

THE BEST OF STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN



Old Town boasts many boutiques and restaurants.

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

Contestants on “The Amazing Race” get to do a lot of enviable things. But when the show detoured at the world’s largest IKEA store in Stockholm (season 6, episode 3) and contestants had to build a desk to get their next clue, my husband and I knew that we could’ve easily dominated that challenge. That belief has become a kind of running joke in our house, and so when I recently visited Stockholm, the one place I most wanted to visit was the IKEA store—even though the Atlantic Station location is mere miles from home. And so it was that I dragged my friend Hans, a native Swede who shockingly had never been to that particular IKEA store, to the round, three-story mecca. As we strolled through the overwhelming selection, Hans translated product names—turns out many items are named after small Swedish towns. I didn’t have time to visit any of these towns, since Stockholm offered much to fill five days. Among the best:

TRAVEL

ARCHIPELAGO

Stockholm is built on 14 islands, where Lake Mälaren flows into the Baltic Sea and the unique Stockholm Archipelago seascape with 24,000 islands. (Sweden has more than 220,000 islands.) Stockholm, a very walkable city, is perhaps best appreciated by boat. My two-hour boat tour sailed past some of the 10 Swedish Royal Palaces, Gröna Lund amusement park, rock islands and several of the city’s 59 bridges.

OLD TOWN

Stockholm was founded in 1252, and the oldest section is northern Europe’s larg-

est and best-preserved medieval city. For 400 years, Old Town was Stockholm; today, it’s a neighborhood filled with boutiques, souvenir shops and restaurants.

ROYAL PALACE

Built in 1750, the Royal Palace is the largest palace in Europe with 608 rooms (Buckingham Palace has 606) and is the official residence of the king of Sweden, Carl XVI Gustaf. Walk past at the right time, and you might catch the changing of the guard in the outer courtyard.

HALLWYLSKA MUSEET

Built in 1893 as a private residence for Count and Countess von Hallwyl, Hallwylska is a showcase of aristocratic life during the Victorian era. Countess Wilhelmina was an avid collector of many things—from seashells to Old Master paintings, silver to tapestries, porcelain to ordinary household items like brooms—which means the house has more stuff to look at than many art museums.

SKANSEN

Sweden’s No. 1 tourist attraction, Skansen is an open-air museum showcasing more than 150 historic buildings from all parts of Sweden, most dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. Interpreters in period costume demonstrate activities like weaving and dancing. There’s also a zoo with about 70 different native animal species, including bears, reindeer and wolves.

HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF WINE & SPIRITS

For geeks like me interested in the technology and social history of alcoholic drinks, this museum is a can’t-miss. The main exhibition boasts two multimedia



Changing of the guard at the Royal Palace.



Souvenir shops draw crowds.

productions and a collection of more than 7,000 items, 12,000 photos and more than 20,000 labels. In 1756, one in every 10 Swedes owned a still, and Sweden had 700 taverns—one for every 100 residents—but today, more Swedes drink wine than spirits.

ABSOLUT ICEBAR STOCKHOLM

Hans guesses that most homes in the world have a piece of IKEA furniture, but I’d bet that even more folks drink Absolut Vodka. Invented in 1877 by Lars Olsen Smith and introduced to the United States in 1979, Absolut Vodka is the world’s fourth largest premium spirits brand, sold in more than 126 markets. Where better to enjoy it than at the Absolut Icebar Stockholm? Everything in the bar is made of ice—from the walls to the stools to the glassware. Before entering, you’ll get a poncho and gloves, since the bar is kept at 23 degrees F. Cold enough to race through a cocktail. **SP**

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE

Delta offers nonstop flights from Atlanta to Stockholm. Flight time is approximately nine hours.

A free bus runs from downtown Stockholm to the south suburban IKEA store every Monday through Friday on the hour between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m.; on weekends IKEA is easily accessible by train.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

A valid passport is required to enter Sweden. The Swedish currency is the krona. Purchase a Stockholm Card for access to 75 museums and attractions and to travel on public buses, trains and selected boat trips; a 24-hour card starts at approximately U.S. \$55, depending on the exchange rate at time of purchase. Buy one at www.stockholmtown.com/stockholmcards.

WHAT TO EAT

Try pyttipanna, a pan-fried Swedish hash made with potatoes, onions and sausage or ham and served with beetroot and fried egg. Semlas, wheat buns filled with marzipan and whipped cream, are traditionally served on Fat Tuesday, but have become so popular that you can often find them throughout the year.

COMING SOON

ABBA fans, take note that a museum honoring the group will open on June 4, 2009, at 10 a.m.

WHERE TO STAY

Radisson SAS Strand Hotel
+46 8 50 66 4000
www.strand.stockholm.radissonsas.com

MORE INFORMATION

Visit Sweden
212-885-9700
www.visitsweden.com



Overlooking a waterway, the Radisson SAS Strand Hotel opened in 1912.

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