

Clio Muse - Test Tour to Christiansborg: At the Heart of Royal Life & History



[Intro text]

Stories

1. The Alexander Hall

Today, the Alexander Hall is used by the Queen and the Danish parliament to host receptions, visits, and small dinners. Take a closer look to discover the rich history hiding here between marble statues and gilded mirrors.



1.1 Directions

You reach the beautiful Alexander Hall by ascending the Queen's Staircase. It'll be the first room waiting for you at the top of the stairs as you begin your tour of the Royal Reception Rooms.

1.2 The Alexander Frieze

The hall is named for the marble frieze that runs along the ceiling - Berthel Thorvaldsen's *Alexander the Great's Entry into Babylon*. You can spot Alexander standing on a chariot drawn by four horses, holding a scepter. His chariot is driven by a winged woman - probably Nike, the Greek goddess of victory, for he has just defeated the city and comes now to claim it. On the other side, the goddess of Peace and Mazaeus, the governor of the city, receive him with gifts.

The frieze was originally commissioned by Napoleon in 1812 to celebrate his entry into Rome - intended, of course, to compare the great French commander to his legendary ancient predecessor. As history would have it, Napoleon never made it to Rome, but a later version of the frieze found a home here at Christiansborg in 1838.

1.3 Tip Standing with your back to the windows, you should be able to spot some fire damage to the frieze in the upper right corner. It originally hung in the second Christiansborg, which burned down in 1884. The Christiansborg you're currently standing in is actually the third version of the castle.

1.4 Bertel Thorvaldsen

It's not for nothing, Thorvaldsen's frieze was chosen for Christiansborg. The Danish sculptor made lots of artworks for the castle - and for the city in general. Although he isn't very famous anymore, in the 1820s and 30s, Thorvaldsen was one of Copenhagen's favorite artists, if not *the* favorite. He was made honorary citizen, titled as advisor to the king, poems were written about him, and, on one special occasion - returning from a longer stay in Rome - he was gifted an entire specially-embroidered furniture arrangement by a group of worried upper-class ladies, who knew he was unmarried and feared he'd have nothing to sit on. ...Perhaps, someone ought to commission a frieze of Thorvaldsen's entry into Copenhagen, the ladies like Babylonian citizens offering up throws and pillows?

1.5 Tip If you're curious to see more of Thorvaldsen's art, his personal museum is right next to Christiansborg. It's the big yellow building with the murals you can sometimes spot out of the windows. (Entrance is free on Wednesdays.)

2. The Queen's Reference Library



Now head to the Queen's personal book collection, or, at least some of it (the whole thing measures over three kilometers of shelf space).

2.1 Directions

Leaving Alexander behind you, walk through the Princess Chamber in red, white, and gold, and into the Queen's Reference Library, a two-storied room in creme and gold, where books line every wall.

2.2 Storks, Owls, and Other Birds

The library is full of birds. First, you'll probably notice the storks in the ceiling. They were painted by the Danish nature painter Johannes Larsen in 1924. People back then believed having storks on your roof brought luck and prosperity - so painting them on the ceiling was a clever way to bring luck to people below.

Then, there are the little golden owls on top of the shelves - symbolizing wisdom. And in the corners of the ceiling: Geese, a band of magpies, screaming at a bird of prey; a flock of fat sparrows, and not least, noble swans - depicted here under a portrait of the poet Hans Christian Andersen, whose fairytale "The Ugly Duckling" got Danes to fully fall in love with the swan - so much so, that they picked it as their national bird in 1984.

2.3 Tip The Lakes in Copenhagen is a popular nesting spot for Danish swans. During spring and summer, you might spot them in the water teaching their fluffy cygnets to swim - you can even rent a white or black swan boat at Kaffesalonen Boat Rental to sail around in if you want to try to get closer.

2.4 Hans Christian Andersen

Four Danish poets are depicted on the ceiling of the Queen's library. H. C. Andersen is one. In his fairytale "The Ugly Duckling", a cygnet (swan baby) is raised by ducks and spends its whole childhood thinking it's wrong, ugly, and inelegant. But as it grows and realizes what it is, the reader understands that it was never any of those things - just a great soul trapped in a world made for ducks.

H. C. Andersen, the son of a shoemaker, grew up in misery and poverty - it took him finding poetry to start to feel properly himself, and in some ways, he never did. Seeing himself on the ceiling of the Queen's Library must've felt utterly enchanting for the boy who grew up working for his food in factories and always felt strange compared to those around him.