



Destination South West Denmark

From the tempestuous North Sea to idyllic towns

Southwest Jutland is one of the most visited tourist destinations in Denmark – a region of contrasts, of narrow streets and wide, open beaches, where imposing, rugged North Sea landscapes meet idyllic towns steeped in history. The stunning 'Black Sun', when vast flocks of starlings darken the skies, and the incredible power of the North Sea are just two of the contrasting natural phenomena of this region, where holidays take on myriad forms – from outdoor pursuits to gourmet indulgence.

Denmark may be small, but it boasts a wide range of scenery, **full of contrasts**. Nowhere more so than in the south-west part of Jutland, which is home to everything from the **wild waves of the North Sea** to the **Wadden Sea mudflats**, meandering river valleys, lakes and **evocative old towns**.

The constant state of flux and distinctive fauna make the Wadden Sea unique. Declared a national park in October 2010, it covers approximately 1,350 square kilometres, and the difference between low and high tides is up to two metres.

The North Sea has a forceful, imposing character, increasingly so as the passing of the seasons transforms its gentle, lapping waves into thundering cascades of water. People have always been drawn to this coastline – in the past, mostly in search of a livelihood, but nowadays more often for leisure. Huge amounts of sand pitch up on **Rømø and Fanø**, where the beaches are among the most expansive in Europe. **The air** in Southwest Jutland has documented restorative powers, so visitors take home healthier, more relaxed bodies as well as wonderful memories.

Miles of sandy beaches and the largest concentration of sand dunes in the country stretch along the coastline between Blåvand and Blåbjerg – the highest dune in Denmark. Picturesque villages add to the allure of the area. Big skies and plenty of space make this an ideal place to indulge in your favourite beach pastimes.

This beautiful part of Denmark offers ample opportunities to enjoy nature in all its diversity. Whether you prefer to travel **on foot, on water or by bicycle**, Southwest Jutland has plenty to offer. It is also a place of **culinary delights** – serving up everything from **succulent marsh lamb** and **homemade sausages** to oysters from the flat sandbanks of the Wadden Sea.

Fascinating and varied activities abound in this corner of Denmark. Whether you're travelling luxury or economy, on your own or with family or friends, there is always something to suit every taste – and wallet! Accommodation options range from wild camping to luxury hotels. Enjoy exactly the type of holiday you want – whether you're looking for **wilderness** or **wellness**.



The Black Sun and other wonders of nature

Southwest Jutland has magnificent scenery and a range of widely contrasting natural habitats. It is also the setting for both wonderful natural phenomena and mankind's struggle against the environment.

The mouth of the **River Varde** in Ho Bay, north of Esbjerg, marks the beginning of the **Wadden Sea**, a type of habitat not found anywhere else in the world. Listed as a national park last year, the Wadden Sea stretches all the way along the Danish coast to the border, and continues down the coast of Germany to Den Helder in the Netherlands. The entire park covers approximately 1,350 square kilometres, of which the Wadden Sea accounts for 900 sq km.

What makes the **Wadden Sea** unique is that fact that its waters leave and come back twice a day. At each tide, about a billion cubic metres of water drain out through four deep channels that run to the North Sea. This process, known as the *ebb*, is followed by the return, or *flow*. **It's approximately six hours and 12 minutes between low tide and high tide, and the water level varies by a full two metres.** The ebb and flow are subject to changing weather and wind conditions, however, so exact times vary. Always check predicted tide times at <http://dmi.dk> before setting out across the seabed at low tide – and remember to leave plenty of time for the return trip!

