

The Best of Denmark

Denmark presents visitors with an embarrassment of riches—everything from exciting Copenhagen to historic castles, unusual offshore islands to quaint villages, and more. To help you decide how best to spend your time, we've compiled a list of our favorite experiences and discoveries. In the following pages, you'll find the kind of candid advice we'd give our close friends.

1 The Best Travel Experiences

- **A Day (and Night) at Tivoli Gardens:** These 150-year-old pleasure gardens are worth the airfare to Copenhagen all by themselves. They offer a little bit of everything: open-air dancing, restaurants, theaters, concert halls, an amusement park . . . and, oh yes, gardens as well. From the first bloom of spring until the autumn leaves start to fall, they're devoted to light-hearted fun. The gardens are worth a visit any time but are especially pleasant at twilight when the lights begin to glint among the trees. See chapter 4.
- **A Week Down on the Farm:** The best way to see the heart of Denmark and meet the Danes is to spend a week on one of their farms. Nearly 400 farms, all over the country, take in paying guests. Stick a pin anywhere on a map of Denmark away from the cities and seacoast, and you'll find a thatched and timbered farm, or perhaps a more modern homestead. Almost anyplace makes a good base from which to explore the rest of the country on day trips. Although there's no official agency to arrange such holidays, many visitors seeking this kind of offbeat accommodations often surf the Internet for

farms that advertise their willingness to receive guests. Another way to hook up is to decide what part of Denmark you'd like to visit, and then contact the nearest tourist office for a list of farms willing to accept paying guests.

- **On the Trail of the Vikings:** Renowned for 3 centuries of fantastic exploits, the Vikings explored Greenland to the north, North America to the west, and the Caspian Sea to the south and east from roughly A.D. 750 to 1050. Their legacy lives on in Denmark. Relive the age at the **Nationalmuseet** in Copenhagen, which displays burial grounds of the Viking period, along with the largest and richest hoards of treasure, including relics from the "Silver Age." Even Viking costumes are exhibited. See p. 87. At Roskilde, explore the **Viking Ship Museum**, containing five vessels found in a fjord nearby, the largest of which was built in Ireland around 1060 and manned by 60 to 100 warriors. See p. 120. If you're in Ribe, check out the **Museum of the Viking Age**, where a multimedia room, "Odin's Eye," introduces the visitor to the world of the Vikings through a vivid sound

Scandinavia



and vision experience. See chapters 4 and 5.

- **In the Footsteps of Hans Christian Andersen:** To some visitors, this storyteller is the very symbol of Denmark itself. The fairy tale lives

on in Odense, on the island of Funen, where Andersen was born the son of a shoemaker in 1805. His childhood home, a small half-timbered house on Munkemøllestræde, where he lived from 1807

to 1817, has been turned into a museum. You can also visit the H. C. Andersen's Hus, where much of his memorabilia is stored (including his walking stick and top hat), and take a few moments to listen to his tales on tape. But mostly you

can wander the cobblestone streets that he knew so well, marveling at the life of this man—and his works—that, in the words of his obituary, struck “chords that reverberated in every human heart,” as they still do today. See p. 129.

