

CNN   
Travel



# *Copenhagen:*

QUEST'S WORLD  
OF WONDER

## EUROPE'S NEW CAPITAL OF COOL

---

Brightly colored buildings contrast with pale Scandinavian stone, locals bike along cobble streets and the sun bounces off the water that slices the city.

Welcome to Copenhagen. A big city of 1.3 million in a small country of just 5.6 million, Denmark's capital is the hottest place in Europe right now and -- spoiler alert -- it isn't down to the weather.

The easy everyday life of Scandinavia combined with Nordic style, world-class food, and a safe, clean, green environment makes Copenhagen just as "wonderful" as the Danny Kaye song always said.

Famously understated Copenhageners have known forever that they live in the capital of cool -- they just don't like to brag about it. But now, everyone's catching on. Copenhagen is home to the two best restaurants on the planet, it's the safest city in the world and boasts the coolest neighborhood to boot.



## *The vibe*

---

Copenhagen is a mini-break from modern life. It's more relaxed than other cities and more human in character and scale.

Instead of the glass and steel skyscrapers found in many capitals, Copenhagen is dominated by four to six-story buildings, with new and old rubbing shoulders.

Design is everywhere, from the Radisson Blu Royal Hotel -- designed by Arne Jacobsen -- to the work of "starchitect" Bjarke Ingels, whose architectural stamp is all over the city.

Nørrebro was crowned the world's coolest neighborhood by Time Out in October 2021, thanks to its friendly feel, arty tendencies, buzzing businesses and community initiatives.

There's a word in Danish: *samfundssind*, from *samfund* (society) and *sind* (mind) meaning community mindedness, which has soared in use during the pandemic. And it's a concept Copenhageners live by.

The relatively narrow wealth gap, low crime rate (currently at its lowest level in more than a decade), more equal society and high levels of trust make it a laid-back place to live and work. It's no surprise that Denmark is regularly voted one of the happiest countries in the world.

Copenhagen is one of those rare capitals where social distancing is easily achievable and you can walk or bike around in your own specious bubble.

A staggering 50% of Copenhageners commute to work by bike and bicycles outnumber cars in the city -- so rent one to fit right in (available everywhere).

The other must-have accessory is coffee. Danes drink a lot of the black stuff and favorites include The Coffee Collective, a micro roaster with a coffee school and four locations, including the hexagonal, copper-topped 19th-century telephone booth at Nørreport Station. Or try "farm to cup" roastery Mokkaeriet in Nørrebro, Vesterbro and Østerbro.

Coffee in hand, watch Copenhageners going about their daily lives, with kids in Christiania bikes, women cycling in heels, dads pushing prams and hipsters just hanging out. When it starts to rain (which it will: it rains a lot in Denmark. Pack umbrellas), duck into a candle-lit café and sink into an experience of pure *hygge*.

Since Rene Redzepi and Claus Meyer converted an old warehouse into the world-class Noma restaurant in 2003, Copenhagen has gone from culinary wasteland to epicurean epicenter.

As well as hoarding Michelin stars, the "Noma effect" inspired all eateries in the city to up their game. Word of warning: Danes plan ahead and restaurants get booked up so make reservations where possible -- and pack loose-fitting clothes. You will eat well.

At the time of writing, Noma has a three-month waiting list but it's worth it: for a once in a lifetime culinary experience, kitchen tour, wine pairing, and atmosphere second to none. Its neighbor Geranium, which took second place on the world's best restaurant list, where head chef Rasmus Kofoed serves an adventurous seasonal menu. Ingredients currently on offer include squid, melted smoked lard and essence of yeast -- although from January 20, 2022 it's going meat-free.

Can't get in to Noma or Geranium? Try Fasangården, where Noma-founder Claus Meyer has taken over the old palace at Frederiksberg Gardens. Or try a multi-sensory food and entertainment experience over 50 courses, five acts and three hours at double-Michelin-starred 30-year-old chef Rasmus Munk's Alchemist. While meals here normally go for \$700 a head, when the pandemic hit in 2020, Munk and a team of volunteers embraced samfundssind and cooked food for the homeless.

The other hot ticket is Amass, chef Matthew Orlando's sustainable restaurant in Refshaleøen, a part of the city that used to be closed off for military use. Dishes like fermented potato bread, tomatoes with pickled rose petals, chanterelle in Douglas Fir pine oil, with fig leaf fudge for afters are created using organic produce pulled from the garden outside the dining room window.

For something more low key, try gourmet pizza with a Nordic twist at Bæst, a truly Nørrebro'rian restaurant where they make their own mozzarella and cure their own meat. Nearby Brus is perfect for a chaser -- a "brewpub" where craft beer made on-site travels less than 20 meters from industrial tanks to your glass.

No reservation? No problem at Social in Nørrebro -- the celebrated yellow-fronted café serving healthy, gluten-free food with a view of the lakes -- popular with locals and explorers alike, with walk-ups welcome (try the signature vegetable waffles).

Noma-run POPL is the best burger joint in Christianshavn, offering organic Danish beef from farms where cattle roam and graze freely. Their vegan burgers are also worthy of note: cooked quinoa goes through a two-day process to become patties in Noma's fermentation lab.

Or head for Refshaleøen, the abandoned shipyard turned street food and skate park mecca. While you're there, visit [Empirical Spirits](#), where Lars Williams and anthropologist Mark Emil Hermansen tinker with flavors, technologies and techniques to make a new breed of spirits. Part futuristic science lab, part sauna, The Tasting Room and the distillery are well worth a tour, or stop and try the goods (the Plum Palermo comes highly recommended).



## The Food



## The Stay

Hotel Sanders is a beautiful, botanical-heavy boutique hotel just 200 meters from Nyhavn with a rooftop conservatory and seriously stylish rooms (slippers and kimonos are included for extra comfort. Yes please...).

## *The Experiences*

It's perfectly possible to be a tourist in Copenhagen without feeling like one -- and there's more to the city than Tivoli Gardens. Swap the Little Mermaid for a trip to the international art center Copenhagen Contemporary, showing installations by world stars and emerging talents.

Or make like a Copenhagener and get active. Cycle Copenhagen's much-loved Cykelslangen "Bicycle Snake" on a scenic ride above the harbor basin or see Bjarke Ingels's best local creations on a 22-kilometer bike tour.

One of Ingels' most striking recent works is CopenHill -- the ski slope built on top of a waste management center where you can ski in all weathers, bringing your own gear or renting equipment.

You're never far from water in Copenhagen and [Islands Brygge Harbor Bath](#) in the center offers a view of the city's skyline while you swim. The quality of the water is checked daily and many Danes swim all year around -- with ardent winter bathers including Danish supermodel [Helena Christensen](#).

Not ready to brave the cold? CopenHot uses clean seawater heated by firewood to create the coziest hot tub experience yet. Or take a tour with Sailing Hot Tubs, where you can cruise the northern harbor of Copenhagen from the comfort of your own tub.

