

# *Dejlige Days*

Guide to Christmas & New  
Year in Denmark

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## **Advent Traditions**

The Danes take Advent very seriously and it involves a lot of candles and greenery. You can buy boxes of forest moss and sprays of pine as well as bulbs such as tulips, hyacinth and amaryllis from all florists and many supermarkets to start decorating your home for advent. Poinsettia and Christmas roses are also popular, bringing both red and white into the home.

You will also see a lot of special candles in the supermarkets. It is traditional to create a four candle display, one candle for each Sunday of Advent. By the fourth Sunday you will have all four candles lit. They can either have the number printed on them (1-4) or you can add your own numbers. They are then placed in an arrangement with greenery and decorations or in a wreath. You may also spot heavy cylinders of ler (clay) in Christmas decoration displays in the supermarkets. You can use this around your candles to affix decorations and stop the candles moving.





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## Advent Traditions

The other candle tradition is a calendar candle with numbers 1 to 24 running down it, and vary massively in price from around 35kr to 300kr. You burn the candle daily to melt away that date until, by the 24th, you should have a little candle stump. It is very usual to see the 24 day ones burning in lots of public places from shops to doctor's surgeries.

Natural Christmas wreaths to be hung on front doors are always very popular and there are plenty to choose from. If you want to decorate your own there are plain ones but many florists offer already decorated ones.

There is also a tradition of Kalender Gaver or Calendar Gifts, whereby children get a small gift each day from the 1st to the 24th December. These are usually little inexpensive things and toy shops and supermarkets have promotional stands selling these. Flying Tiger and Søstrene Grene are also great places for gifts and also numbered bags.



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### **St Lucia**

13th December in Denmark (as well as other Scandinavian countries) is St Lucia Day. It was thought to be the shortest day of the year before the introduction of the Gregorian calendar and in schools there is a tradition on a St Lucia procession with girls (and boys) dressed in white, carrying candles to bring light to the dark.

The first girl wears a crown of four candles. It is usually a tradition in schools but it is not unusual for there to be processions of local schools in shopping malls as well.

Recently I learnt a lot more about the story of St Lucia (or St Lucy) from my son. The story is St Lucy secretly brought food to persecuted Christians in Rome, who were forced underground into the catacombs. Lucy would wear a crown of candles so she could use both of her hands to carry items. A big part of a celebration is food and traditionally St Lucia breads are made. There are special shaped sweet breads flavoured with saffron.





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### Christmas Crafts

Hearts are at the very centre of Christmas decorations here in Denmark. The lights strung along Strøget and other shopping streets have large illuminated hearts as their centrepiece. The pleated Christmas hearts are about as traditional as you can get when it comes to Danish Christmas decorations. HC Andersen made the oldest known hearts in 1860 and they are still going strong today.

Many families get together on the first Sunday of Advent to make these hearts as a celebration of the coming month. I remember one year glancing out of my kitchen window to see the artists who lived across the street gathered around the table, candles burning, with their children and grandchildren making the hearts together. What a lovely scene and to me sums up what the Christmas season should be all about.

It is easy to get pre-cut papers to make them or templates - Panduro is the best place for these.

There are also more complicated paper stars made from strips of paper. You can get these strips in packs in shops such as Søstrene Grene and they come with basic instructions but I'd recommend finding a YouTube video for your first attempt.



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### Christmas Food

The traditional Danish Christmas meal is roast pork, boiled potatoes or sugared potatoes, red cabbage and gravy, although in recent times roast duck and goose have become popular. For dessert, the classic dish is ris à l'amande; cold rice pudding with whipped cream, vanilla, almonds and hot cherry sauce, or 'risengrød' (hot rice pudding). All enjoyed with the odd glass (or more) of snaps.

It is traditional to place a whole almond in the bowl of ris à l'amande and the person how gets it in their bowl is the recipient of a mandelgave, a small gift suitable for anyone as you never know who will get the almond.

But for those of you who prefer a turkey (kalkun in Danish) for your Christmas dinner it is possible to get hold on them but you need to order in advance.





