes that you can borrow or rent and outlets like Kobenhavns Cyklebors (www.cykelboersen.dk) rent out two-wheelers for up to US\$10 a day. Bicycle lanes are clearly marked, well-respected and

immaculately paved, making this one of the most bicycle-friendly cities in Europe. For city tours by bike, visit www.citysafari.dk.

Once you've got your two-wheeler, head to Rundetaarn or Round Tower (<http://www.rundetaarn.dk>) for panoramic views. Even though the tower, built in the 17th century, is just eight-storeys tall, you'll see the city-centre's tight cobblestoned core, abutted by the grounds at Tivoli Gardens, a historic amusement park and pleasure garden.

Further afield lies the up-and-coming area of Vesterbro. A former industrial quarter and red light district, its streets are now lined with cool new boutiques and bistros, especially around Halmtorvet, the square on which the city's meat

market used to stand. To get there, head south on the canalside Noerre Soegade, then along Vester Soegade until you reach Vesterbrogade.

Next, make your way across Christianshavn to Islands Brygge, an industrial area of freight rails and

vacant warehouses until recently – it now boasts modernist lofts, arts centres like the waterfront Kulturhuset, cafes and, in summer, urban beach clubs like Halvandet, Havnebad and Luftkastellet, which take up residence here. To get there, follow Vesterbrogade north until you reach H.C. Andersens Blvd. Make a left and head over the Langebro bridge. Islands Brygge will stretch out on your right along the canal.

Finally, be sure to head to that temple of bohemia, Christiania (www.christiania.org), a former 85-acre (about 34 hectares) military base turned hippie colony that's celebrating its 36th anniversary. Located on the eastern side of the city's primary waterway and dubbed a 'free town', its 1,000 residents – most with dreadlocks and piercing – are a self-governed bunch who enjoy

rent- and tax-free status, but few luxuries. They take pleasure, instead, in a sustainable car-free quarter that's swathed in green spaces, dotted with lakes and criss-crossed by gravelled paths lined with mural-covered, corrugated-roofed housing that will soon, sadly, make way for condos. There are also countless ateliers belonging to carpenters, blacksmiths and other craftsmen, not to mention cafes and restaurants, like Spiseloppen (www.spiseloppen.dk), where organic dishes, like reindeer with gooseberries, are served up in an airy warehouse by a roster of international chefs.

SHOP AWAY

Design fans rejoice: few places on earth offer the scope and magnitude of design-y apparel like Copenhagen.

Start your day by discovering the city centre and its petite core, consisting of a tidy network of pedestrians-only streets, which includes Europe's longest, the 1.2km Stroget. It is a bustling cobblestoned expanse stretching from Raathus Pladsen or City Hall Square to Kongens Nytorv, a broad square that doubles as a giant ice-skating loop in winter.

It is anchored by Copenhagen's grand Hotel D'Angleterre and Magasin, a multi-level department store, where the newsstand is largely occupied by design titles from >>

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far and wide. Stroget is a delight to browse as it is home to Danish retailers like Georg Jensen and Bang & Olufsen, and Danish design powerhouses like Illums Bolighus, Birger Christensen, Holmegaard, and Tage Andersen.

If you're after something more elusive, make your way to a bohemian boutique like Brinja (Islands Brygge 21; www.brinja.dk). It offers fanciful one-off pieces that recall the roaring 1920s, the mod '60s and the groovy '70s.

Over at Munthe Plus Simonsen's eponymous boutique (Gronnegade 10; www.muntheplussimonsen.com), you get all-noir knitwear, suede jackets and flowing tops accessorised by fur trimmings and other embellishments.

Need to add some colour to your shabby-chic wardrobe? Visit Natasja Jensen's small but charming boutique, N&J Design (Gasvaerksvej 4a; www.nogjdesign.dk), where, in a tiny workshop, she goes about the business of creating her own line of stylish products.

WHERE EAT'S AT

Denmark's once drab food scene has undergone a much-needed makeover thanks to a handful of gifted chefs who, having made good overseas, are back to wow local taste buds.

One example is the charismatic Chef Bo Bech who, after stints in Paris and London, where he garnered Michelin stars galore, has transformed the bistro at Paustian (a waterside furniture showroom designed by Jorn Utzon of Sydney Opera House fame) from a ho-hum lunch spot into a superlative eatery. It is located at Kalkbraenderiloebeskaj 2 (www.paustian.dk).



The city's hottest lounge-cum-restaurant, Umami (Store Kongensgade 59; www.restaurantumami.dk), is the pet project of restaurateur Jesper Boelskifte. The bi-level space blends Oriental modernism with Gallic flair. Housed in an antediluvian 19th-century warehouse in the up-and-coming Christianshavn quarter is Noma (93 Strandgade; www.noma.dk),

the realm of Chef Rene Redzepi, the star of Scandinavian gastronomy. The Michelin-starred fusion menu features, among other things, exotic seafood, dishes like musk ox and milk skin, and Dover sole with green strawberries. A newcomer in Copenhagen, food guru Sir Terence Conran's Custom House (Havnegade 44; www.customhouse.dk) features a trio of restaurants – a brasserie, an Italian fine dining eatery and a Japanese grill and sushi bar – housed together.



ABOVE: The bistro at Paustian, where Chef Bo Bech performs culinary

magic. **RIGHT:** When in Copenhagen, do what the locals do, and bike around the city.



The latest hot spot is Bistro Boheme (Esplanaden 8; www.bistroboheme.dk), a busy vinotheque that's the brainchild of local restaurateur Torben Olsen. If Europe's liberal smoking ethos (often between courses and after-meals, of course) are a turn-off, head to Cofoco (7 Abel Cathrines Gade; www.cofoco.dk), Copenhagen's first non-smoking restaurant.

Located in a tiny whitewashed townhouse in Vesterbro, diners enjoy inventive Franco-Danish cuisine at tables flanked by exposed brick walls or at a long antiqued communal high-table, over which a lovely chandelier hangs. ■

ESSENTIALS

1 CURRENCY
Danish Krone (DKK)
US\$1 = 5.40 DKK

2 VISA
Citizens of the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and EU member states require no visa to enter and stay for a period of up to three months. For more information, log on to www.um.dk

3 BEST TIME TO VISIT
May to September is mild, with up to 15 hours of daylight.

4 GETTING THERE
Singapore Airlines flies 3 times weekly from Singapore to Copenhagen.

5 MORE INFORMATION
[\[www.visitdenmark.com\]](http://www.visitdenmark.com)

DAY-TRIPPER



QUICK TRIPS OUT OF THE CITY

- Malmö**
Thanks to the Oeresund Bridge (above), the centrepiece of a monumental 16km-long engineering marvel, you can head to Sweden for the day. Trains make the 35-minute journey every 20 minutes, depositing visitors in an atmospheric market town that's now known the world over for its architectural landmark, the Turning Torso residential and commercial tower, designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. [www.malmo.se]
- Dragør**
Located on the idyllic island of Amager, 12km south-east of Copenhagen, this charming fishing village seems to have been frozen in time. Rows of terracotta-roofed, ochre-coloured houses line cobbled streets blooming with flowers. The tiny town features a museum whose collection includes local maritime memorabilia. [www.dragoer.dk]
- Helsingør**
Just 45 minutes north of Copenhagen is Helsingør, the storied site of Kronborg Castle, the fortress of Shakespeare's Hamlet. The fairy-tale waterside structure offers a panoramic view, across the harbour, of the city of Helsingborg in Sweden; a short ferry ride will take you there. [www.visit helsingor.dk]