



Aarhus — you're welcome

Denmark's second biggest city takes new measures to give visitors a great experience. Every year thousands of locals welcome tourists who, in turn, feel even more at home.



By VICKI LARSEN



‘I meet people all the time. In this way, I’m part of something’

“May I help you?” is a question often heard in stores. In Aarhus though, tourists are also met with similar courtesy as they walk along the cobble-stoned streets, thanks to the 1,900 locals who have joined VisitAarhus’ volunteer program to ensure visitors receive a proper welcome.

“When locals and tourists meet, it creates a positive energy. The locals want to give something back to the city and they’re curious about what’s happening. They share these characteristics with the visitors, who in turn, gain a more authentic experience during their stay,” says Ulla Lund Svenningsen, Head of Engagement at VisitAarhus.

And it works – in the VisitDenmark survey City tourists in Aarhus, 69% of the visitors cited “friendliness of the locals” as a reason for visiting the city.

Wearing blue polos and “Ask me” badges, the volunteers – also called “ReThinkers” – stand out in the city. You could even say they make hospitality fashionable. However, a smile is the best way to gain visitors’ attention, if you ask Ulla Rasmussen and Lone Højgaard, who joined the program in 2017.

“We always say ‘hi’ and walk up to the visitors, so, they know we’re here to help. I wouldn’t have done something like that before, but I’ve become more open and attentive to others,” says Rasmussen.

As a consequence, she says she’s become more appreciative of Aarhus, its nature and its culture. The same goes for Lone Højgaard, who also takes great pride in introducing her hometown to others.

“I was about to retire and needed something fun and meaningful. To me, it’s important to engage with others. As a ReThinker, I meet people all the time. In this way, I’m part of something,” she says.

Aarhus is the only European city to have introduced such a scheme so far, but looks unlikely to be the last.

“We wanted to create a community for the citizens of Aarhus. The locals function as hosts who are eager to help visitors. By doing so, we can show the rest of the world our city has the most hospitable inhabitants,” says Ulla Lund Svenningsen.

THE PROGRAM BEGAN two years ago when Aarhus was European Capital of Culture, which led to the creation of a wide variety of events across culture, tourism and businesses. To help with its implementation, the volunteer program was conceived and after the European Capital of Culture year had run its course, the program was maintained, and continues to be run by VisitAarhus, which uses it to attract events to the city.

An excellent example of how the system works in action is the cathedral and surrounding squares in the heart of the city – an area that has witnessed the full extent of the city’s changes over the past 800 years. Today, it’s a must-see for tourists and a great location for ReThinkers like Else Flytkjær, who also joined the program in 2017.

“I’m passionate about culture. As a ReThinker, I’m able to share my passion with the visitors and contribute to events in Aarhus. It makes me feel useful and active,” she says.

Flytkjær says she has learnt not only a lot about local history but also the social skills required to share this knowledge with others. All agree they now feel a stronger connection to the city as a result.

“The tourists notice the smallest things I hadn’t even thought of in Aarhus. In turn, I’m more aware of what we – the locals – should value and preserve in our city,” says Rasmussen. ○

Do Aarhus like a local



WHERE TO RELAX
“DOKK1 is a public library – and so much more. Here, you can read newspa-

pers, books, join public events, have a coffee or sit down and watch the panoramic view of the seaside. Furthermore, it’s a great place for children – their playground and indoor toys are highly popular. Like all public libraries in Denmark, DOKK1 is free to enter. Don’t miss the café, which has a wide range of delicious coffees and fresh bakeries.”

Ulla Rasmussen

Hack Kampmanns Pl. 2 • dokk1.dk



THE INNOVATION HUB

“Godsbanen is a former freight train station that’s buzzing

with life and creativity today. It has many workshops, specialized in everything from jewelry to wood or textiles. In addition, they have a small theater, Katapult, that puts on many interesting shows. Outside, you’ll find graffiti and tents for meetings, that give the place an urban, rustic feel. People are friendly, so you’re welcome to have a look around. Godsbanen is open from 8-16 on weekdays, and entrance is free.”

Else Flytkjær

Skovgårdsgade 3 • godsbanen.dk



SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ACTION

“The South Harbor is an old industrial area, but it’s changing rapidly. Here, you’ll find plenty of creative workshops and socially responsible initiatives. For example, they’ve just opened a repair shop for bicycles, Cykel-DoKK, where homeless people can find work. Entrance is free it and gives you another perspective on Aarhus.”

Lone Højgaard

Mindet 6 • sydhavnaarhus.dk