



From Cyberspace to the Middle Ages

An introduction, for the benefit of the acting time traveller
at the Medieval Center



Middelaldercentret

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The Medieval Center

a background sketch

The Medieval Center was started in 1989 in connection with the 700th anniversary of Nykøbing Falster, Denmark. The local museum reconstructed a trebuchet – a medieval war machine, used at sieges of cities and castles. It was the first time in modern times such an endeavour was undertaken – except for Napoleon III and Kaiser Wilhelm II, who both had officers attempt similar reconstructions. Unfortunately, both were made from materials too fragile, and both broke down after a few shots (Napoleon's even started by shooting backwards!). These were bad results for both emperors – but they provided valuable information for future trebuchet builders.

The reconstruction project was a huge success and was conducted without mishaps. There was extensive press coverage, both nationally and internationally, and almost 20.000 people visited the construction area at the Guldborgsund during the process. The seed for a museum had been laid!

During the following years, the activities of the center grew, supported by various development funds, the EEC Social Foundation, the center's earnings, and by

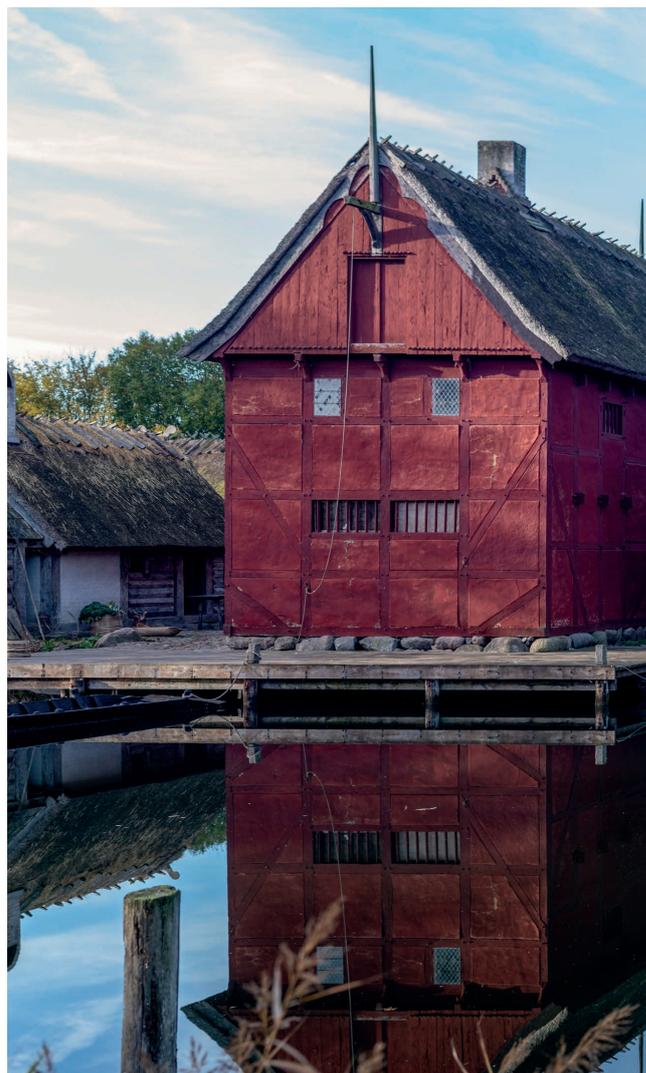


very strong local support. The visitor numbers rose each year, but at the time, the Medieval Center didn't have the infrastructure to handle that many guests.

A Danish Foundation, Arbejdsmarkedets Feriefond, decided to have a look at the center – and while the center was hoping to get funding to build public toilets, the foundation had more generous plans: three months later, almost 50 million Danish Kroner were donated, stimulating further local co-financing. Now, the Medieval Center could take a tiger leap directly into a major regional museum institution.

