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Christmas in Copenhagen: a Scandi winter wonderland

Twinkling lights, communal feasting and beer delivered by horse-drawn wagons bring festive cheer to the Danish capital

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To be in Copenhagen in December is to experience truly exhilarating tastes of Christmas. The air is heavy with the scent of caramelised almonds that are sold in red and white striped paper bags, while stalls on the harbourside at Nyhavn are dispensing glögg, mulled wine with almonds and raisins. And there's [Julebryg](#), Tuborg's Christmas beer, delivered to bars across Copenhagen by horse-drawn wagons.

Danes also head to their iconic amusement park Tivoli ([tivoli.dk](https://www.tivoli.dk)). In gardens created in 1834, you'll find giant pirate ships, a Chinese pagoda and more than 1m glowing

lamps. Denmark's [Queen Margrethe](#) personally designs the costumes for the ballet performances that Tivoli holds each Christmas; this year it's *The Snow Queen*, based on the fable by Hans Christian Andersen.

Tivoli has one of the oldest rollercoasters in the world, the famed wooden Rutschebanen, built in 1914, but it also has some of Copenhagen's best restaurants, including [Brdr Price](#), which adheres strictly to classic Scandinavian cuisine in winter - cod cosseted in butter and cream, and duck with red cabbage. If you want to push the boat out, Copenhagen's most luxurious boutique hotel, the [Nimb](#), is housed in another of Tivoli's fantastical buildings.



📷 Gløgg it down: the Christmas market in Nyhavn. Photograph: imageimage/Alamy

At Christmas in Tivoli, there's the scent of real fir cones, plus gløgg and apple pancakes. A branch of [Illums Bolighus](#), Copenhagen's most exclusive department store, sells some of the most tasteful festive ornaments on the planet, along with the essentials of Danish design. There are candles in every shape and form (but usually white), because the Danes light more candles than any other nation on earth.

While Scandinavia will never be a bargain break, Copenhagen's inhabitants have come up with ways of mitigating their own rising costs of living with a spot of *fællesspisning* - communal dining. Set-price meals where everyone sits at long tables and eats at the same time are currently all the rage in Copenhagen.

Most famous is Folkehuset Absalon (absaloncph.dk) in Vesterbro. A former Lutheran church has become a community building, with a restaurant, yoga studio, pottery classes and not-very-serious activities, including darts, created as a social project by Lennart Lajboschitz, the founder of Tiger. Many of the sessions are held in English because, well, this is Scandinavia and it's seen as a sensible thing to do, and Absalon's evening meal is blissfully simple - and cheap. Tickets can be booked online, but you can also see if there are places left by turning up at 5pm. There are Christmas parties on Fridays and Saturdays with songs and traditional food, including their delicious rice pudding, all for 350 kroner (£40).



📷 Name in lights: Tivoli amusement park. Photograph: Allan Baxter/Getty Images

This ethos is spreading to hotels, too. In 2020, Kanalhuset (kanalhusetcph.com) opened in Christianshavn, one of the oldest and prettiest parts of central Copenhagen. This buttery-yellow, 18th-century building - another project of Lennart Lajboschitz's - was previously an orphanage and hospital. Now there are 12 hotel rooms and another 14 apartments with kitchens that can be booked for longer stays. Rates are reasonable - especially for Scandinavia - offering a 7pm evening meal for 150 kroner (£18), which everyone eats together. At this time of month, it turns into a feast with tradition, tealights and communality in equal measure; which is why, at the moment, I will always raise a glass of festive beer to the way Scandinavia celebrates Christmas.

Bed and breakfast doubles at Kanalhuset start at 1,400 kroner (£160);
kanalhusetcph.com

More Scandi escapes

Oslo and Stockholm are also full of fun in the festive season

Oslo



📷 Photograph: Getty Images

The Norwegian capital's festive season started on 24 November, with a musical ceremony, carols and drinks marking the sending of a tree from a forest on the outskirts of Oslo to London's Trafalgar Square. The celebrations continue mainly outdoors. The market at Spikersuppa features an ice rink that's free to swoop around on. And shopping-wise, Oslos Supermarked (oslossupermarked.com) at the Salt arts complex by the harbour allows you to look for handmade or second-hand presents, and have a quintessentially Nordic sauna experience as well. Since Oslo is the Scandi capital most likely to get snow in December, tobogganing is an essential part of the Christmas run-up; the best run is between Frognerseteren and Midtstuen metro stations and sleds can be rented.

Stockholm



📷 Photograph: Spirins/Getty Images

If Tivoli is a Scandi Christmas at its most fantastical, Skansen in the Swedish capital returns it to its roots (£18; [skansen.se](https://www.skansen.se)). This living museum on Djurgården opens on Fridays to Sundays until 17 December with stalls of the most tasteful variety alongside resident reindeer and - if you are lucky - a vintage tram that takes you there from central Stockholm. (Top tip: warm up by viewing the glass-blowing first.) Stortorget, a square in the quaint and cobbled Gamla Stan, is Stockholm's oldest Christmas market. It was first held in 1837. Today it mixes crafts with stalls selling vast bars of chocolate - a charming bit of Swedish excess. It runs to 22 December.

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