

# Eurovision 2016: a guide to Stockholm

LGBT travellers can expect a warm welcome in the Swedish capital, this year's Song Contest host city

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Stockholm and its 'garden island', Djurgården [visitsweden.com](http://visitsweden.com)

Flashing lights, screeching high notes, extreme wind machines, broken English... yes, it's Eurovision Song Contest time again, and this year the annual celebration of song and dance – which rallies and divides Europe all in one night – lands in the Swedish capital, Stockholm.

Whether you're watching for the camp performances, the awkward presenter banter or for the thrill of last-minute leaderboard leaps, it's always a spectacle, and Stockholm has its work cut out for it as it welcomes Song Contest superfans in their thousands.



The Ericsson Globe will host Eurovision 2016 (Soren Andersson/mediabank.visitstockholm.com)

Eurovision-lovers flooding the city will find Stockholm a progressive, forward-thinking city with a thriving nightlife and an incredible fashionable sense, so it's never out of style – whether in knee-high snow or balmy summer sunshine. You'll also find a smorgasbord of culinary delights. Don't miss *fika* (a coffee and cake break) at the likes of Fabrique ([fabrique.se](http://fabrique.se)).

Spread across several islands in a wider archipelago, each of central Stockholm's districts brims with individuality: hipster-heavy Sodermalm in the south; well-heeled Ostermalm to the north-east; businessy Norrmalm to the west; tree-lined Djurgarden on the eastern perimeter; residential districts Kungsholmen and Vasastaden, rich with neighbourhood dining and independent cafes; and Gamla Stan, the cobbled old town dating back to the 12th century, which sits at the heart of the city.

Stockholm's LGBT scene is an open, modern and integrated one (which some may read as "hard to find") but the Swedish capital has hosted both EuroPride and the EuroGames (a sporting event run by the European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation) in recent years, and you'll find rainbow murals adorning metro stations, Hollywood legends at rest and Absolut and Aquavit in equal measure. Time your visit to coincide with Pride (25-31 July; [stockholmpride.org](http://stockholmpride.org)), and join the hundreds of thousands following the parade around the city.



Bar at the Hotel Rival

This Saturday, the city welcomes the Eurovision final to the Ericsson Globe stadium, but any Saturday night in Stockholm couldn't start better than with drinks at Rival ([rival.se](http://rival.se)), the boutique hotel owned by Abba's Benny Andersson, followed by throwing shapes to Europop at Schlager at King Kong ([facebook.com/kingkong.sthlm](https://facebook.com/kingkong.sthlm)).

Currently £1 converts to 12SEK, while US\$1 is 8SEK.

### **Unpack**

In the heart of Ostermalm overlooking a tree-lined park and the national library is the Scandic Anglais ([scandichotels.com/anglais](http://scandichotels.com/anglais)), part of a homegrown group of Scandi designer hotels. Seconds from some of the city's best shopping and one metro stop away from Centralen station, the 200-room hotel also includes a gym, two decadent bars and a Jamie's Italian serving affordable Italian plates. Doubles start at 1,150SEK per night, including breakfast.



Scandic Anglais hotel in the district of Ostermalm

### **Think local**

Dubbed “the lungs of Stockholm” for its expansive green space, the island of Djurgarden is the perfect escape to nature, in the heart of the city; take the water taxi from Slussen for a scenic journey to the island accompanied by city views. Walk along woodland trails, take a dip at one of the swimming spots or stop in at the Grona Lund amusement park ([gronalund.com](http://gronalund.com)) and open-air museum Skansen ([skansen.se](http://skansen.se)).

South of Stockholm sits Woodland Cemetery ([skogskyrkogarden.se](http://skogskyrkogarden.se)), a Unesco World Heritage Site designed by modernist architects Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz, set across 250 acres of pine-covered boulder ridge. In this tranquil space where nature and design meet, you’ll also find the final resting place of Swedish Hollywood actress Greta Garbo.

### **Eat**

Open flames dance, smoked birch scents the air and a fierce heat emanates from the kitchen of Ekstedt ([ekstedt.nu](http://ekstedt.nu)), the recently Michelin-starred restaurant from Niklas Ekstedt, situated in Ostermalm. Without the modern luxuries of electricity or gas, the chefs instead cook using wood-fired ovens, hot charcoal, ash and smoke to deliver complex and diverse seasonal Scandinavian dishes for diners over a four (840SEK) or six-course (1,090SEK) set menu.



Cooking over an open flame at the Michelin-starred Ekstedt (RPA Jorgensen)

On Stortorget Square in the heart of quaint, cobbled Gamla Stan (Old Town) is Chokladkoppen ([chokladkoppen.se](http://chokladkoppen.se)), a gay-owned café with mismatched seating and diverse artwork serving famous bowls (yes, bowls) of indulgent hot chocolate, generous sandwiches and fresh salad plates (between 40SEK and 60SEK).

### **Drink**

Summer means bankside drinks on Norr Malarstrand in Kungsholmen, and Malarpaviljongen ([malarpaviljongen.se](http://malarpaviljongen.se)) is a must-visit, particularly for LGBT locals and visitors. Complete with waterside deck gently bobbing throughout long summer days, it's a great place to catch up over cocktails and is open daily roughly 11am - 1am (weather dependent) from April to September.

### **Spend**

There's much more to Swedish design than Ikea. Swedish interiors are as stylish and covetable as you like, and you can stock up on exceptional accoutrements at Granit ([granit.com](http://granit.com)) on Humlegardsgatan. For clothes as well as quirky homeware, head to Sodermalm, where you'll find high-quality designer essentials at Grandpa ([grandpa.se](http://grandpa.se)) and a huge choice of second-hand thrift stores, with particularly good buys at Stockholm Stadsmission ([stadsmissionen.se](http://stadsmissionen.se)).



Discover high-quality designer essentials at Grandpa (Mikael Sjoberg/mediabank.visitstockholm.com)

### **Don't miss**

Whether you're a Eurovision fan or not, Abba The Museum ([abbathemuseum.com](http://abbathemuseum.com)) is a must. One of the many museums on Djurgarden (see "Think local", above) it's an interactive celebration of song and dance following the band's rise to fame, as narrated by Benny, Bjorn, Anni-Frid and Agnetha. See their costumes, sing along to their greatest hits and even star in a music video as their "fifth member". Entry costs 195SEK, including access to the standalone Swedish Music Hall of Fame exhibition. Just opened is Good Evening Europe, a pop-up interactive exhibition initiated by Abba's Bjorn Ulvaeus himself, celebrating 60 years of the Eurovision Song Contest (runs to September).

### **Travel essentials**

#### **Getting there**

Arlanda airport is 37km north of the city and served by British Airways ([ba.com](http://ba.com)) from Heathrow, SAS ([flysas.com](http://flysas.com)) from Heathrow, Edinburgh and Manchester, and Norwegian ([norwegian.com](http://norwegian.com)) from Gatwick, Manchester and Edinburgh. Ryanair ([ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com)) flies from Stansted to Skavsta (103km south-west of town) and Vasteras (106km north-west).

### **More information**

[eurovision.tv](http://eurovision.tv)

[visitsweden.com](http://visitsweden.com)

*Patrick Hanlon and Russell Alford blog about travel and food at [gastrogays.com](http://gastrogays.com)*