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## **Christmas Food**

Ask in your local butcher (slagter) and see if they can order one in for you. Good places to try are Cleavers in Torvehallerne and also the butcher at Kulvtorvet ([www.thebutcheratkulvtorvet.com](http://www.thebutcheratkulvtorvet.com)) close to Nørreport station is a sure bet. Rotunden Food Market ([www.rotunden.com](http://www.rotunden.com)) in Hellerup and Nemlig.com also stock turkeys.

For other Christmas goodies from home (if home is the UK or US) the online shop The British Corner Shop ([www.britishcornershop.co.uk](http://www.britishcornershop.co.uk)) is excellent but remember to order well in advance to make sure they haven't sold out of your heart's desire.

Christmas crackers (the kind you pull not eat!) are not easy to get hold of. You will see little tree crackers but not the big ones we are used to in the UK. Amazon or The British Corner Shop can deliver them but again don't leave it too late.

It is a good idea to get your Christmas food shopping done well in advance as many things sell out quickly. If you are planning to make ris à l'amande the all important almonds often sell out in many supermarkets. There are few opportunities for panic buying on Christmas Eve as many supermarkets and almost all shops and malls close in the early afternoon, so plan ahead.



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# Traditional Danish Christmas Treats

Look for the red boxes in most supermarkets of spiced Christmas cookies such as pebernødder and brunkager, as well as other biscuits from early November. Get a box of each and find your favourites.

Here is a little round up of the most popular three cookies. Brunekager (Brown biscuits) which are essentially little thin ginger biscuits (with other spices) with almonds in them. Pebernødder (pepper nuts), little tiny round crunchy biscuits flavoured with spices such as cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and cardamon. Klejner are little fried buttery dough rings flavoured with vanilla.

Æbleskiver and gløgg are ubiquitous from the end of November onwards with all cafes serving this lovely Christmas combo of little hot donuts served with icing sugar and jam and washed down with warm spiced red wine with almonds and raisins in the bottom of the glass. You can easily make all these at home as supermarkets stock frozen æbleskiver and ready made Gløgg and packs of the almonds and raisins.

Christmas beers are well worth trying and although Tuborg's julebryg is lovely there are tons of others to try.





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### Christmas Trees

You can buy a decent Christmas tree from one of the many Christmas tree sellers that start popping up all over the city from the end of November. You are charged by the metre and are usually pretty expensive compared to countries such as the UK and France but usually of excellent quality.

Check the height of your ceiling before you head out to get one. Once you have chosen one they will keep it on the stall wrapped in a mesh sack for you to collect if you don't want it straightaway, many stalls will offer a delivery service (at a cost) or you can make like a Dane and balance it on your bike to get it home!

It is possible to travel outside the city to Christmas tree farms to cut down your own tree but you will most probably need a car for this.



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## How Danes Celebrate

Although the 24 of December isn't a public holiday most people finish work at lunch time and either head home or out of the city to celebrate Christmas with family. Many supermarkets will close after lunch so be sure to check the opening hours of your local supermarket. From around 2pm onwards the streets are deserted.

Like most celebrations in Denmark, Christmas is celebrated the night before. Danes will eat their big Christmas meal on the 24th, exchange gifts, light real candles on their tree which they will pull into the middle of the room to dance around whilst they sing traditional songs. Some people will also go to church in the evening.

The 25th is a time for relaxing and eating more food, this time a Christmas table of cold and hot dishes.

December 25 and 26 are public holidays.





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### Things to do

#### Christmas markets

In recent years there have been loads of Christmas markets in the city — the main ones are at Kongens Nytorv, Tivoli and Nyhavn. There are other ones but they tend to be a bit generic and not as cosy.

There are tons of smaller crafters markets all across the city from the end of November. Searching on Google or Facebook (best place for smaller events) for either Christmas markets or julemarked and your location.

#### Tivoli

Tivoli is a must over the Christmas period and the park always looks spectacular so make sure you add this to your must do list. You can take your children to see Father Christmas for free but there is a cost if you want to get a photo with him. You are not allowed to take any sneaky smartphone snaps.

#### Christmas Tables at Royal Copenhagen

Every year Royal Copenhagen show a number of amazing tables in their flagship store in the centre of Copenhagen on Amagertorv. They are usually breathtaking and designed by well known Danes.