A walk across the seabed is a special experience at any time of the year. The Wadden Sea is home to more than **3,000 common seals** that head towards land to find food and rest on the sandbanks at low tide. The area is also home to huge numbers of birds. Every year, between 10 and 12 million birds land on and around the Wadden Sea in search of food. One species that visits in large numbers during spring and autumn is the starling, the stars of the **magnificent 'Black Sun' phenomenon**. At sundown, starlings from every corner of the globe descend upon the marsh, where they gather in **huge flocks, up to half a million strong**, and settle on the rush beds for the night. They even block out the sunset – hence the term 'Black Sun'. People converge from far and wide just to watch, and **guided tours** of the marsh are run to observe this magnificent sight. A touch of drama is added whenever birds of prey turn up in search of easy pickings. A sparrowhawk on the prowl is noticeable from a distance because the huge flock will constantly change direction and shape to escape it.

Skallingen, between Blåvand and Fanø, is another unique natural environment – a stretch of 'young' land formed after a storm surge in 1634. A mixture of **marsh and dunes**, the area is still in the process of transformation and erosion. Parts of Skallingen flood during heavy storms, causing bits of the landscape to disappear completely. During the Second World War, **German occupation forces buried more than 72,000 mines in the area** to prevent an Allied landing. The area was partially cleared after the war but large areas remained closed for decades. In 2006, work started to clear the last of the mines, and visitors are now free to enjoy this very special place.



The struggle of mankind against the forces of nature is evident at **Højer Sluse**, a mixture of small townhouses and old marshland farms that once served as the port for Tønder. Nowadays, the town is better known for its **sluice and storm barriers**.

Holidays by bike, on foot or sand yacht

For active types, Southwest Jutland provides everything from safaris in the wilds of the Wadden Sea to yachting and hiking along meandering waterways

Some people go on holiday just to relax and chill out, while others seek excitement and adventure. A wide range of **active holidays** awaits in Southwest Jutland. One unusual, fun activity is a **seal safari**, a unique guided tour of the drained seabed to observe these delightful creatures resting on the sandbanks. Oysters are eaten straight from the sandbank or taken home after **oyster safaris**. Good footwear is essential for both kinds of safari. If all that walking isn't to your liking, seals can also be observed from the many boats that make trips along the North Sea coast. **Special all-terrain wheelchairs** are also available for people with disabilities who wish to take trips out onto the Wadden Sea mudflats.

If you want to be absolutely sure of finding seals without travelling far, then a visit to the **Fisheries and Maritime Museum in Esbjerg** is for you. Both species of seal that live in the Wadden Sea are housed in the sealarium. The museum also has a saltwater aquarium where you are even permitted to touch the fish. Petting animals is also allowed in the zoos and wildlife parks in the area, e.g. **Enghave Animal and Nature Park** at Brørup, the **Safari Zoo Park** in Lintrup and **Blåvand Zoo**.

Happy hikers tramp the '**coast-to-coast path**' – a **120-km route** that follows the rivers Varde, Holme and Vejle from Ho Bay out to the east coast of Jutland. Some follow the path from start to finish, while others enjoy it in small chunks. Many opt to pitch tents along the way and spend the night in one of the **stopping places**, with running water, toilets and campfire facilities. Fishing licenses are available if you want to catch your own dinner. Walking routes have been marked out in the area around the Jels lakes, which bear the straightforward names Oversø, Midsø and Nedersø (upper, middle and lower lake). This 78-hectare area, which emerged during the Ice Age, is full of things to see and do in beautiful surroundings, including the chance to **practise your angling skills**. Swimming is permitted from the jetties on Nedersø. The area around Åtte Bjerger, south of Brørup, is great for hiking, with marked trails and designated sites for campfires. At almost 60 metres above sea level, the 'mountain' of Flaghøj is the highest point in the area. Ribe Cathedral can be seen from its summit. A visit to Vejen is *de rigueur* for keen hikers who want to take on the Danish counterpart to El Camino, **Hærvejen** (variously referred to as the Army Road and the Oxen Road), a beautiful old road that winds its way through Vejen and the surrounding district.

Cyclists have a wide range of options, too. As well as the excellent road network, bike routes abound in the Vejen area and around Marbæk, near Esbjerg. **Three cultural-history routes** are also planned in and around the port city of Esbjerg. The local council in Tønder has set up two routes – 17 and 32 km – through the marshes between Bredebro and Ballum. One of these passes the ruins of **Trøjborg Castle**. Or for something completely different, but still on wheels, you can rent a bicycle trolley and pedal along the tracks of the former railway line between Nørre Nebel Station and Nymindegab.

