

Travel Denmark

THE BIG WEEKEND

AARHUS

It's European Capital of Culture, but it's big on beer, food and bike rides, too, says *Joseph Furey*

SATURDAY

Morning

Generally speaking, when a place is advertised as buzzing, by the time you've packed your case, the buzz has moved on. Not so with Denmark's second largest city, on the Jutland peninsula. As befits the joint 2017 European Capital of Culture (it shares the honour with Paphos, in Cyprus), this port – busy since the days of longships – will be rocking for a while yet.

Let **Baresso**, Denmark's coffee chain, take care of breakfast (a latte and, yes, a Danish – or, as it's called here, a pastry – cost £4; baresso.com). Then head west for an exhaustive introduction to the city, country and culture: **Den Gamle By** is an open-air museum of 75 buildings, some from as far back as the 16th century, collected from all over Denmark to create "the Old Town". Divided into time zones, here be workshops, a herbalist's garden, a post office and a jazz club, as well as museums dedicated to posters, toys, timepieces and, new this year, 20th-century jewellery (in the Danish fashion: sleek and elegant, the unblingiest bling). The attention to detail is astounding and its effect wonderfully eerie, calling to mind the television series *The Prisoner* (from £13; dengambleby.dk).

Follow the boutique- and bar-flanked Aarhus canal east into the **Latin Quarter**, the city's oldest – and formerly Viking – district. Independent stores and craft studios are the norm here, and at its centre stands the red-brick romanesque **Aarhus Cathedral**, begun in the 12th century and built above the grave of Niels the Holy. (His father, King Canute V, was rather less holy: he died in the Game of Thrones-like Bloodfeast of Roskilde.) The interior has spectacular frescoes that somehow survived the Reformation (donation; aarhusdomkirke.dk).

Afternoon

For a taste of authentic *hygge* (though the word is now so overused that the natives are threatening to toss their chunky knits on the fire), seat yourself at a communal table in **Langhoff & Juul**, a folksy fine-diner that raises your expectations of what can be achieved with organic fruit and veg to alpine heights. A piled-high open sandwich, or *smørrebrød*, will fill you up for a week (mains from £9; langhoffogjuul.dk).

Swap the comforts of this home from home for something a little more challenging at the **ARoS** art gallery, a good place to get a sense of the outward-looking, forward-thinking image Aarhus wants to project this year. The *No Man Is an Island* exhibition presents works from the permanent collection and loaned pieces that look at how art allows people to overcome social and political divides. It is shocking (rare) and moving (rarer still) at the same time (full house!). For the best view of the city, head for *Your Rainbow Panorama*, on the roof, a spectrum-hued circular glass walkway touched by the magic of Oz (£14; en.aros.dk).

Evening

This year, Aarhus bagged the title of European Region of Gastronomy and its



Above, the panoramic rainbow-coloured walkway at AROS. Top right, experience *hygge* at Langhoff & Juul; and chill out by the canal

fourth Michelin-starred restaurant. To try one, eat at **Substans**. It's pricy, but René Mammen is one of the best purveyors of the Mediterranean-healthy new Nordic cuisine, and what he can do with lumpfish caviar is nothing short of witchcraft (tasting menus from £82; book a fortnight ahead; restaurantsubstans.dk).

The restaurant has some unlikely neighbours in **Frederiksgade**, a lively stretch of drinking dens beloved of students, who comprise a fifth of the

city's population. Finish your evening at the pick of these bars, the aptly named **Tir Na Nog** ("land of the young"), a wannabe shebeen, and the **Sherlock Holmes**, as good a pub as you'd find in England – smoking saloon, 40 whiskies, live music five nights a week, closes at 6am.

