

Gamla Stan, Stockholm



Gamla Stan

Stockholm's Old Town, known as Gamla Stan, is a small concentrated area where the city began in the middle of the 13th century. Much of the medieval enclave remains, although in typical Scandinavian style, it is freshly brushed and painted regularly. Its charm is in the architecture along its narrow stone-paved lanes and cobbled streets around its squares, especially the main one, Stortorget, surrounded by old merchants' houses.

In this neighborhood, along with plenty of shops, restaurants, and cafés, you'll find the Nobel Museum, the Post Museum, the Royal Coin Cabinet, and several churches. It's also a good area to stay if you can find suitable accommodations, with options including luxury boutique hotels, guesthouses, and even affordable inns and hostels.

Vasa Museum, Stockholm



The Vasa Museum (Vasamuseet) in Stockholm is Sweden's most popular museum and now attracts around a million visitors annually. More than 20 million people have visited since the museum opened in 1990, and it's not hard to see why.

In 1628, the pride of the Swedish Imperial fleet, the 64-gun warship *Vasa*, sank on its maiden voyage. The ship lay below the icy waters for more than three centuries until, in 1961, an incredibly ambitious salvage operation took place. Now, visitors from across the world come to see this fascinating time capsule. The museum caters to tourists of all nationalities, and English language guided tours and audioguides are available. A visit to the *Vasa*, which houses 10 separate exhibitions and a further four museum ships, is a day out in itself. A shop and a restaurant are located on the site for those wanting to make a full day of it.

Drottningholm Palace, Lovö



Drottningholm

Fairy-tale Drottningholm Palace (Drottningholms slott), on the island of Lovö, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It lies about 11 kilometers west of Stockholm city center (45 minutes by ferry), making it an excellent day trip from the capital city. Dating from the 17th century, the palace is now the official residence of the Swedish Royal Family.

In the picturesque terraced park are bronze sculptures from Bohemia and Denmark, brought back as trophies of war. Be sure to take in the Chinese Pavilion, which dates from the late 1700s. The 18th-century Palace Theatre (Drottningholms Slottsteater) is still used for performances during the summer months. In the Theatre Museum, you can see period stage costumes and stage scenery. Guided tours are available (in English), and a variety of fun programs and workshops are available for kids and adults alike.

The Göta Canal, Gothenburg to Stockholm



The Göta Canal

Often described as Sweden's greatest feat of engineering, the Göta Canal (Göta kanal) dates from the early 19th century and is 190 kilometers in length. It's now one of the country's premier tourist attractions and offers a unique perspective on Sweden's heartland. In addition, by connecting with lakes Vänern and Vättern and the Trollhätte Canal, it forms part of a water link all the way from Stockholm, in the northeast, to Gothenburg, in the southwest.

Featuring 47 bridges and 58 locks the canal stretches from Sjötorp at Lake Vänern to Söderköping on the Baltic Sea. There's a choice of passenger cruise vessels or you can hire a boat and experience the canal in your own way.

Kiruna and the Ice Hotel, Lapland



Kiruna Church

Sharing the same latitude as central Greenland, Kiruna in Lapland is Sweden's northernmost town. It's also the chief town of the largest commune in the country, which borders both Norway and Finland. The midnight sun is visible here from mid-May to mid-July.

Originally a Lapp settlement, the town began to develop when mining of iron ore started around 1900. Incredibly, due to subsidence caused by mining, the entire city is being slowly moved northwest to the foot of the Luossavaara Mountain. The world's first ever Ice Hotel at Jukkasjärvi is about 17 kilometers outside the city. The ICEHOTEL, with its stunning rooms and furnishings, is re-created each year in a new design, built from ice in the river Torne. In the summer, this is a center for river rafting, stand up paddleboarding, fishing, and canoeing. Sweden's highest mountain, Kebnekaise, is 90 kilometers west of Kiruna, and 95 kilometers northwest is Abisko National Park, where the Lapland Railroad runs west to Narvik on the Norwegian coast.

Skansen and Djurgården, Stockholm



Traditional Swedish houses in Skansen National Park

Skansen, the world's oldest open-air museum (and one of the world's largest), is a historic village made up of houses and farmsteads from all over Sweden. Together, these impressively preserved buildings represent both rural and urban culture at various periods from 1720 to the 1960s. Gathered here are churches, schoolhouses, manor houses, shops, mills, workers' homes, artisan's shops (including a book bindery, print shop, shoemaker, tinsmith, comb maker, and glassworks), a bakery, a funicular railroad, a Sami camp with reindeer, and a number of complete farmsteads.

These homes, farms, and workshops are inhabited by costumed interpreters who carry on the everyday work, demonstrating the crafts and skills as well as doing household and farm tasks. A zoo includes animals native to Sweden, as well as sections for exotic animals and a children's zoo. Skansen is located in the huge urban Djurgården park, a favorite place for locals, especially in the summer.

Visby, Gotland



Visby, Gotland

Steeped in medieval history and brimming with ruined churches, the rose-entwined, walled town of Visby, on the island of Gotland, is a huge draw for visitors from around the world. Quaint cobblestone streets snake about the town, and when exploring, it's all too easy to lose your sense of being in the modern world. Adorned with stepped gables, many medieval trading houses remain, as well as some timber buildings from the 17th and 18th centuries.

Clearly, Visby's reputation as 'the pearl of the Baltic' and **UNESCO World Heritage Site** status are both well deserved. A self-guided or guided sightseeing tour of the magnificent walls, which date back some 700 years, is a must. Built into the structure are some 44 defensive towers, and the walls still bear the scars of attack in the form of two breaches.

Direct flights are available from Stockholm and several other Swedish cities, as well as excellent ferry links.

Stockholm City Hall



Stockholm City Hall

One of Sweden's most famous buildings, Stockholm City Hall (Stockholms stadshus) was built between 1911 and 1923, using an astonishing eight million bricks. It is considered one of the finest examples of National Romanticism, designed by the architect Ragnar Östberg. The 106-meter-tall tower is topped by three crowns.

A very informative tour recounts some of its history, as well as information about the Nobel Prize, which is presented here each year. On the tour, you'll see the Blå Hallen, the Blue Hall, where the Nobel dinner is held, and the Gyllene Salen, the Golden Hall, lined by 18 million gold mosaic tiles.

Liseberg Theme Park, Gothenburg



Liseberg Theme Park, Gothenburg

Liseberg is one of the most popular places to visit in Sweden, and each year, the park lures more than three million visitors. It has a huge range of attractions, from children's carousels and a fairy-tale castle to adrenalin-pumping rides for speed demons, bumper cars, and four roller coasters.

The park stages concerts in summer, too, and it's a real favorite with both Swedish families and visitors from abroad. At Christmas, the park hosts an excellent market. There are plenty of places to eat and beautiful flowers in bloom during the summer. For the best views in Gothenburg take a ride on the Big Wheel.

Kärnan & the Fredriksdal Open-Air Museum, Helsingborg



Kärnan (The Kernel), Helsingborg

Located across the Oresund strait from Denmark's Helsingor (Elsinore), the town of Helsingborg is full of historic sites. Its most prominent feature and famous landmark is a massive brick tower called Kärnan (The Kernel), originally built in the 14th century as a lookout turret for the town's fortress. It stands at the head of market square (Stortorget), looming 35 meters above. Ambitious tourists can climb its 190 steps to get stunning views of the town below, as well as the Oresund Bridge and Denmark.

After exploring the city's historic center, head to the Fredriksdal Open-Air Museum & Botanical Garden (Friluftsmuseum) for an authentic look at Swedish daily life in centuries past.