



COPENHAGEN! DESIGNED TO PLEASE

It's weekend break size, everyone speaks English, and it's easy to get to. Copenhagen is also a designer's dream and with the city's Gay & Lesbian Film Festival starting a week Friday, now is as good a time as any to rub shoulders with some strapping Danes.

BY KEVIN R.

FORGET Danish pastries – although they are certainly worth getting your tongue around – its Danish design that's worth salivating over in Copenhagen. The stores are crammed full of it and an afternoon shopping on **Stroegtet** – a pedestrianised version of Oxford Street running from **Fredericksberggade** to **Oestergade** – will make you wish you'd driven over in a hatchback for those purchases that might not readily pass for hand luggage on the way home.

But first things first. Arriving at Kastrup airport with its dark wood floors and smart stores gives you that first feeling for Denmark's creativity. Getting into town from here is a pleasure; the train takes 20 minutes, costs next to nothing and departs and arrives on time. Central Station, like those in other European cities, is choc full of the usual suspects: druggies, alcoholics and street people – but even they come value added. My friend Mark was accosted by one who spoke to him in Danish, naturally – but when he realised Mark was American he immediately broke into an almost perfect English rant about the police.

We ignored him, of course, as we had just hired bikes and were far more interested in cruising around town. To be accurate, we used the free **City Bike** system where you put 20 kroner (£2) into a slot like the ones in a supermarket to release a bike. When you are done, you return the bike to any of the numerous parking areas and the money is refunded. That's the theory. In practice, the coins were stolen from our bikes soon after we got them and the next day, the bikes disappeared altogether so we had to get another pair.

So what's worth doing when you have your own transport? Well, we were in chilling-out mode, and Copenhagen is perfect for that, given the abundance of cafes and eateries. Tourists head to the picturesque, but slightly contrived **Nyhavn**, and we did too, but for something more real, not to mention gay, try **Oscar Bar** and **Heaven** in the city centre. Oscar is not in a particularly exciting location, close to the Radhuset (town hall) square, but it is a bright and inviting space and does good smørebødder (open sandwiches), a typically Danish meal. Heaven is more of a pub/bar and serves food (great burgers) right along the cobbled street of **Kompagnistræde** which also has some interesting boutiques – **Stil-Leben**, for example, offers nifty, one-off ceramics from design students.

There is also **Kronprinsensgade** where Robbie Williams is known to flash his plastic from time to time. This was the hippest place five years ago before the big brands muscled in. But worth checking out all the same are stores like Stig P, **Munthe + Simonsen** and **Brunns Bazaar**. If you want edgy clothing go to **Steen&Stoffer** in **Klosterstræde**. For design, there are numerous shops all over the city but Stroegtet offers the big hitters of **Illum Bolighus**, **Georg Jensen** and **Royal Copenhagen**

right next to one another. The latter two have interlinking doorways so you can spend all day perusing tableware, glassware and furniture if you are that keen. Products from designers such as Nanna Ditzel, Kasper Salto (a favourite of Bill Clinton) and Morten Brorsen – whose Cinal shelving has been a worldwide hit – can be found there.

A place where design is definitely not factored in, is the colourful community of **Christiania**, the self declared EU-free zone, on the island of **Christianshavn**. Here, it first appears that anarchy rules, but the combination of comfortable communal living, hardcore marijuana smoking, and the trappings of the tourist dollar for the dope stallholders on, believe it or not, Pusher Street, have conspired to turn the place into a caricature of itself, not unlike a set for a bad TV soap. But if Camden Market is your scene this will be too.

On the way to Christiania, stop at **Luftkastellet**, a bar and restaurant that is attached to the youth hostel, way off the beaten track. Right on the harbour, this spot offers views of the Copenhagen skyline which are nothing special, but the fact that you are sitting on sofas and chairs with sand between your toes is quite cool, as is the crowd. We were there while a very smart wedding party was taking place. In a youth hostel? That's the Danes for you.

In the evening we drifted back to Oscar for a few drinks before going clubbing. **Pan** was not what I expected from Copenhagen's principle gay nightclub – these days I think it is the only nightclub in town as the neighbouring **Cockpitt** has just closed. The atmosphere was cosy, not a sprawling warehouse as you might expect. There are five levels to Pan, each with comfy sofas and coffee tables with candles to create a relaxed, rather than highly charged, ambience. There is also a courtyard that offers an escape from the DJs on the two dance floors, for slackers like me who can't take the pace.

Oerstedsparken is just a few minutes north of the main gay drag. This is a cruisy park after dusk, with police patrols to protect you – not arrest you. But with its lake and undulating paths, it's also an ideal place to stop off on a sunny afternoon (unlikely in October but you never know) and idle away an hour or two.

While I was in town I did also try and find the **Little Mermaid** that symbolises Copenhagen, as any self-respecting gay boy is bound to do. I have seen it before, years ago, and was unimpressed then by its small size, further dwarfed by the huge harbour surrounding it.

This time around I couldn't even find her. A Danish acquaintance Marie told me that apparently someone had planted a small bomb inside her, and when it exploded she fell off her rock and into the harbour. She had severe bruising and a hole from the inside out on her thigh, poor thing. The Danes were of course outraged, so much so that according to Marie "the police homicide (sic) department is investigating the matter".

PLACES TO GO AND STAY

Bobi-Bar Klareboderne, adjacent to Koebmagergade. A hangout for literary types, drunks, poets, students. One to avoid if you're a typical scene queen. Mixed.

Centralhojernet 18 Kattesundet. The oldest gay bar in town.

Copenhagen Rainbow 25C Fredericksberggade (Stroegtet). Tel: +45 33 14 10 20. The most central gay B&B serving a yummy breakfast, with free 24-hour internet facilities and discounted rates for the duration of the CGLFF. Gay.

Heaven Café 18 Kompagnistræde. Tel: +45 33 15 19 00. Bar with a pub feel and good food. Gay.

Jailhouse - CPH 12 Studiestræde. Tel: +45 33 15 22 55. If you like men in uniform check out the waiters. Gay.

K Bar 20 Ved Stranden. The best cocktails in town. Low key music and atmosphere. Mixed.

Luftkastellet 100b Strandgade. A bar and restaurant with its own sandy beach! Mixed.

Men's Bar 3, Teglgardsstræde. For the Levi's, leather, bears crowd.

Oscar Bar & Café 77 Radhuspladsen. Tel: +45 33 12 09 99. Light, airy, relaxed. Gay.

Pan Disco 3 Knabrostaede. Disco with a difference – it is also like an intimate café. Gay/mixed.

Roberts Coffee 17 Larsbojensstræde. Good coffee on two levels, one like Starbucks, the other akin to a Turkish bazaar. Mixed.

The Square 14 Radhuspladsen. Tel: +45 33 38 12 10. The city's newest designer hotel.

Ziraf 34 Skt. Pederstræde. Tel: +45 33 93 99 04. Recently opened lesbian watering hole.

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COPENHAGEN GAY & LESBIAN FILM FESTIVAL, 17-26 OCTOBER

THE Copenhagen Gay & Lesbian Film Festival (CGLFF) is the oldest film festival in town. In the last 17 years, it has become a fixture of Copenhagen's cultural calendar and attracts an increasingly diverse international audience. The festival kicks off on Friday 17 October at 8.30pm at the Cinemateket with 'My Mother Likes Women' followed by a launch party.

For full details: www.cgiff.dk
For tickets: Cinemateket, 55 Gothersgade, tel: +45 3374 3412 or Gloria, 59 Radhuspladsen, tel: +45 3312 4292

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