

COPENHAGEN

Vikings raided and terrorized Europe, but latter-day Danes became a model for tolerant coexistence. The spirit of the '60s took root and survived longer here than almost anywhere else, making the city's name synonymous with social change. Forces of reaction threaten that reputation with bulldozers, but for now Copenhagen still hangs loose.

Michael Thompson

the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen is Scandinavia's preeminent city. Hans Christian Andersen gave the world fairy tales and lived a bit-sweet and likely bisexual life here. Long before there was a Copenhagen, the far-ranging Vikings ventured from here to leave their mark across Europe and beyond. Later Danes established colonies in India and the Caribbean. On what are now the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Danish sugar plantations are gone, but you still see the blond-haired descendants of their owners and omnipresent Danish names.

Founded in 1167, Copenhagen became the Danish capital in 1443. The period of greatest growth was during the Danish

Renaissance when much of the most interesting architecture was built by King Christian IV. Notable legacies from this time include Rosenborg Castle, the Round Tower, and the Stock Exchange. They survive today, despite the great fires of the 18th century and the British naval bombardments of 1801 and 1807 which devastated much of the city.

Greater Copenhagen has grown to a population of around 1.9 million today—almost one-third of all Danes. English is almost universally spoken; Danes learn it from an early age. Because most movies and much of the TV are in English, Danes share a good deal of popular culture with Americans, Canadians, and Brits, while retaining their distinct national identity.

Dunst (Dunst.dk) is a group of queer

activists, briefly residents of Christiania's Gay House, that does music, radio, parties, performances, and community consciousness-raising in Denmark and beyond. Closely associated is the Queer Festival of the past two years (2007's was July 9 to 15) involving local artists, musicians, DJs, performers (drag and otherwise), and workshops seeking "alternatives to heteronormative culture, politics, and spaces." You can get the flavor at Queerfestival.org and

Monster at City Hall



Monsters atop the Stock Exchange

Myspace.com/copenhagenqueerfestival.

The Copenhagen Gay & Lesbian Film Festival (Cglff.dk) will screen October 19 to 28, and the Nørrebro Theatre (Nbt.dk) has stage presentations of gay interest, including *Hedwig*, through November 10. Radio Rosa (Radiorosa.dk) has broadcast gay radio since 1983, at 98.9 FM (from 9:30 p.m. daily, except Sunday 4 to 6 p.m.).

Other annual gay dates include the annual Midsummer Night celebration at Helgoland at Amager Beach each June 23, and Gay Pride (Copenhagenpride.dk), each August.

Gay history

Until the 1830s few Danes were officially punished for sex with men or boys. Rapid urban growth after the 1860s brought a discernible "sodomitical" subculture, but it took tabloid sensationalism of the 1890s and homosexual prostitution scandals for a 1905 law to be passed forbidding the practice. From 1906 to 1911 there was massive press coverage, and homosexual suicides, round-ups, and exiles became frequent. Two early noted gay celebrities – critic Clemens Petersen and actor Joakim Reinhard – fled to the U.S. to avoid scandal.

Changes came with the general radicalization of the 1930s, which helped the passage in 1933 of a law decriminalizing homosexuality for those over 18. But in a backlash after World War II, police began arresting men for sex in public places, and age-of-consent laws were more strictly enforced. In response, the "League of 1948" homophile organization was launched and began publishing *Pan* in 1954 – now the world's oldest continuously published homosexual magazine.

In the 1970s, as elsewhere in the world, organizations such as the Gay Liberation Front were formed with a more confrontational agenda. The League, renamed the National Association of Gays and Lesbians (Lbl.dk), later re-assumed leadership of the movement with an assimilationist approach, advancing the position that Danish queers see themselves first as Danes, an interest group – not a separate minority apart from the larger society. The very success of integration helps explain what is, for such a large city, Copenhagen's relatively small gay subculture.

Parliament in 1987 forbade discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and in 1989 introduced "registered partnerships," which the Lutheran state church began blessing in 1997. Gay-parent adoptions were legalized in 1999, and many politicians and other public figures are now openly gay.

