

FOR THE MODERN TRAVELER FROM SCANDINAVIAN AIRLINES | APRIL 2019

SCANDINAVIAN TRAVELER⁴



A perfect stare

Actor Tuva Novotny has
an eye for Danish design
as well as directing
socially-aware movies

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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

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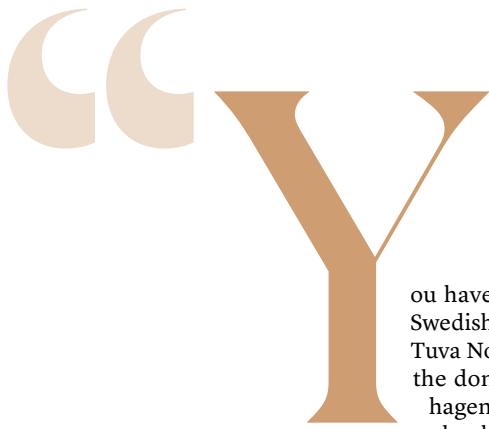
Something to lean on

After spending most of her career in front of the camera, actor Tuva Novotny has taken the plunge and stepped behind the lens.

By EMILY NATHAN Photos by ANDREAS HOUMANN







ou have to meet my chair!” The Swedish actor, writer and director Tuva Novotny is standing beneath the domed glass roof of Copenhagen’s Glyptotek art museum, her hand poised on the back of Danish design company Egevaerk’s Fly Chair, which she has brought with her to the museum.

“We had this beauty in a movie I was shooting, and I was like, ‘Oh my god, what is this?’” she effuses. “Nobody else on set seemed to notice it, but I was obsessed. It’s not just any chair, but a most amazing piece of craft that captures everything that’s art to me – beauty, complexity, hard work, precision. Each chair takes three months to make by hand – three months! I can’t afford to buy it, but I just want to share it with the world, so I emailed the company and they let me borrow it. And here we are, me and my chair. It’s a true love story.”

It’s certainly unconventional to meet a celebrated actor-cum-director who would rather focus on someone else’s achievements than her own, but Novotny’s sincere appreciation for the arts is reflected in the trajectory of her career. Her early foray into acting at the age of 14, her training as a ballerina and a bassist, and her lifelong devotion to the written word – “Literature has always been a very good friend,” she says – culminated in the Scandinavian premiere of her second feature film, *Britt-Marie Was Here*. An adaptation of the novel by Swedish writer Frederik Backman, the film

follows a 63-year-old woman who decides to leave her husband and begin again.

“Even though life is never perfect, I felt there must be an immediate recognition in this story for any age or gender, in terms of daring to start afresh,” Novotny says, as she peruses the Glyptotek’s Roman sculpture collection, cradling the Fly Chair. “I’d like to see the movie as a form of anastrophe, my favorite word. It comes from the old Greek – a catastrophe is an utter disaster, while an anastrophe is a catastrophe with the possibility of learning something, of taking away something good.”

NOVOTNY, WHO IS 39, has sharp, sea-green eyes and the kind of lips that pull into a mischievous smile. Disarmingly down-to-earth, she does her own hair and makeup, laughs easily and describes her ideal vacation as months at home with her two daughters, immersed in writing among their quotidian routines. She was raised in Northern Sweden in a cradle of creativity – her Swedish mother was a sculptor and former actor, and her father, half Czech, half Swedish, was a theater director and professor at Gothenburg’s journalism school.

