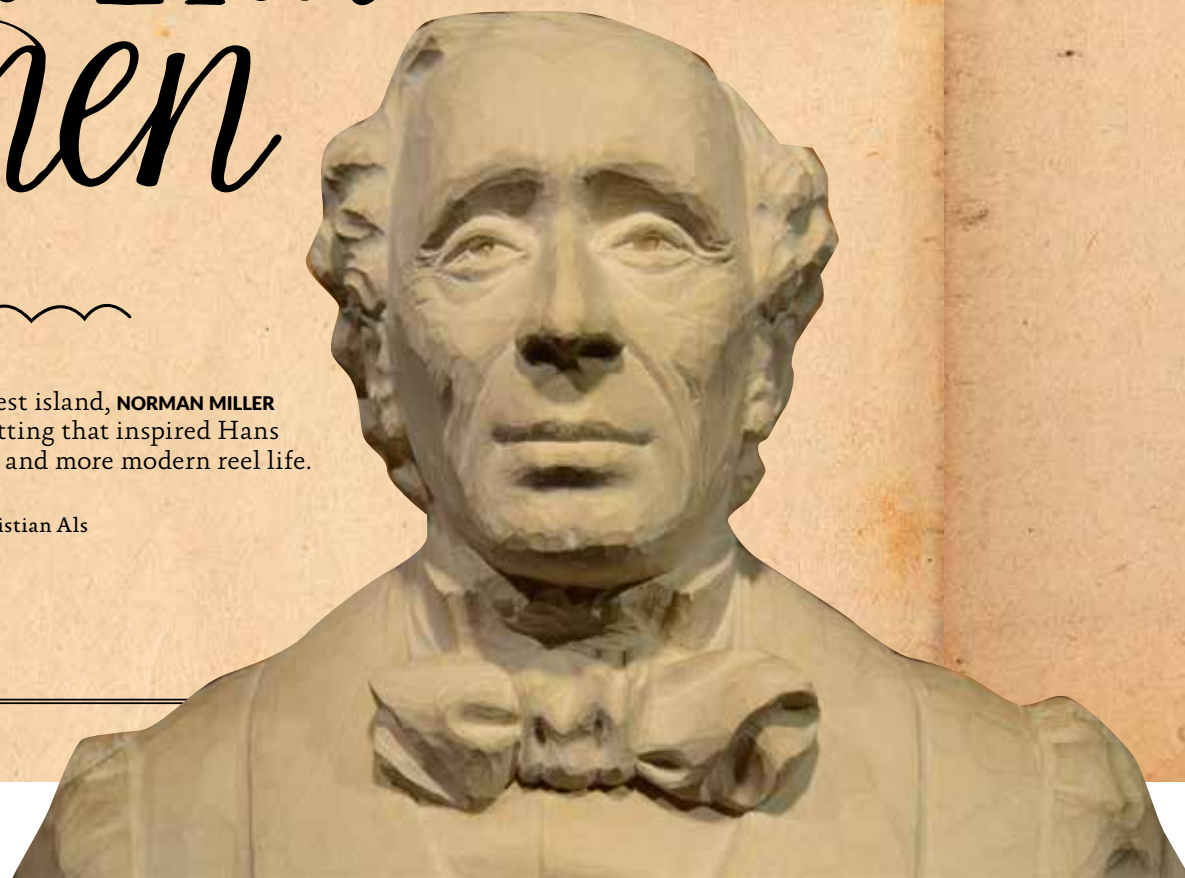


Of Gods, Fairy Tales & Men in Funen

On Denmark's third-largest island, **NORMAN MILLER** discovers the fairy-tale setting that inspired Hans Christian Andersen's tales – and more modern reel life.

PHOTOS Christian Als



INTRODUCTION



A Books at the Hans Christian Andersen Museum, with the author's handwritten inscriptions.

The geographic heart of Denmark, the island of Funen (Fyn in Danish) is a melange of bucolic fields and fertile farmland scattered with more than 120 historic castles and manors. A shoreline of slender sandy beaches is punctuated by seafarer towns like Svendborg and Faaborg, picturesque gateways to the small wild islands of Funen's southern archipelago. Denmark's third-largest city Odense, on Funen, is about 90 minutes by train from Copenhagen Airport.

