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STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

THE GREEN MILES

Spanning lush green islands, Stockholm is the epitome of eco-friendly living — and has the inaugural European Green Capital Award to prove it. **Words by Lola Akinmade Åkerström**

IT'S SAFE TO SAY Stockholm is a whole lot more than Ikea and beautiful blondes — an image instantly dispelled when I became a resident here a few years ago. Today's Stockholm is a curious mix of eco-friendly outdoor living during the warmer months and picturesque winters, as highlighted in the novels of Stieg Larsson's popular Millennium trilogy.

Although winters are long and cold, life is set up perfectly for cosying indoors in one of the innumerable nightspots, shrouded in thick layers of snow, while the arrival of spring and summer are both celebrated with festivals and an instant move outdoors at the first sign of sunshine. Indeed, the constitutional right of public access, *Allemansrätten* ('everyman's right'), allows you to camp, hike, and pick berries almost anywhere across the archipelago. Geographically speaking, Stockholm is spread across 14 islands, each with its own distinct character and ample park space, making the city a scenic labyrinth of waterways, waterfront

views, and 470 miles of bike paths and greenery — you're usually no more than a five-minute walk from water.

The most visited island is touristy Gamla Stan (Old Town), with its network of narrow, cobble-stoned streets and historic red, yellow, and green tapered buildings, including the box-shaped Royal Palace. Once the royal hunting grounds, lush Djurgården Island has many notable museums such as Vasamuseet and Skansen and forests, parks, and gardens best explored along numerous footpaths and bike routes.

Across from Djurgården is Östermalm, arguably the priciest part of the city, with trendy nightclubs and expensive real estate. Business and shopping is usually done in Norrmalm, while a short walk from Gamla Stan takes you to the island of Södermalm ('Söder' to locals), known for its eclectic atmosphere, off-beat vintage stores, ethnic restaurants and quirky nightlife.

Further west lies Långholmen. Home to a notorious prison-

turned-hotel of the same name, it's ideal for long nature walks and beach basking.

It's hard not to notice Stockholm has mastered the art of low-impact living without skimping on their chic-minimalist style. From purifying rainwater to converting waste into bio-gas for public transport, and with dozens of self-sustaining green hotels and restaurants using bio-fuels and organic products, the collective culture here is to use, recycle, and repeat. Little wonder, then, that last year the city was the recipient of the European Commission's first European Green Capital Award — in recognition of its innovative citywide, eco-friendly initiatives.

Mingle with locals for a *fika* (coffee break) at one of the many coffee houses, filling up on sugary sweet pastries. Later, as night falls, rub shoulders with after-work drinkers in one of the many chic lounge bars — it's not uncommon to find businesses closing as early as 4pm, so employees can make the most of their downtime and, of course, their beloved island city.



From top: Kungsträdgården; Waterfront restaurants at Djurgården



SEE & DO

Ship shape: The Vasa Museum exhibits *Vasa*, a warship that sank in 1628 and lay undiscovered at the bottom of Stockholm's harbour until 50 years ago, when it was raised to the surface remarkably well-preserved, due to an absence of shipworms in the Baltic Sea waters. www.vasamuseet.se/en

Past lives: Skansen, on the island of Djurgården, is the world's oldest open-air museum. It features a replica of a 19-century town, complete with farm animals, a zoo, and an artisans' workshop. Rent a bicycle and explore the island, with the Nordic Museum, Gröna Lund amusement park, and Rosendal palace and garden. www.skansen.se/en

Picture perfect: Fotografiska is a modern photography museum located in a large art nouveau-style industrial building. Past exhibitions have included works by celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz and a slew of Scandinavian photographers. <http://en.fotografiska.eu>

In the frame: Sweden's largest art museum, the National Museum — opposite the Royal Palace on Södra Blasieholmshamnen — is home to an impressive collection of 16th-19th-century paintings and sculptures. Here you'll find timeless works by Rembrandt, Renoir, Gauguin, and Swedish artists Carl Larsson, Johan Tobias Sergel, and Anders Zorn. www.nationalmuseum.se

Water babies: While Stockholm's core islands are easily accessible on foot, you can also island-hop. From

Slussen, Djurgården ferries run with a stop at Skeppsholmen, while the Nybro ferry and *M/S Emelie* leave from Nybroviken. In summer, a 20-minute trip leaves Strandvägen or Slussen to Fjäderholmarna island. Or take a weekend smörgåsbord brunch cruise on *SS Stockholm* to Vaxholm and enjoy *sill* (herring), *gravad lax* (cured salmon) and *köttbullar* (meatballs).

www.waxholmsbolaget.com
www.fjaderholmarna.se
www.stromma.se

Bohemian life: A short walk from Stockholm's Old Town, Gamla Stan is the edgier bohemian district of Söder. A slum in the 17th century, it's now the place to find vintage and secondhand stores, organic restaurants and fair trade cafes, retro music and innovative design stores, art galleries, clubs, and numerous ethnic restaurants. It's also a prime spot for people-watching. www.sofa.se

