

1

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 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. You join the host family and other guests for meals. You can learn about what's going on at the farm, and pitch in and help with the chores if you like. Activities range from bonfires and folk dancing to riding lessons or even horse-and-buggy rides. Although the official agency that used to arrange such holidays is no longer in existence, many visitors seeking this kind of offbeat accommodation often surf the Internet for farms that advertise their willingness to receive guests. Or, decide which part of Denmark you'd like to be located in, then contact the nearest tourist office to see which farms are willing to accept paying guests.
- **On the Road on a Bike:** Denmark is relatively flat, making it one of the best countries in Europe for touring on two wheels. You pass green hills, half-timbered villages, castles, manor houses, beech forests, and lakes as you roll along. Cyclists are given high priority in traffic. You can set out on your own, but a company that's loosely affiliated with the Danish tourist office is **Bike Denmark**, Olaf Poulsens Allé 1A, DK-3480 Fredensborg (☎ 48-48-58-00; www.bikedenmark.com). It offers eight different self-guided bike tours of Denmark. Some depart from Copenhagen; others cover parts of Funen and, in some cases, southern Sweden. Tours last for 5 to 10 days, and cover 20km to 60km (13–37 miles) per day. Detailed maps and directions are given to each cyclist, who proceeds at his or her own pace along itineraries especially selected for their exposure to areas of historic interest or natural beauty. Luggage is transported ahead of time and awaits participants in their hotel rooms at the end of a long day of cycling.
- **A Day (& Night) at the Tivoli:** These 150-year-old pleasure gardens are worth the airfare to

Copenhagen all by themselves. They're a little bit of everything: open-air dancing, restaurants, theaters, concert halls, an amusement park . . . and, oh yes, gardens. 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 anytime, but are especially nice at twilight, when the lights begin to glint off the trees. See chapter 4.

- **On the Trail of the Vikings:** Renowned for 3 centuries of fantastic exploits, the Vikings explored Greenland, North America, and the Caspian Sea from roughly A.D. 750 to 1050. Their legacy endures 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 on exhibit. At Roskilde, explore the Viking Ship Museum. It contains five vessels found in a fjord nearby, the largest of which was built in Ireland around 1060 and manned by 60

to 100 warriors. And 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 an all-around sound and vision experience. See chapters 4 and 5.

- **In the Footsteps of Hans Christian Andersen:** To some visitors, this storyteller is *the* symbol of Denmark. The fairy tale lives on in Odense, on the island of Funen, where the shoemaker's son was born 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. Andersens Hus, see the large store of memorabilia (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, and marvel at his life and works. In the words of his obituary, they struck "chords that reverberated in every human heart," as they still do today. See chapter 5.

2 The Best Scenic Towns & Villages

- **Dragør:** At the doorstep of Copenhagen, this old seafaring town once flourished as a bustling herring-fishing port. Time passed it by, however, and for that we can be grateful. It looks much as it used to, with half-timbered ocher-and-pink 18th-century cottages—all with thatched or red-tiled roofs. The entire village is under the protection of the National Trust. A 35-minute ride from the Danish capital will take you back 2 centuries. See chapter 4.
- **Ærøskøbing:** This is storybook Denmark. The little village on the country's most charming island, Ærø, lies 29km (18 miles) across the water south of Svendborg. A 13th-century market town, it is a Lilliputian souvenir of the past, complete with little gingerbread houses. You expect Hansel and Gretel to arrive at any moment. See chapter 5.
- **Ribe:** On the peninsula of Jutland, this is the best-preserved medieval town in Denmark. It's famous 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—often the

subject of European myth and legend—flies back in April to nest. The medieval center of Ribe is protected by the National Trust. From April until mid-September, a night watchman circles the town, spinning tales of its legendary days and singing traditional songs. See chapter 5.

