



## Copenhagen

by Dag Heede

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Apart from Stockholm, Copenhagen is the only large Nordic city. Its glbtq subculture is, however, small, since queers are well integrated into Copenhagen society. Today, Copenhagen is a popular tourist destination for glbtq people from other parts of Scandinavia and around the world.

The city itself has about one million inhabitants, with the greater Copenhagen area having more than twice that. Almost half of the Danish population resides in the greater Copenhagen area. The bridge connecting Copenhagen with Malmö, which opened in 2000, extends Copenhagen's status as queer metropolis to Southern Sweden.

Copenhagen is the most cosmopolitan of all Nordic cities. Norwegians and Swedes claim that the world begins in Copenhagen, which is also called the Paris of the North. With an ambience reminiscent of that of Amsterdam, Copenhagen is the most open-minded and relaxed place in Scandinavia.

### History

Until 1814 the city was the center of a trilingual empire encompassing Norway in the north and extending all the way to Hamburg, Germany in the south. In 1864 the empire was reduced to Denmark, but Copenhagen kept growing. The old ramparts were abandoned and new proletarian suburbs were built in this period of early industrialization. The abandoned ramparts became a gay male meeting place. Today the area, now known as the H. C. Ørsted's Park, is still the best known cruising spot in the city.

Otherwise queer life in Copenhagen was, historically, a matter of meetings in private circles. Even in 1900 when Copenhagen became a metropolis of half a million inhabitants, there were no homosexual bars or cafes. To participate in such subcultural activities, Danes travelled to Hamburg or Berlin.

There is no historical evidence of lesbian circles. However, many unmarried bourgeois women lived together, especially school teachers. It is questionable whether they should be considered lesbian, but many formed tender, romantic friendships. Pioneering pedagogue Natalie Zahle (1827-1913) lived most of her life with another woman, and many founders of philanthropic societies were female couples who tried to turn fallen women and other "queer" folk into good housewives and mothers.

### Modern Times

After World War II Copenhagen developed a small homosexual subculture with a handful of bars. The town hall square became a market for young male prostitutes. The practice of male prostitution was sensationalized in the tabloid press, and police harassment intensified.

In 1969 pornography was decriminalized, and the first sex fair in the world took place in Copenhagen the same year. Such events transformed Copenhagen into a leader of the international sexual revolution.



The flag of Denmark flies over a canal in Copenhagen.  
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In the 1970s and 1980s alternative subcultures emerged. For example, in Christiania, a former military zone, now a "free state" inhabited by anarchist squatters, the Gay House became the center for Gay Liberation.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the focus of queer activism in Copenhagen changed from political to cultural work, especially experimental queer theater.

The all male Miss World contest has become a popular annual event. A small lesbian circle experiments with queer art at the Women's House in Copenhagen.

Today, Copenhagen's tourist board attempts to attract queer visitors. The city's picturesque historic center, modern architecture and design, and the Royal Ballet are used to market Queer Copenhagen, along with a small collection of bars, cafes, restaurants, saunas, cinemas, and beaches that cater to a predominantly glbtq clientele. Every August queers celebrate at Copenhagen Pride, a colorful parade through the center of the city.

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