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## FEATURED ARTICLE

## Copenhagen alternatives: 5 best cities to escape the crowds

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22 AUGUST 2019

The undisputed cool kid of Scandinavia, Copenhagen draws millions of visitors each year with its winning formula of historic charm, gastronomic brilliance, cutting-edge architecture and on-the-pulse nightlife. All this in the capital of a country repeatedly hailed as the world's happiest? It's obvious why Copenhagen is such an alluring destination.



Brightly coloured waterfront facades of Nyhavn © Kateryna Negoda/Getty Images

But few major European cities have escaped the spectre of overtourism, and reports suggest Copenhagen (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/news/2019/08/20/copenhagen-overtourism/>) is now suffering from too much love, with effects ranging from crowded tourist hotspots to noise pollution. Here are five lesser-trodden Copenhagen alternatives which capture some of that city's appeal, while being treasures in their own right.



Modern buildings in Oslo, Norway, with their reflection into the water © William Perugini / Shutterstock

## Oslo, Norway

This perennially underrated Nordic capital promises fjordside Scandi-chic with fewer crowds guaranteed. Other parts of Norway have struggled with an unprecedented upsurge in tourism, but Oslo (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/norway/oslo>)'s tourist board welcomes more visitors – a 2017 campaign (<https://www.visitoslo.com/en/oslo/the-great-escape/>) saw Oslo 'rescuing' frazzled travellers from the Mona Lisa-hungry throngs of Paris. Oslo feels less crowded partly because its sights are spread out, but you'll make light work of getting around thanks to an efficient public transport network. Some of its top attractions – Vigelandsparken (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/norway/oslo/attractions/vigelandsparken/a/poi-sig/1289810/360236>) and the incomparable Vikingskipshuset (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/norway/oslo/attractions/vikingskipshuset/a/poi-sig/415294/360236>) among them – are found in leafy suburbs, and the city's position on the Oslofjord underlines

the fact that nature is only ever a few minutes away. The hypermodern, white marble Oslo Opera House (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/norway/oslo/entertainment/oslo-opera-house/a/poi-ent/1289995/1342177>), rises elegantly from the regenerated harbourfront area, while, at Tjuvholmen, renowned modern art gallery Astrup Fearnley Museet (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/norway/oslo/attractions/astруп-fearnley-museet/a/poi-sig/415214/1341966>) nestles beside a small urban beach and harbour baths to offer high-brow and casual waterside experiences alike. But if you feel more at home in a less polished setting, hop on a bus to Grünerløkka (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/norway/oslo/grunerlokka-vulkan>) for an unpretentious, all-you-can-eat buffet of buzzing bars, restaurants, and one-of-a-kind boutiques.



The stunning architecture of George Square in Glasgow © Dragos Cosmin photos/Getty Images

## Glasgow, Scotland

It may be Scotland's most populous city, but with many travellers choosing to visit Edinburgh over Glasgow (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/scotland/glasgow>), you're unlikely to be troubled by an overwhelming number of fellow visitors here. A smattering of Clyde-side modern masterpieces, including the Zaha Hadid-designed Riverside Museum (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/scotland/glasgow/attractions/riverside-museum/a/poi-sig/1187299/1342326>), the Clyde Auditorium (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/scotland/glasgow/entertainment/clyde-auditorium/a/poi-ent/1182383/1342326>) (better known as the Armadillo) and the curvy, aluminium and titanium clad Glasgow Science Centre (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/scotland/glasgow/attractions/glasgow-science-centre/a/poi-sig/409880/1342326>) hold their own in the architectural stakes, and the exhibitions and events they play host to are just as impressive. Look past the outdated stereotypes of deep-fried *everything* and you'll discover a culinary scene that's as varied as it is surprising. Make reservations at Ox & Finch (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/scotland/glasgow/restaurants/ox-finch/a/poi-eat/1540137/360631>) or boundary-pushing Stravaigin (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/scotland/glasgow/restaurants/stravaigin/a/poi-eat/409784/360631>) for a taste of what Glasgow's pioneering chefs have to offer. And though happiness is almost as hard to pin down as that most Danish of concepts, *hygge*, pull up a chair in any one of the city's welcoming pubs

(<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/scotland/glasgow/travel-tips-and-articles/glasgows-ten-best-pubs-and-bars/40625c8c-8a11-5710-a052-1479d2756ed5>), and you'll be well on your way to understanding the meaning of both: that Glaswegian sense of humour is legendary for a reason.