For thrill-seekers, the huge beaches on the south-west coast of Jutland are also a magnet. On the islands of Rømø and Fanø, you can even try **high-speed yachting** – without getting wet! When the tide is out, the beautiful Wadden Sea mudflats are perfect for sand yachting. Foreign tourists flock to Rømø and Fanø to have a go at this demanding sport, and yachts can often be seen hurtling headlong across the wide, open plains. Plenty of room is available for other popular beach activities along the North Sea coast – e.g. **kite flying, kite boarding** and **windsurfing**. Fanø (in June) and Rømø (in September) both host major **international kite festivals**.

Nowadays, **Rømø** is very much associated with tourism and outdoor activities. The Rømø dam, built in 1939–48, lets visitors **drive out to the island**, which is home to some of the most expansive **sandy beaches anywhere in northern Europe**. Even at the height of the busy season, there's enough room for everyone.

Culture for all tastes

The towns of Southwest Jutland towns have so much to offer tourists with an interest in culture

Visitors to Southwest Jutland always find it easy to pass the time – whether they are into museums, exhibitions, music, churches, crafts or galleries. This is a region with a diverse cultural heritage. Traders, warriors, monks and mariners have frequented the area since time immemorial – and left their mark. Southwest Jutland is home to **Denmark's oldest runic inscription**, on a stone from Malt that dates from the early Viking Age. Along with the runic stones at the churches in Læborg and Bække, it reminds us that the area has been inhabited for thousands of years. Runes are also found on the national treasures known as the **Golden Horns**, which were originally found at Gallehus near Tønder. Gold has a long history in the area. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Tønder was home to the highest number of **goldsmiths** in North Schleswig. It is also known for its lace – in 1780, more than 12,000 women made lace in the area between Tønder and Ribe.

The main street in **Tønder** is home to beautiful **gabled houses with bay windows** that bear witness to an era of prosperous merchants and wealth, as well as a style of architecture unique to this part of Southwest Jutland. It would be unthinkable to talk about Tønder and design without mentioning the internationally acclaimed **Hans J. Wegner**, who was born and raised in the town. Wegner is particularly well known for his sculptural and functional chairs, which have won a host of awards. A large collection of



them is now housed in the old water tower in Tønder, which is more than 100 years old. Now the **Wegner Tower Museum**, it offers a unique insight into the craftsmanship of one of Denmark's most famous furniture-makers.

The cultural history of Southwest Jutland is closely related to its natural habitats. Located in the midst of a flat landscape, surrounded by wetlands, the **cathedral city of Ribe celebrated its 1,300th anniversary in 2010**. The city's most prominent landmark, the best-preserved Romanesque cathedral in Denmark, testifies to Ribe's former grandeur. The Michelin travel guide gave the city a top ranking for good reason – over the centuries, floods and storms may have made their mark here, but Ribe remains one the **best-preserved medieval towns** in Denmark. In its time, Ribe has served as a commercial, administrative and religious hub. The Vikings were the first to settle here, establishing a marketplace around 700 AD. The site was perfect – the small ships of the day were able to sail into the river harbour, and the flat landscape made it easy to spot encroaching enemies. **Ribe Viking Museum** depicts day-to-day life, extensive trade with Europe, and the unique and beautiful jewellery and ornate crafts of the Viking Age. A trip to the **Ribe Viking Centre** will let you translate these visual impressions into something more practical. At this **reconstructed Viking homestead**, visitors taste, feel and try out everyday life in Viking times.