Today, the Medieval Center is a recognised member of the formal forum of “Knowledge-based Activity Centres in Denmark” (VPAC) – a group of sites, rooted in a research-based concept of adventure/entertainment and visitor participation, with authenticity as a highly important keyword.

The Center has since extended activities with a medieval technology park, the magic forest and Griffenholm. This booklet, however, will focus on the area of the center known as Sundkøbing, the medieval market town, and the reenactment work taking place there.



The history of the market town of Sundkøbing

Time and Place

The Medieval Center focuses on the period known as the Middle Ages in Denmark, from the end of the Viking Age in AD 1050 to the reformation of AD 1536.

For paedagogical reasons, however, Sundkøbing portrays a very specific point in time during the Late Middle Ages; time is passing here, following the actual calendar... but 610 years back in time! In 2020, Sundkøbing presented AD 1410, and in 2024 it's 1414. It gives ample opportunity to explain history, related to historical events, but also to elaborate on the history of Sundkøbing and its citizens. The years around AD 1400 – the age of Margrethe the First and Eric of Pomerania – were chosen because it is a well-documented period in Denmark, full of dramatic and important events, while at the same time being a period that presents ample possibilities to conduct exciting research projects and experimental archaeology.

Sundkøbing

The market town of Sundkøbing is a fiction; there was never a medieval town here. There was, however, one on the opposite side of the waterway, where the market town of Nykøbing lays, next to an important royal fortress.

Our modest town has the status of a market town, giving it the privilege of arranging markets and fairs at the town square. The town has also been given the royal privilege of minting.

The town consists of the “old town” – a street with a series of mixed small houses and workshops where goods are produced and sold, a market square and dwelling quarters for travellers (which also contains the workshops of the tailor and the painter/scribes' workshop), and the “new town” around the harbour, with two merchants' houses and several smaller buildings.

The citizens of Sundkøbing

The townspeople of Sundkøbing are largely modest craftspeople; currently, there is a blacksmith, a tailor, a weaver, a cloth dyer, a carpenter, a rope maker and their apprentices and families. Among the upper crust, there is the rich merchant, who is also the mayor.

There is a Captain of the Town Guard, with an office in the small double-house at the town square, and the mayor hires professional soldiers to protect his ships when travelling.

The local knight is Sir Henrik Svane (Swan) who owns large estates on Lolland and Falster, and who has erected a jousting arena in the fields right next to the town. Lord Svane is a member of the King's Council, making him the highest court judge, representing the authority of the crown.

Furthermore, there is a motley crew of tradespeople, travelling craftsmen and journeymen visiting the town.



Authenticity a keyword!

The Medieval Center wish its visitors to have as authentic an experience of the Middle Ages as can be achieved. This goes for buildings, clothing, tools, war materials, animals, plants, personal appearance, etc.

Our knowledge of the period stems from a wide range of sources. Archaeological finds include excavated villages, towns, fortresses, graves, treasure hoards, ships and so forth. Written sources include legal texts, wills, ecclesiastical treatises, custom accounts, household accounts etc. Pictorial sources include murals (primarily ecclesiastical, to a lesser degree secular), illuminated books, woodcuts and paintings, and altarpieces. Sculptural sources include stone- and woodcarvings in church decoration, burial monuments and so on. There is an enormous range of items mostly retrieved during archaeological excavations, but also things that have simply remained in use since they were made; churches and a small number of secular buildings, like Boderne in the city of Næstved, and the town gate of Stege on Møn.

The many props in use are made, either as replicas or as copies of medieval original pieces. A replica is made using original materials and tools, while a copy is made to match a specific original item, using original materials, but modern tools.



The presentation

We are in the Year of Our Lord...

At the Medieval Center we use first- and third-person interpretation with the visitors. This means that reenactors – staff as well as volunteers – act as medieval persons, but don't need to go so deep as to pretend they don't know the "outside world". Obviously, you should not discuss what was on television last night, but keep in mind your medieval persona. If a visitor asks a question to which you do not know the answer, you may point the visitor to one of the other citizens or the staff.

