

48 hours in...

Stockholm

A sense of refinement pervades every part of this little European capital, from the elegant palace and the surrounding government buildings to the latest designer boutique hotels

Stockholm, the elegant lady of Northern Europe, has always pulled up her nose at the tag Venice of the North, opting to stay uncrowned by lofty titles or cloying endearments. The city centre itself is the perfect representation of how Stockholm pragmatically embraces modernity and its centuries-old heritage side by side. Here, signature Swedish contemporary architecture and design are right at home in a city founded around 1250.

It soon becomes clear as you walk around that nothing ostentatious will do. The city is spread across 14 islands at the mouth of freshwater Lake Mälaren.

The former Viking stomping ground has water in all possible configurations meandering throughout: from the Baltic Sea's presence to streams, bays and lakes. This makes for wonderful strolls across bridges big and small, in particular in and around the centre of the city.

PEER AT THE PAST

Gamla Stan (Old Town) is on the island of Stadsholmen, where the Royal Palace looks discretely out on to the city. Here, the cobbled streets and narrow alleyways attract plenty of visitors seeking a glimpse of the 13th-century buildings, as well as

the changing of the guard. But early mornings before the rush reveal the island's German architecture and the washed-out colours of the buildings surrounded by water, in a moment of quiet solitude. Taking a bridge east from Gamla Stan leads to the wealthy area of Östermalm; north to the city centre, Norrmalm; and north-west to Vasastan, the foodie neighbourhood.

ADMIRE ART AND DESIGN

Along Klarabergsgatan, the main road running through the city, rises Sankta Clara Kyrka, a red-brick church dating





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to the 16th century. A few steps along is the concrete giant of the city's arts and culture centre, the Kulturhuset, where exhibitions and performances of all kinds are hosted.

Walking a little bit further east will bring you to the shopping district with its brand-new department stores, such as the tasteful NK Stockholm. Tucked in-between them is an array of local artisans specialising in age-old crafts such as brasswork (check out the brand Skultuna) and woodwork.

The lobbies of the redesigned Lydmar Hotel and Nobis Hotel (converted from two 19th-century buildings) serve as the area's go-to locations for professionals who appreciate doing business in such contemporary design settings. Elsewhere, the old and the new all curl around the city's official meeting point: Stureplan.

Across yet another bridge you'll find Skeppsholmen, slightly to the south of the city centre. Historically home to the

military, with easy access to the Baltic, today it houses the Moderna Museet (Museum of Modern Art). Here you can admire a collection of works by artists ranging from Marcel Duchamp to Pablo Picasso. Along with the Arkitektur och Designcentrum (Centre for Architecture and Design), this institute calls artistically inclined kin to this tiny island.

On the southern side, between some old trees, is Hotel Skeppsholmen. Set in a historical early-18th-century building given a highly contemporary redesign by award-winning Swedish architecture firm Claesson Koivisto Rune (also responsible for the Nobis Hotel conversion), this is one of the most popular brunch spots in the city.

MIX WITH THE LOCALS

Södermalm is the playground of the city's young and trendy, made popular by Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* trilogy. The area sports various

attractions, ranging from buzzing bars and theatres to beautiful parks. Walking around the island, variety is the drawcard: the 1859 Södra Teatern where shows are staged all year round, Abba-famed Benny Andersson's Hotel Rival for post-work drinks, Drop Coffee where you can enjoy a cup expertly brewed from sustainably produced beans.

The southern part of the island, SoFo (south of Folkungagatan), has become the most bohemian area of Stockholm: vintage clothing stores and retro decor and design are the order of the day, with contemporary New York-inspired cafes dotted around. 📍

For travel arrangements to Stockholm, contact the Diners Club Concierge Service on 0861 DINERS (346377), complimentary for those who BELONG.