2 The Best Scenic Towns & Villages

- **Dragør:** At the very doorstep of Copenhagen, this old seafaring town once flourished as a bustling herring port on the Baltic. Time, however, passed it by, and for that we can be grateful, because it looks much as it used to, with half-timbered ocher and pink 18th-century cottages topped with thatch or red-tile roofs. The entire village is under the protection of the National Trust of Denmark. A 35-minute ride from the Danish capital will take you back 2 centuries. See “Side Trips from Copenhagen” in chapter 4.
- **Ærøskøbing:** This little village on the country's most charming island (Ærø) is storybook Denmark. A 13th-century market town, Ærøskøbing is a Lilliputian souvenir of the past, complete with little gingerbread houses. You expect Hansel and Gretel to arrive at any moment. See “Across the Water to Ærø” in chapter 5.
- **Odense:** The birthplace of Hans Christian Andersen is visited by thousands of the storyteller's fans every year. Denmark's third-largest city still has a medieval core, and you can walk its cobblestone streets and admire its half-timbered houses, including H. C. Andersen's Hus. Other than its associations with the writer, Odense is a worthwhile destination in its own right, filled with attractions (including St. Canute's Cathedral). On the outskirts you can explore everything from the 1554 Renaissance castle, Egeskov, to a 10th-century Viking ship at Ladby. See “Odense: Birthplace of Hans Christian Andersen” in chapter 5.
- **Ribe:** Located on the island of Jutland, this is the best-preserved medieval town in Denmark—known for its narrow cobblestone lanes and crooked, half-timbered houses. An important trading center during the Viking era, it's known today as the town where the endangered stork—the subject of European myth and legend—nests every April. The National Trust protects the medieval center. From April to mid-September a night watchman circles Ribe, spinning tales of the town's legendary days and singing traditional songs. See “Ribe” in chapter 5.
- **Ebeltoft:** On Jutland, this well-preserved town of half-timbered buildings is the capital of the Mols hill country. It's a town of sloping row houses, crooked streets, and local handicraft shops. The Town Hall looks as if it had been erected for kindergarten children; in Ebeltoft you can also visit the 1860 frigate *Jylland*, the oldest man-of-war in Denmark. See “Ebeltoft” in chapter 5.

3 The Best Active Vacations

- **Biking:** A nation of bikers, Denmark has organized the roads to suit the national sport. A network of bike routes and paths is protected

from heavy traffic, and much of the terrain is flat. Bicycling vacations are available as inclusive tours that cover bike rental, ferry tickets, and accommodations en route. Some deluxe tours transport your luggage from one hotel to the next. For more information, contact the **Danish Cycling Federation**, Rømersgade 7, DK-1362 Copenhagen (☎ 33-32-31-21; www.dcf.dk).

- **Camping:** With about 550 officially sanctioned campgrounds, Denmark has one of the highest numbers, per capita, of campgrounds of any nation in the world, and living in a tent or a pop-up trailer in the great outdoors is something of a national obsession. There are plenty of campsites near the city limits of Copenhagen, and many more are located around the country in areas of scenic or historic interest, some near the sea. The official website and address of the **Danish Camping Federation** is www.campingraadet.dk. For information about the nation's campsites visit the website, or call or write at Campingrådet, Mosedalsvej 15, DK-2500 Valby (☎ 39-27-88-44). Other sources of information about camping are available at www.visitdenmark.com (the official website of the Danish Tourist Board), or an equivalent site, www.dk-camp.dk, which lists more than 300 campsites that are privately owned. You can obtain a free *DK Camping Danmark* catalog at all DK-CAMPing grounds, tourist offices, and many service stations.
- **Fishing:** For centuries, much of Denmark relied on the sea and whatever the country's fishermen could pull out of it for its diet. Since then, no smørrebrød buffet has been complete without a selection of shrimp, herring, and salmon. The preparation of plaice, cod, eel, perch, and trout are culinary art forms. The seas off Funen, especially within the Great Belt, have yielded countless tons of seafood, and that tradition has encouraged anglers and sport enthusiasts to test their luck in the rich waters of the Baltic. Many outfitters can introduce you to the mysteries of fresh and saltwater fishing. One of the most consistently reliable is **Ole Dehn**, Søndergard 22, Lohals, DK-5953 Tranekær (☎ 62-55-17-00), on the island of Langeland, south of Funen. Its most popular offering involves half-day deep-sea fishing tours on the Great Sound, which cost 220DKK (\$37) per person.
- **Golf:** There are about 130 golf courses scattered across the flat, sandy, and sometimes windy landscapes of Denmark, many of them landscaped around the sand dunes, ponds, forests, and rocky outcroppings for which the country is well known. Most of the clubs welcome visitors, although in some cases you might be asked to present a membership card from your club at home. Local tourism offices are usually well-versed in steering golfers to worthwhile courses, but for some insight into what's available, click on either of the following websites for information about the sport: www.golfonline.dk or www.golf-in-europe.com/denmark/denmark.htm.
- **Horseback Riding:** Riding schools throughout Denmark rent horses and local tourist offices can hook you up with a stable, if available in their area. Our favorite place for riding is **Kursus & Feriecenter**