We do not try to speak authentic medieval Danish, but do avoid distinctly modern expressions, and do properly address each other. The standard greeting is "*Guds fred!*" (app. "godspeed" – pronounced roughly "gøðs frēð"), applied to visitors and reenactors alike. The titles of *Herr* (Sire, or Mylord) are used only for the knights, and *Fru* (lady) only for the wives of the knights. To all other males, the title is mester, if you do not know the person's name.

Currently, there are a lot of expectations from visitors. Movies and series like *Braveheart*, *Robin Hood*, *King Arthur*, and *Game of Thrones* have created some very romantic notions in some people, and thus stimulated some very specific expectations; loads and loads of "fair damsels and brave men of supernatural strength and spectacular heroic deeds, generously spiced with love and drama, and of course a happy end". We cannot live up to that vision, nor do we wish to. In Sundkøbing, the Medieval Center presents a snapshot of everyday life, and in the jousting arena, we present the favourite sport of the age, and the greatest mass

entertainment: the tournaments! What takes place here is edutainment: we entertain the spectators, while at the same time educating them.

Clothing

At The Medieval Center, clothing from various social layers is presented, ranging from the humblest peasant to the proudest merchant or knight.

The Center has a large collection of clothing and shoes that are at the disposal of volunteers who do not have their own. Only common, everyday work clothing is on loan.

There is a strong emphasis on authentic materials and sewing techniques in the making of the clothing. After many years of research in textiles and clothing, the Medieval Center has accumulated substantial knowledge in this area, and sewing courses are offered to volunteers who wish to make their clothes, in cooperation with the Guldborgsund Gildet.

All privately owned clothing must be approved by the Medieval Center before use while at the museum. The clothing must be suitable for the role performed by that person: craftsman, tradesman, soldier, servant etc – both regarding materials, colours and cut.

Living in a medieval house

As a citizen (volunteer) in Sundkøbing, you will be trusted with the task of living a la the medieval in a house: cooking, cleaning, maintaining, performing a

craft and – not least! – present it to visitors. It is hard work, but also quite enjoyable. Water and firewood must be fetched, food must be prepared. Floors must be swept; the house must be kept tidy. The chores are distributed according to gender: women oversee cooking and running the house, while men are occupied by the craft (assisted, however, by the women), and repairing and maintaining the buildings. Children assist wherever they can, especially in fetching water and firewood, although most boys are in an apprenticeship from about the age of 8.

As a volunteer, you will normally be lodging with one of the craftspeople, acting as an apprentice or visiting relatives of the craftsman. Others are travelling craftspeople looking for work in the booming market town, or tradespeople selling their goods in the town's market.

Personal Equipment and appearance

When presenting a medieval persona, you must look the part. Fashion changes and beauty ideals changed along. A perfect medieval woman had fair skin, a high forehead, small breasts very high on the chest, and wide hips. Men should have rather long (preferably curly) hair, a short goatee, broad shoulders, a slim waist, long slender legs, and small feet.

Of course, not everyone can live up to that (as indeed they could not 600 years ago), but at least one may avoid the most obvious mistakes: make-up, painted nails, visible piercings, visible tattoos, modern jewellery, eyeglasses. Especially eyeglasses are a frequently occurring subject for debate: "But I cannot see without glasses!" Well, no... but neither could you, had you been living in the Middle Ages, and besides, most people do get by after all – you will not need to read newspapers or use a computer. With authenticity as the keyword (and compromises not applied), how could you get the visitor to believe in you if you wore modern glasses? Contact lenses, of course, are acceptable, and medieval glasses also – if you impersonate a learned male, that is, such as a monk. Eyeglasses in the Middle Ages were for the few.

