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Comment: Embracing technology - exploiting Copenhagen's tourists
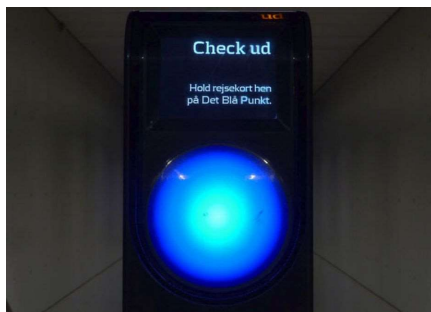

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The latest Danish ticket system Rejsekort is already controversial for other reasons. And it is consistently more expensive for those here on a short stay, argues Alex Berger

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The new travel card Rejsekort is making a visit to Copenhagen much more expensive for tourists

by Alex Berger

Recently we saw the phase-out of Denmark's 'klippekort' (clip cards). These 'klippekort' allowed commuters to get significantly discounted public transit tickets by purchasing bulk trips 10 at a time.

Like many systems around the world, on-site pricing for buses is higher than tickets purchased in advance. This discourages people slowing down the loading/boarding process and encourages people to participate in transit programs. All of which is great. However, unlike other programs where the increased pricing is only applied to time-sensitive transit situations (e.g., buses) – the Danish system charges the same high rate across the board regardless of if you're purchasing a one-off ticket on a bus, from a kiosk, or at an automatic vending machine.

It typically costs you DKK 24 for a one-hour two zone ticket in Copenhagen. When calculated using a 10 ticket 'klippekort' the adjusted price typically averaged out to DKK 15 or less. From a pricing standpoint, DKK 24 is quite an excessive price (even by Danish cost-scales) for a ticket, while DKK 15 may not be cheap but is still quite a bit more reasonable.

Visitors to Copenhagen were able to buy a clip card and use it without incurring any additional costs, technical barriers, or obstacles. Unfortunately, in their push to digitize, these old paper clip cards were done away with and will be phased out completely 30 June 2015.

The problematic Rejsekort

The system that replaced them has been twofold. You're faced with either the option of purchasing (DKK 80) a transit card called _Rejsekort_ (a bit like the UK's Oyster card) that you pre-charge and then use to check in and check out with the trip amount being automatically deducted.

Check out the University Post article on _How to use the puzzling Danish travel card_.

This card has a number of restrictions making it unpractical for tourists, grants you an additional 20 per cent discount when traveling during off-peak times (dropping the DKK 15 ticket to DKK 12), and requires you keep at least DKK 50 on the card at any time which is almost impossible to cash-out and which equates to a DKK 50 sunk cost on top of the DKK 80 signup fee.

The other option is to use your mobile. If you download the app, navigate the settings, and manage to get it switched over to English, you can then purchase discounted tickets. Of course, this requires that you have a functional cell phone, with data, learn and master the whole Danish zone system (which most Danes don't even really have a firm grasp on), and then take care of app-based billing while hoping it 1) works and 2) doesn't incur secondary fees.

Frustrating for tourists

If we're to be honest, neither of these two options are viable for tourists. Annoyed and frustrated, I reached out to several DSB staff members based at Nørreport station. Their answer? The same old broken record – tell people to buy a 24 or 72 hour city pass.

Are these city passes actually a good deal? It depends, but usually – no. The 24 hour city pass costs DKK 80 while the 72 hour pass costs DKK 200. Where these are a good deal is in cases where people are based in or traveling repeatedly into zones 3 and 4. However, a good 95 per

cent of a tourists' time will be spent in zones 1 and 2. If you're a hostel/backpacker all of the city's key hostels are in the heart of these two central zones. Also, just to put things into context, my 30 day unlimited 2 zone commuter's pass costs me a bit under DKK 400 and that's for unlimited travel over an entire month.

If we assume the price tourists would/should be paying using the old system or if they had the default, peak period, access to the tools residents have we can assume they SHOULD be paying DKK 15 per trip. Given the small geographic size of Copenhagen it is unlikely that most people will travel by public transit more than three, perhaps four, times in a given day. At a price of DKK 15 per trip, you'd need to travel 5 1/3 times to reach the 'value' of a DKK 80 24 hour ticket. Meanwhile, if we look at the same for the DKK 200 72-hour ticket, you'll need to take 13 1/3 trips over that three day period or roughly 4 ½ trips per day, every day, for the duration of the ticket to break even with what tourists SHOULD be paying.

Of course, if we use the sticker price that tourists are currently being forced to pay (DKK 24) then that drops to 8 1/3 trips before it becomes a decent deal on the 72 hour ticket, and a mere 3 1/3 trips on a 24 hour ticket.

Exploiting visitors

I believe one of the reasons Copenhagen has a reputation as such an expensive city is the simple fact that the first and last thing most visitors experience is getting price-gouged by the public transit system. That's extremely unfortunate. It's also very unfortunate that in a society based around fairness and equal treatment, that visitors are so obviously being exploited under the new system.

Tourists bring in a significant amount of money and have a direct impact on large swaths of Copenhagen's economic ecosystem. Copenhagen, and Denmark as a whole should be embracing technology as a tool to help encourage and reward their interest in Denmark while facilitating the investment of their tourist dollars. Not squeezing them for pennies in a poorly thought out and even more poorly executed Nickel and Dime scheme.

For reference you can find pricing and a breakdown of Copenhagen's public transit system via the *Visit Copenhagen website*.

TL;DR version for tourists: Install and use the app if you can. Otherwise, do a little research and evaluate which zone you'll be in and if it makes sense to buy a commuter card. Remember, purchasing tickets from kiosks, on the buses, and vending machines means you'll pay 2x normal prices.

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