- **Odense:** Thousands of Hans Christian Andersen's fans visit the storyteller's birthplace every year. Denmark's third-largest city has a medieval core, and you can walk its cobblestone streets and admire its half-timbered houses, including the H. C. Andersens Hus. Odense is also a worthwhile destination in its own right, with many attractions (including St. Canute's

Cathedral) in the city and nearby. On the outskirts you can explore everything from the 1554 Renaissance castle Egeskov to a 22m (72-ft.) long 10th-century Viking ship (at Ladby, 19km/12 miles north-east of Odense). See 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 though it were erected for kindergartners to play in. In Ebeltoft you can also visit the 1860 frigate *Jylland*, the oldest man-of-war in Denmark. See 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:** There are a number of pleasant, well-equipped campgrounds near Copenhagen and elsewhere, and a total of 516 throughout the country. For information about campsites and facilities, contact the tourist information office in the town or region that appeals to you. You can also write to a nationwide organization devoted to marketing Danish campgrounds to the rest of the world, the **Campingraadet**,

Mosedalvei 15, DK-2500 Copenhagen (☎ 39-27-88-44).

- **Fishing:** For centuries, Danes relied on what fishers could pull out of the sea for their 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's 1,095km (680-mile) coastline, 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; www.oledehn.dk). Its most popular offering involves half-day deep-sea fishing tours on the Great Sound, which cost 220DKK (\$29) per person. The 6-hour

Scandinavia



fishing experience, from 8am to 2pm, is conducted whenever business warrants it. Their headquarters are not on the island of Funen but on a long and skinny barrier

island, Langeland, directly fronting the Great Belt's rich schools of fish.

- **Golfing:** In recent years, golf has become quite popular in Denmark. There are more than

8 CHAPTER 1 · THE BEST OF DENMARK

100 clubs throughout the country, most of which welcome visitors—all you need is a membership card from your club at home. Several clubs have a pro trainer, golf shop, clubroom, and restaurant. Contact local tourist offices for a list of the golf courses in the regions you plan to visit.

- **Horseback Riding:** Riding schools throughout Denmark rent horses; local tourist offices can offer advice. Our favorite place for riding is the Isle of Læsø (off the northern coast of Jutland), which you can explore on the back of an Icelandic pony; a 1-hour riding tour costs 130DKK (\$17) for adults or 110DKK

(\$14) for children ages 4 to 15. The stable is large, with 140 Icelandic ponies, the sturdy, cold-resistant breed which, although small, are very sturdy with a comfortable “seat.” As opposed to most other breeds, Icelandic ponies have five gaits—not only walk, trot, and canter, but a tilt and a “pass.” After you gallop past salt marshes and birds, you can stop from time to time to relax on the beach. For more information, contact **Krogbækgaard**, Byrum, DK-9940 Læsø (☎ 98-49-15-05; www.rideferie.dk). Boats sail to Læsø from the port of Frederikshavn in North Jutland.

4 The Best Festivals & Special Events

- **July 4 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 on May 21, this is one of the country’s great spring events. Happy

folk in colorful costumes fill the streets. Almost 10,000 people take part in the celebration, honoring the victory of spring over winter. The whole city bursts with joy. See chapter 2.

- **Copenhagen Jazz Festival:** One of the finest jazz festivals in Europe takes place in July. Some of the best musicians in the world show up to jam in the Danish capital. Indoor and outdoor concerts—many of them free—are presented. See chapter 2.
- **Viking Festival** (Frederikssund): During this annual festival (June 19–July 15), 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

- **Kronborg Slot** (Helsingør): Shakespeare never saw this castle, and Hamlet (if he existed) lived centuries before it was built. But Shakespeare set his immortal play

here—the Bard has spoken, and that’s that. Its cannon-studded bastions are full of intriguing secret passages and openings for guns, and it often serves as the

backdrop for modern productions of *Hamlet*. The brooding mythical hero Holger Danske is said to be asleep in the dungeon and, according to the legend, the Viking chief will rise again to defend Denmark if it is endangered. See chapter 4.

- **Christiansborg Palace** (Copenhagen): The queen receives official guests 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 monarchs. You can tour the richly decorated rooms, including the Throne Room and banquet 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 it 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.

