

The Perfect Weekend

STOCKHOLM

The Swedish capital and the largest city in Scandinavia, Stockholm is often called a 'Venice of the North', with lakes and inlets instead of canals. Even as the days grow shorter and the first breath of winter is in the air, it's a place that richly rewards explorers on a long weekend, with its historic town quarters, inviting coffee shops, diverse museums, ever-present love of design and an archipelago on its doorstep.

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TRAVEL ESSENTIALS BA, Norwegian and SAS fly to Stockholm's Arlanda airport from Edinburgh, Gatwick, Heathrow and Manchester, while Ryanair serves the more out-of-town Skavsta and Västerås airports from Stansted (from £80; ryanair.com). Travelcards for the metro, buses and trams cost £11/£21 for 24/72 hours (sl.se).

MAP ILLUSTRATION: NIK NEVES



The walk

Stockholm is a city of islands, cliffs and lofty overlooks – a compact place, but not always a flat one. Luckily, walkers have plenty of spots to break for a coffee. At the core of the capital, **Gamla Stan** ('The Old Town') has an island all to itself, its humped shape hidden by tall, close-set houses three or more centuries old. Crossing the Vasabron bridge to its northwest corner, the first sight is the graceful 17th-century design of Riddarhuset, Sweden's former House of Lords. Deeper into Gamla Stan, Västerlånggatan is a narrow but well-trodden shopping street, the closest thing Stockholm has to a tourist trap. Smaller alleys lead up to the left, towards the centre of the island, where you can find the best of the quarter's small art galleries and craft shops. It's quieter during the day than it would have been in medieval times, when this was the extent of the city and home to all its trades, recalled in names like Järntorget (Iron Square). But when the lanterns twinkle on at dusk, and people leave the cobblestones for the warmth of a tiny bistro, the old town looks truly ageless.

● visitstockholm.com ➔

Lamps light up the alleys leading to Köpmantorget (Merchant's Square) in Gamla Stan at dusk



The coffee

The aroma that best represents Stockholm is a waft of roasted coffee beans escaping from a doorway, chased by warm notes of cinnamon and cardamom from some new-baked buns. No day here is truly fulfilled without a 'fikapaus' or two, the time when people pause from their duties for fika – a good cup of coffee and, ideally, a sweet pastry to go with it. Fika is not a hasty shot of espresso at a stand-up counter, or a cup grabbed 'to go'; it's time marked off for slow appreciation. This is especially true at **Johan & Nyström**; the business began 12 years ago as Sweden's first speciality coffee roasters, selling to cafés around the city. It has since also opened a store of its own on a street corner in the Södermalm district. Window-side benches and attached wooden tray tables are designed for easy perching (a blessing for customers in bulky winter clothes) and tins of coffee and tea provide colour in the modern space. The aim here is to show an already keen nation the diversity of world coffees, not just in the chalked up menu, but in Friday tastings and home barista courses too.

● Coffee from £1.60; johanochnystrom.se



ABOVE Though coffee is the main mission at **Johan & Nyström**, the shop is serious about its tea range as well. **BELOW** The classic combo for a Swedish fikapaus: coffee and a cinnamon bun as served at **Johan & Nyström's** concept store in Södermalm



The hotel

Clara Strömberg was a visionary in her time, but she could hardly have guessed that one day a fine hotel would be named after her. This 19th-century pioneer of women's education founded the Ateneum school for girls, and the premises it moved into in 1910 now bear the name **Miss Clara Hotel**. The seven-floor building stands on Sveavägen, one of the city's main avenues. With its chunky, sculpted stonework at street level and subtly curved windowframes set in a sandy-coloured façade, it's typical of the solid Stockholm take on Art Nouveau. Pieces of bentwood furniture in the rooms hint at the exterior design, but inside it's more about functional style: herringbone parquet, filament bulbs in the lounge set to a low, warm orange, and plum-coloured stone in the bathrooms, with underfloor heating – a nice touch in winter. The wide-ranging, high-quality breakfast buffet offers a chance to go local with the likes of cheese on crispbread, and also a test of that cardinal Swedish virtue, lagom (having just enough, not too much).