Krogbækgaard, Læso, DK-9940 (☎ 98-49-15-05; www.rideferie.dk). It is situated on Langeland, a long and narrow tidal barrier off the southern coast of Funen. The stable houses 120 Icelandic ponies, a sturdy breed that survives well in

the harsh climate and scrub-covered landscape of this windswept island. A 2-hour horseback-riding trek costs 250DKK (\$42), with a 5-hour or 6-hour tour a better value at 600DKK (\$100), including lunch. See “Laesø” in chapter 10.

4 The Best Festivals & Special Events

- **July 4th Festival** (Rebild, near Aalborg): This is one of the few places outside the United States that celebrates U.S. independence. Each year Danes and Danish-Americans gather for picnic lunches, outdoor entertainment, and speeches. See chapter 2.
- **Fire Festival Regatta** (Silkeborg): This is the country's oldest and biggest festival, with nightly cruises on the lakes and illumination provided by thousands of candles onshore. The fireworks display on the final night is without equal in Europe, and Danish artists provide the entertainment at a large fun fair. Usually held the first week in August. See chapter 2.
- **Aalborg Carnival**: Celebrated in late May, this is one of the country's great spring events. Happy

revelers in colorful costumes fill the streets. Almost 10,000 people take part in the celebration, honoring the victory of spring over winter. See chapter 2.

- **Copenhagen Jazz Festival**: One of the finest jazz festivals in Europe takes place in July. During this festival, you can find some of the best musicians in the world jamming here in the Danish capital. Indoor and outdoor concerts—many of them free—are presented. See chapter 2.
- **Viking Festival** (Frederikssund): During this annual festival (mid-June to early July), bearded Vikings revive Nordic sagas in an open-air theater. After each performance, there's a traditional Viking banquet. See chapter 4.

5 The Best Castles & Palaces

- **Christiansborg Palace** (Copenhagen): The queen receives official guests here in the Royal Reception Chamber, where you must don slippers to protect the floors. The complex also holds the Parliament House and the Supreme Court. From 1441 until the fire of 1795, this was the official residence of Denmark's monarchy. You can tour the richly decorated rooms, including the Throne Room and banqueting hall. Below you can see the well-preserved ruins of the 1167 castle of Bishop Absalon, founder of Copenhagen. See chapter 4.

- **Rosenborg Castle** (Copenhagen): Founded by Christian IV in the 17th century, this redbrick Renaissance castle remained a royal residence until the early 19th century when the building was converted into a museum. It still houses the crown jewels, and its collection of costumes and royal memorabilia is unequaled in Denmark. See chapter 4.
- **Kronborg Slot** (Helsingør): Shakespeare never saw this castle, and Hamlet (if he existed at all) lived centuries before it was ever built. But Shakespeare did set his

immortal play here. Intriguing secret passages and casemates fill its cannon-studded bastions, and it often serves as the backdrop for modern productions of *Hamlet*. The brooding statue of Holger Danske sleeps in the dungeon, but, according to legend, this Viking chief will rise again to defend Denmark if the country is endangered. See chapter 4.

- **Frederiksborg Castle** (Hillerød): Known as the Danish Versailles, this moated *slot* (castle) is the most elaborate in Scandinavia. It was built in the Dutch Renaissance style of red brick with a copper roof, and its oldest parts date from 1560. Much of the castle was constructed under the direction of the

“master builder,” Christian IV, from 1600 to 1620. Fire ravaged the castle in 1859, and the structure had to be completely restored. It is now a major national history museum. See chapter 4.

- **Egeskov Castle** (Kværndrup): On the island of Funen, this 1554 Renaissance “water castle” is set amid splendid gardens. The most romantic example of Denmark’s fortified manors, the castle was built in the middle of a moat, surrounded by a park. The best-preserved Renaissance castle of its type in Europe, it has many attractions on its grounds, including airplane and vintage automobile museums. See chapter 5.

