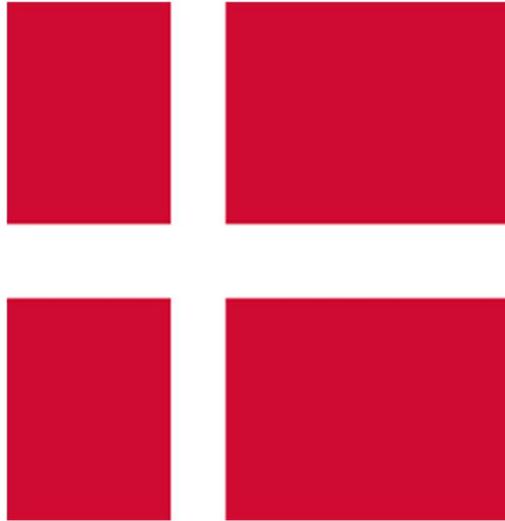


CELEBRATING ITS 800th BIRTHDAY - POSSIBLY THE OLDEST STATE FLAG STILL IN USE TODAY

DANNEBROG - THE NATIONAL FLAG OF DENMARK



The national **flag of Denmark** is called **Dannebrog**. The Denmark flag is red with a white cross that extends to the edges of the flag shifted to the left side.

The Denmark flag is the oldest state flag in the world still in use, with the earliest source dating back to the 14th century. Prior to the use of Dannebrog, Denmark used the raven banner.

The Denmark flag that is officially used by the Danish royalty was introduced on 16 November 1972 when the Queen adopted a new version of her personal coat of arms. The royal standard is the Denmark flag with a swallow tail and charged with the monarch's coat of arms set in a white square.

DANNEBROG: The flag that fell from the sky.

In 1219, legend has it, the Danish flag fell from heaven during a battle in present-day Estonia, helping the Danish army to an unexpected victory.

Today, 800 years after the battle in Estonia, the red-and-white flag has gained widespread use among the population of Denmark – for birthdays, funerals and practically everything in between. Up until today, in many homes in Denmark, parents tell their children the legend of how the Danish flag came about.

In the early 13th century, the Danish king Valdemar Sejr (Valdemar the Victorious) led his army on a crusade in present-day Estonia. During a battle on June 15, 1219, the Danes were on the defensive when suddenly a red banner with a white cross fell from the sky. As a result, the luck changed, the Danish army won, and Denmark got its flag. Although King Valdemar's crusade did take place, the story of the falling flag obviously has no basis in reality. That, however, does not make it any less powerful. "What matters is that it's a good story. The mythological and religious elements only make it better. So does

its old age,” says Torben Kjersgaard Nielsen, historian at Aalborg University in Denmark and author of a book on the Danish flag.



The legend was first mentioned by historians in the early 16th century. Since 1913, the flag – and the legend of its origin – is celebrated annually on June 15, which is named Valdemar’s Day after the late king. That day, as on many other days, the flag is raised across the country.

The Danish flag was not always Danish. During the European crusades from the 11th to 13th centuries, a red flag with a white cross was used frequently, without connection to Denmark. It became a Danish flag around the mid-14th century, which makes it one of the world’s oldest national flags in continuous use. Back then, the flag was carried by the Danish king Valdemar Atterdag (Valdemar “Another Day”).

For centuries, the Danish flag was a royal flag. In 1834, the king even prohibited ordinary citizens from using it. This changed, however, in the mid-19th century, in connection with The First Schleswig War, a Danish-German military conflict. When the Danish soldiers returned home after winning the war, they were met with the sight of red-and-white flags hanging from private homes across the country. A few years later, the ban was formally lifted.

Today, the Danish flag is still used frequently by the royal family and state institutions. In addition, use among the general population has grown significantly. The flag is practically everywhere – on very different occasions with equally different meanings. One of the most popular uses is to decorate birthday cakes and buns with small paper flags. But it is also flown at half-mast for funerals. Other uses

include painting the Danish flag on the faces of fans of the national soccer team. Sewing it on backpacks for journeys abroad. Hanging it on the Christmas tree along with other decorations. Raising it over allotment gardens at weekends. Or printing it on packaging of vegetables to show they're locally grown.

"Everyone uses and interprets the Danish flag in their own way. Paradoxically, this is what makes it a uniting symbol," Kjersgaard Nielsen says.

The name of the Danish flag is Dannebrog. This probably means "the cloth of the Danes".



The population of Denmark probably use their national flag more than people in most other countries do. One reason for this is that no laws – only guidelines – regulate the use of the most common version of the Danish flag. The possibility of a flag law was discussed in the early 20th century, but there was no political majority for it. Today, it would be impossible.