But when writer Hans Christian Andersen was born here in 1805, he came into what was then an Odense slum. Andersen was raised by a poor shoemaker father and washerwoman mother during an era that had one foot in a world of

ancient superstition, and the other inching towards modernity. Today, Odense – which was named after the Norse god Odin – still reflects an old-new balance, as mediaeval architecture blends with urban sophistication.

Though Andersen wrote plenty in other forms, including 14 novels and short stories, his renown rests on his over 160 fairy tales, which were translated into an equal number of languages. Among them are classics like *The Emperor's New Clothes*, *The Little Mermaid*, *The Red Shoes* and *The Ugly Duckling* – along with *The Snow Queen*, the foundation of 2013 film-and-merchandise phenomenon *Frozen*.

Odense's Andersen trail winds through a Nordic townscape that must be a location scout's dream. ➤



“Odense has retained the charms of a mediaeval town – tiny alleys, secret passages and a whole lot of doll-size houses built of wood and clay,” says Mads Dambo, director of the hip Brandts Gallery (brandts.dk).

Denmark’s first museum for visual culture is, however, thoroughly modern in its focus. A recent exhibition, *Selfie*, matches fine-art names such as Andy Warhol and Cindy Sherman with image-moulding celebrities such as Kim Kardashian. I’m dazzled, too, by contemporary Chinese artist Yue Minjun’s paintings of screwed-up laughing faces in bizarre colours. Their edgy mania makes me wonder if they’re laughing with joy or despair.

It’s the sort of mixed feeling I suspect Andersen

felt at the contrast between his outward success and the darker undertones of his personal life, reflected in places like the Grabrodre Hospital. Today, this former 13th-century Franciscan monastery feels peaceful – but it once housed the insane asylum where both Andersen’s grandfather and mother ended up. Visiting them, Andersen absorbed the residents’ strange ramblings as powerful, terrifying inspiration for future tales.

At a tiny square of stone by the river at Vaskepladsen – known as the Washing Site – I bow my head in memory of Andersen’s mother, who cleaned clothes for the city’s wealthy here. Forced to work in icy water, she tried to warm herself by consuming alcohol, which ultimately became a fatal



addiction. Andersen restored her dignity as a loving mother in the tale *She Was Good for Nothing*.

Further along the riverbank, a tranquil green enclave by the magnificent Odense Cathedral (odense-domkirke.dk) has a bronze statue of Andersen gazing over the river’s deepest point. It’s not only a lovely spot, but also a nod to the local belief of the Au-mann, a water spirit said to sacrifice people to prevent the river from flooding the town. Andersen wove this dark ancient tale into *The Bell-Deep*.

The cathedral staged Andersen’s religious confirmation, for which he received a pair of new shoes that gave him a huge childish pride he later revisited in the salutary tale *The Red Shoes*. As a mark of Andersen’s story-telling prowess, this single ➔

B A statue of Andersen at Odense Cathedral overlooks the river.

C The Washing Site, where Andersen’s mother once cleaned clothes.

D Fresh fruit and vegetables aplenty at a local farmers’ market.

FILMING FUNEN

The island has provided the backdrop for more than 70 film and TV series in the past decade. **JULIE LINN MILLING** from movie fund Film Fyn shares her must-visits for cinephiles.

MIND YOUR MANORS
We have 123 castles and manor houses that add a unique visual quality. An area featured in the film *Someone You Love* was the landscape around Holstenshuus Gods manor in Diernaes village. In the coming film *The Day Will Come*, you’ll see Gyldensteen Gods manor in the north of Fyn and Forsorgsmuseet (Welfare Museum) in Svendborg (svendborgmuseum.dk).

HEAD TO THE HILLS
There’s more than 1,000km of stunning coastline and landscapes in Funen. The Svanninge Hills in the south of Fyn were featured in Ole Bornedal’s epic TV drama series *1864*. These hills are accessible to visitors.

DINING WITH THE STARS
Falsled Kro (falsledkro.dk) is a top-notch dining spot for celebrities, as is Hotel Stella Maris (stellamaris.dk). Other top restaurants are Rudolf Mathis (rudolf-mathis.dk) in Kerteminde and Liefyfroy (liefyfroy.dk) in Nyborg. Chocolatier Konnerup & Co (konnerup-co.dk) is a favourite for handmade treats.

CELEB BOLTHOLES
We have put up stars in the 17th-century manor Damsbo Gods (damsbogods.dk). Film crews often stay in luxury summer cottages by Nab Strand (visitfaaborg.dk).