The Viking Age came to an end with the rise of the monarchy in the early Middle Ages, about the same time that Ribe began to emerge as an administrative centre. A visit to **Ribe old town** is like stepping back in time. The city remains a religious centre thanks to its cathedral, the beautiful interior of which is adorned by Carl-Henning Petersen's frescos and stained glass windows – consummate examples of **modern ecclesiastical art**. If you are fit enough, it is worth climbing the stairs to the top of the tower, where your exertion will be rewarded with stunning views over the city and surrounding marshlands. It soon becomes obvious why it was used as a watchtower and why cannon were deployed there.

Esbjerg – the biggest and youngest city in the region

When the port was established in 1865, Esbjerg was little more than a hamlet. By the end of the 19th century, this had all changed, and the architecture tells the story of the city. Esbjerg has no humble medieval dwellings, but plenty of **opulent edifices** from more recent times that radiate power and strength, designed by some of the greatest architects of the day. The rapid pace of the city's development is also reflected in the exhibitions in the **Esbjerg Museum**, where the urban environment of 1900–1950 is evoked by old shop interiors, workers' houses and the mansions of the wealthy, etc. Esbjerg may be relatively young but there is **no shortage of culture**, e.g. the various local artists' workshops on **Strandvejen**, which have banded together to promote their work. The city also boasts several art galleries, including in the Esbjerg Performing Arts Centre, which houses both a music venue and Esbjerg Art Museum, and was designed by the renowned architects Jørn and Jan Utzon.

Vejen – in the striking area between Esbjerg and Kolding – is another centre of craftsmanship and culture in beautiful surroundings. The well-known **Vejen Art Museum** houses an extensive collection of Danish symbolism from the late 19th century. The museum is best known for the controversial statue 'Troll that



smells Christian blood' by the artist Niels Hansen Jacobsen (1861–1941), who was born and raised in the town. Jacobsen was highly acclaimed in Denmark and abroad. Several of his works are on display in important Copenhagen venues such as the St. Petri Cemetery, the Glyptotek, etc., but Vejen Art Museum is the place to be if you want to peruse a large collection of his work under one roof.

Another popular attraction in Vejen is the Viking Games held at Jels every July. Here, the most famous Vikings bounce back to life on a beautiful outdoor stage, and bloody sword fights and plenty of drama ensue. The Viking Games celebrate their 35th anniversary in 2012.

Stargazers and **astronomy enthusiasts** will find plenty to do in Vejen. The **Orion Planetarium** is the only place in Southwest Jutland where you can sit back and explore the universe from the comfort of an armchair. If animals and bargain-hunting are more your thing, swing by **Brørup Market** – Northern Europe's largest livestock auction and flea market, which is open every Friday, all year round.

Fanø is visible from the harbour in Esbjerg. This small island community can only be reached **by ferry**, but Fanø still has its own local council, even after the most recent local government reforms. This craving for independence may have its historical roots in the fact that the residents bought their island from Christian VI for 6,000 rix dollars in 1741. Shipping, the traditional occupation on Fanø, is no longer as important as it once was, but it has left its mark. The beautiful **captains' houses** and the islanders' **beautiful folk costumes** tell of an affluent community that travelled far and wide long before the era of globalisation. Tourism may be far more important nowadays, but because Fanø is a vibrant, independent community, it doesn't shut up shop when the last tourist goes home. Fanø is full of life all year round.

To the north lies Varde, a transport hub where the road meets the **River Varde, the third-biggest in Southwest Jutland**. In the Middle Ages, Varde flourished on the proceeds from cattle driven through the town. Fires were to take a terrible toll, however, and little remains of the medieval town. But, if you want to see how the town looked before the last great fire in 1821, head to the **Minitown model village**, a replica of old Varde in scale 1:10. **Varde Museum** recently conducted its own archaeological excavations to shed new light on the town's medieval past and origins. It also houses a contemporary exhibition of works by the fascinating artist **Otto Frello**, who has a square named after him in the town, on which two of the gable ends feature paintings by the 85-year-old artist. Varde and the surrounding area are also home to no fewer than ten smaller museums, specialising in topics as varied as Denmark's first dairy, the artillery of the Cold War era, the importance of lifeboat stations, school in the olden days, the Second World War bunker system and the history of amber. In other words, there's no shortage of things to see and do!