“My first cinematic experience was with my dad, in this small-town cinema watching *The Time of the Gypsies*,” she reflects. “I think he trained me to watch movies in a certain way, and so did my mom and my stepmom. I saw film as a natural capturing of the various art forms, encompassing music, visuals and even sculptural aesthetics. I’ve done other things, but film →

WHO SHE IS AND WHAT SHE DOES

Tuva Novotny

→ **Age:** 39
→ **Birthplace:** Stockholm, Sweden
→ **Lives:** Copenhagen, Denmark
→ **Profession:** Director, writer, actor
→ **Career:** Novotny’s acting debut was in 1996 in *Bullen*, a TV program for teenagers. Beginning that same year, she made a name for herself in 133 episodes of the soap opera *Skilda världar*, and debuted big on the big screen in Daniel Alfredson’s 1997 movie *Tic Tac*. In 2010, she appeared in the Hollywood blockbuster *Eat Pray Love*. For several years she has written screenplays for film and

television and since 2010 has starred in the TV series *Dag*, going on to make her directorial debut in four episodes. Her first feature, *Blindspot*, which she wrote and directed, won, among other awards, the Fipresci award (the international critics award) at the Gothenburg Film Festival and the Grand Jury Prize at Copenhagen Pix. Her second feature, *Britt-Marie Was Here*, opened the Gothenburg Film Festival. This year, she stars alongside Ben Kingsley in *Intrigo: Death of an Author*, by Daniel Alfredsson, and has the female lead in *The Suicide Tourist*, a movie by Jonas Arnbj.

'Novotny's sincere appreciation for the arts is reflected in the trajectory of her career'



has always been the most natural environment for me.”

Her parents separated when she was young, and her stepmother and father wove a new family unit from the threads of their own families. This diverse heritage has informed her multicultural life and career, bringing her to Norway and then Copenhagen, where she’s been based since 2003.

In some ways, she says, she is more at home in the “brutalism” of Danish culture than she ever was in Sweden. “As much as I appreciate both the Swedish and Norwegian polish, I think there is a real existential anxiety there – like, are you good enough if you’re not smiling all the time, not happy, not well brought-up?” She pauses. “Danes have a much more ‘whatever’ attitude about things, which can seem brutal, but sometimes it gives you more leeway to just be.”

NOVOTNY’S INTEREST IN life’s less-than-ideal moments is aptly embodied by the first feature she wrote and directed, the award-winning 2018 film *Blindspot*. Shot in one continuous take with no cuts and starring only a few actors (the rest of the cast are real professionals), it accompanies an Oslo family through the tragedy of their seemingly well-adjusted teenage daughter jumping from a window.

The courage to tackle such a bold topic in a directorial debut – and what it reveals about her motivations – has not been lost on her colleagues. “Tuva is both brave and vulnerable at the same time,” says Norwegian actor Pia Tjelta, the star of *Blindspot* and Novotny’s close friend. “Hers is a social project as well as an artistic project. She not only has a vision, she has a mission, and it’s nothing less than changing the world.”

Former Norwegian Film Institute commissioner Silje Riise Næss, now installed in Copenhagen at the Danish Film Institute, supported the project when it was submitted for funding, and admires Novotny’s “rather rare combination of intuition and intellectuality. Her story strikes you in the gut, but also makes you reflect afterwards. She has a clear will for her films, and art and culture in general, to play a role in society. Like addressing serious mental health problems among young people, and how we all need to be equipped to deal with it.”

INDEED, NOVOTNY’S CHOICE to film *Blindspot* in one shot was more than just a neat trick. Representing a stealthy “political agenda,” it allowed her to bring light to the issues of mental illness and suicide prevention while disposing of tools filmmakers use to manipulate their subject, instead putting the audience in the same raw, uncensored seat as the protagonists.

“There is clear expertise surrounding how to discuss these topics, and that’s not to romanticize, dramatize,



‘Her story strikes you in the gut, but also makes you reflect afterwards’

or glorify them in any way,” Novotny explains. “To honor that, I wanted to cut away from dramatizing elements, eliminating the strongest tool we use to create suspense in movies – editing. One-shot is as present as you can be in a movie, reacting and responding as moments arise, which gives an amazing intensity, authenticity and organic feel to the project, and to the result.”

ALTHOUGH HER WORK to date is not easily categorized, Novotny has managed to define a space for herself in the anthropological realm, offering keen observations about the ways we humans both struggle and thrive in our rapidly changing world. She is a passionate proponent of realism, and she chooses to explore subjects that push the boundaries of social etiquette, especially in Scandinavia, where the idea of existential angst is not always acknowledged as an acceptable, and inevitable, part of being alive.