Acting, or playing a role

In Sundkøbing, everybody has a specific character,



more or less clearly defined. You are either a master craftsman, an apprentice, and so on. You have a name and a background story.

Some volunteers settle for a very sketchy background story, along the lines of "I am travelling with my husband, who is a craftsman, and we are just passing through the town". Others opt for a detailed, full background with a family history stretching back several generations. The professional presenters each have their own background stories, tying them to Sundkøbing through many years. Of course, stories may disappear or be added, as people die or move away, and new ones enter the arena.

An entirely authentic medieval performance is impossible. We cannot speak like they did in the Middle Ages. Social norms concerning gender, and respectful behaviour to your betters, however, are easily achieved. The strict, authoritarian attitude to raising children, where children are expected to be obedient and respectful to adults, can be the subject of many beneficial conversations with visitors.

You mustn't overact. If you are not a skilled actor, do not engage in extensive role-playing. More experienced presenters will often encourage you to take part in small "plays", where you can engage without the need for professional acting.

Chores of the Day

- 9:30 Information meeting in the White House, where everybody is present. This meeting is run by the person in charge of the area on that day. Here, information and the various tasks of the day are distributed, such as helping at the trebuchets, the tournament, or the bow range.

- 10:00 The Medieval Center opens for the public. Everyone is ready and in place.

- 12:00 The trébuchets are demonstrated. During high season, the small trebuchet is also demonstrated at 15:00.

- 13:30 /14:00 Tournament. During low season, the tournament is presented on Tuesday, Wednesday,

Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday at 13:30. During high season, the tournament is presented every day at 14:00.

- 16:00 the Medieval Center closes for the visitors. There may also be days with special events, with unusually long opening hours. If so, the rules for clothing, etc, apply until closing time.

In between the announced, staged events, "life goes on" in Sundkøbing – presenting the various daily chores such as cooking, tasks in the workshop, housekeeping, gardening etc.

During May, August and September, numerous guided tours for groups and school classes take place. These will pass by most of the houses, being told about daily life and the different crafts.



Rules, Regulations & all things practical...

These are the main buildings and rooms at the Medieval Center:

1 - Administration: This is where the offices of the administrative staff and the curator are. It is also where meeting rooms, clothing rooms and the library are located.

2 - Entry Building: Visitor entry and exit, visitor toilets, museum shop, exhibitions, entry to the restaurant.

3 - The White House: Eating and living room with modern kitchen, at the disposal of staff and volunteers.

4 - Staff Facilities: In the southern wing of the entry building, with access from the yard, are located the toilets, showers, washing facilities and a locked gunpowder storage room. This area is normally exclusively reserved for staff.

5 - Volunteer Toilets & Showers: In the side wing of the entry building, accessible from the yard; Three toilets and showers are at the disposal of the volunteers.

6- Visitor Toilets: In the small side building, next to the entry hall. For the use of visitors only.

7- Smithy and Carpenter Workshop: Only accessible to staff, except by special formal appointment.

8- Leather Workshop: In the side wing of the White House. Only accessible to staff, except by special formal appointment.