Going out

Today most gay nightlife is contained within one-square kilometer of the old city adjacent to City Hall (Rådhus) Square, so walking or a cycle-cab will get you most anywhere. Bicycles are free to take from racks throughout the city (with a 20-kroner deposit) to use within the central district, and the city is well served by frequent buses, a metro, and regional trains. The main rail station is also at the city center.

Among the gay bars in the old city **Oscar** (Rådhuspladsen 77) bar and cafe is the easiest to find, just to the north of City Hall clock tower. Open daily from noon, it's a great start for a tour of gay Copenhagen. They have a full bar, sandwiches and omelets, wi-fi access, and a young, friendly, smiling staff. Their information corner has local gay and arts periodicals and maps, events listings and business cards. Weather permitting, they have outdoor tables too. On weekend nights it's standing-room only as they fill up before everyone heads out to dance, and the guys who work here can fill you in on the hottest dance club of the moment.

Just around the corner, **Centralhjørnet Bar** (Kattesundet 18) is the oldest gay bar in town, with pleasant old-fashioned pub ambiance, and a friendly, older clientele. The nearby **Can Can** (Mikkel Bryggers Gade 11) is a small establishment, also with an older but welcoming crowd. **Code** (Rådhusstræde 1) will open sometime in October as a sophisticated lounge bar.

Men's Bar (Teglgårdstræde 3) is just that, a place for men – just guys – young and old, of all kinds. A tradition persists here of buying a drink for someone who catches your fancy across the bar, and it's an easy-to-meet-people kind of place. Each first Sunday afternoon there's a big spread laid on here for their customers, friends, and visitors.

Jailhouse (Stuðiestræde 12) is a play-

ful lock-up look-alike and the staff dresses the part in uniform. The basement bar is long and usually packed with guys, and the dining room upstairs is popular with locals, too. **Scandinavian Leather Men** or **SLR** (Stuðiestræde 14a), a fetish membership club for men, has a strict dress code. Look for info about their new location around the new year.

Masken Bar (Stuðiestræde 33) is a bi-level hang-out, mostly young guys, with internet access. Directly across the street, **Cosy** (Stuðiestræde 24) is a small gay dance club – so small and narrow it does indeed get quite intimate in the crush.

Larger dance clubs include: **Below** (Axeltorv 3), across from Tivoli Gardens, with a young, energetic, mostly male Saturday crowd, some revelers stripping down to their underwear; **Blender** (Hausergade 34), another new, and already popular, dance spot up near Rosenborg Gardens; **Dunkel** (Myspace.com/dunkelbar); and **Rocco** (Zum Biergarten, Axeltorv 12). **Pan** was Copenhagen's biggest gay dance club since 1970, but it closed earlier this year. See Ziraf.dk for more dance party listings.

Besides the many Turkish *döner kebab* shops, there's a home-grown alternative to the American fast food joints. The first *pølsevogn* (sausage stand) appeared in Denmark around 1910, and today more than 130 million red *pølser* are consumed annually. Just watching people eat them can spark the imagination. Restaurants of assorted ethnicities offer varied food options, and many buffets and *smørrebrød* at lunchtime offer good value for the price. **RizRaz** (Kompagnistræde 20) is one such, with veggie options, and it's open until midnight daily. For sumptuous deserts try **Konditori La Glace** (Skoubogade 3), serving sweet treats since 1870.

Amigo Sauna (Stuðiestræde 31a) is the largest sauna in Copenhagen with steamy facilities on three floors, a maze, and cabins for a romp with new-found friends.