“I really feel that things today move at high speed in terms of social psychology and society, and the first thing to go is literally just looking into people’s eyes and saying, ‘How are you?’” she says. “We see a new generation going down broadly in terms of stress and anxiety, which I believe is a consequence of a couple of generations moving too fast, being too busy to stop and sense ourselves, sense each other. And all those little ‘blind spots,’ things we miss or ignore, add up to make people feel alienated or isolated. But there is a countermovement coming. We’re talking about slow food, slow living, reducing consumption and getting to the essence of what we really need, and what’s really important.”

Novotny stops in front of a palm tree in the museum’s Winter Garden and delicately places the Fly Chair on the ground, gazing at it. “Which brings me to this.” She looks up and smiles. “Life isn’t perfect. A movie will never be perfect. But a chair? A chair can be perfect.”

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COPENHAGEN AND BEYOND – TUVAS TOP TIPS

Although she was born in Sweden, Copenhagen has been home to Tuva Novotny since 2003. Here are a few of the good reasons why she loves the city.

THIS WAY TO COPENHAGEN
→ A round trip to Copenhagen will earn you up to **1,000** points in SAS Go.
Book at flysas.com

NY CARLSBERG GLYPTOTEK

1 A simply beautiful place, worth visiting just for the architecture, if not for the vast array of fine art, built around the personal collection of Carlsberg Brewery heir Carl Jacobsen. Antiquity fans will find plenty of amazing sculptures from ancient Mediterranean cultures, as well as more modern works. The café, located under a stunning glass-domed roof in a sort of plant-studded greenhouse, is full of delicious treats.

Dantes Plads 7 • glyptoteket.com

EGEVÆRK STUDIO

→ This Danish design company made my darling Fly Chair. They're located 30 minutes outside the city, but oh my, what impressive craft and artworks they create, inspiring both for the eye and the soul.

Nordre Beddingsvej 24, Hundested
egevaerk.dk

ARKEN MUSEUM

→ It's a bit of a ride to get there, but the trip is worth it. Arken is a beautiful museum, designed by Danish architect Søren Robert Lund and located next to the sea. It's a perfect day trip to get some fresh air and enjoy fascinating exhibitions of modern and contemporary art.

Skovvej 100, Ishøj • arken.dk

CISTERNENE MUSEUM

→ Built underground in the old water reservoirs of the city in the heart of Søndermarken Park, this is a magical space with inspirational exhibitions. It's the only dripstone cave in Denmark, full of naturally formed stalactites and



Photo: Shutterstock



Photo: Shutterstock

stalagmites, and it's an extremely special space to see art exhibitions. I've never encountered anywhere like it in the world!

Søndermarken, Frederiksberg
cisternerne.dk

TIVOLI

2 Need I say more? The classic, most special amusement park in the world! You definitely don't need to be a fan of the rides to have an incredible day or evening here, with its gorgeous landscaping, new food hall and cozy cafes.

Vesterbrogade 3 • tivoli.dk

SONNY

→ Located in Copenhagen's center but a bit off the beaten track – this beautiful café is as cozy as

it gets. The pastries, snacks and meals are all homemade with top-shelf ingredients all of which are delicious. A perfect stop for your latte and avocado toast.

Rådhusstræde 5 • sonnycph.dk

AMAGER STRANDPARK

3 A mere 10-minute bus ride from the city center, Amager is a great beach for swimming in the summer, or for polar dips in winter. It's very crowded in the high season, but it's also enormous, so there's plenty of room for everyone. For those not into sunbathing, you can also run, cycle, sail, kayak, snorkel, wind-surf, kite-surf, play beach volleyball and even lift weights.

kobenhavnergron.dk/place/amagerstrandpark



Offbeat museums

Find all of Denmark's curious museums at scandinaviantraveler.com