OF GODS, FAIRY TALES & MEN IN FUNEN



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tale inspired not just the famous 1948 British film of the same name, but also a 2005 Korean horror movie and a Kate Bush album.

At a weekend farmers' market, I recharge with delicious pickled herring and dark rye bread over an al fresco lunch, before ducking into the Hans Christian Andersen Museum (museum.odense.dk) carved from his low-slung bright yellow childhood home. However, my favourite bit was added in 1929, long after his death in 1875 – a dome adorned with frescoes by artist Niels Larsen Stevns, depicting the writer on an idyllic day out exploring Funen: beaches framed by island vistas, leafy courtyards ringed by mustard-coloured houses, and sylvan country views.

The joy of Funen is that these vistas are all still

there. Asked about the island, Danish actor Mads Mikkelsen said, "If you take the bicycle, you're riding through something you thought was gone in the 1940s or '50s. It's a fairy tale."

You don't even have to leave Odense for a taster, thanks to the lovingly created Funen Village (museum.odense.dk). The 25 relocated 18th- and 19th-century buildings enjoy a setting that recalls lines from Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling*: "The corn fields and meadows were surrounded by large forests, in the midst of which were deep pools. It was, indeed, delightful to walk about in the country." Costumed inhabitants talk about historic lives, to the sound of a blacksmith at work and the smell of brewing beer that wafts through the air.

E At the farmers' market, sample cheese from Graham's Farmhouse.

F Trace Andersen's history at the museum named after him.

G Puppets represent characters from the author's many fairy tales.

H Funen Village, where one can experience what life was like 200 years ago, houses about 50 animals.



SEE DENMARK'S CAPITAL COPENHAGEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A LOCAL INSIDER AT SILVERKRIS.COM



H

Appetite whetted, I head for the old Christian 4tal (christian4tal.dk) beer house on Vintapperstraede, where timeworn wooden walls provide an atmospheric backdrop to savour Danish craft brews, such as the smoky, chocolatey Thisted Limfjords Porter.

The next day, I treat myself to lunch at Falsled Kro (falsledkro.dk), a former 16th-century thatched-roof smuggler's inn in south Funen. Celebrated across Denmark, it bears the so-called "royal privilege" – a distinction dating back to 1286 when King Erik Klipping grew weary of unsatisfactory stops on his travels and ordered the establishment of inns with food and rooms fit for a king. But they feed commoners like me too, with bold pairings of ➔

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Fast Facts

CURRENCY
Danish Krone
US\$1= 6.8DKK

VISA
Requirements vary. Visit
nyidanmark.dk for details.

BEST TIME TO VISIT
June to August, for
long pleasantly warm
days. December is for
wonderful Christmas
markets in historic
locations like Egeskov
Castle, Nyborg Castle and
Lundegaard Manor.

HOW TO GET THERE
Singapore Airlines
flies 5 times weekly to
Copenhagen, from where
you can catch a train
to Odense.

MORE INFORMATION
visitfyn.com



! Christian 4tal
beer house is the
perfect place for
enjoying Danish
craft brews with
friends.

! Historic Broholm
Castle is now a
charming hotel.

Funen ingredients: poached egg with lobster and tomato; fish of the day plucked from the sea in Faaborg, served with humble cabbage elevated to an intriguing accompaniment.

I dip further into Funen's heritage experience at Broholm Castle (*broholm.dk*), one of several historic country piles that have been turned into spectacular hotels. Its 16 bedrooms, plus three in the separate Mill House, adorn a moated eastern Funen wonder boasting a panoply of soaring turrets and its very own enchanted forest to explore.

A manor has stood here since 1326, though the main building dates back to just 1642.

In the main living room, past generations

gaze down from portraits hung above an antique clavichord I wish I knew how to play. I check out the manor's intriguing collection of Funen flint tools dating back far before Christ, then enjoy a dinner of salted cod with pumpkin and garden herbs, Funen pork with local ale, and a dessert of local apples given a pickled and jellied Nordic twist.

Andersen sung the praises of Broholm during a visit in 1836. "The leaves of the forest were transparent, the violets grew in bushes, the woodland fields were in full bloom, and between the trees, they could look out across the water to Langeland, which rose high above the sea with its woods and windmills." Sounds like a fairy tale? Thankfully, it's real. ■