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### Things to do

#### Ice skating

Open air ice rinks spring up all over the city from the end of November and stay until March. They are free to use but there is a cost if you wish to hire skates. An excellent ice rink is at the entrance to Frederiksberg Have.

Remember that if the Lakes freeze they are deemed dangerous to skate or walk on until Copenhagen Kommune give their approval. You will see people walking on them despite warnings and if you decide to do so, it can be risky if the ice is not thick enough.

#### Christmas lights

In many major squares such as the ones outside the Rådhus in Frederiksberg and the City Hall square in Copenhagen (and others outside the city) there will be huge Christmas tree which will be lit on the first Sunday of Advent, which in 2018 is Sunday 2 December.

Usually the Christmas trees are lit by Father Christmas. The tradition of the tree in the City Hall Square in Copenhagen started in 1914!

If you want to search for a local Christmas tree lighting event the best search term is juletræet tændes and then your location.

Hotel d'Angelterre light their amazing display for the first time on 23 November 2018 at 4.45pm. Band of the Royal Life Guards will be playing winter and Christmas tunes.





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#### Fireworks

New Year's Eve in Copenhagen can be summed up by one word – bang! Masses of people buy big boxes of fireworks from approved temporary shops or tents, take to the streets and set them off. It starts at about 9pm and goes onto the small hours with the biggest explosions at midnight. It seems rather dangerous and can be in crowded places but people seem to take some care in firing them off.

It is prohibited to import fireworks into Denmark. New rules for the purchase and use of fireworks came into force in 2014. The main points are you must purchase fireworks from 15 December to 31 December. You must use the fireworks from 27 December to 1 January.

You can get safety glasses for adults and children in many supermarkets and other shops.

It is common on and around New Year's Eve for teenagers to engage in some serious pranks – often involving firecrackers. Therefore, you should ensure that your car is locked and that your mailbox and apartment windows are closed. Even the post office seals its post boxes so that only thin letters can be posted.



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#### Opening times

As with the Christmas period, shops have reduced hours or may be closed over the New Year period so check your local supermarkets or places you wish to shop. Don't leave buying champagne or sparkling wine to the last minute as many places sell out.

Some restaurants will be taking bookings but may close around 11pm so staff can enjoy midnight. Some places will only be open for collection of pre-ordered menus even if they are usually eat in places. A lot of them will be closed completely.

Make sure you make bookings as soon as they are available for either table bookings or pre-ordered menus.

#### New Year's Eve novelties

You can buy novelty things such as New Year's Eve cake toppers, napkin little sparklers, sparkly hats, glasses etc from most supermarkets, Flying Tiger and Søstrene Grene.

#### Food and drink

Traditionally the main meal for the evening is a roast beef joint or steaks, lobsters, lobster soup, langoustines, oysters and other luxury seafood or sushi. Washed down with champagne, of course. Very decadent and the perfect way to celebrate. Many people will celebrate at home.





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You can buy all this food from supermarkets or it can be ordered from restaurants or caterers. Look out for nytårsmenu advertised and remember to book well in advance. At midnight it is traditional to share a Kransekage, special marzipan ring cake, washed down with champagne. It is a tower of concentric rings of chewy almond meringues (this is the best way I can describe it) with icing and sparklers and flags adorning it. They can be ordered from bakeries or bought from supermarkets — be warned they are not cheap!

#### Danish New Year's Eve Traditions

Queen Margarethe addresses the nation at 6pm with her annual New Year's Eve address, watched by millions.

Crowds start to gather in the City Hall Square in Copenhagen and by 11.30pm it is packed as the crowds wait for the bells to ring in the New Year. It is very busy and there are risks that people will set off fireworks in the crowd.

For those outside Copenhagen or who want to stay in the warm they can follow the action as broadcaster DR sets its cameras on the clock tower as the final minutes of the year tick away.

Before this DR broadcasts the short film called Dinner for One. The 1963 black-and-white sketch is aired every year just before the final countdown to midnight begins.

When the big moment comes, many people will get up on a chair so that they can literally jump into the new year.



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## **Season's Greetings and stay in touch!**

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Facebook - @dejlignedays

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Blog - [www.dejlignedays.com](http://www.dejlignedays.com)

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