



City confidential Copenhagen

It's happily gay, fabulously foodie and very well built: **Hugh Graham** is dazzled by Denmark's capital

A dishing Danish waiter, complete with regulation blond hair and piercing blue eyes, is explaining the fashionable Nordic food to me at René Redzepi's Noma (Strandgade 93, www.noma.dk), a double-Michelin-starred eatery that was just ranked third in the world by *Restaurant* magazine. The exotic, hi-tech grub sounds bizarre, and the menu is a mouthful from any angle: raw clam wrapped in parsley gel served with dill and mussel juice and horseradish snow; ashes of leek and hazelnut served with shards of caramelised chicken broth; beef tartar with tarragon emulsion, wood sorrel and granulated juniper? But it looks like art, presented on grey felt or driftwood, and tastes delicious, a prime example of the Nordic new wave of cuisine that is sweeping Copenhagen. The warehouse setting is rustic chic – teak '60s furniture, sheepskin rugs and rough stone and wood, with a view across the harbour to the New Royal Theatre, a sleek, black glass beauty that is pure porn for architecture tourists.

Food, sex and design: no wonder epicurean Copenhagen has become one of Europe's coolest gay breaks. Its

gayness comes to the fore from July 25 to August 2, when 15,000 queer visitors will descend on the city for the second World Outgames. It's a natural choice for a Queer Olympics: Denmark was the first country to recognise gay marriage (in 1999); Centralhjørnet, Copenhagen's main gay bar, has been around for a century; and it's famously tolerant – the local police actually patrol cruising grounds to protect, not prosecute, alfresco lovers.

The city is one of Europe's coolest gay breaks

But for trend-watching gay travellers, and metrosexuals too, Copenhagen's other sensual pleasures are more intriguing than the sex shops along Istegade. Thanks to the new posh Nordic nosh, Copenhagen now has 12 Michelin-starred restaurants, more per capita than any city in Europe. Noma is the biggest fish in the pond, but at Bo Bech at Paustian (Kalkbrænderiløbskaj 2, www.bobech.net), a Michelin one star, Copenhagen's foodie and design fantasies merge into one: the dockside warehouse was designed by Jørn Utzon of Sydney Opera House fame, and



Great Danes
The futuristic Opera House, and, inset, Bo Bech at work in his kitchen at Paustian

combines a hip furniture showroom with an edgy restaurant. The theatrically minimalist setting is an apt showcase for the theatrically minimalist food: fjord shrimp with smoked cheese, lime drops and unripe elderberries; Norwegian lobster in rosemary branches perfumed with smoke. If your pink pounds don't stretch this far, restaurants like Den

Anden (Fortunstræde 7, www.denanden.info) and Cofoco (Abel Cathrines Gade 7, www.cofoco.dk) offer cheaper thrills, with similar Danish panache.

The sybaritic culinary pleasures are backed up by some seriously sexy modern design. On the harbour, the foxy glass Black Diamond (1999) library looks just like its name; the aforementioned New Royal Theatre, another eye-catching hunk of glass, seems to float on the water, and nearby, the 14-storey Copenhagen Opera House (2004) is pure Scandinavian spaceship.

Copenhagen's gay scene is more kitsch than cool, centred in the chocolate-box medieval old town, around Studiestræde. Centralhjørnet (Kattesundet 18), the *grande dame* of the scene, is camp and glitzy; Masken (Studiestræde 33), a louche late bar, is emblazoned with a giant mural of Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler; the Cosy Bar (Studiestræde 24), an after-hours pick-up joint, is womb-red with ornate mirrors; and Café Intime (Allegade 24, www.cafeintime.dk), a fab old-school piano bar, features *chanteuses* who channel Marlene Dietrich. Oscar (Radhuspladsen 77, www.oscarbarcafe.dk), a tasteful and glossy café-bar, is an exception to the campy.

So, take your pick, eat the gorgeous grub, feast your eyes on the blonds, or just ogle the architectural eye candy. It all tastes good.

Get packing

Fly

SAS flies Heathrow to Copenhagen six times daily, from £118 return (www.flysas.com). Hugh Graham travelled with **ManTrav** (0845 094 0254, www.mantrav.co.uk).

Sleep

First Hotel Skt Petr (Krystalgade 22, www.firsthotels.com/sktpetr), the city's hippest design hotel, is housed in a former department store, and full of chic Scandinavian furniture. To save your pink pounds, **Hotel Windsor** (Frederiksborggade 30, www.hotelwindsor.dk) is a budget gay B&B in a centrally located old apartment building. The rooms are clean and trendy, with flatscreen TVs, but you share a bathroom (the communal shower comes with full-length mirrors...).

Climate

From June to September the average high is 20°C; September is the rainiest month.

More info

World Outgames, July 25-Aug 2 (www.copenhagen2009.org). Get *Time Out Copenhagen* (£8.44 from www.timeout.com/shop).