6 The Best Offbeat Experiences

- **Cycling Around Ærø:** Regardless of how busy our schedule, we always like to devote at least 1 sunny day on what we view as the greatest cycling trip in Denmark: A slow, scenic ride around the island of Ærø, lying off the coast of Funen. Relatively flat, its countryside dotted with windmills, the island evokes the fields of Holland, but is unique unto itself. Country roads will take you across fertile fields and into villages of cobbled streets and half-timbered houses. You’ll think Hans Christian Andersen planned the island just for you. This is small town Denmark at its best. Yes, you’ll even pass a whistling postman in red jacket and gold and black cap looking like an extra in one of those Technicolor MGM movies from the ’40s. See p. 136.

- **Journeying Back to the 1960s:** If you’re nostalgic for the counter-culture of the 1960s, it lives on in Christiania, a Copenhagen community located at the corner of

Prinsessegade and Badsmændsstræde on Christianshavn. Founded in 1972, this anarchists’ commune occupies former army barracks; its current residents preach a gospel of drugs and peace. Christiania’s residents have even organized their own government and passed laws, for example, to legalize drugs. They’re not complete anarchists, however, since they venture into the city at least once a month to pick up their social welfare checks. Today you can wander about their community, which is complete with a theater, cafes, grocery stores, and even a local radio station. See chapter 4.

- **Exploring Erotica:** Denmark was the first country to “liberate” pornography, in 1968, and today there’s a museum in Copenhagen devoted to the subject. In the **Erotica Museum** (at Købmagergade 24; ☎ 33-12-03-11), you can learn about the sex lives of such famous figures as Nietzsche, Freud, and even Duke Ellington.

Founded by a photographer of nudes, the museum has exhibits ranging from the tame to the tempestuous—everything from Etruscan drawings to pictures of venereal skin disease and sado-masochism videos. See p. 87.

- **Calling on Artists and Craftspeople:** West Jutland has many open workshops where you can see craftspeople in action; you can

meet the potter, the glassblower, the painter, the textile designer, and even the candlestick maker. Local tourist offices can tell you which studios are open to receive guests in such centers as Tønder, Ribe, Esbjerg, Varde, Billund, Herning, Struer, and Skive. The island of Langeland seems to have more artists and artisan studios than most.

7 The Best Buys

- **Danish Design:** It's worth making a shopping trip to Denmark. The simple but elegant style that became fashionable in the 1950s has made a comeback. Danish modern chairs, glassware, and even buildings have returned. Collectors celebrate "old masters" such as Arne Jacobsen, Hans Wegner, and Poul Kjærholm, whose designs from the 1940s and 1950s are sold in antiques stores. Wegner, noted for his sculptured teak chairs, for example, is now viewed as the grand old man of Danish design. Younger designers have followed in the old masters' footsteps, producing carefully crafted items for the home—everything from chairs, desks, and furnishings to table settings and silverware. For the best display of Danish design today, walk along the pedestrians-only Strøget, the major shopping street of Copenhagen. The best single showcase for modern Danish design may be **Illums Bolighus**, Amagertorv 10 (☎ 33-14-19-41).
- **Crystal & Porcelain:** Holmegaard crystal and Royal Copenhagen

porcelain are household names, known for their beauty and craftsmanship. These items cost less in Denmark than in the United States, although signed art glass is costly everywhere. To avoid high prices, you can shop for seconds, which are discounted by 20% to 50% (sometimes the imperfection can be detected only by an expert). The best centers for these collectors' items in Copenhagen are: **Royal Copenhagen Porcelain**, Amagertorv 6 (☎ 33-13-71-81), and **Holmegaards Glasværker**, Amagertorv 6 (☎ 33-12-44-77).

- **Silver:** Danish designers have made a name for themselves in this field. Even with taxes and shipping charges, you can still save about 50% when purchasing silver in Denmark as compared with in the United States. If you're willing to consider "used" silver, you can get some remarkable discounts. The big name in international silver—and you can buy it at the source—is **Georg Jensen**, Amagertorv 6, Copenhagen (☎ 33-11-40-80).

