

Stockholm, Sweden: Travel Feature

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Think of Sweden and chances are that you'll think of their most famous exports - perhaps ABBA, a familiar name to most people of a certain generation and nowadays, IKEA, the furniture store that's made it big worldwide. But there's much more to the country than that.

The capital, Stockholm, is in the southeast of Sweden and is built on 14 different islands, which separate the Baltic Sea from Lake Malaren. When we ventured there, it was mid summer. Summer in Sweden was an eye opener in itself. I don't know about you, but I always thought that the Scandinavian countries, like Sweden and Norway, were wintry places, cold most of the year round. Nothing could be further than the truth. During our visit, we experienced a heat wave with temperatures regularly in the high 80s and exceptionally long days, as they're so far north. It wasn't unusual for the sun to still be up after 10:00 pm.

Perhaps one of the first things that hits you about Stockholm is the beauty of the city, surrounded by water, which makes for some gorgeous picture postcard views. In fact, some of those views can be seen in some of the IKEA stores mentioned earlier, helping to promote the city as widely as possible.

The first stop on most people's list of places to visit here is the Royal Palace -- and with good reason. Although it's no longer the private residence of the King, it's got more than 600 rooms and lives up to any of the finest palaces in the world, such as Versailles in France, Buckingham Palace in London, or the Prince's Palace in Monaco. Highlights inside include the Hall of State, complete with Queen Kristina's silver throne and, as you'd expect, the State Apartments. These are still used for official functions and are full of beautiful finery. The Karl XI's gallery, where all the major meals are served, is modeled on the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles and is truly striking.

Outside the palace, it's well worth catching the Changing of the Guard ceremony that takes place every day at midday. The guards make an impressive picture as they march over one of the main bridges in Stockholm to head for the palace. They are an interesting sight, with uniforms that could definitely be described as built for work, rather than ceremony, with colors predominantly navy blue with striking silver helmets.

The Palace isn't just a place to view the various rooms -- it's also home to museums, including Gustav III's Museum of Antiquities, a wonderful

collection of statues brought home by that king from his journey to Rome. The Treasury is a bit like the Tower of London, filled with the most important State regalia, including the fount that's used for royal baptisms and the crown, sceptre, orb, and keys of the kingdom.

Although the Royal Palace takes up a huge part of Gamla Stan -- the Old Town -- it's well worth some time to browse this area. As you turn every corner, you're greeted with more beautiful ancient buildings. Many places claim to have an Old Town, but Stockholm's definitely has history everywhere you turn.

A short walk from the palace but a couple of islands away, which gives you an idea of how water based this city is, you'll find the Stadshuset or City Hall. Completed in 1923, it contains the Council Chamber and the Blue Hall, which is where the annual Nobel Prize festivities take place. But perhaps the most stunning room here is the Golden Room -- and that's essentially what it is. It has something like 19 million fragments of gold leaf in it! You're taken on a tour, so time to linger in each room is limited. We could've stared all day in this room, taking in all the detail. It also offers some superb views back towards Gamla Stan.

As you'd expect from a city that's very much based on the water, another must-do on any visit to Stockholm is a boat ride around the city, which gives you a unique perspective. It's also the only way to easily travel to two of the other major visitor attractions in Stockholm. They're located on the island of Djurgarden, which, as the name suggests is a huge natural park and garden area, although it started life as a Royal hunting ground. Today that's where you'll find both the Vasamuseet and Skansen.

If your Swedish isn't that great, Vasamuseet is the Museum of the Vasa, which was a Royal warship that capsized in Stockholm harbor in 1628. It was found on the seabed in 1956 and after a major salvage and conservation program; it was finally put in its own museum, which opened to the public in 1990. Essentially the museum is built around the ship and it's kept fairly dark to help preserve it. You can walk around different levels of the museum, each giving different views of the ship, with exhibitions all around, explaining about life in Sweden at that time and life on board the Vasa itself.

It's a fascinating place and, looking at the ship, it's hard to believe it is actually the real thing and not a very good replica, so good is the standard of the preservation. Highlights include the stern, which has been painstakingly restored to how it would have originally looked and the figureheads on the ship, both giving some indication of the beauty of the Vasa when it first set sail.

Quite a walk away is Skansen, which celebrates life gone by. When it opened in 1891, it was the world's first open air museum. Today it's home to houses and cottages from the past, along with craftsmen, including glass blowers and shoemakers, demonstrating work from the 19th century. But perhaps one of the biggest draws here, especially for the younger members of the family, is the animals. When we were there, we were lucky enough to see the brown bear cubs, only a few months old, and they were truly delightful. It was also the closest we've ever been to creatures like wolves and elk and it was quite an eye opener to see them so close up.

We spent three days in Stockholm and came away with plenty of places that we didn't get time to see, such as Drottningholm, the actual home of the Royal family today, and the Archipelago, the outer islands of Stockholm with their traditional wooden houses, linked to the main city center by frequent boat and even steamboat services.

If you thought that Sweden was just about winter, ABBA, and IKEA, then Stockholm will definitely change your mind. It's packed full of history and things to do and see and is definitely somewhere that's well worth a few days of your time.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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