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# Escape



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 Metro Book Chat  
 welcomes three new  
 provocative reads  
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**High culture:** The angled roof of the Moesgaard Museum gives views across Aarhus



**Spoke-ing:** Cycles are the favoured means of transport



**Treesy does it:** The nearby Marselisborg Skovene Forest

# WANNA COME ROUND AARHUS?

Denmark's second city hits new heights of Scandi-cool, says **Jonathan Thompson**

**W**HISPER it but Copenhagen might be about to lose its status as Scandinavia's capital of cool. Less than 100 miles from Denmark's political, cultural and gastronomic hub, a new pretender is challenging its predominance. Aarhus, Denmark's second city, is about to have its own time in the sun. New British Airways direct flights from London, a trio of recently Michelin-starred restaurants and European Capital of Culture status for 2017 – plus a simultaneous European Region of Gastronomy title for next year – mean Copenhagen's crown is under threat. The first thing that strikes me when I arrive in Aarhus is how young it is. Nearly 20 per cent of its 330,000-strong

population are students, bringing the average age down to just 38, which makes for a vibrant city. It is centred on the boutiques, cafés and cobbled streets of its cool Latin Quarter, and I hire a bike to explore it. Pedal power is clearly the preferred means of getting around for locals, too; they zip about in Scandi-chic swarms, barely breaking a sweat as they zoom past me. Aarhus was recently voted the best shopping destination in Scandinavia and there's plenty here to spend your krone on, from high fashion to quirky art galleries – and one of the most extraordinary coffee shops I've seen, Great Coffee on Klostergade (greatcoffee.dk). Needless to say the brewing, done in what looks like a

The Dane ingredients: **Page 26** »



**Pot of gold:** Inside the ARoS Your Rainbow Panorama



**Splashing:** Moesgaard Beach is five miles from the city

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**Toast the coast:**  
A bar on Aarhus's sandy beach and, right, the Iceberg building in the docklands district



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cross between a cocktail bar and science lab thanks to the bulbous Bunsen burner-style pots, is more inventive than the name.

Refreshed, I ride along the pretty Boulevarden river, which runs through the heart of the city centre, to the spot where early Viking settlers founded the city. It's ironic that Aarhus, one of Europe's youngest, most vital cities, is also one of its oldest: the Vikings established a

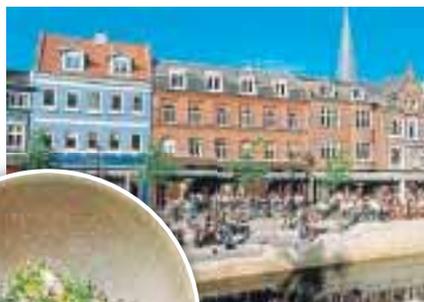
settlement here as early as the ninth century and Aarhus now marks the occasion on the last weekend of every July, with the world's biggest 'Moot' (July 30 and 31, £5.50). Part Viking festival, part market, part battle recreation, the weekend-long event on the city's Moesgaard Beach features everything from archery lessons to horse-riding competitions, with stalls selling Viking-inspired items fashioned from iron, wood, amber, silver and leather.

Moesgaard Museum (£14.50, moesgaardmuseum.dk) is recommended for another history lesson. Here I check out the star turn, the gurning Grauballe Man – a perfectly preserved Iron Age bog body. It's no wonder Grauballe looks like he's wincing: experts believe he died in the third century BC after his throat was cut by his own people. Afterwards I head up the building's iconic sloping grass roof to take in the incredible views.

The Moesgaard is just one of a number of ground-breaking museums here in Aarhus, with other highlights ranging from The Women's Museum (£5, kvindemuseet.dk), the world's first centre dedicated to the history of women, to Den Gamle By (dengamleby.dk) – an old part of the town with buildings dating back to the 16th century and exhibitions showing how people lived in the 19th century, the 1920s and the 1970s.

The stand-out highlight for me, however, is undoubtedly AROs (£13, en.aros.dk), the city's modern art museum, currently featuring Grayson Perry's Hold Your Beliefs Lightly exhibition. Its bold, rainbow-coloured roof is an art installation in itself – Your Rainbow Panorama by Olafur Eliasson.

The ingenious, interactive exhibit allows visitors to walk 'through' the



rainbow, which I do with maybe just the slightest of skips. It's a 150m-long circular tunnel with tinted windows, allowing views of the city and harbour through a riot of colours. Above all, though, the Aarhusian

renaissance has been driven by gastronomy and I go to meet one of the key men behind it: local chef René Mammen, whose restaurant Substans (seven-course menu from £105, restaurantsubstans.dk) was one of the hat-trick of establishments here

**Highlights:** From left, a Substans dish; riverside cafés; Mammen describes what he considers a city-wide culinary revolution over recent years.

'When I first came here ten years ago, there were only five good restaurants,' laughs the tattooed young chef. 'Now there are 100 good ones and ten really, really good ones.'

Aside from Substans – all bare brick walls and white resin floor, patrolled by bearded waiters in leather aprons – those really, really good ones include the two other Michelin-starred establishments: Gastronomé (three course menu from £60, gastrome.dk) on nearby Rosengade, and Frederikshøj (three-course menu from £133, frederikshoj.com) on the edge of the Marselisborg Skovene Forest, which runs for four miles along the coast.

That's the thing about Aarhus, as chef Mammen says: 'All the ingredients are here.' Forest, beach and harbour are all within a 20-minute bike ride of the bars and boutiques of the Latin Quarter.

Throw in an enviable collection of fascinating, world-class museums and scores of outstanding restaurants and you have genuine city-break gold.

Returns from £120 return, ba.com, visitaarhus.com, visitdenmark.co.uk

# All the Dane city-break ingredients

## SECOND BEST?

Overshadowed by their respective capitals but with plenty to offer, these are the second cities worth investigating this summer



### BRNO Czech Republic's second city after Prague

The ancient capital of Moravia has direct London flights, a lovely old town and plentiful accommodation. Check out the impressive Špilberk Castle, then kick back with a pint of lager for less than a quid in the hometown of the man credited with inventing modern beer, František Ondřej Poupé.

gotobrnno.cz



### PLOVDIV Bulgaria's second city after Sofia

With a genuine claim to be Europe's oldest city, Plovdiv first popped up on the map as long ago as 6,000BC, as part of the civilisation of Thrace. Its Roman amphitheatre still stages big events today and its Archaeological Museum – as you might expect from such an ancient town – is world-class.

visitplovdiv.com



### PORTO Portugal's second city after Lisbon

This coastal city, best known for its port, has a youthful swagger, too. Casa de Ló café is a former bakery now home to nightly DJ sets, while nearby Rua Miguel Bombarda offers art galleries, vintage clothing shops and free music. When Porto tires you out, board a three-hour train to the Douro Valley. visitportugal.com