



MY CITY*: STOCKHOLM

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ENJOY A SPELL OF MIDSUMMER MAGIC AS THE SUN SHINES IN SWEDEN'S COOL CAPITAL CITY, SAYS LOLA AKINMADE ÅKERSTRÖM

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PHOTOGRAPHY: LOLA AKINMADE



LOLA AKINMADE ÅKERSTRÖM
Nigerian-born Lola (lolaakinmade.com) is an award-winning writer and photographer whose work appears in *National Geographic Traveler*, *The Guardian* and many more. She is the editor of *Slow Travel Stockholm* (slowtravelstockholm.com).

***There's no better way to get to the heart of a city than through the people who live there. Every month, we ask someone, clearly in love with their city, to take us on a personal tour and tell us what makes it so special. You may feel inspired to visit one day or to rediscover the charms of a city closer to you, but for now just sit back, relax and enjoy some armchair travel.**

How long have you lived in the city?

I've lived in Stockholm for six years now. I was born in Nigeria, moved to the US when I was 15, got my degrees and worked there for many years before moving to Stockholm.

Tell us what makes Stockholm unique

Stockholm feels like the gift that keeps on giving – from its booming start-up scene, thriving indie music and gaming industry to its artisans, designers and fusion food trend. Built across 14 unique islands connected via a mesh of waterways, there are so many secret corners and hideaways to steal away to and truly soak up the city's relaxed vibe.

What is it like in June?

It's a challenge to get a local out of Sweden during the



- 1 A view across Gamla Stan, the old town of Stockholm
- 2 Rosendals Trädgård is a beautiful garden, bakery, shop and café on the island of Djurgården
- 3 Midsummer is a big deal in Stockholm, with garlands and maypoles everywhere
- 4 Look out for restaurant chalkboards advertising their daily lunch deals
- 5 Miracle cure: salmon, and other fish, cured in many and various ways, is a Swedish speciality

summer. This is when the city comes alive in every sense of the word. Mild, temperate weather, the bluest skies, lush greenery all over the city, with people heading out into Stockholm's archipelago of 30,000 islands to unwind and live the slow life. June also means midsummer, which everyone celebrates here – even the most uptight of people can be seen wearing handmade flower wreaths on their heads, hopping around the maypole (majstång), and singing traditional Swedish folk songs.

What time of day do you most enjoy?

With almost 22 hours of daylight, summer evenings around Stockholm are the best. The city is full of golden light, people are happier, and the sun never truly sets but just hovers beautifully on the horizon, allowing plenty of time for camping, hiking, sailing and all the other outdoorsy activities the Swedes enjoy. »



“I never tire of Djurgården, especially its beautiful garden, the greenest of Stockholm’s islands”

Where’s your favourite outdoor space?

I have lots of favourite hideaway spots on the island of Lidingö where I live but in town, I never, ever tire of exploring Djurgården, especially its beautiful garden Rosendals Trädgård. Djurgården is the greenest of Stockholm’s 14 islands and it is home to its most popular museums – Vasa Museum (with its 17th-century warship), Skansen open-air museum, the ABBA museum, the Nordic Museum, and many more.

Tell us about the colours and light in Stockholm?

Stockholm won the inaugural European Green Capital back in 2010 and you’re never more than a 10-minute walk away from the water or a park. Stockholm shimmers gold when the light hits the deep blue waters of the harbour and reflects off its buildings, making it arguably the most stunning Scandinavian capital.

What are the people in Stockholm like?

I always associate human characteristics with cities I explore. Edinburgh feels like a moody yet brilliant gentleman and Belfast is a brawny rugby player forced into a business suit. I describe Stockholm as very androgynous, wearing a jean jacket with a flipped

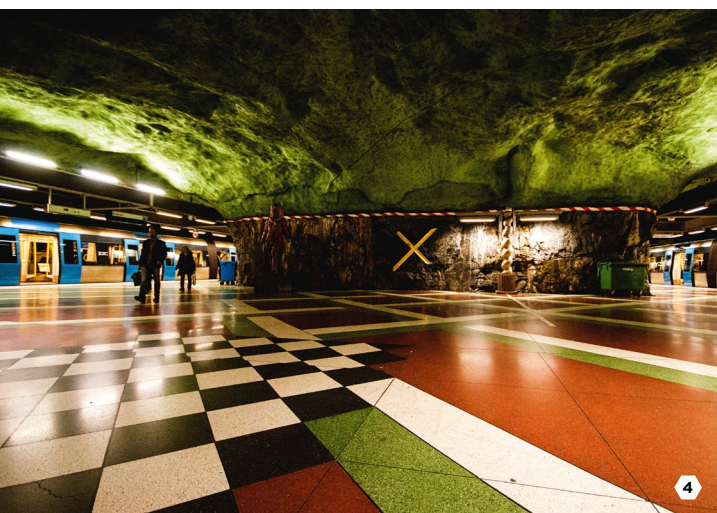
collar and white pants. It is the most open society, run by the most private people. Stockholm is a lot more diverse than people think and you can easily tell which islands you’re exploring based on the cross-section of residents there.

Where are your favourite places to gather with friends?