The area around the Wadden Sea bears witness to how hard mankind has had to struggle against the elements and the mighty ocean to survive and make a living over the years. **Højer Sluse** and its storm barriers are examples of the ingenuity marshalled against high tides and storm surges. But the sea gives as much as it takes. The 'upstart' Esbjerg can thank its location by the open sea for its rapid growth – the burgeoning offshore- and windmill industries are merely the most recent additions to its waterfront.



Southwest Jutland is steeped in Danish history. It is home to the **Oxen Road**, the ancient trade route to the south. The area around Vejen spawned the first runes, Løgumkloster boasts some of the oldest and most beautiful Nordic monastic buildings, and Møgeltønder is the site of the royal **Schackenborg Castle**. An episode in history that has since been reverted but still resonates in Denmark to this day was the loss of South Jutland after the war in 1864. The border was moved up to the **Kongeåen river**, and everything south of it remained under German rule until reunification in 1920. The relics left by the Germans after WWII were more substantial. During the war, the North Sea coast was part of the 'Atlantic Wall' that stretched from France up to North Jutland. It consisted of a series of **bunkers and fortifications**, the remains of which are still visible in areas including Rømø, Fanø and the northern beaches at Vejers and Blåvand.

A taste of Southwest Jutland

Southwest Jutland has a fascinating food culture influenced by both gourmet and traditional cuisine

A diverse range of culinary delights awaits in Southwest Jutland. The Wadden Sea is a treasure trove of delicacies, from **shrimp** and **oysters** to **succulent marsh lamb** and juicy **Wadden beef**. Meat from animals who graze the salt marshes of the Wadden Sea has a unique flavour. Their diet includes sea-meadow grass, which tolerates salt, so the animals ingest important nutrients and minerals that endow the meat with a distinctive and delicious taste.

A number of **gourmet restaurants** in the region serve Wadden Sea menus, made up of everything from oysters, mussels and shrimp to special dishes featuring the succulent lamb, sheep and oxen that graze on the marsh. All of the dishes are prepared with the utmost care and respect for the raw ingredients.

If you prefer to cook your own dinner, why not **catch your own fish** or gather **oysters** and **mussels** on the Wadden Sea sandbanks? You can cook them in your caravan or holiday apartment, or even in a layby or at one of the many designated campfire areas. The region is also home to a large number of **farm shops and specialist food shops** selling **local produce** such as honey, homemade sausages, air-cured ham, cheese, organic poultry and the famous **Rømø shrimps**, all of which can be washed down with beer from the local breweries. The hospitality is warm and welcoming, and the locals are rightly proud of both their region and its food. A visit to one of the inns in the area is like stepping back in time. They are often **thatched**, with the **original rooms** preserved and **local dishes** served with pride and care.

This part of Denmark also produces **wool and amber, rushes for thatching, jewellery, arts and crafts, glass**, candles and flowers. There's a broad range of products available, often sold in convivial little farm shops that also offer visitors the chance to visit a **working farm**.



Accommodation is never a problem in Southwest Jutland, and the possibilities are endless – all the way from spacious **holiday apartments**, on the waterfront or inland, to idyllic **rural camping** steeped in silence in the great outdoors, to modest **bed & breakfasts**, convivial inns, **hostels**, hotels or lodgings in one of the **salt-marsh farms**.

For further information about Southwest Jutland and the latest news and events, visit:
www.southwestjutland.com/intro.

Further information is also available at the local tourist offices' own websites:
www.visitribe.dk, www.romo.dk, www.visitesbjerg.dk, www.visitvejen.dk, www.visitwestdenmark.com
and www.visitfanoe.dk.

And don't forget that you can enjoy reading about other peoples' holiday memories – and perhaps find a source of inspiration for your own vacation – at the Facebook page: www.facebook.com/sydvestjylland.