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## Swedish sensation: how Stockholm became a modern gay mecca

Between EuroGames and Stockholm Pride, this stylish city is having its gayest year yet – from smorgasbords to schlager rooms, GSN finds out how the Scandi capital took on the world of LGBT travel and won

29 April 2015 | By [Gareth Johnson](#)



Photos by Gareth Johnson and other sources.

If ever there is a time to visit Stockholm, it's the summer of 2015. Already there's a palpable buzz around what will be an almost month-long LGBTI party, beginning with [Stockholm Pride](#) (from 27 July to 1 August) and concluding with [EuroGames](#) (from 5-9 August).

It's no surprise that Stockholm was selected to host the EuroGames event: it's a city that's embraced LGBTI visitors for years. Equal marriage was introduced in Sweden in May 2009, and last month Stockholm [won the destination award](#) at the British LGBT Awards

A city of striking beauty, Stockholm is defined by light and water. This is a low-rise city built over 14 islands and connected together by 57 bridges, so you're surrounded by water at every turn. What's more, we struck it lucky with the weather – clear blue skies and warm days for our entire stay.

We travelled the length and breadth of the Scandi capital to find out exactly why it's such an LGBTI tourist paradise – and here's what we found out...



## Things to do

- Wander the streets of SoFo. This is a super-cool neighbourhood on the island of Södermalm. It's got a real hipster vibe with independent stores, great cafes and bars. Make sure you pick up some caramels from [Parlans Konfektyr](#), which are handmade and deliciously smooth and buttery. The liquorice flavor is a game-changer.
- Experience [Fotografiska](#). This is Stockholm's house of photography. It features changing exhibitions from the world's leading photographers. When we were there we saw fantastic work from Andres Serrano. This is an historic building that has been given a modern makeover. The cafe is worth checking out – grab a coffee and a shrimp sandwich as you admire the stunning views across the harbour.
- Take a ferry. The best vantage point to admire the beauty of Stockholm is from the water. The Djurgården Ferry departs from Slussen (where Lake Malaren meets the sea).
- Make yourself at home at the [Thiel Gallery](#). This stunning mansion on Djurgården Island has been transformed into an creative haven. Ernest Thiel was a prominent businessman with a passion for collecting art. He created this mansion so that he could share his collection with the people of Stockholm. This summer the gallery will be presenting a special exhibition focusing on the work of Eugène Jansson.
- Take fika. This is a Swedish ritual that is a civilised form of coffee break – accompanied by a cinnamon bun. There are lots of options around Stockholm where you can take a fika break, but why not try [Chokladkoppen](#), the gay coffee shop in Gamla Stan, which is the Old Town where you will find cobbled streets and The Royal Palace.
- Combine culture and travel. The T-bana is Stockholm's underground transport system and also boasts the world's longest public art installation. Each station features murals and artwork.
- Face your Waterloo. Sweden's biggest export is the music of pop icons ABBA and the famous four have taken a hands-on role in creating [the ABBA museum](#) that celebrates their career. This is actually a lot more fun than you might imagine, even if you're not a massive ABBA fan. Interaction is the key focus – you get to record a song, dance in

a music video, and appear on stage as you embrace your ABBA fantasies. One of the great features of this experience is that you can then download your performances and enjoy them again. Although, listening back to my recording of Mamma Mia I was bit disappointed – I hadn't quite nailed the notes as precisely as I had imagined!

- Dive into history. Stockholm's most popular attraction is the [Vasa Museum](#). This is the home of a massive wooden warship that sank while on its maiden voyage in 1628. Incredibly preserved, it is a unique opportunity to appreciate Europe's maritime past.
- Stock up on some Swedish style. As well as numerous well-known fashion brands, there are some emerging designers in Sweden that are really exciting. The best place to see them all in once place is [Nordiska Kompaniet](#) – the department store known by everyone as NK. Check out the cafes and restaurants on the top floor and then give your credit card a workout. The store's staff are particularly helpful and knowledgeable and will help explain who's who in Swedish fashion.

*Caramels from Parlans Konfektyr (below) is one of the highlights of the SoFo neighborhood on the island of Södermalm.*



### Where to eat

- [Urban Deli](#). Overlooking Nytorget square, this is the go-to food option in the SoFo neighbourhood on the island of Södermalm. It's a sprawling space that includes a deli, a grocery, a bar and a cafe. You could easily spend the day here.
- [Zink Grill](#). Warm and intimate, this is simple food done really well. Share a meat platter and feast on chops, sausages, pork belly, and white beans in a rich tomato sauce.
- [Oaxen Slip](#). This is the more relaxed and casual eatery from the team who also operate Oaxen Krog – one of only three restaurants in Stockholm that has been awarded two Michelin stars. This is Scandinavian cuisine at its best.
- [Broms](#). In the stylish district of Östermalm, Broms is a true neighbourhood restaurant which also offers locals a deli and take-out food option. Bold use of flavors and confident fusion of styles makes this an exciting dinner destination.

*The Urban Deli (below) overlooking Nytorget square is a great option for lunch.*



### **Where to drink and party**

There are a number of LGBTI venues dotted across Stockholm – there’s no specific ‘gay district’ and most venues are very mixed and welcoming of everyone. The city’s [QX magazine](#) is a good guide to what’s on and where to go, or ask your hotel concierge for advice.

- [Mälarpaviljongen](#): A series of floating wooden pontoons form the best summer party in Stockholm. Drink rose and while away the hours hanging out with your friends and people-watching.
- [King Kong](#): A basement space that has a big bar, a main dance-floor as well as a schlager room. A really fun upbeat crowd. We were there on a Saturday night and it was a good choice.
- [Wonk](#): This is a late night club on Saturdays. The barmen take their shirts off and the young, mixed crowd are out for a good time.
- [Patricia](#): This is a Sunday night party on a boat (safely moored so you’re not going anywhere). It’s recently moved location and the locals are taking their time to rediscover it, but it’s a cool venue and worth checking out.

### **Where to stay**

- [Hotel Rival](#): This used to be a cinema and it carries that love of movies through its stylish design. Locals come here for brunch on a Sunday or to see a show in the in-house theatre. The Rival is a great hotel, and is ideally located for exploring the city. There’s a strong sense of style, the service is super-friendly but professional and the breakfast smorgasbord is spectacular.
- [Hotel Diplomat](#). A family-run luxury hotel, there is a personal touch and an eye for detail evident in this beautiful property. A great bar and restaurant too.

- [Prins van Orangiën](#). A small wooden boat that has been turned into a surprisingly affordable luxury hotel. Perfect for a group who wants to take over the entire ship, but you can also just book one room for your stay.
- [Nordic Light Hotel](#). A modern hotel in a great location. Best suited to a business trip rather than a romantic mini-break.

*The hotel Rival (below) is a great option for accommodation.*



### **Getting there**

We flew from London's Heathrow airport – an easy flight time of two-and-a-half hours with [SAS Scandinavian Airlines](#) (the quickest and best way to then get into town is on the [A-Train AB Arlanda Express](#).)

### **Planning your visit**

- [gaylesbian.visitstockholm.com](http://gaylesbian.visitstockholm.com)

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