I love meeting up with a bunch of girlfriends every month to try out different restaurants around town, mostly international cuisine and fusion foods. I enjoy observing the cultural institution called *fika* where you take breaks to socialise and catch up with friends, family, and colleagues over coffee and yummy baked goods such as cinnamon buns – or cardamom buns for me. A personal favourite *fika* spot is Muggen ([muggen.se](#)) along Götgatan on the island of Södermalm.

Tell us about eating in your city?

Stockholm does exceptionally good traditional Swedish food called *husmanskost* – think meatballs, pancakes, pickled herring – and seafood. Dining out in Stockholm can quickly make a dent in your wallet but what I love is that many Michelin-starred restaurants also have bistros called back pockets (*bakfickor*), which serve the same high-quality food but at more affordable prices. Also be on the lookout for signs that say *dagens rätt* or *dagens*, which means the dish(es) of the day – at reasonable prices.



What's your favourite way to get around?

Stockholm's public transport is quick, efficient and punctual. The *tunnelbana* (subway) also happens to be the world's longest art exhibition at 110km long with artwork by 150 artists in more than 90 stations.

What types of shop do you most like to visit?

HAPPYsthlM is a super-cute boutique store in Gamla Stan that sells handmade ceramics, printed floral-pattern textiles and jewellery. For tea lovers, Tea Centre of Stockholm transports you to the 19th century with tin canister-lined walls, porcelain kettles and dark mahogany wood. I also like to head over to Södermalm for secondhand shops, flea markets, antiques shops, record stores and vintage boutiques.

Where do you like to escape to?

My husband and I have a special place that we call 'the

rock' on the island of Lidingö, which we live on. It's an outcrop with gorgeous, relaxing views of the waterways where we watch Baltic ferries and ships sail into and leave the harbour.

What has been your best discovery about your city?

Stockholm is embracing brunches and there are now some wonderful restaurants serving breakfast all day, such as the Sthlm Brunch Club (sthlmbrunchclub.se). Another favourite is the Jazz Brunch at Södra Teatern – it has stunning views across the harbour while you listen to live bands and tuck into a fabulous spread. »

- ❶ The island of Djurgården is a green oasis and an ideal place for walking and cycling
- ❷ Oh must we really pause for delicious cakes and a chat to observe *fika*? Well, when in Stockholm...
- ❸ Locals in a park in Södermalm – in the summer, everyone gets outdoors as much as possible
- ❹ A station on Stockholm's *tunnelbana* (subway)
- ❺ A couple of Hornstull's young and funky residents wander through the colourful streets



- ❶ Room for Kids, a busy children's library, arranged in age-appropriate sections
- ❷ Kanelbullar (cinnamon buns), the perfect *fika* snack. Did we mention the Swedish habit of stopping work for cake and a chat?
- ❸ The writing's on the wall: time for a spot of lunch at a café in Gamla Stan

What would surprise a newcomer to your city?

Just how walkable it is. You can walk from island to island within an hour.


Is there anything you would change about the city?

Full integration continues to be a major issue in Stockholm. Many foreigners still have a hard time finding jobs within their fields because the market is heavily skewed towards hiring native Swedes first.

Where would you recommend a visitor to stay?

Stockholm has some fantastic boat hotels called *botels*, which are refurbished remnants of the city's nautical past, now used as modern-day lodgings.*

What keeps you there and is there anywhere else you'd like to live?

Besides my young family, which means I'm firmly rooted here, Stockholm is a visually stunning city and, as a photographer, it keeps me inspired. While I have a shameless crush on Edinburgh, my heart has been stolen by Stockholm. 

* For a list of *botels* in Stockholm, visit thesimplethings.com/blog/stockholmbotels.

LOLA'S PERSONAL TOUR

FAVOURITE SHOP

Lagerhaus

Relatively affordable, high-quality patterned textiles, glassware, kitchenware and books on Swedish culture and cuisine. Good for tasteful souvenirs and gifts.

lagerhaus.se

FAVOURITE FAMILY-FRIENDLY SPOT

Rum för Barn (Room for Kids)

Located on the fourth floor of Stockholm's iconic Kulturhuset, this exquisite children's library with several age-appropriate sections allows you to read and borrow books in several languages, as well as providing daily activities for children.

en.kulturhuset.stockholm.se/Bibliotek/Rum-for-Barn

FAVOURITE CAFÉ

Rosendals Trädgård Kafé & Bageri

A unique café and bakery set amidst greenhouses, rose gardens and apple orchards. Dishes, such as pan-seared Arctic char on couscous, are organic and seasonal, and its fresh pastries and breads are baked from biodynamic flour in a wood-fired stone oven.

rosendalstradgard.se

FAVOURITE FOOD SCENE

Teatern at Ringen

Eight kiosks in a food mall run by Sweden's top chefs to suit every budget, from gourmet hot dogs at Korvkiosk, to truffle ravioli and slow-cooked eggs at CAOS.

ringencentrum.se/teatern

GREAT WAY TO SPEND AN HOUR

Djurgården

One of Stockholm's many islands, Kungliga Djurgården (Royal Game Park) is where many of the city's historical museums, palaces, gardens and parks are located. Rent a bike from Stockholm City Bikes to explore.

citybikes.se

BEST VIEW

Fåfången

Fåfången means 'vanity' in Swedish, very apt for this restaurant's prime location. Located on a hill in the north-east of Södermalm, it has one of the best views in town.

fafangen.se