

A Tale of Two Shopping Cities: Copenhagen and Helsinki

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June 27, 2014



Shopping along Strøget in Copenhagen may make you lose your mind. (Photo: e g g/Flickr)

If the road to hell is paved with good intentions, the road to HEL is chock full of amazing Scandinavian design. HELsinki, that is. Just hop aboard Finnair Flight 666 from Copenhagen

(seriously) and you'll have yourself a HEL-uva weekend in retail heaven.

(Somebody at IATA, the trade association for the world's airline industry that determines airport codes and flight numbers, clearly has a sense of humor.)

Here's a quick shopping guide to Northern Europe's most sophisticated capital cities.



Rooftops in the Helsinki Design District (Photo: Timo Junttila)

STYLE CENTRAL

There are design destinations dotted around Copenhagen and Helsinki, but each city boasts its own particular area that can serve as a great starting point for doing some serious credit card damage.

Copenhagen: Take a stroll downtown to the Danish capital's lively shopping street [Strøget](#). It's among the longest pedestrian streets in Europe. Stores range from the Danish toy manufacturer **Legø** to top design houses, including **Georg Jensen** and **Royal Copenhagen**.

Helsinki: The city's pride and joy is its [Design District](#), a 25-block area in the center packed with over 200 creative shops (look for black and white signs designating official Design District community partners). It's easy to get a crash course in Scandinavian style in places like the flagship store of **Artek**, which specializes in everything aesthetic from art to industrial design.

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*Anna Heino - Design Jewellery in the Helsinki Design District
(Photo: Timo Junntila)*

ONE-STOP SHOPS

Copenhagen: [Illums Bolighus](#) has four glorious floors fully stocked with items from almost every iconic and up-and-coming Danish designer. Whimsical wooden **Kay Bojesen** monkey, bear, and elephant figurines found on the ground floor are a hit with the young (and young at heart) while upstairs, hanging lamps from **Le Klint** (made of folded white plastic to resemble paper lanterns) will light up the faces of almost any adult.

Helsinki: Glassware at Finland's famed [Iittala](#) shop and the bright, colorful kitchen mugs, clothing and other pop-patterned creations at [Marimekko](#) are export stalwarts. But the [Design Forum Shop](#), with its tastefully curated collections from outfits like **Lehtorinne design studio**, offers creations from trend-setting Finns that you can't get easily at home.

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*Danish designs at superstore Illums Bolighus in Copenhagen
(Photo: Aaron Rasmussen)*



The Design Forum Shop in Helsinki (Photo: Aaron Rasmussen)

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Copenhagen: Antique street flea [Ravnsborggade](#) in the eclectic Nørrebro neighborhood is *the* place for mid-century modern finds (while popular in the U.S., that era's design items are ubiquitous in Denmark, translating into less demand, more selection and cheaper prices). Haggle away and put some serious strain on your suitcase with treasures like a blue Solholm ceramic desk lamp, colorful Royal Copenhagen vases, and a 1960s glass-and-silver ice bucket.

Helsinki: In [Hietalahti Market Square](#) vendors set up racks of clothes and rows and rows of tables full of antiques and other goods Monday through Saturday and on summer Sundays (weather permitting). Here you'll find small gifts for friends and family stuck back home: birds made of glass (lots of Finnish glassware in general), vintage broaches and pins, retro desk lamps, vintage purses, jackets and other clothing.

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Mid-century modern flea market finds in Copenhagen (Photo: Aaron Rasmussen)

Aaron Rasmussen is a freelance writer and editor based in Brooklyn. His Scandinavian shopping spree transformed him from a simple souvenir collector to full-blown hoarder.

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