● Rooms from £200; missclarahotel.com

ABOVE Large photo prints of dancers decorate the lounge area at **Miss Clara Hotel** on Sveavägen. **BELOW** Many bedrooms at the hotel have pieces of modern furniture that echo the shape of the large Art Nouveau-era windows that face the main street



The activity

The call of the outdoors is strong in Stockholm, in winter as well as summer. Watching many locals flit across frozen surfaces, you might think they were born with blades on their feet, but there are guided ice-skating excursions for newcomers too. Each group heads out from the city to where the ice is at its best and sturdiest that day, whether it's a forest lake or the labyrinthine channels of the Stockholm Archipelago. Equipped with skates, helmet, poles and other essentials, skaters swap terra firma for its beautiful and surreal winter counterpart. The ice may be white with frozen bubbles, or glassy and clear. When a group of skaters pass at speed, there is often a strange, sonar-like echo from beneath. After a few hours in the cold air, most build up a sturdy appetite for lunch, seated on a rock by the icy shore.

● Guided ice-skating excursion £135 incl lunch, equipment and transport; stockholmadventures.com



Skating on frozen waters near Nynäshamn, south of the capital, between a few of the 30,000 islands, skerries and rocks that make up the Stockholm Archipelago. **INSET, BELOW** Hot dogs grilled over a campfire for a skaters' lunch

The snack

What cheese is to France, in all its bewildering variety, herring is to Sweden. This little fish is a national favourite, served pickled or in mustard sauce on a smörgåsbord table, and chopped up with beetroot and apple in a Christmas salad. In the north of the country, it's fermented in a sealed can for several months before being eaten, usually outdoors, in a breeze. Standard Atlantic herrings grow smaller and less fatty when it lives in the brackish waters of the Baltic Sea. Swedes call the saltwater version 'sill', but use 'strömming' for herring caught north of the port of Kalmar. One of the simplest ways to try this staple is at **Nystekt Strömming**, a no-frills stall with a few wooden tables and benches on the plaza outside Slussen metro station, which overlooks the south side of Gamla Stan. Behind the counter, fillets of herring are fried and then served with a choice of sides. The texture of the slightly breaded fish is balanced with creamy mashed potatoes and a triangle of crispbread, along with red onion, pickled cucumber, dill mayonnaise, grated carrots and more. As in many other cities, food trucks have taken off in Stockholm in recent years, but herring has always swum ahead of the trend.

