

Captured in

Malavika Bhattacharya shares
an Instagram-inspired guide to
Copenhagen's urban delights.

Copenhagen



From above: Copenhagen's iconic cycle bridge, The Bicycle Snake, connects the city with the harbour; Ørestad is a residential care facility for the elderly. Opposite: The SEB bank headquarters is an architectural landmark.



Scandinavia is well ahead of the curve on architecture and design. Copenhagen is testament to this fact, with its modern glass-and-steel behemoths blending

seamlessly with ornate neoclassical structures, swank new bicycle-only bridges extending over canals, and colourful backyards that house secret cafes and art galleries.

In this landscape of urban cool, every split second is an Instagram moment. My Insta feed is flooded with photos of futuristic buildings, bridges, and bicycles in the weeks leading up to my visit to the Danish capital. In an effort to go beyond the tourist sights and uncover the 'real' vibe of a city, I turn to Instagram to unearth local gems in a new place.

Amongst the scores of images I scour, the most eye-catching ones are by individually managed accounts of local Copenhageners. While travel channels and tourists flood social media with images of the Little Mermaid and Nyhavn—and there's certainly no denying the charm of colourful 17th century terraced buildings bordering a canal—local accounts focus more on under-the-radar aspects of the city.

A crop of young local Instagrammers have taken it upon themselves to document Copenhagen's coolest spots, steering clear of what a tourist normally associates with the city. Urban architecture, public spaces, and hidden backyards feature prominently in their photos, as do unique perspectives of well-known structures.

This is the Copenhagen I want to discover—one where spired churches and half-timbered Renaissance buildings are juxtaposed against ultra modern façades.

To help me find these secret spots, I meet up with local photographer and Instagram

A crop of young local Instagrammers have taken it upon themselves to document Copenhagen's coolest spots.



whiz Astrid Maria, who up until now I had known as @astridkbh. An alternate perspective of the city is best seen through the eyes of an in-the-know local, and between working at the ongoing Copenhagen Photo Festival, conducting Instameets and photo walks, Astrid very kindly shows me her favourite spots.

SPIRES AND SPIRALS

On a blustery afternoon, we begin our walk at the famous Baroque-style **Church of Our Saviour** in Christianshavn, defined by its gleaming black and gold spire. “You can climb to the top for a good view of the canals, and you can even see Sweden,” Astrid says, making special mention of the spiral staircase that winds around its exterior. I don’t know it yet, but spirals—staircases or otherwise—are a recurring motif in local Instagrammers’ accounts. The modernist versions are usually found in the interiors of swank new buildings, in stark contrast to the equally fascinating medieval spires that define the skyline in the city’s older parts.

NEXT STOP

The Arken Museum of Modern Art is surrounded by a manmade beachscape just south of Copenhagen in Ishøj. It showcases one of Scandinavia’s finest collection of artworks. arken.dk

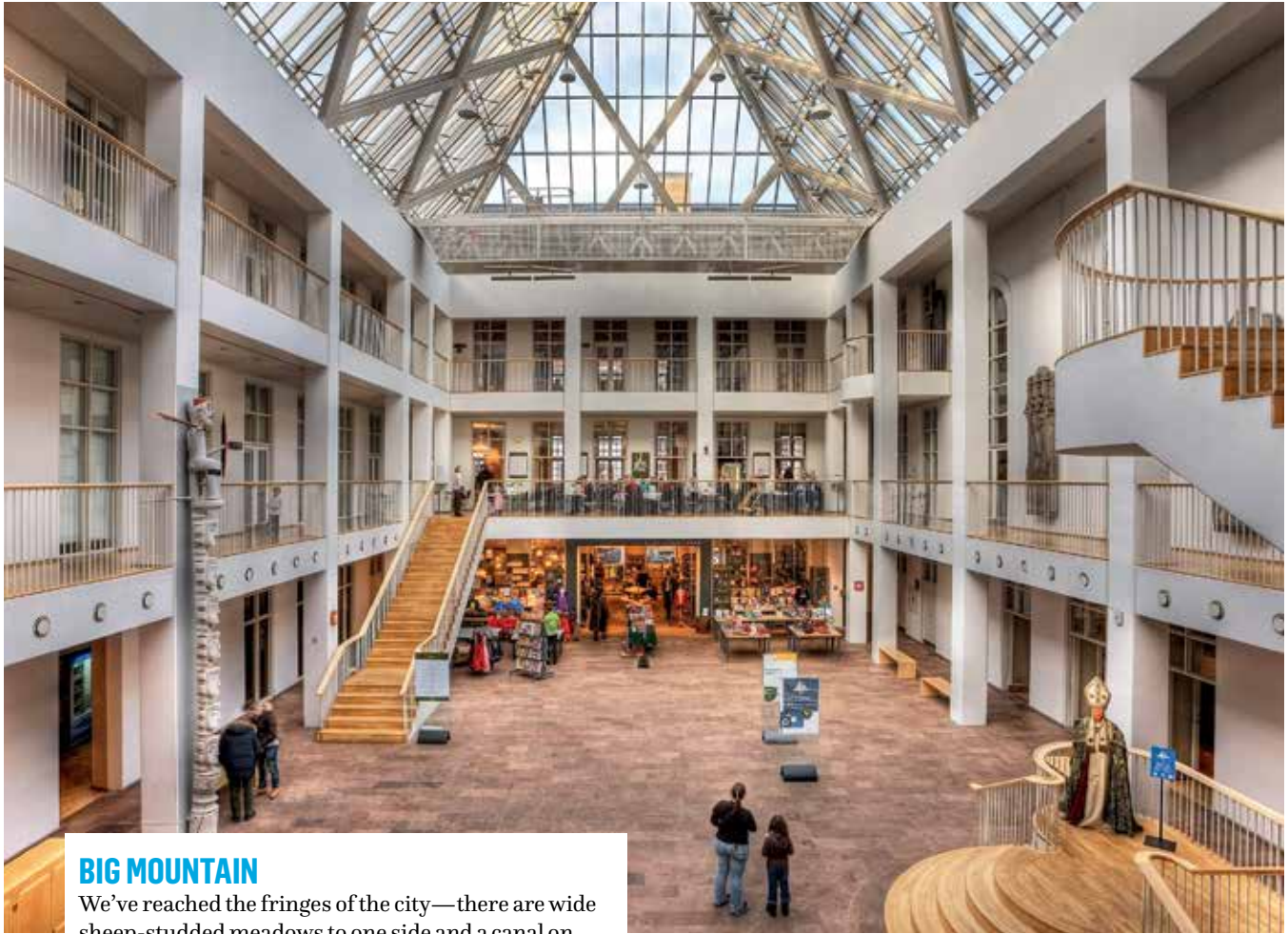
On a boat ride through the canals the previous day, I had fantastic views of the **Old Stock Exchange** or Borsen, which is among Copenhagen’s oldest buildings dating back to the 17th century. Dull green copper roofs sit atop red brick buildings and a spire with four entwined dragon tails point towards the sky. Renaissance architecture clustered around the canals makes for endless photo-ops as we sail past the city’s tallest tower, the 106-metre **Tårnet** or the tower atop Christiansborg Palace, which now houses a restaurant, the Parliament Building, and the National Museum.