Vantage points: There are dozens of picture-perfect viewing points for views of Stockholm. From Slussen, ascend Katarinahissen (the Katarina Elevator) for the ultimate bird's-eye view, or walk down the elevated street of Katarinavägen for stunning vistas of Gamla Stan. Alternatively, stroll along Söder Mälarstrand on the secluded Monteliusvägen (Montelius road) and marvel at the spectacle of Lake Mälaren, Gamla Stan, Riddarholmen and the City Hall on Kungsholmen, or work up an appetite hiking uphill to Fåfången, then reward yourself with coffee and pastries while looking across to Djurgården and Gröna lund. >>



DID YOU KNOW? While Stockholm spans 14 different islands, its archipelago stretches 87 miles along Sweden's eastern seaboard and consists of around 30,000 islands, skerries (rocky reefs) and islets. Although only 150 are inhabited, they are a popular summer getaway for Stockholmers, many of whom own or rent cottages on the archipelago.

£ BUY

Runway chic: Stockholm's shopping districts are centred around Biblioteksgatan, Kungsgatan, Hamngatan, and Drottninggatan, all within walking distance of one another. For designer brands such as Gucci, Armani and Louis Vuitton, head to Birger Jarlsgatan street in Östermalm. For a wider range of high-end goods, venture inside chic department store Nordiska Kompaniet (NK) at Hamngatan. For more reasonable shopping fare, however, your best bet is the Gallerian shopping centre. www.nk.se www.gallerian.se

Gourmet delights: There are three main indoor fresh food markets in town — heavily frequented Hötorgshallen at Hötorget, the more expensive Östermalms Saluhall at Östermalmstorg, and the ugly Söderhallarna at Medborgarplatsen. You'll find gourmet classics at all three, such as pickled herring, seafood, cured

meats, freshly baked bread, cheese, and handmade chocolates.

www.hotorgshallen.se
www.ostermalmshallen.se
www.soderhallarna.com

Beyond retro: Allow an afternoon to rummage through the retro shops in Söder — at Bondegatan, in particular. Here you'll find more vintage stores per block than in any other area of the city. A notable gem is Lisa Larssons Secondhand (Bondegatan 48), which stocks leather jackets, fabrics and clothes from the 1960s, '70s and '80s, alongside vintage jewellery and designer shoes. www.lisalarssonsecondhand.com

Everyday wear: For the typical mall experience, take a 15-minute bus ride from Slussen over to Nacka Forum for high-street favourites such as H&M, Zara and Mango, and no shortage of cafes and restaurants. www.nackaforum.se

Above, from left: Hötorgshallen market traders; The lounge of a Hotel J suite

🎯 LIKE A LOCAL

Ditch the rental car: The public transport network is efficient and extensive. The same ticket or travel card works on buses, trams, the subway (tunnelbana) and ferries. An eight-ride 'remsa' ticket costs from 180SEK (£18), three-day cards from 200SEK (£20) and seven-day cards from 260SEK (£26). The better-value Stockholm Card allows unlimited public transport, including ferries, and access to around 80 attractions. One-day visitor cards start at 425SEK (£42) and can be bought from the tourist office or online. www.sl.se/en www.stockholmcards.com

Special treatment: Restaurants can be expensive, so look out for signs reading 'Dagens rätt' (Today's special). You'll find dishes, often from the regular à la carte menu, available at up to half price.

Pick a number: Queuing is the norm here, and many stores use a ticketing system to indicate your position in line.