8 The Best Hotels

- **Phoenix Copenhagen** (Copenhagen; ☎ 33-95-95-00): The Danish Communist Party used to

have its headquarters here, but the "Reds" of the Cold War era wouldn't recognize this pocket of

posh today. It reeks of capitalistic excess and splendor, from its dazzling public rooms with French antiques to its rooms with dainty Louis XVI styling. See p. 55.

- **Hotel d'Angleterre** (Copenhagen; ☎ 800/44-UTELL in the U.S., or ☎ 33-12-00-95): Some critics rate this as the finest hotel in Denmark. As it drifted toward mediocrity a few years back, a massive investment was made to save it. Now the hotel is better than ever—housing a swimming pool and a nightclub. Behind its Georgian facade, much of the ambience is in the traditional English mode. Service is among the finest in Copenhagen. See p. 54.
- **Falsled Kro** (Falsled; ☎ 62-68-11-11): Not only is this Funen Island's finest accommodations, but it's the quintessential Danish inn, with origins going back to the 1400s. This Relais & Châteaux property is now a stellar inn with elegant furnishings as well as a top-quality restaurant, rivaling the best in Copenhagen. See p. 135.

- **Hotel Hesselet** (Nyborg; ☎ 65-31-30-29): This stylish modern hotel on Funen Island occupies a woodland setting in a beech forest. The spacious rooms are artfully decorated, often with traditional furnishings. A library, Oriental carpets, and an open fireplace add graceful touches to the public areas. Many Copenhagen residents come here for a retreat, patronizing the hotel's gourmet restaurant at night. See p. 127.
- **Hotel Dagmar** (Ribe; ☎ 75-42-00-33): Jutland's most glamorous hotel was converted from a private home in 1850, although the building itself dates back to 1581. This half-timbered hotel encapsulates the charm of the 16th century, with such adornments as carved chairs, sloping wooden floors, and stained-glass windows. Many bedrooms are furnished with antique canopy beds. A fine restaurant, serving both Danish and international dishes, completes the picture. See p. 149.

9 The Best Restaurants

- **Era Ora** (Copenhagen; ☎ 32-54-06-93): This is the best Italian restaurant in Denmark. This 20-year-old restaurant is the domain of two Tuscan-born partners who have delighted some of the most discerning palates in Copenhagen. Denmark's superb array of fresh seafood, among other produce, is given a decidedly Mediterranean twist at this citadel of refined cuisine. See p. 66.
- **Godt** (Copenhagen; ☎ 33-15-21-22): Even the Queen of Denmark dines at this superb restaurant, celebrated locally for its international cuisine. The best and freshest of produce and various ingredients at the market are

fashioned into the most pleasing and quintessential of dishes. See p. 67.

- **The Paul** (Copenhagen; ☎ 33-75-07-75): Winning a coveted Michelin star, this is the best restaurant among the deluxe dining rooms of the famous Tivoli Gardens. Drawing gourmet diners with its carefully crafted international menu, it offers an inspired cuisine in these pleasure gardens. There is a daring and innovation here found in no other Tivoli restaurant. See p. 63.
- **Marie Louise** (Odense; ☎ 66-17-92-95): Glittering with crystal and silver, this dining room on a pedestrian street is one of the

finest on the island of Funen. In an antique house, this Danish/Franco alliance offers a cuisine that's the epitome of taste, preparation, and service. Seafood and fish are the favored dishes. See p. 131.

- **Falsled Kro** (Falsled; ☎ 62-68-11-11): Even if you don't stay here, consider stopping for a meal. A favorite among well-heeled

Europeans, this restaurant produces a stellar French-inspired cuisine and often uses seasonal produce from its own gardens. The succulent salmon is smoked on the premises in one of the out-buildings, and the owners breed quail locally. Such care and attention to detail make this one of Denmark's top restaurants. See p. 135.