

## Cozy in Copenhagen - A 24-hour search for hygge

Story by Travel Editor Ed Boitano - Senior Life

Each TV season Jack Bauer saves the world from terrorists. Not only does he save us, but he does so in a 24-hour period—the time allotted and the name of his weekly series, *24*. I have grown to depend on him. I've often wondered, though, just how I would hold up under such clock-ticking duress. This August I decided to find out.

I was given 24 hours to explore Copenhagen, Denmark - a place that I had only previously dreamed of visiting. My plan was not only to see as much of the city that I could in 24 hours, but also to do something even more daring than stopping a terrorist attack: to go on a quest to experience hygge. Yes, hygge. And to further the stakes I decided to take time out for a couple of meals, something I had never seen Jack do. **Hygge, you ask?** Hygge (pronounced whoo-guh) is a uniquely Danish word that does not exist in any other language. The closest definition is "cosy," or a feeling that evokes something warm inside. This is more than sitting by a roaring fire on a winter's day - though that is where its roots began - but can also mean a good meal with friends or even a walk in the woods. It is a state of mind as well as a physical state. I think I came close to achieving hygge a couple of times during my youth in Seattle, just didn't know there was a name for it. Now was a unique opportunity to experience it on its native ground.

### Hour one

8:32 a.m.: I arrived at the swank Scandic Copenhagen Hotel, located on a canal in the heart of the city, a good six hours before check-in. The gracious staff allowed me to immediately check into my room. From my window I could see a bustling city of green spires, copper-roofed buildings, medieval streets and canals. Once a humble fishing village, Copenhagen (population 1.7 million) is now Scandinavia's largest city. I had read about Denmark's cradle-to-grave welfare system that gives everyone the same opportunities, such as free health care and education, support for the elderly and handicapped, solid unemployment benefits and liveable pensions. Now I was seeing it in action. I was also seeing bicycles; every where, bicycles. Later I found that Copenhagen provides them for free. I felt very content watching city life unfold - cosy, in fact - but it was too early to even think of the Big H.

11:36 a.m.: I met my friend Anette in the lobby. She presented me with a Copenhagen Card, which allows free admittance to 60 museums and other city attractions, free train, bus and metro transportation. It would prove to be an essential component for the next 18 hours. The two of us hit the streets, where over a thousand years of history awaited us. I quickly discovered that due to its compact size, Copenhagen could best be enjoyed on foot. It was a sunny day and the whole city seemed to be outdoors. I was told that members of the Royal Family, the oldest existing royal family in the world, can be seen strolling on the streets.

### Hour six

1:06 p.m.: We arrived at Tivoli Gardens, an amusement park established in 1843. It felt like a World Expo with examples of international architecture, fairytale gardens, amusement rides and concerts. Lunch was at Divan 2, where I sampled smørrebrød (an open-faced sandwich), frikadeller (meatballs) and local berries in cream for dessert. Outstanding. The only thing better was the conversation with Anette, who amazed me of her knowledge of the U.S. I sensed I was nearing hygge.

3:30 p.m.: Anette had to go back to her office, but first pointed me in the direction of Radhuspladsen, a bustling square in the heart of the city. It is also the entrance to Strøget, Europe's longest pedestrian shopping street. The mile-long street is packed with shops and designer stores, cafés and bars, many in half-submerged cellars or historical buildings. In an odd way it was cosy being around so many people, but hygge did not come to mind.

4:33 p.m.: Strøget ends at Kongens Nytorv, an old canal area, lined with 17th century Dutch-style town houses. Once a haunt for sailors, today it is the place to experience one of Copenhagen's supreme pleasures: a canal cruise of the old city. Attractions included a glimpse of the Royal Yacht, formal Danish architecture, and the city's most recognizable symbol, The Little Mermaid statue. Inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's 1837 fairy tale, she's small, but a resilient young lady who has survived kidnappings and vandalism throughout the years.

6:02 p.m.: Next stop, the subway to the free city of Christiania. In 1971 an eclectic group of "bohemians" took over an area of abandoned military barracks and developed their own city, completely independent of the Danish government. Given official status as a social experiment, Christiania today consists of dirt roads, funky houses, paintings and sculptures, restaurants and over 1,000 inhabitants - all less than half a mile from the parliament. There are four rules in Christiania: no weapons, no hard drugs, no cars and no photographs.

9:36 p.m.: Back to Strøget for dinner in a little cellar café. I had a Carlsberg and Fiskeboller (fish balls). I told the owner that they were the best ones I had ever eaten. He said that the only ones better are the ones prepared by his mother. It was a hygge thing to say.

### Hour 18

1:10 a.m.: I took a stroll to get an overview of Copenhagen's array of discos and club bars. I reserved the final hour for a reflective walk along the canal by the hotel. Had I experienced hygge? History, culture, world-class food, sophisticated people - but hygge, I really wasn't sure. Perhaps it was too early to say. Now, as I sit back in Los Angeles, and bask in the memories of my 24 hours in Copenhagen, I suddenly feel warm inside. It has to be it! I wonder if Jack Bauer would have been able to recognize it. No, he would be too busy keeping the world safe. That gave me a warm feeling too.