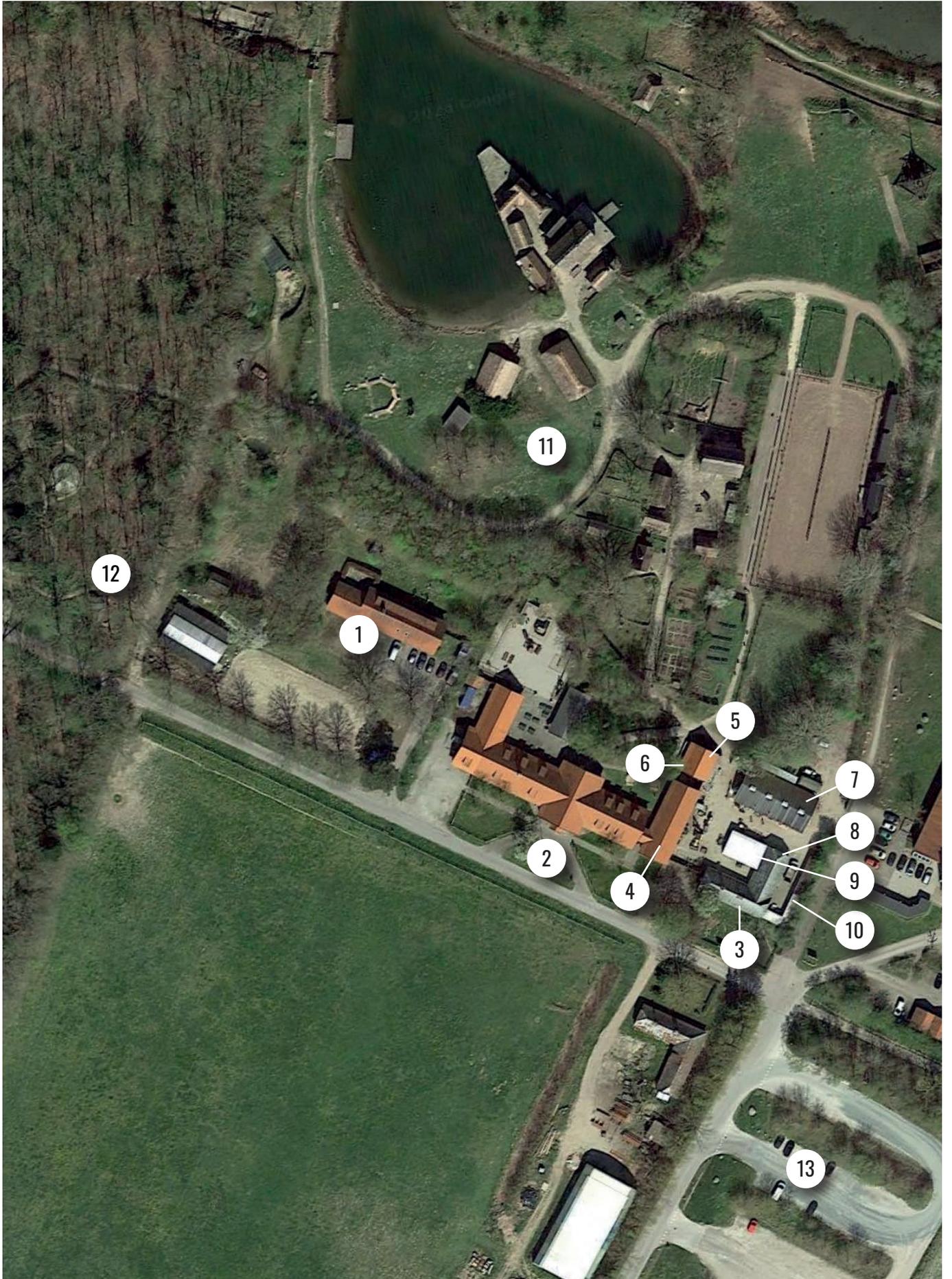
9 - The White Workshop: Addition to the side wing of the White House. Storage room for various tools.

10 - Volunteer Storage Room: Here you find lockers with room for sleeping bags and similar.

11 - Outdoor Area: Accessible to the visitors, where medieval reenacting is taking place – i.e. Sundkøbing and the forest.

12 - Griffenholm: The “steampunk” park which is used for school programs and has 3 Escape Rooms that can be booked in advance.

13 - Parking: For visitors and volunteers. Parking next to the main gate (next to the White House) is not permitted.





Booking a stay

From February 1st stays at the Medieval Center can be booked. This is done by contacting the Center and placing a booking for the upcoming season. To do so, please send an email to Pia Bach, responsible for the volunteers, at pia@middelaldercentret.dk. (Please note that bookings can only be made via email, and not by Messenger, for example.) Thus, you will be booked to stay for a given period in one of the houses.