- **Frederiksborg Castle** (Hillerød): Known as the Danish Versailles, this *slot* (castle) with a moat is the most elaborate in Scandinavia. Built in the Dutch Renaissance style of red brick with a copper roof, the castle's oldest parts date from 1560. Much of the castle was constructed under the direction of the "master builder," Christian IV, from 1600 to 1620. Now a major national history museum, the castle was ravaged by fire in 1859 and had to be completely restored. See chapter 4.
- **Egeskov Castle** (Kværndrup): On the island of Funen, this 1554 "water castle" is set amid splendid gardens. It's the most romantic example of Denmark's fortified manors. Built in the middle of a moat, it's surrounded by a 74-hectare (30-acre) park. The best-preserved Renaissance castle of its type in Europe, it has many attractions on its grounds, including an airplane museum and a vintage automobile museum. See chapter 5.

6 The Best Offbeat Experiences

- **Calling on Artists & 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 guests in such centers as Tønder, Ribe, Esbjerg, Varde, Billund, Herning, Struer, and Skive. One of our favorite crafts studios lies in Jutland, 26km (16 miles) west of Esbjerg, near the town of Blåvand, on a farmstead in the tiny agrarian hamlet of Ho. Here, the

husband-and-wife team of Asger Kristensen and Inga Sørensen directs the **Havlit Stentøj studios**, at Vesterballevej 1, Ho, DK 6857 Blåvand (☎ 75-27-95-93). Jointly, the couple produces charming ceramics, including hand-painted replicas of birds—some rustic, some more detailed and refined. The artists take their inspiration from the rugged landscapes of West Jutland in their fabrication of such additional objects as urns, pots, and bas-reliefs. Hours are from April to October, Monday through Friday from 10am to 5:30pm; from November to

March, Monday through Friday from noon to 4pm.

- **Making People-to-People Contacts:** If you'd like to meet Scandinavians with interests and backgrounds like yours, the best "bridge" is **Friends Overseas**, 68-04 Dartmouth St., Forest Hills, NY 11375 (☎ 718/544-5660). There's a \$25 fee for your "hookup" in Scandinavia, but for many it's worth the money to have this close encounter with these bright, articulate people, who are among the most educated in the world. Know in advance that there isn't any background investigation of the people you're going to be matched with, and everything is very casual and free-form—basically the Scandinavians listed in the company's handbook are whoever happens to fill out the proper forms. But based on the instincts of company founder Larry Eisner, and the natural friendliness of the Scandinavians, social encounters usually work out happily, without unpleasant incidents. Contact information is grouped into sub-categories that include families with children, couples, and singles. For more information, see "People to People," in chapter 2.
- **Journeying Back to the 1960s:** If you're nostalgic for the counter-culture, it lives on in Christiania, a

Copenhagen community at the corner of Prinsessegade and Badsmandsstræde on the island of Christianshavn. Founded in 1972, this is an anarchists' commune that occupies former army barracks; its current residents preach the 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—they do venture into the city at least once a month to pick up their social welfare checks. Today you can wander about the community, which has 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), you can learn about the sex lives of such famous figures as Nietzsche, Freud, and Duke Ellington. Founded by a photographer of nudes, the exhibits range from the tame to the tempestuous—everything from Etruscan drawings to pictures of venereal skin disease and sadomasochism videos. See chapter 4.

7 The Best Buys

- **Danish Design:** The simple but elegant lines that became fashionable in the 1950s have made a comeback. Danish modern chairs, glassware, and even buildings have returned. "Old masters" such as Arne Jacobsen, Hans Wegner, and Poul Kjærholm are celebrated; their designs from the 1940s and 1950s are sold in antiques stores. Wegner, noted for his sculptured

teak chairs, is now viewed as the grand old man of Danish design. Younger designers have followed in the footsteps of the "old masters," 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,

Copenhagen's major shopping street. The best single showcase for modern Danish design may be **Illums Bolighus**, Amagerterv 10 (© 33-14-19-41).

