

A DANISH FAIRY TALE

Colourful
houses at
Nyhavn in
Copenhagen



"I should have been a shoemaker but I decided to become an actor. So, I came to Copenhagen with just 10 Danish Krone and a belief in myself." Standing in front of the towering Copenhagen City Hall is a humorous old man, dressed in a long, black coat with a top hat. He smiles at me and continues his story, "I failed as an actor, a singer and as a ballet dancer, but by the age of 30, I started writing fairy tales and the rest, of course, is history. I am Hans Christian Andersen and it's a pleasure to meet you."

We are lost in the old-world charm that envelops the Copenhagen City Hall Square or Rådhuspladsen. The

sun is playing hide-and-seek and there is a nip in the air. A group of people has gathered here to listen to stories from the man dressed as Hans Christian Andersen. Next to him, standing tall, is a statue of the author himself that seems to be smiling at us. Our guide, Richard, is a traveller, actor and musician from the United States who has travelled everywhere from Varanasi to Buenos Aires. But today, he is the Danish author. With a twinkle in his eye, he narrates snippets from the latter's life as he takes us around the city.

As we listen to stories such as *The Ugly Duckling*, *The Princess and the Pea* and *The Little Mermaid*, the cob-

Lakshmi Sharath takes a walking tour of Copenhagen,
with author Hans Christian Andersen as her guide

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bled lanes of pedestrian street Strøget begin. I wrap my jacket a little tighter around myself as it gets colder and threatens to rain, and glance around to take in as much as I can. High above the Richs Building, I can see one of the famous Weather Girl sculptures on her bicycle. There is also the dragon water fountain, Dragespringvandet, where a bull locks horns with a dragon. But it is The Lure Players that fascinate me the most. Two formidable Vikings stand on a column, each blowing a lur – an ancient wind instrument. Built between 1911-1914, the monument was a gift from the Carlsberg Foundation to Copenhagen on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of brewer JC Jacobsen's birth (1811-1887).

Chiming with excited conversation, our little group walks towards the City Hall. As we look at the paintings and hear stories about Norse Gods, we stop at another sculpture of Andersen, standing next to the Wedding Registry Office. Ironically, the author never married! "I remained a child at heart and perhaps it is this childlike innocence that made me write fairy tales," our guide conjectures. It begins to drizzle as we continue walking around Gammeltorv Square. Standing there, I gaze at one of the oldest fountains in Copenhagen – the Caritas. The word caritas means charity and refers to the sculpture group on the top of the fountain, modelled after a wood carving from 1608 created by



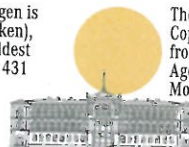
At 106 metre, the Christiansborg Palace tower is the highest tower in Copenhagen, offering a magnificent view



If you want to experience Copenhagen like a local, skip the public transport and take a bicycle instead



Just north of Copenhagen is Dyrehavsbakken (Bakken), which is the world's oldest amusement park. It is 431 years old



The National Museum in Copenhagen has exhibitions from the Stone Age, Viking Age and Middle Ages to Modern Danish history



1. A fountain by the Copenhagen City Hall

2. The statue of The Little Mermaid at the Copenhagen harbour



Otto of Luneburg. For centuries, this area was the political and legal centre of Copenhagen. "You could imagine criminals being flogged here as the people watched," says our guide as we potter around.

We enter the Church of Our Lady before visiting the Copenhagen University, which is filled with colourful murals. As we continue our walking tour, Richard - nay, Andersen - tells us about the history of the monarchy. Adding to Copenhagen's fairy tale vibe are the many palaces that dot the city. There is the grand Amalienborg Palace that is the royal residence, the Christiansborg Palace that contains the Danish Parliament, the Supreme Court and the Ministry of State, and the Rosenborg Castle. A little further away from the city centre is Frederiksberg

Palace and my favourite, Kronborg Castle, which is popularly referred to as Hamlet's Castle. However, the essence of the fairy tale town lies in Tivoli Gardens, the enchanting amusement park. Besides the fun and frolic, you go through a roller coaster of emotions, ranging from wonder to nostalgia. I become a child at heart as I take the Hans Christian Andersen ride, feeling transported to a world of fantasy.

As the day draws to a close, I walk down to the harbour and see the statue of The Little Mermaid, sitting on a rock and looking out over the waves, and Andersen's words echo in my ears: "My whole life, you could say, was the greatest fairy tale of all."

The author is a travel writer. The views expressed in the article are her own