



# Copenhagen

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## Why Go?

Copenhagen is the coolest kid on the Nordic block. Edgier than Stockholm and worldlier than Oslo, the Danish capital gives Scandinavia the X factor. Just ask style bibles *Monocle* and *Wallpaper* magazines, which fawn over its industrial-chic bar, design and fashion scenes, and culinary revolution. This is where you'll find New Nordic pioneer Noma, voted the world's best restaurant in 2010 and 2011, and one of 10 Michelin-starred restaurants in town – not bad for a city of 1.2 million.

Yet Copenhagen is more than just seasonal cocktails and geometric threads. A royal capital with almost nine centuries under its svelte belt, it's equally well versed when it comes to world-class museums and storybook streetscapes. Its cobbled, bike-loving streets are a *hyggelig* (cosy) concoction of sherbet-hued town houses, craft studios and candle-lit cafes. Add to this its compact size, and you have what is possibly Europe's most seamless urban experience.

## When to Go

Arguably, the best time to drop by is from May to August, when the days are long and the mood upbeat. Events such as Distortion in June, Copenhagen Jazz Festival in July and Copenhagen Pride in August give the city a fabulous vibe, though many of Copenhagen's top restaurants close for several weeks in July and August.

Golden foliage and top cultural events such as Kopenhagen Contemporary and Kulturnatten make autumn appealing, while late November and December counter the chill with Yuletide markets, twinkling lights and *gløgg* (mulled wine).

## History

Copenhagen was founded in 1167 by tough-as-nails Bishop Absalon, who erected a fortress on Slotsholmen Island, fortifying a small and previously unprotected harbour-side village.

After the fortification was built, the harbourside village grew in importance and took on the name *Kømandshavn* (Merchant's Port), which was later condensed to *København*. Absalon's fortress stood until 1369, when it was destroyed in an attack on the town by the powerful Hanseatic states.

In 1376 construction began on a new Slotsholmen fortification, Copenhagen Castle, and in 1416 King Erik of Pomerania took up residence at the site, marking the beginning of Copenhagen's role as the capital of Denmark.

Still, it wasn't until the reign of Christian IV, in the first half of the 17th century, that the city was endowed with much of its splendour. A lofty Renaissance designer, Christian IV began an ambitious construction scheme, building two new castles and many other grand edifices, including the Rundetårn observatory and the glorious Børsen, Europe's first stock exchange.

In 1711 the bubonic plague reduced Copenhagen's population of 60,000 by one-third. Tragic fires, one in 1728 and the other in 1795, wiped out large tracts of the city, including most of its timber buildings. However, the worst scourge in the city's history is generally regarded as the unprovoked British bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807, during the

Napoleonic Wars. The attack targeted the heart of the city, inflicting numerous civilian casualties and setting hundreds of homes, churches and public buildings on fire.

Copenhagen flourished once again in the 19th and 20th centuries, expanding beyond its old city walls and establishing a reputation as a centre for culture, liberal politics and the arts. Dark times were experienced with the Nazi occupation during WWII, although the city managed to emerge relatively unscathed.

During the war and in the economic depression that had preceded it, many Copenhagen neighbourhoods had deteriorated into slums. In 1948 an ambitious urban renewal policy called the 'Finger Plan' was adopted; this redeveloped much of the city, creating new housing projects interspaced with green areas of parks and recreational facilities that spread out like fingers from the city centre.

A rebellion by young people disillusioned with growing materialism, the nuclear arms race and the authoritarian educational system took hold in Copenhagen in the 1960s. Student protests broke out on the university campus and squatters occupied vacant buildings around the city. It came to a head in 1971 when protesters tore down the fence of an abandoned military camp at the east side of Christianshavn and began an occupation of the 41-hectare site, naming this settlement *Christiania* (see p55).

While the Global Financial Crisis has created undercurrents of unease, there's no doubt that Copenhagen is currently basking

## COPENHAGEN IN...

### Two Days

Start with a canal and harbour tour, then soak up the salty atmosphere of Nyhavn on your way to **Designmuseum Danmark**. Lunch on fabulous *smørrebrød* at **Schønne-mann** before heading up the historic **Rundetårn** for a bird's-eye view of the city. Done, take in bohemian **Christiania** before an evening of shameless fun at **Tivoli**. On day two, brush up on your Danish history at **Nationalmuseet**, lunch at New Nordic up-and-comer **Marv & Ben** and take in a museum or two on **Slotsholmen**. Assuming you've booked ahead, end on a culinary high with dinner at **Noma**, **Alberto K** or **Mielcke & Hurtigkarl**.

### Four Days

If you have a third day, escape the city with a trip to art museum **Louisiana**. Lunch there before heading back into the city for a retail rush at design meccas **Hay** and **Illums Bolighus**. Come evening, hit Vesterbro's trendy Kødbyen district, supping at **Kødbyens Fiskebar** and sipping at **Mesteren & Lærlingen**. Kick-start day four with centuries of art at **Statens Museum for Kunst**, then spend the rest of the day treading the grit-hip streets of **Nørrebro**, stopping for coffee at **The Coffee Collective**, vino at **Malbeck** and contemporary Danish grub at **Relæ**.