Astrid and I soon leave the medieval architecture behind and make our way to **Orestad**—a quiet, developing area with a somewhat industrial vibe. “Where are we going?” I ask. “A car park,” she calmly replies. This unpredictable introduction to a local’s Copenhagen sets the tone for a behind-the-scenes look at the city.

The parking lot isn’t run-of-the-mill, of course. For one, the huge perforated façade is fascinating. Natural light streams through, and when viewed from afar, the holes create an image of parked cars, like a mirror to the interior. The multi-level interiors are an “Instagram favourite,” Astrid tells me, for the upward spiral view it provides.

Around the corner is a parrot green façade with blocky, asymmetrical balconies that I recognise immediately from the pictures I’ve seen. **The Orestad Plejecenter** is a residential care facility for the elderly, and among the city’s most recognisable and photographed structures, with its colour-blocked buildings in shades of green.





BIG MOUNTAIN

We've reached the fringes of the city—there are wide sheep-studded meadows to one side and a canal on the other. From the edge of the water, rises a sprawling, space-age-like structure, all sharp angles and glass-ensconced frontages. We might as well have turned the corner and stepped into the future. This is Bjarke Ingels' iconic project **8 Tallet**, or Eight house. Built like the figure eight, with sloping rooftop gardens and inner courtyards, the edgy residential complex is any urban photographer's dream. "There were so many people coming here to take pictures that they've restricted timings to outsiders," Astrid says, pointing to a board that lists public visit timings.

Bjarke Ingels, the man who's designing the new 2 World Trade Center in New York, is the current sweetheart of the Danish architecture industry. His designs have left an impressionable mark on Copenhagen's landscape. The previous day, I'd spotted powder blue shipping containers on the canal, fashioned into floating studio apartments built around a garden. Urban Rigger is Ingels' model student housing project, a carbon neutral, sustainable solution to the demand for affordable housing.

On the metro to the city centre, we zip past a towering Mount Everest. Seeing my quizzical expression, Astrid explains that Mountain Dwellings—another ultra-modern residential complex by the BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group)—is a terraced housing compound that sits atop a parking lot. Perforated aluminium plates cover the façade, creating a rasterised image of Mount Everest, visible clearly from the windows of the elevated metro. In this city, even a short ride on a public transport system reveals visual wonders.



From above: The National Museum of Denmark; the spiral staircase that winds around the Church of Our Saviour.



From above: Superkilen is an urban park designed by celebrated architect Bjarke Ingels; the Palm House at Copenhagen Botanical Gardens.

Copenhagen inspires, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the hipster district of Nørrebro.



ARTSY QUARTERS

The locals might refer to the Latin Quarter as Pisserenden, but the area has gentrified completely over the last century as compared to when it used to be a haven of bawdy bars and ill-behaved revellers. Trendy boutiques, cafes, and European colourful façades now line the streets. We make our way down **Studiestræde**, stopping to gape at the eminently photogenic buildings that house lively gay bars and second-hand stores. We walk through the heavy gates of a building and stumble unexpectedly into the loveliest backyard. Away from the hustle of the street lie tangerine walls draped with a tangle of green creepers, cobblestones, and pots of purple and white flowers. “Backyards are some of the most beautiful spots in Copenhagen,” Astrid tells me. This particular backyard is home to the charming Galleri Krebsen, an art space displaying local artists’ works.

With hidden quirks in traditional spaces and dazzling modern architecture, it’s no wonder that young local photographers have capitalised on their city’s offerings. Walking past a wall in Nørrebroparken, a stretch of graffiti gives way to large photo prints displayed on the wall. Large-size Instagram images showcase tunnels, train tracks, and other commonly overlooked aspects of the city.

The open-air gallery titled **The Endless Treasures of Nørrebro** features stunning imagery by Urban Explorer CPH (@urban_explorer_copenhagen) and seeks to “make you open your eyes more attentively, love and take care of our city.”

Encouraging ordinary passers-by like me to stop and take note of the beauty that exists even in ordinary public spaces, the exhibit and my time with Astrid, has shown me that creative locals don’t have to look far for everyday inspiration—Copenhagen is the muse. ■