Normally, you will be given one specific house. In some cases, sleeping on straw mattresses in attics or tents can be agreed upon, and it is also possible to spend the night in the medieval hostel at the town square.

Weekend stays, short mid-week stays or entire weeks may be booked by everyone in May, early June, late August, and September. During high season (School holidays) booking is normally only for entire weeks, from Saturday morning to Friday afternoon.

Guest Rooms

The Medieval Center has four modern guest rooms. These are reserved for formal guests. Only in special circumstances may these rooms be used by volunteers who can't, for various reasons, not live in a medieval house. This is only possible by prior appointment!

Single-Day Volunteers

It is possible to take part for just a single day, without spending the night in one of the medieval houses. You cannot as a volunteer come without a previous appointment with the Center – even for a single day.

Registration on arrival

On arrival, you must check in at the Administration building at 8:15 to get your clothing. The clothes are kept in the basement of the building and will be handed out by an employee.

Returning your clothes

On the day of departure, you will hand back your



clothing. This takes place between 16:15 and 16:45.

The clothes and shoes are returned to the same basement where it was handed out. There will be staff present to receive it.

Ongoing information during your stay

Remember that attending the daily morning meetings in the White House at 9.30 is mandatory. Here, the activities of the day will be drawn up, and all functions at the various activities will be distributed.

Some tasks require special training, and can only be performed by the staff. Other functions will be given to volunteers; we prefer for you to choose your tasks yourself, but if no one volunteers for a given, necessary function, we may appoint someone to do it.

In the White House, you will find a text presenting each of the houses in the medieval town. Here, you will find a description of the house and its furniture and equipment; please read these carefully. You will

find that living (and acting) in the house is made much easier with this information. It also contains a small section of cooking recipes.

If in doubt, you can always ask the employee in charge of the day, or any of the professional presenters.

During high season, you will find a plan of the volunteer tasks for the entire week pinned on the notice board. We strongly encourage you to volunteer for tasks in advance by putting your name in the relevant boxes. It makes it easier for you to plan the week, and it shortens the morning meetings.

You will also find a meal plan, where you can volunteer to help prepare a joint dinner. The menu is decided in advance.

Showers & toilets

There are three toilets with showers available. Visitor toilets are not to be used, and neither are staff showers or toilets.

Lockers

You will find lockers in the volunteer's room. Here, you may store your modern clothing, valuables, and luggage. If you only require a small locker, those can be found in the volunteer's bathroom. Remember to bring a padlock! When arriving, you must tape a note to the door of the locker, stating your name and the period you will occupy the locker. When leaving, you remove the note and your padlock, thus making the locker available for the next person. Lockers left with a padlock on will be force-opened and emptied by the Medieval Center.

Before and after closing time

If you are using sleeping bags, camping mattresses or any other modern equipment, all these must be removed from your house – never hide away inside the house! – before the Center opens at 10:00.

Keys

Workshops and other staff facilities are locked outside opening hours. The back gate is left unlocked, giving access to the White House to volunteers all day round.

Waste

Waste bins are found in the yard outside the White House. No kind of non-medieval waste may be thrown anywhere at all in Sundkøbing; if you come across garbage, accidentally overlooked by the caretaker staff, you are expected to remove it yourself.

Smoking

In the field, smoking in medieval clothing is forbidden during opening hours. Certain areas are no-smoking at all hours, such as the entire town streets, and the entire harbour area.

Sailing and swimming in the Harbour

Volunteers are not allowed to be on the ships and boats, or to sail them. This is also the case outside opening hours. During opening hours, bathing in the harbour is not permitted. Outside opening hours, you may swim in the harbour or the Guldborgsund, should you wish to, but this is always entirely at your own risk!