Copenhagen Gay Center (Istedgade 34) has a porn shop, four cinemas, dark-and-playrooms, and a dry sauna. **Body Bio** (Kingsgade 7) has gay and bisexual recreation and cruising with a store, a sauna, and play spaces. **Shop 6** (Gasvaerksvej 6),

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At Below



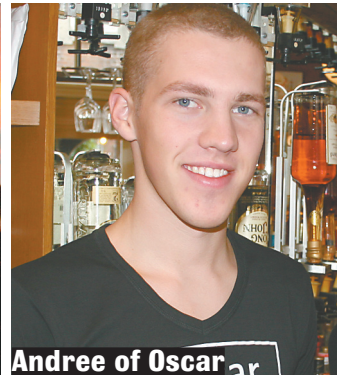
At Masken



At Jailhouse



Lars of Below, Lorenzo of Oscar



Andree of Oscar



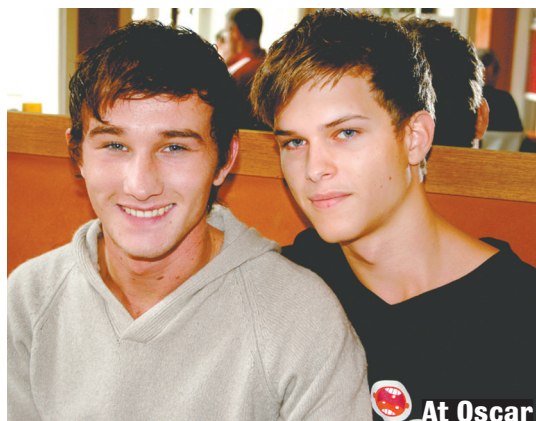
Kristian & Carl-Emil of Oscar



At Below



At Men's Bar



At Oscar



Johannes of Oscar



At Oscar



At Below



At Men's Bar



At Below



Knut of Masken



Kenneth & Johan of Jailhouse



At Below



At Oscar



Southwest
gate to Christiania



Christiania Hangs On

Its public face is radical, druggy, edgy, young, male, confrontative, and embattled. The setting contrasts bucolic with post-apocalyptic. Can this semi-autonomous social experiment survive in today's chillier political climate?

Michael Thompson

Denmark's reputation as a socially progressive society was confirmed in the 1960s with legal reforms that, for instance, decriminalized most kinds of pornography in 1969. But today's Venstre/Conservative coalition government is not as tolerant in some ways as previous ones, despite Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's personal support for issues such as gay marriage. His government has been a staunch ally of the Bush administration's war policies.

Freetown Christiania's survival is one flashpoint of controversy. The former military barracks and surrounding waterfront lands have been home to a semi-autonomous community for the past 36 years. The communally-held property is everywhere colorfully daubed with graffiti art, and its green open spaces have been a retreat for outsiders, artists, and others, who have dropped in here seeking relief from economic pressures, and to try out new ideas and social groupings. This longtime and ad-hoc social experiment, permitted to flourish under previous administrations, is now threatened by governmental reversals and plans to retake the central area for conven-

tional, market-driven development.

Since police shut down "pusher street," the open hash smoking is slightly more discreet among the throng of mostly young males in "downtown" Christiania. The National Museum acquired one of the more colorful hash stands from the old days, and the hash dealers themselves moved back under the trees. Remaining stalls sell head-shop items, beads, t-shirts, and other counter-culture stuff. Hard drugs are not tolerated, but the community makes a point of not rejecting addicts as individuals, accepting them as part of the social fabric.

One nearby building houses a Tibetan Buddhist meditation area, adorned with pictures of the Dalai Lama and selling "Save Christiania" buttons. In another structure there's a skateboarder's heaven of ramps and bowls. At the open-air bar/restaurant, unconventional is the norm – for both customers and staff. Tourists pass through, as if crossing a movie set – but without their cameras, as photography is discouraged, for obvious reasons.

Gay House stands empty these days. The original founders either died or moved away, and the Dunst queer group, members of which tried to live there recently, didn't fit in (some-

thing about style, or clashes in music preference, were the reasons given, glossing over, I suspect, something deeper). So they moved on, to do their thing elsewhere.

