

A stranger in our midst

Somehow most of us seem to know each other in the gay community in Copenhagen. But are we a members only club, unwelcoming to newcomers? Is a certain code of conduct required in order to navigate in the Danish gay community? FAHAD SAEED from Sabaah asked MIGUEL OBRADORS from Pangea, a new international LGBT network, about his experiences.



Miguel Obradors is a member of the international LGBT network, Pangea.

Written by Fahad Saeed

I was enjoying wine and Arabic grooves at a Sabaah party when I started a conversation with an American-Pakistani medical engineer. He told me he had been in Copenhagen for almost a year working for a Danish medical company, but was going to return to New York soon. So how did he find his stay in Copenhagen? Will he be coming back?

"It's been a mixed experience. Gay people in Denmark are very reserved, and most people are happy hanging out with the same crowd," he said.

At this point I was feeling a bit ashamed and guilty, that a foreigner would leave Denmark without any fond memories and no desire to ever come back. This made me wonder if other so-called newcomers have had the same experience and if there is a way to break the Danish ice? I asked Miguel Obradors, a member of the international LGBT network Pangea, about his experiences within the gay community in Copenhagen.

"I think that you really have to

make an effort from your side too. As a newcomer you should take time to really observe the Danish culture. Unlike many non-western countries, people in Denmark move out to live on their own at a very early age. This creates a very individualised culture, which in my opinion probably is why there is a lesser need for a big gay scene," he said.

– But are gay people in Denmark more reserved than in other countries, and are we unwelcoming?

"I would say that people in Scandinavia in general are more introverted. This is probably because of the cold weather," he joked.

"But if I had to offer advice to any newcomers I would say that it is essential that you network with other foreigners or newcomers, as they can be your link to the gay community. Secondly you should find a social group that fits your interests. People in Denmark socialise in small networks that focus on personal interests. You can always find a network through a social group or club, for

example Pangea, BLUS, or Sabaah, or Pan Idræt which is a sports association for gay people," he said.

– So you are saying that Danes like to socialise with a sense of purpose?

"Of course this is a generalisation, but I would say yes. For most parts Danes like to socialise around a certain cause, like meeting people in an association of some sorts because this gives their socialising a meaning. You don't have to know anyone before hand, and participating in activities give you opportunity to make new friends."

– Does not speaking the Danish language create any barriers?

"Fortunately almost every single Danish person speaks English, which is good. But of course there are some cultural things that are closely tied with the Danish language. The Danish word *hyggeligt*, for example, cannot be translated into any word in English or other language."

– What can we do to make newcomers or foreigners feel more welcome?

"I would say that it is important to look at nuances. A lot of Danes have a certain perception of what a foreigner is, and they are often surprised if things are not as they seem. So I would say that it is important for them to keep an open mind."

Pangea

The international LGBT network, Pangea, is placed under the LBL (The Danish National LGBT Union). Further information can be found at internationalgroup.lbl.dk or by emailing to miguel@lbl.dk.