● Herring with mash £7; 10am–9pm daily →



Fried herring with all the extras, as served at the **Nystekt Strömming** stand

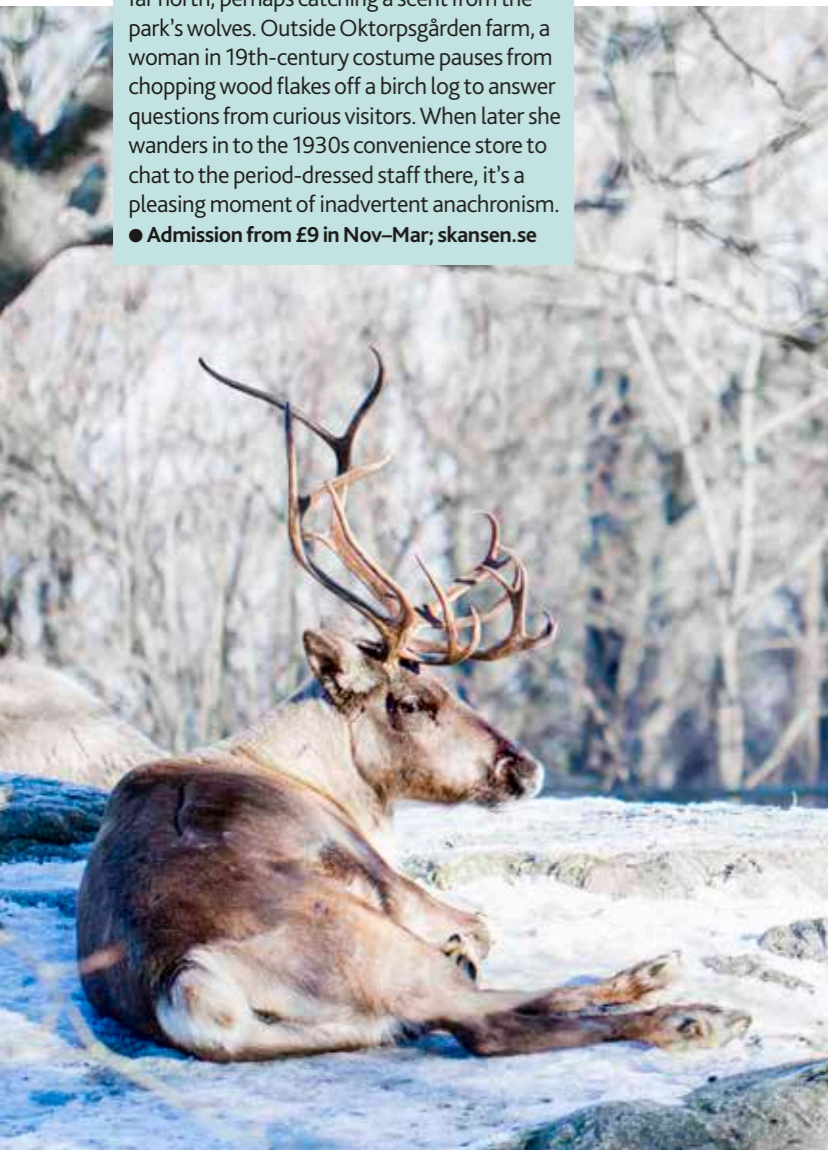
The museum

The park-like surrounds of Djurgården are home to the city's greatest concentration of museums, but none is quite like **Skansen**. Founded in 1891 to record Sweden's traditions before they were swept away by industrialisation, it's a combined open-air museum and zoo, and possibly the world's most tasteful theme park. Over its 125 years, more than 150 heritage buildings have been moved here from all over Sweden: lordly manor houses, turf-roofed cottages, a church and town quarters that include a working bakery and glass-blowing workshop. At one corner of Skansen, sheep and pigs surround prosperous farmsteads from southern Sweden. **BELOW** Reindeer at rest near the Sami camp, representing the far north, perhaps catching a scent from the park's wolves. Outside Oktorpsgården farm, a woman in 19th-century costume pauses from chopping wood flakes off a birch log to answer questions from curious visitors. When later she wanders in to the 1930s convenience store to chat to the period-dressed staff there, it's a pleasing moment of inadvertent anachronism.

● Admission from £9 in Nov–Mar; skansen.se



ABOVE Wall hangings with biblical scenes decorate the best room of Oktorpsgården farm, relocated to Skansen from southern Sweden. **BELOW** Reindeer at rest near the Sami camp



The shop

The bespectacled browser passes stands of umbrellas, racks of aloha shirts and shelves of hunting hats before finding what he wants: a charcoal-grey double-breasted blazer from Tiger of Sweden, a local brand founded in 1903, and revamped in the 1990s. It's an apt choice to make at **Herr Judit**, a store that sells vintage men's clothing and accessories, as well as newer items. At the counter, a shop assistant sporting a Rosie the Riveter-style headscarf punches sums into a calculator with one hand while a chihuahua perches on the other one. She deposits the dog on a stool and gets up to arrange some bow ties on a fan of wooden rails. Herr Judit is a few doors down Hornsgatan from Judits, the womenswear store from which it branched off; also on the same street is its home interiors branch, Brandstationen. It sells pieces from the late 17th century onwards, but one speciality is 1950s Italian lamps, which apparently suit Scandinavian furniture well.

