

TRAVEL

Northern capitals offer contrasting city styles

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Visiting three Baltic capitals — Copenhagen, Oslo and Helsinki — last summer made for some interesting contrasts and comparisons of these cosmopolitan cities on the Baltic Sea.

Copenhagen is like a fairy tale written by one of its famous sons, with its whimsical Tivoli Gardens, its cityscape punctuated by towering spires and its statues of Hans Christian Andersen and The Little Mermaid.

Oslo is its serious counterpart, with its compelling museum tracking Norway's resistance to the Nazis, its collection of the works of one of its famous sons, the painter Edward Munch, and its reputation for promoting worldwide peace and human rights.

Helsinki is probably the most cultural of the three cities, with its spectacular Art Nouveau architecture by world-renowned Finnish architects Alvar Aalto and Eliel Saarinen, its monument to and concert halls named in honor of composer Jean Sibelius and its recently opened Kinema Museum of Modern Art.

We spent the most time in Copenhagen, where our high-rise accommodations in a hotel exuding Danish Modern design overlooked Tivoli. This came in particularly handy for watching the twice-weekly fireworks display, as well as the special red and white (Denmark's national colors) spectacular which followed the Danes' close match with Brazil in the quarter finals of the World Cup.

We found it a young, open city which includes an alternative lifestyle neighborhood known as Christiania, claimed by modern day hippies. Occupants don't pay taxes and do openly buy, sell and use marijuana and hashish, but we also saw signs warning against hard drugs.

Our only criticism of Copenhagen was of the food, which is expensive and not very good. The exception was the ice cream

cones, served along the Stroget, the milelong, pedestrian-only shopping street, where soft ice cream dipped in a cocoa-like powder might have been the best I've ever tasted.

We learned the most about Copenhagen on a walking tour led by an American musicologist who has lived there for a dozen years, studying ancient Danish music. Each day he takes English-speaking tourists to various parts of the city.

Copenhagen, much more than Oslo or Helsinki, is a city of bicycles. Danes pay, our American guide told us, the highest percentage of their income for social services of any Scandinavian country. Since it's hard to accumulate money for a car, much less a house, most of Copenhagen appears to ride bikes and live in rental units.

However, cars and private homes abound in both Oslo and Helsinki. It was in Oslo that we visited metro-Detroiter David Hermelin, now the U.S. Ambassador to Norway. After a tour of the American Embassy, which sits conveniently across from the palace and gardens of Norway's king, we drove to the Ambassador's Residence, where the house and grounds take up a full city block.

It was Hermelin who told us how wealthy Norway has become, thanks to its oil deposits, but they have not let their wealth alter their culture or the seriousness of their vision. Part of that vision includes reaching out to other nations and promoting dialogue. It's no fluke, Hermelin says, that meetings for the Oslo Peace Accord and Ottawa Treaty on Land Mines were held in Oslo.

It was his wife, Doreen, who told us that the Norwegians, who endure some long, cold and dreary winters, have a philosophy that there is no bad weather, just bad dressing for that weather. She says mothers with weather-proofed carriages and strollers are outside in all temperatures and climates. And that

manufacturers of children's outerwear tug them with the temperature range they protect against.

Hermelin said we should not miss the Norwegian Resistance Museum, and he was right. Photographs, newspaper clippings, films and objects detail the continuing acts of defiance against the five-year Nazi occupation. Teachers refused to allow their students to be militarized; the clergy repeatedly raged against the Nazi edicts; and Munch, who died at 81 during the occupation, refused to join an "Honorary Art Council" being formed by the Quilting government.

The Munch Museum, housing many works by the expressionist Norwegian artist, gave us a new understanding of this man probably best known for his paintings "The Scream." As my husband wrote in the journal he kept of the trip: "Probably the most emotional art exhibit anywhere — but what terrible emotions. Nearly every subject, especially all the females, are in anguish. Easy to see the influence of other artists — Cezanne, Renoir, Gauguin, Monet all echoed. Quite an experience."

Visitors, we are told, are more impressed with Vigeland Sculpture Park than Oslo's residents. But it's hard not to be captivated by the 192 full-size sculptures of men, women and children, modeled in the nude by Norwegian sculptor Gustav Vigeland without assistance of students or other artists. He also designed the architectural setting and the layout of the 80-acre grounds which are part of Frogner Park.

Well-traveled friends, Sandy and Larry Altman of West Bloomfield, told us: "If you see nothing else in Oslo, you must see this." As you walk among the sculptures, you are confronted with the full range of human relationships from birth to death.

Helsinki, also, has more than its share of public art, including the wonderful statues of Finland's Olympic gold medalist



Finnish style: Judith Doner Berne visits a sculpture of Finland's great composer Jean Sibelius in Helsinki.

Paavo Nurmi, "the Flying Finn," in front of the Olympic Stadium, and the Jean Sibelius Memorial in Sibelius Park.

This city is a visual delight, its spacious streets interspersed with many gardens and parks. Both the design of the city and its architecture show the influence of its previous conquerors, Sweden and especially Russia.

But modern day architects have their day as well. The railroad station, designed in 1918 by Saarinen, is a notable example of modern architecture, as is the newly opened Kinema, the museum of contemporary art, designed by American architect Steven Holl.

We stayed in Copenhagen for three days before boarding a cruise ship where Oslo and Helsinki were two of seven ports of call. Our shorter experiences there point up the problems of cruising to as opposed to actually staying in any major city.

We certainly got much more of a feel for Copenhagen. If we are lucky enough to ever revisit Oslo and Helsinki, I would not do it from a cruise ship.



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