More politically motivated and confrontational folk were involved in protests last March against the forced demolition of Ungdomshuset (Youth House) in Nørrebro, a multi-ethnic neighborhood with a multitude of shops and restaurants. The building, which served as an alternative community center, was the site for the Second International, and was visited by both Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg. A series of demonstrations this September in memory of the building resulted in more clashes with police.

Whatever results from these wranglings, at least there is still debate among people here, outside the box of consumerism. It's a place where fear-mongering politicians, the conventional demons, saints, and the European Union are

all challenged. Men piss on walls in public as well as hold hands together, and mothers don't clasp hands over children's eyes at the sight of either. Christiania's gritty truth doesn't make it into the travel fluff about Copenhagen's Little Mermaid and Royal Danish pottery – all of which is nice, but remains the stuff of theme parks. Like H.C. Andersen's fairytales or the monsters on the Stock Exchange building, there's that something else beneath the calm surface here, something that's struggled at birth elsewhere. Some lingering Viking orneriness? ▼



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also sells DVDs. **Men's Shop** (Viktoriagade 24) is another sex shop with play spaces.

Accommodations

Carstens Guesthouse (Christians Bygge 28; Carstensguesthouse.dk) has rooms from singles or dorms, to larger suites – all at reasonable rates. There's a kitchen, a breakfast option, free wi-fi internet, a roof-deck garden, and cable TV, plus the use of phones, computer, bicycles, DVD movies, and laundry facilities for a little extra. Carsten is helpful with info on sights and city nightlife.

Copenhagen Rainbow B&B (Frederiksberggade 25c; Copenhagen-rainbow.dk) is above the central pedestrian shopping street, Strøget, and near City Hall Square and all the bars and restaurants.

Hotel Windsor (Frederiksborggade 30; Hotelwindsor.dk) is a gay hotel on the other side of Ørsted's Park. **Amagerhus** (Skovmarken 4a; Amagerus.dk) is a small gay-friendly B&B near the airport and Amager Beach. See more hotels listed on our website.

Other attractions, events, information

Ørsted's Park is the gayest of green open spaces. It's been a cruising area for over a century, maybe inspired by bronze replicas of classic Greek male nudes that adorn paths circling the central lake. The park is open 24 hours, but the local gay press advises caution after dark. Bellevue and Tisvildeleje beaches are gay-favored swimming areas.

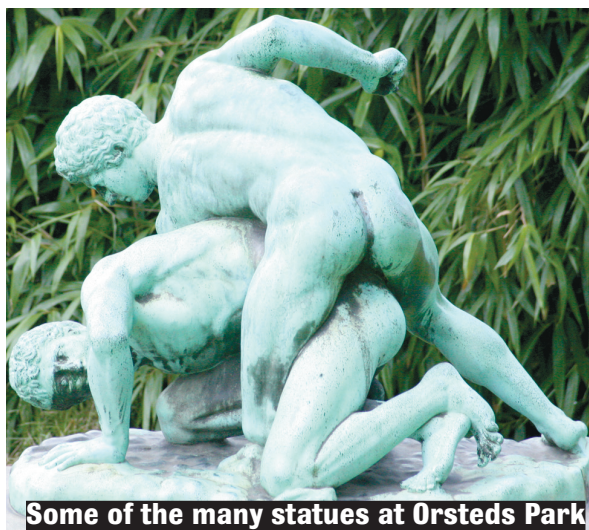
Tivoli Gardens, the famous amusement park, is another downtown attraction, and the National Museum, the National Art Gallery, and Rosenborg Castle are also worth a visit. See website Visitcopenhagen.com for more on the city's tourist charms.

Websites Copenhagen-gay-life.dk and Gayguide.dk, and the magazines *Pan Bladet* (Panbladet.dk) and *Out & About* (Out-and-about.dk) have more information. Gay maps can be found online and around town.

From July 25 to August 2, 2009, Copenhagen will be host to the World Outgames. See Copenhagen2009.org for more details about this big gay sports event. ▼



A summer's evening in Copenhagen



Some of the many statues at Ørsted's Park