- **Crystal & Porcelain:** Holmegaard crystal and Royal Copenhagen porcelain are household names, known for their beauty and craftsmanship. The items cost less in Denmark than in the States, although signed art glass is always extremely costly. To cut costs, you can shop for seconds, which are discounted by 20% to 50%—sometimes the imperfection can be detected only by an expert. Copenhagen's best centers

for these collectors' items are **Royal Copenhagen Porcelain**, Amagerterv 6 (© 33-13-71-81), and **Holmegaards Glasværker**, Amagerterv 6 (© 33-12-44-77).

- **Silver:** Danish designers have made a name for themselves in this field. Even with taxes and shipping charges, buying silver in Denmark is about half as costly as doing so in the States. If you're willing to consider "used" silver, you can get some remarkable discounts. The big name in international silver is **Georg Jensen**, Amagerterv 6, Copenhagen (© 33-11-40-80)—and you can buy it at the source.

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 bedrooms with dainty Louis XVI styling. See p. 60.
- **Hotel d'Angleterre** (Copenhagen; © 800/44-UTELL in the U.S., or 33-12-00-95): Some critics rate this the finest hotel in Denmark. It drifted toward mediocrity a few years back, before a massive investment saved it. Now the hotel is better than ever, and houses a swimming pool and a nightclub. The service is among the finest in Copenhagen. See p. 60.
- **Falsled Kro** (Falsled; © 62-68-11-11): Funen Island's finest accommodation is this quintessential Danish inn, with origins going back to the 1400s. A Relais & Châteaux property, it has been elegantly furnished and converted

into a stellar inn with a top-quality restaurant that rivals the very best in Copenhagen. See p. 137.

- **Hotel Dagmar** (Ribe; © 75-42-00-33): Jutland's most glamorous hotel was converted from a private home in 1850, and the building dates to 1581. This half-timbered hotel encapsulates the charm of the 16th century, with carved chairs, sloping wooden floors, and stained-glass windows. Many of the rooms have antique canopy beds. A fine restaurant that serves Danish and international dishes completes the picture. See p. 151.
- **Hotel Hesselet** (Nyborg; © 65-31-30-29): This stylish, modern hotel on Funen is set in a beech forest. The spacious guest 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 head here for a retreat, patronizing the hotel's gourmet restaurant at night. See p. 129.

9 The Best Restaurants

- **Era Ora** (Copenhagen; © 32-54-06-93): The Golden Age (its English name) is the grandest Italian restaurant in Denmark, and one of the best of its kind in northern Europe, even attracting members of the royal family. The cuisine is based on the best recipes of Tuscany and Umbria, using the freshest of Danish produce when available. See p. 69.
- **Kommandanten** (Copenhagen; © 33-12-09-90): A house built by a Danish commander for his family in 1698 accommodates this restaurant. The menu reflects the finest Continental and Mediterranean influences in such dishes as foie gras with lobster and truffle sauce, and pigeon sautéed with bacon, cabbage, and cherries. Fresh seafood is served in every conceivable way. The wooden floors and beams date to the 17th century, but the Warhol art makes the restaurant look trendy. See p. 70.
- **Divan II** (Copenhagen; © 33-12-51-51): This early-19th-century slate house was constructed when the lush Tivoli Gardens were being laid out. In this romantic setting, you can enjoy both a meal and a view over the lake across from the Hans Christian Andersen Castle. The chefs prepare the gardens' most refined cuisine, ranging from rack of Danish lamb roasted with garlic and sage to mousseline of lobster baked with turbot and served with asparagus spears. See p. 68.
- **Marie Louise** (Odense; © 66-17-92-95): Glittering with crystal and silver, this dining room, located on a pedestrian street, is one of the finest on the island of Funen. In an antique house, this Danish-French alliance offers excellent cuisine, preparation, and service. Seafood and fish are the favored dishes. See p. 133.
- **Falsled Kro** (Falsled; © 62-68-11-11): Even if you don't stay here, consider enjoying a meal. A favorite among well-heeled Europeans, the restaurant produces stellar French-inspired cuisine, often using seasonal produce from its own gardens. The succulent salmon is smoked on the premises in one of the outbuildings, and the owners breed quail locally. Such care and attention to detail make this one of Denmark's top restaurants. See p. 137.