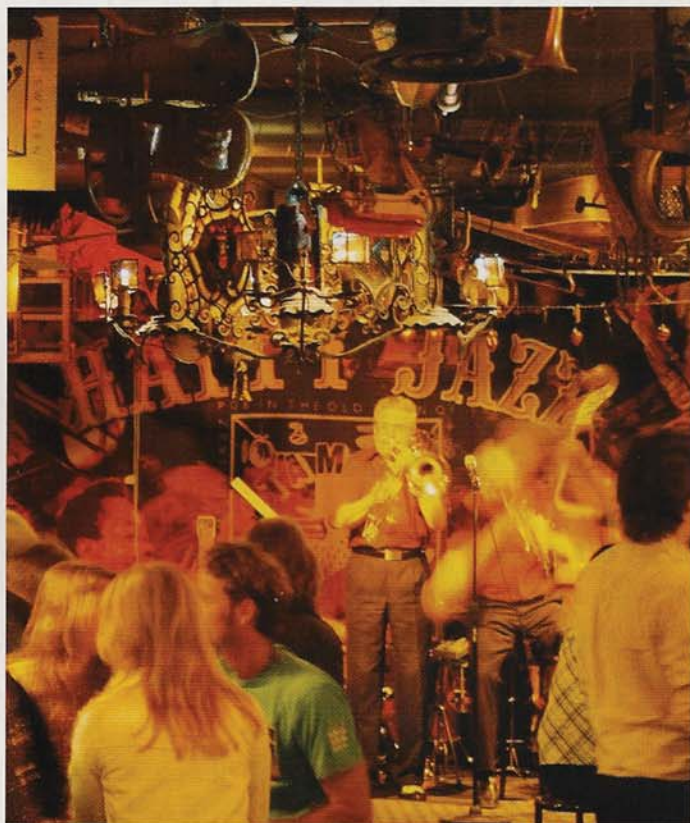
🛏 SLEEP

Stockholm offers a diversity of lodging options, including a hostel in a jumbo jet, but they are relatively more expensive than in cities like Amsterdam or Berlin.

£ af Chapman & Skeppsholmen: Built in 1888 as a trading ship, the *af Chapman* is now a hostel, with tall, flagged masts. Centrally located on the island of Skeppsholmen, most cabins retain their original style. www.stfchapman.com

££ Hotel J: This nautical-themed hotel in Nacka is a short boat trip from Nybrokajen or a 15-minute bus ride from Slussen. Its 45 white and navy rooms overlook Djurgården. The hotel is adding 113 rooms this summer. www.hotelj.com

£££ Hotel Diplomat: Housed in an art nouveau building, this hotel has a prime spot on Strandvägen, the city's most exclusive waterfront boulevard. Its individually decorated rooms, meanwhile, offer exquisite views of Nybroviken. www.diplomathotel.com ➤



EAT

Stick with what Stockholm does best: seafood. Ordering filleted fish or shellfish off any menu in town is a sure-fire winner. Not a seafood fan? Then try local moose, lamb and reindeer dishes.

£ Rosendals Trädgård Kafé & Bageri: Worth the hike through Djurgården, this cafe, set amid flower gardens and orchards features a hearty menu of pastries, soups, salads, sandwiches, and heavier dishes using top-quality, organic, seasonal ingredients. www.rosendalstradgard.se

££ Djuret: Vegetarians beware: Djuret means 'the animal'. Its creative, fortnightly-rotating menu centres on a specific animal, such as boar, lamb, reindeer, or moose, with all parts of the animal used. Sister grill-house Svinet ('The Pig') is open all summer. www.djuret.se

£££ Wedholms Fisk: A harbour fixture with traditional décor and a menu offering simple, quality seafood. www.wedholmsfisk.se

AFTER HOURS

Stockholm's nightlife is more pop/rock than grunge, and you'll find lots of after-work lounges and clubs in trendy Stureplan — a square in Östermalm — and edgy Söder, as well as a few jazz houses, comedy clubs, and opera theatres tucked away in between.

Hotellet: Close to Stureplan, you'll find Stockholm's wealthy young professionals at this stylish spot, sipping cocktails with colleagues or sampling the decadent French-inspired menu. www.hotellet.info

Debaser Medis: One of the city's best nightlife venues, located at Medborgarplatsen in Söder, Debaser Medis churns out rock concerts and dance music to a young, cool crowd. www.debaser.se

Stampen: This cosy club in historic Gamla Stan is a hot spot for the over-30s crowd, hosting live blues, jazz, swing and rock nightly on two stages. www.stampen.se

Left: Jazz at Stampen

essentials STOCKHOLM

GETTING THERE

» Most international flights arrive into Stockholm Arlanda Airport, 22 miles north of the city. British Airways and SAS have daily flights between Heathrow and Stockholm. Norwegian flies daily between Gatwick and Stockholm. Ryanair flies from Gatwick and Stansted to Stockholm Skavsta Airport, about 62 miles from the city. www.ba.com
www.flysas.com
www.norwegian.com
www.ryanair.com
» Average flight time: 2h15m.

GETTING AROUND

» Taxis are expensive, so take the 20-minute Arlanda Express train from the

airport to Stockholm Central Station and T-Centralen metro station, or catch a bus from the airport. Storstockholms Lokaltrafik (SL) operates Stockholm's subway/tube system (tunnelbana), buses, trams, and some trains. www.arlandaexpress.com
www.sl.se

WHEN TO GO

» May-September, when the city emerges from its dark winter. The summer climate is comfortable, while the archipelago is at its most beautiful between June and August.

NEED TO KNOW

» Currency: Swedish Kronor (SEK). £1 = 10.19 SEK

» International dial code: 00 46.
» Time difference: GMT +1.

MORE INFO

» Time Out Stockholm. RRP: £12.99.
» www.visitstockholm.com
» Useful information: Many stores and attractions open late (10-11am) and close early (4-6pm).
» English is widely spoken.

HOW TO DO IT

» Lastminute.com offers city breaks to Stockholm from £298 per person including flights from Heathrow with British Airways and a two-night stay at Best Western Karlaplan Hotel. www.lastminute.com

