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Take a getaway to Copenhagen

Georganne Brennan Nov 12, 2017

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The colorful 17th-century buildings line the old port district of Nyehaven in Copenhagen.

Georganne Brennan photo

Denmark's capital, Copenhagen, and its surrounding area include world class museums, miles of coastline, canal rides and ferry trips, plus Tivoli Gardens, the second-oldest theme park in the world.

The city also has a vibrant, creative food world, as chefs increasingly draw from the country's forests, seas, and farms, infusing classic cuisine with a Nordic twist from gathered moss to rye- infused schnapps.

There is plenty of Viking lore, iconic design houses, and lots of fascinating shops, all of which make Denmark's capital an exciting getaway for northern California fans of food and style. It is especially easy with Norwegian Airways new flights departing from Oakland. Once you arrive in Copenhagen, you'll discover that public transportation, from bicycles to subways, trains, and efficient buses, means a car isn't necessary.

If you opt to stay in the heart of the city, a half-hour walk in any direction will take you to some of the area's top sights, restaurants, and stores. A half-hour train ride from Copenhagen will take you such sites as the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde or to a revamped Victorian-era spa hotel built on the coast across from Sweden.

There are many centrally located hotels in Copenhagen with a wide range in price and location, including the Admiral Hotel right on the waterfront created from an 18th-century warehouse, the white minareted Hotel Nimb, designed like an Moorish Palace and set in its own garden grounds inside Tivoli Gardens, and the grand Hotel d'Angleterre, first established in 1755 and completely renovated a few years ago.

The Hotel d'Angleterre houses a spa, a Michelin-starred restaurant, a Champagne bar, Balthazar, its own floral design shop, and views of the old port, Nyhavn. A favorite of Denmark's Queen Margrethe II, the hotel is also a favorite of international celebrities.

When I arrived there, I learned I had just missed Mick Jagger and his entourage who had departed the day before. It's a popular place with locals too who enjoy the bar for a drink and snack, and the restaurant for fine dining at lunch or dinner. Even if you are not staying at the d'Angleterre, it is worth a visit to this iconic hotel, and I'd suggest a meal there too, if possible, for a sample of some of the elegant fare on offer at Marchal featuring red deer, pheasant, Danish oysters, and wild mushrooms.

For a leisurely overview of Copenhagen, take a trip aboard one of the many canal boats that ply the narrow, inner city waterways, crossing under the bridges, and adventuring into the outer harbor. You can get stellar views of the modern opera house and of the concert hall, and also the famous statue of Hans Christian Anderson's Little Mermaid.

Canal boats come equipped with headphones that can be dialed to different languages, making it easy to enjoy the sights while having them identified. Round trip canal boat trips can be booked canal side at Nyhavn, the old port district, and on your return it's fun to wander along the colorful quay with its 17th century buildings, many of them now cafes and restaurants, and to the opera house and park beyond. Or, turn away from the port to discover warrens of streets full of design ware, boutiques, specialty shops and restaurants, including the highly popular Aamans 1921 which specializes in contemporary concoctions of traditional smorrebords.

A half-hour walk from Nyhavn in yet another direction, is the 19th-century arched gateway entrance to the fabled Tivoli Gardens. It's full of fanciful gardens, decorative pathways, and cottages with flowering sod roofs interspersed with roller coaster rides, an old-fashioned merry go round, boutiques, restaurants and cafes.

Tivoli is a place where Copenhageners come to enjoy themselves with their families and friends as well as being a must-see for visitors. It has a seasonal schedule and is open from spring through late September, opening again for Halloween season, and for Christmas and winter holidays. I visited during the Halloween season, and the park was lavishly decorated with 22,000 fresh pumpkins of all shapes and sizes, witches and broomsticks, spiders and spider webs. Come the other seasons, the park will be decorated accordingly.

A short train ride from Copenhagen's Central Station, just across from Tivoli, will take you to the small town of Skodsborg on the Oresound leading to the Baltic Sea and just across the narrow strait from Sweden. From the station it's only a five-minute walk to the Kurhotel Skodsborg where you can book yourself for a glorious spa repose, enjoy local, fresh Nordic food in settings from casual to elegant, or even take a cooking class.

The spa experience alone is worth the trip. The pools, saunas, treatment, yoga, and fitness rooms are located primarily on the second floors of the resort, just below the brasserie and terrace on the third floor, so the spaces are filled with light streaming in from windows that overlook the watery expanse of the sound.

My favorite was a the saunagus, which combines aromatherapy with the sauna, and involves a sauna mistress or master orchestrating with various scents such as juniper, pine, lemon grass, and citrus, interspersed with ice and waves of extra intense heat, and then culminates with a dip into the icy waters of the sound just across the road. It was a wonderfully vitalizing experience, and I was ready to do it again the next day.

At the rear of the hotel is a red gate that leads down a woodsy path and through a tunnel to enter into the Jaegersborg Forest Park for an immersion into nature. Here you can hike or bike the trails to the neighboring village or simply soak in the quiet forest that is home to over 2000 red deer and many other woodland animals. Bikes are complimentary at the hotel.

A short train or bus ride will take you further along the coast to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, located on extensive grounds along the sound, with a café and gift store. Upcoming exhibits are of Picasso's Ceramics, and the paintings of the German Impressionist, Gabriele Munter.

Visiting Copenhagen offers such a range of experiences, vistas, and discoveries, making it one of Europe's must-see cities.

Georgeanne Brennan is a frequent traveler to food- inspired destinations when she is not home in Northern California writing and tending her on-line kitchen and garden store, La Vie Rustic – Sustainable Living in the French Style www.lavierustic.com.