Animals

It is strictly forbidden to feed horses and sheep; no bread, no cakes – nothing! They are looked after and fed by the staff. You may, however, feed the chicken. Riding the Center's horses is not an option, neither in nor outside opening hours.

Shopping and public transport

If you wish to shop, you can go to the nearest shopping centre Føtex, 4 minutes by car or 30 minutes walking distance from the Center; or go to Nykøbing. Please do NOT go shopping dressed in our medieval clothing! The clothing is only worn outside the Center when taking part in some special event, staged by the Center.

City Bus No. 702 depart from the parking lot next to the Center, taking you to the Train Station in Nykøbing. A Bus Plan is displayed in the passageway by the staff toilets.

Fire extinguishing equipment and emergency routes

Each house has equipment for fire extinguishing. The exact location of the fire extinguishers in each house is stated in the plan at the White House. Please make sure that you are familiar with the whereabouts and use of the fire equipment in your house – and check that it is in place!

There are two emergency entrance points to the field. One is through the big double gate at the staff entrance, behind the White House, which follows behind the tournament arena and on through the field, passing by the church building site, ending at

the gate by the modern stables, by the edge of the forest. This route is made as a wide, firm gravel road to accommodate ambulances and other emergency vehicles.

First aid kits are found in the White House. A Defibrillator is mounted on the outside wall of the visitor toilets.

During your stay, you may choose to do the dishes in a medieval manner, using a handful of straw, water, and sand – but at least the final dishing should be done using dishing soap and warm water. If you borrow equipment from another house, you must always return it after use. Modern dishing is done at the outdoor sinks outside the volunteer's toilets in the yard by the White House.



Equipment in the medieval houses

In the houses, you will find all the utensils and tools that the Medieval Center has decided belong in each house, such as cooking and eating utensils. Please note that this complies with modern standards, neither regarding comfort nor working routines; medieval people were less spoiled than us... but that is all part of the charm of the whole experience.

You are expected to keep all types of equipment clean and in working order. When leaving the house, dishes, cooking pots and so on are to be left thoroughly cleaned and in their proper place, ready for the next occupant.

There are sleeping quarters in all houses, either in the shape of proper beds, or straw mattresses which can be placed on the floor at night. The beds are done in a medieval manner with sheets, blankets, and pillows. You may either sleep “medievally” or place a sleeping bag on top of the bed. When sleeping “medievally”, this must be agreed upon in advance. Remember that there are special rules for making the bed – you will find more information on this subject in the text concerning your specific house, which can be found in the White House.

Food

Ingredients for cooking are available to all volunteers.

Special culinary desires or dietary requirements must be catered for by yourself.

Volunteers who spend a single day at the Center are entitled to lunch (bread and toppings), found in the White House.

You may choose to cook all your meals in the medieval houses, or you may combine a modern breakfast with a medieval lunch during opening hours, for example.

Dinner can also be a collective project when you cook together in the modern kitchen in the White House.

In the large refrigerator in the kitchen, you will find breakfast, a selection of toppings, milk, juices, etc.

