

The wine was white and cold, the hake pan-fried, the sunset spectacular, and sitting just over there on the terrac was an actual supermodel. I wasn't in the Caribbean. I wasn't in the south of Fra This was, as unlikely as it sounds, Denmark — and the Helenekilde Badehotel, in Tisvildeleje, could be my new favourite seaside hotel. Helena Christensen and family were having a nice time, too.

Most Britons would just as soon book a Saharan ski trip or a Swiss diving holiday as a Danish beach break. But we're missing out. This is a special coastline, and there's a lot to go round — 4,545 miles of it, mainly wild, occasionally chic, shared by a population of only 5m. Dismiss thoughts of a

Scandinavian deep-freeze: Copenhagen's July highs are similar to London's, with two extra hours of sunshine a day — but even in high season, there'll be space in the (free) car park. Here's where I'd head on a Danish seaside road trip.

JUTLAND

Sailors and Germans know all about the pleasures of the Jutland coast, but don't let that put you off. At its northernmost point, you'd feel like you were at the end of the earth (or at least most of the way to Sweden) if it weren't for all the people with rolled-up trousers taking selfies. This is **Grenen**, an epic sand spit where you can stand with one foot in the Baltic and the other in the North Sea, which I did, obviously.

To the west, you'll get that end-of-



the-world tingle again at **Bulbjerg**, miles of shingle, sand, wild flowers and kittiwakes, where the National Trust would plonk a cafe. Instead, here you get a few bins and a loo in a converted German concrete bunker.

Then you're in Arabia-on-Sea. **Rubjerg Knude's** lighthouse of 1900 is slowly falling into the sea, thanks to the huge shifting sand dune they built it on. It's a hot, surreal step-slip-step to the top. The kamikaze race back down is whoop-inducing. You've got until 2023.

The east-coast sophisticates of **Skagen** probably wouldn't approve of that sort of behaviour. It's a bohemian place that had its own school of painters at the end of the 19th century. The streets are narrow, the houses are yellow with red roofs, and the harbour buzzes with yachties and live music. The little Hotel Plesner offers nautical style and does splendid things with mussels and giant plaice (doubles from £145, B&B, in summer; three courses £35; hotelplesner.dk). Every local has a favourite beach, but the one they'd like to keep secret is Stranden 2. (Turn left at the "Stranden 2km" sign.) It's just some dunes, some sand and not much else, so it's perfect.

Before you leave Jutland, stop for an ice cream in **Hou** — your kids might like to know that the Danes are big into sprinkles, sauce and cream on top. Its dinky harbour reminded me of Walberswick, in Suffolk, and its twin beaches offer super-shallow waters, with that lovely ridged sand that massages the soles of your feet. Do watch out for the jellyfish, though, like I should have done.

FUNEN

The island of Funen — birthplace of Hans Christian Andersen — is the gateway to some lovely littler islands. If you've neglected to bring your own boat (happens), take the road bridge to **Langeland**, a thin finger of land that manages to squeeze in just the 28 beaches, the pick of which is Ristinge. Park among the pines and head for the dunes.

Driving back through **Svendborg**, queue up at Bendixens Fiskehandel, a hut on

the harbour where a dish of squid rings, potato salad and the ubiquitous Danish

garlic mayo will set you back less than £7 (bendixens-fiskehandel.dk).

Stop over at the more gourmet Hotel Hesselet, in **Nyborg**, a modernist thing with jetties in front taking you over the seaweed into calm waters. Whatever you order for dinner, insist it comes with potatoes. You've not truly had a boiled spud until you've had a boiled Danish new potato in summer — a tuberous revelation (doubles from £172, B&B; three courses from £48; hotel-hesselet.dk).

ZEALAND

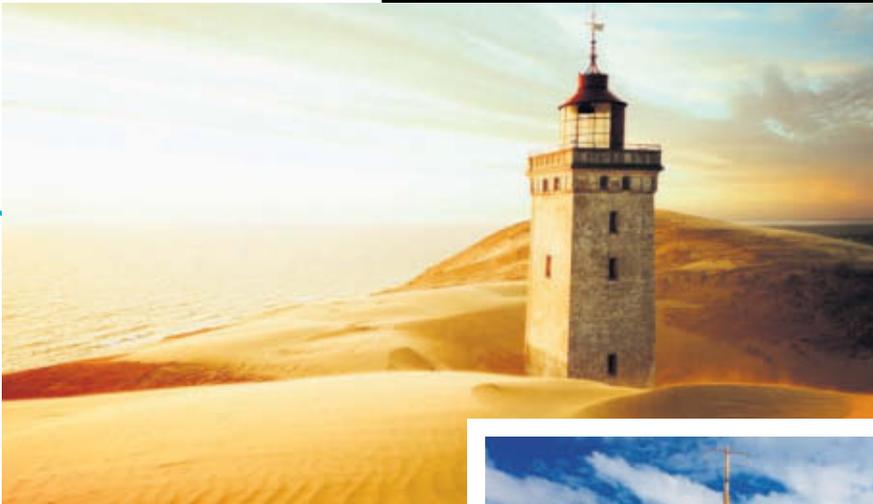
Twenty miles north of Copenhagen begins the Danish Riviera. Every country's got one (not Switzerland). Peter Schmeichel has a house here, as did Hamlet, if he wasn't made up. Kronborg Castle, in **Helsingor**, was the model for Elsinore, so it's fair enough that it hosts an annual Shakespeare festival (hamletscenen.dk). There's more culture at the Louisiana gallery, in **Humblebaek**, which if it weren't in a little beach town in Denmark would be mentioned in the same breath as MoMA and Tate Modern. On the sculpture lawn, there's a Moore here, a Miro there (£11; louisiana.dk).

If Hou is Denmark's Walberswick, **Hornbaek** is its Southwold. The designer Ilse Jacobsen had her first shop here. The retro Hansens ice cream stall does one-scoop cones for £2. The people are younger, sexier, more tanned. (OK, it's not totally like Southwold.)

Then, eventually, you'll come to **Tisvildeleje** and the Helenekilde Badehotel, a former retirement home now booked up by evacuees from the bar prices in Copenhagen (doubles from £155, B&B; three courses £41; helenekilde.com). Its beach is no great shakes — steep steps lead down to rock pools and a graffitied seawall — but the decor's a serene mix of candy stripes, tongue-and-groove and old photos, and the staff knock about in Nike trainers. Beautiful, relaxed and a complete surprise, with the odd local supermodel thrown in — but that's the Danish seaside for you.

THE BRIEF

Martin Hemming was a guest of [Visit Denmark](#). Fly to Aalborg, in Jutland, on Thursdays and Sundays with Norwegian; or to Copenhagen with British Airways, easyJet, Norwegian, Ryanair or SAS. You can find more hotels or book a self-catering cottage through [visitdenmark.co.uk](#).



FUNEN

The island of Funen
Christian Andersen
some lovely littler i



Cees van Roeden; Giovanni Simeone; Gunter Grafenhain/4 Corners

Dunes in July? Above,
beat the beautiful
people to the beach at
Hornbaek, in Zealand

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Broken beacon

Left, from top, Rubjerg Knude lighthouse is slipping into the sea; fishing boats on the wild west Jutland coast; and a cutesy beach house. Right, the Danes don't mess about when it comes to seaside ice creams