

Travel

Sarah Turner
30 Nov 2011

Recommend 13 0

The Swedish nation - so clever looking, so sorted in their winter uniform of black down jackets and wraparound shades. As they wander around the stalls of Skansen, the outdoor museum in Stockholm, it's enough to dilute the goodwill in any nationality who can't wear winter clothing with such aplomb.

Skansen - whose month of Christmas events started last Saturday - is a full frontal charm offensive with historic buildings, cobbled streets and squares, all with little red wooden stalls selling an enticing menu of mellowness and mulled wine.



Market forces: Riddarholmen Island forms

Ponies and traps transport excited children, and stallholders are dressed as 19th-century peasants (although I'm willing to bet there's some seriously 21st-century thermal underwear action underneath the tweed coats and mufflers).

And then the music starts and these urbane adults start singing and hopping like frogs around a light-bedecked pine tree. "It's a Swedish folk song. We usually sing it in summer but it works in winter too," says a man when he sees my bemused expression.

Sophistication has a mutually beneficial relationship with sentiment when it comes to the festive season in Sweden. There are stalls selling hand-dipped candles, saffron buns, fur hats and enough gingerbread to construct a small city while the buildings include glass blowers to provide singularly tasteful baubles (it's tempting to linger over this, especially if you're too self-conscious to warm yourself up with a spot of frog hopping.) Even a flurry of snow arrives on cue.

Did I buy much? Some gingerbread found its way into my luggage but I'm not sure that's the point - a Christmas market is more about buying into its Charles Dickens/Little Women vibe.

Stockholm's festive spirit isn't confined to Skansen either - there are small outbreaks of Christmas markets throughout the city.

The food-centric market at Gamla Stan - the oldest part of Stockholm - sees a nightly influx of office workers and an intoxicating blend of sausages, spices and candied almonds, all fuelled by copious amounts of glogg, mulled wine that results in another gentle sing-song as their clever Scandinavian glasses mist over from the heat of the wine. On my way back to the hotel, I pass parents pulling very happy children along the street on sleds.

Only a Scrooge could object to a Swedish Christmas. This is a country so sweet that at Christmas department stores have a whole section devoted to dressing your child up as gingerbread.

As I look out of my window at the Hotel Rival (so Swedish it's owned by Benny from Abba) I could see into the apartments nearby - awash in high IQ rugs and lined with books, all with a single tiered row of white lights in the window - a million miles away from the grid-busting barrage of lights you get in Britain. I don't think anywhere does Christmas quite as tastefully as Sweden.

**British Airways flies from London City Airport to Stockholm, returns from £63, ba.com*

Sponsored links

Luxury Holidays

Specialists in Discount Luxury Holidays, Hotels & Flights

UK holiday from £144

Luxury Bell Tents, Yaxham Waters - Fully equipped luxury bell tents sited on a quality holiday park in Mid Norfolk. Weekend

Direct Holidays

Fantastic deals on package holidays and last minute getaways online. Go Direct and cut out travel agents commission

More offers