SUNDAY

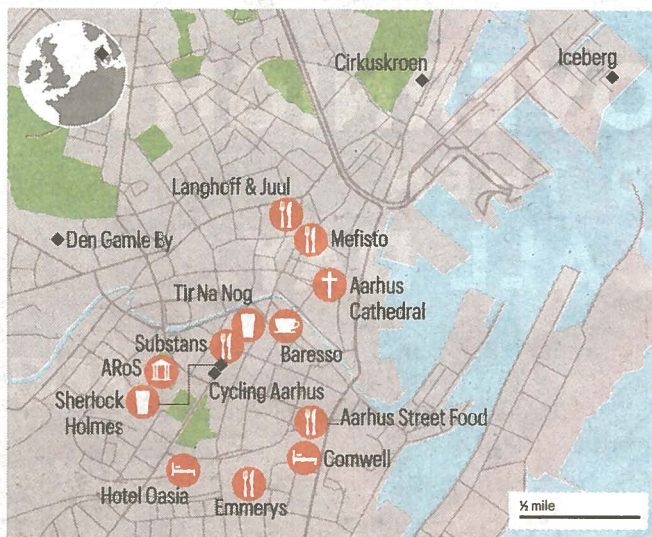
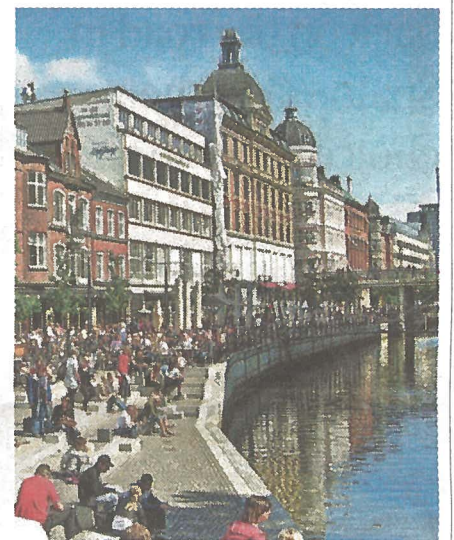
Morning

Get up almost before you get in and clear your head with a dose of the great outdoors. Hire a sensible sit-up-and-beg bike from **Cycling Aarhus** (£13 a day; cycling-aarhus.dk), load up on carbs at an **Emmerys** organic bakery and make the most of a city that is friendlier to two wheels than it is to four. The surrounding countryside looks like an ad for a Health & Efficiency holiday – rolling woodland, empty beaches, bracing waters – and is simply too good to waste. Make for **Bellevue**, a powder-fine beach four miles north of the city, the route to which takes you through **Riis Skov**, a beech forest whose floor in spring is thick with wild garlic.

On your return, stop off at the city's newest neighbourhood, **Aarhus East**, which is rising out of the old harbour like a vision of the future. The ambition of this waterfront development, which still has a way to go, can be seen in the **Iceberg**, a residential complex with a brilliantly hammy sense of drama that made it an instant architectural icon.

Afternoon

Not sure what you fancy for lunch? Open the menu at **Aarhus Street Food**, a shabby-sweet mess hall-cum-meeting



WHERE TO STAY
Hotel Oasia has a cool Nordic style and puts on an organic breakfast buffet (doubles from £105, B&B; hoteloasia.com).

The four-star **Comwell Aarhus**, in the city's newest and tallest high-rise, has 240 rooms and mod cons to spare (doubles

from £145, B&B; comwell.dk).

GETTING THERE
Ryanair flies to Aarhus from Stansted; from £50 (ryanair.com)

place in a former bus garage that does food-truck tuck from the four corners of the earth. It's all good, but pick Super Bao's pork-filled steamed buns and your companions won't leave your plate alone (from £5; aarhusstreetfood.com).

Remount your bike for a six-mile jaunt, south of the city this time, to the **Moesgaard Museum**. A new institution full of very old things, it has an impressive collection of archaeological discoveries from the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages, as well as the Viking era. Pay your respects to Grauballe Man, a 2,300-year-old sacrificial victim found preserved in a bog, who inspired Seamus Heaney to write one of his finest poems. Then wander the parks and shoreline of the 250-acre Moesgaard estate or take in the sea view from the top of the museum's sloping grass roof (£14; moesgaardmuseum.dk).

Evening

As dusk comes on, the streets start to look more like the mean ones seen on *Dicte*, the gritty Nordic noir cop show that's set here. Things can get spooky up by the docks, too: pop into **Cirkuskroen**, one of the oldest bars in the city, where the walls and ceiling are covered in clowns (drinks from £2; cirkuskroen.dk).

The classy-cosy **Mefisto**, a Latin Quarter institution, is the perfect venue for your farewell supper. Its cooking is solidly French modern, including lobster and Limfjord oysters; go for one of the signature four-course menus (mains from £12; mefisto.dk).

Joseph Furey was a guest of Visit Aarhus, the Hotel Oasia and Ryanair. For more information, see visitaarhus.com