● herrjudit.se



ABOVE Vintage men's fashion at Herr Judit. **BELOW** Brandstationen is the clothes store's interior design branch. **OPPOSITE** Oaxen Slip has a nautical theme, while adjoining Oaxen Krog serves dishes such as scallop, topside and truffle seaweed (inset)

The meal

A fleet in mid-air greets diners at **Oaxen**, a restaurant with a dual identity, named after the archipelago island on which it began. Three years ago, it moved to an old shipyard on a tiny, quiet inlet at the edge of the capital. This partly explains the single scull and other old boats hanging in the light that streams through the west-facing windows in the larger of its two dining rooms, Oaxen Slip. A door at the back leads to its double Michelin-starred sibling: Oaxen Krog, a more meditative space, lined with slatted oak panels. Slip's take on Swedish bistro dishes includes tartare of beef topside with sour cream, Dijon mayo, shallots and sourdough crumbs, followed by a chocolate and caramel cake out of a childhood dream. At Krog, a typical offering might be quail, grilled over spruce and redolent of the Swedish forest, served with a trio of celeriac: fried, as a velvety purée, or pickled with dandelions.

● Mains at Slip from £15, six-course Krog tasting menu £160; oaxen.com



The bar crawl



If a new bar pops up in town, the chances are it will be on a street in **Södermalm**.

Towards the east end of Hornsgatan is Marie Laveau, a large tiled space lit in pink neon, named for a New Orleans voodoo priestess. Though its after-work crowd mostly goes for beer or wine, the food and cocktail menus offer Southern US-inspired options too. Down Swedenborgsgatan, Morfar Ginko is grungier in feel, but has fancier food and also a barbershop downstairs.

In the 'SoFo' area (south of Folkungagatan), Katarina Ölkafé is a local beer specialist where jazz plays softly and dogs are welcome. And three streets away, a slight, sweet smell of rye and a boar's head on the wall give away Bar Central, whose food, beer and wine all come from Central Europe.

● Beers from around £5.30, cocktails from around £13; marielaveau.se, morfarginko.se, katarinaolkafe.se, barcentral.se

LEFT Beers from the Stockholm area are the hallmark of Katarina Ölkafé in Södermalm. **BELOW** A statue by Carl Eldh symbolising dance gazes out from the terrace of Stadshuset towards Gamla Stan



The sunset spot


Northern sunsets are glorious, if a little eccentric. Stockholm is one of the world's highest-latitude capitals, and the golden moment can happen any time between 2.47pm in deepest December and 10.08pm at Midsummer. The city seems designed to look at its best in the lingering evening light: the sun reflects off the ripples between the islands and brings to life the townhouse façades painted in warm hues. In winter or summer, the lakeside **Stadshuset** (City Hall) provides an almost theatrical stage for an end-of-day performance. Cross the main courtyard of this castle-like edifice

– a red-brick icon of the National Romantic style of the 1910s and '20s – and continue through the colonnade. Ahead is a broad terrace, which looks out towards Södermalm, and the spires of Gamla Stan to the left. Stadshuset is the venue for the Nobel Banquet on 10 December each year, and the view outside is a prize-winner too. The tall church tower of Riddarholmskyrkan, topped by a lacework of cast iron, catches the last of the direct sun, but the twilight waits courteously for those sightseers who are not yet ready to depart.

● international.stockholm.se/the-city-hall

The local's tip

“I like to walk around in Stockholm to be inspired by new styles. Near my shop is a nice restaurant called Woodstockholm. It's kind of plain inside, but the smallness of the place makes it quite cosy. It has a theme which changes, such as 'forest', 'Salvador Dalí' or 'aphrodisiac', and dishes like duck, artichoke and fig to go with it. I have been there several times in the last year.”

HÅKAN STRÖM runs Barber & Books, a gents' hairdressers, beard-grooming business and bookshop in Södermalm (barberandbooks.se). 



RORY GOULDING is our sub-editor. At the age of eight, he dragged his Swedish granny to Skansen and its zoo three times in three days.