Spending beautiful evenings on the canalside in Utrecht © blank\_re/500px

## Utrecht, The Netherlands

It wouldn't be on the tip of the tongue for many people, but the lively university city of **Utrecht** (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/the-netherlands/the-randstad/utrecht-city>), mixes medieval charm with a progressive approach to city living pulled straight from Copenhagen's playbook. The picturesque, canal-hewn old town, dominated by the 112m-high **Domtoren** (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/the-netherlands/utrecht/attractions/domtoren/a/poi-sig/496086/360853>), offers a glimpse of Utrecht's past (be sure to check out fascinating subterranean archaeological museum **Dom Under** (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/the-netherlands/utrecht/attractions/dom-under/a/poi-sig/1521334/360853>), too), but city planners are firmly forward-thinking, and have rolled back decades of car-focussed infrastructure to enable a culture where bicycles and pedestrians come first. With an abundance of scenic (and mercifully flat) cycling routes in and around Utrecht, there's no better way to explore than on a bike. For a change of perspective, swap your two-wheeler for a **canal bike** (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/the-netherlands/utrecht/activities/canal-bikes/a/poi-act/1233443/360853>) (pedal boat) and take a relaxing glide along the Oudegracht or Nieuwegracht canals. Unique to Utrecht, the two-tiered network of waterways originally allowed for a system of wharves below street level. Nowadays many are filled with shops, bars, restaurants and even boutique lodgings, such as **Hotel 26** (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/the-netherlands/utrecht/hotels/hotel-26/a/lod/3abc317b-4dbe-4b5b-ac87-7732397df80f/360853>).



Spending beautiful evenings on the canalside in Utrecht © blank\_re/500px

## Hamburg, Germany

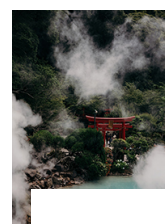
Once a Hanseatic powerhouse, [Hamburg](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg>)'s star faded for a time, but right now the light of the city that put Germany on the trading map is shining brighter than ever. One moment you'll be imagining the Hamburg of old as you wander alongside the red-brick wharves of Unesco-listed [Speicherstadt](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg/speicherstadt-hafencity) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg/speicherstadt-hafencity>), and the next you'll be bang up-to-date as you admire the futuristic, ship-like facade of the architecturally-acclaimed [Elbphilharmonie](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg/attractions/elbphilharmonie/a/poi-sig/420899/359370) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg/attractions/elbphilharmonie/a/poi-sig/420899/359370>) concert hall. When a place has historically worked hard, you might reasonably expect that it would also play hard, and Hamburg does not disappoint. The nightlife here spans the full spectrum, from sophisticated cocktails ([Le Lion](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg/nightlife/le-lion/a/poi-dri/1293883/1342301) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg/nightlife/le-lion/a/poi-dri/1293883/1342301>)) to rough and ready pubs ([Zum Silbersack](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg/nightlife/zum-silbersack/a/poi-dri/1596983/1342305) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg/nightlife/zum-silbersack/a/poi-dri/1596983/1342305>)), with every shade of excitement in between. Start with a beachside beer at [StrandPauli](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg/nightlife/strandpauli/a/poi-dri/420877/1342305) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/hamburg/nightlife/strandpauli/a/poi-dri/420877/1342305>) and who knows which way your night will go.

### ART AND CULTURE

#### Oita's best onsen

Oita boasts the highest number of natural hot springs in all of Japan. Here's where to find them and how to prepare for the adventure.

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Copenhagen's beautiful neighbour, Aarhus, is perfect for a weekend getaway © Westend61 / Getty Images

## Aarhus, Denmark

Choosing to look for Copenhagen alternatives doesn't mean you have to skip Denmark altogether. Just three hours from the capital by train, [Aarhus](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus>) is the country's second city, and its impressive roster of food, music and cultural festivals, architectural eye candy and stellar dining options make it an ideal alternative to its bigger sibling. If it's your taste for New Nordic flavours tempting you to travel, [Aarhus is the destination for you](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/travel-tips-and-articles/new-nordic-beyond-noma-the-rise-of-danish-cuisine-in-aarhus/40625c8c-8a11-5710-a052-1479d276226a) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/travel-tips-and-articles/new-nordic-beyond-noma-the-rise-of-danish-cuisine-in-aarhus/40625c8c-8a11-5710-a052-1479d276226a>). The annual [Food Festival](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/events/food-festival/a/poi-fes/1570763/1002866) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/events/food-festival/a/poi-fes/1570763/1002866>) in September is the largest in Northern Europe, and no less than four restaurants in the city – including [Gastromé](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/restaurants/gastrome/a/poi-eat/1578358/1002866) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/restaurants/gastrome/a/poi-eat/1578358/1002866>) – have been anointed with a Michelin star. Still more have been recognised with other accolades from the guide. Meanwhile, [Aarhus Central Food Market](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/restaurants/aarhus-central-food-market/a/poi-eat/1570788/1002866) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/restaurants/aarhus-central-food-market/a/poi-eat/1570788/1002866>) offers up delicious plates to those on a more modest budget. You'll need to occupy yourself between meals, though, and a clutch of brilliant museums will make sure of that. Olafur Eliasson's colourful installation *Your Rainbow Panorama*, sitting atop [ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/attractions/aros-aarhus-kunstmuseum/a/poi-sig/1438876/1002866) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/attractions/aros-aarhus-kunstmuseum/a/poi-sig/1438876/1002866>), has become a symbol of the city, while the [Den Gamle By](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/attractions/den-gamle-by/a/poi-sig/428411/1002866) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/attractions/den-gamle-by/a/poi-sig/428411/1002866>) and [Moesgaard Museum](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/attractions/moesgaard-museum/a/poi-sig/1440133/1002866) (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/denmark/aarhus/attractions/moesgaard-museum/a/poi-sig/1440133/1002866>) bring Aarhus' recent and Viking-age history to life in award-winning style.

## More about these Copenhagen alternatives

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