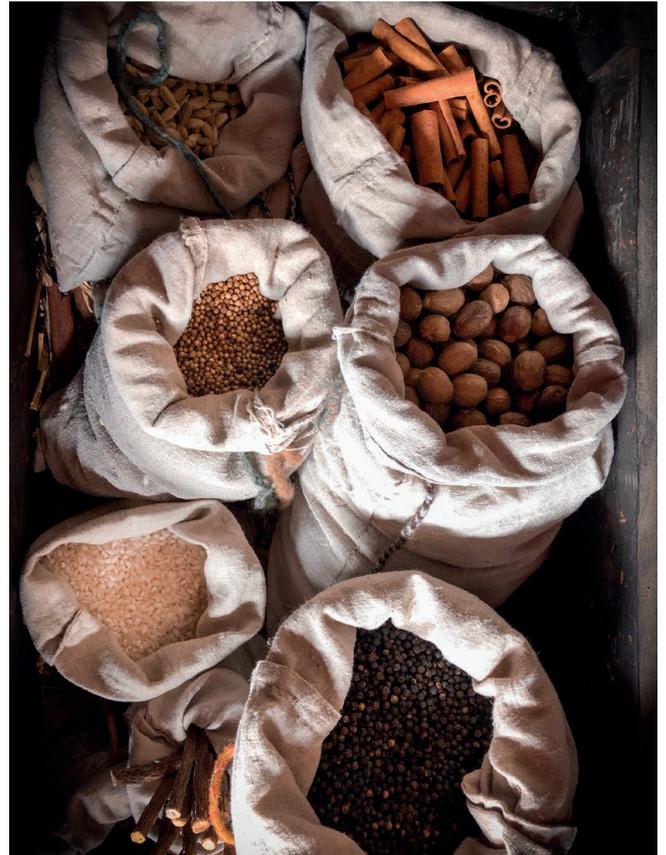
The deep freezer is filled with chicken, mincemeat, beef, etc. You are supposed to take what you need from the freezer, for use on the following day, if you plan to do medieval cooking in your house. New supplies are added on a semi-day-to-day basis, making medieval dishes a possibility. On the shelves of the kitchen, you will find other ingredients, such as spices.

In the White House, you will find recipes for various medieval dishes that can be prepared in the houses.

Once you get used to cooking over an open fire and handling more pots in the same fire, it is not that difficult. You should, however, start early; it usually takes longer than one would expect!

We recommend that you cook large portions at a time; leftovers from lunch can be used for dinner, and so on. You may also make a deal with the family next door to cook for each other every alternate day and eat your meals together. Dinner leftovers are thrown in the gutter, or on the dunghill – but only vegetables, as meat will attract rats! Dry bread is not a waste, it is saved and used later for sauces!

Cooking and domestic chores, like cleaning, are a very important part of the daily display, as they help enormously in creating the feel of a real, lived-in house.





Expectations

The Medieval Center and its volunteers have certain expectations of each other. Both wish for a pleasant experience, with mutual giving and receiving.

What we offer to our volunteers:

- An opportunity to act out as a medieval person at the Center and delve into an exciting activity.
- An opportunity to try out medieval life as a citizen of Sundkøbing.
- Borrowing medieval clothing for use at the Center.
- Ingredients for cooking your meals if you stay for more than one day.
- An opportunity to take part in courses and workshops.
- A chance to expand your knowledge and get qualified assistance within the various operating fields of the Center.
- Information at the morning meeting and via the notice board in the White House.

What volunteers generally expect:

- To be treated respectfully.
- Information on current activities and answers to your questions.
- To be assisted where needed.
- Expectations to be (well) met.

What the Medieval Center expects from the volunteers:

- You take an active part in giving the visitor the best possible experience.
- You follow the rules and guidelines of the Center.
- You perform the tasks you are given.
- You stay informed on all relevant matters.
- You remain loyal to the Medieval Center and its aim.
- You make sure that your children also follow the rules and guidelines.

Final words

Why bother to be a volunteer at the Medieval Center? Because it is fun, of course; you meet new and old friends, you learn something new, and you present the Middle Ages to interested visitors. You can enjoy the social possibilities and live out your hobby, and the kids will love it. Furthermore, the weather is usually only bad for short periods... ;-)

Everyone comes to the Medieval Center with a unique background, and all have their reasons for joining. We may all have an opinion as to how things should be conducted, but the main goal is for everyone to enjoy and benefit from each other's company. Volunteers wish to have a great "holiday experience", while the Medieval Center has research to conduct, visitors to entertain and enlighten, and a business to run. Together, we can make sure that the Medieval Center remain a wonderful playground for professionals and amateurs alike, for the locals, and for the many visitors who come to see, hear, smell, and taste the Middle Ages.

Please enjoy yourself – Godspeed!



Middelaldercentret

