



Picture PERFECT

From affordable eateries to post-modern design, **Felicity Cousins** explores the lighter side of Stockholm

Built on 14 islands, where Lake Malaren meets the Baltic Sea, Stockholm's location provides a stunning playground for both business and leisure travellers.

Its archipelago has over 30,000 serene and rocky green islands and islets, with typical Swedish houses painted Falu red, a coppery colour produced only in Sweden. The city's waters are so clean that when the capital was bidding for the Olympics in the 1990s, the mayor kept filling his glass from the lake below the City Hall to impress the judges.

Being proud of the natural environment is nothing new for Swedes. Nicole Torbjörnsson, project

manager for meetings and conventions at Stockholm Visitors Board, explains: "For Sweden, the whole 'green' movement happening now in Europe is very strange, because we have been collecting our bottles to recycle since the 1950s. We are an outdoor nation and close to nature, so respecting the environment just comes naturally."

As with London, you have to pay a toll (around SEK30/£2.50) to get into the city by car, but actually crossing the road in Stockholm takes some getting used to. Unlike in the UK, where everyone takes their chances, scurrying in front of swooping buses and dodging behind cars in traffic jams, in Stockholm

everyone waits. No one moves until the green man lights up, even if the roads are completely empty. It's a little frustrating, but this is the Stockholm way: the rules are set and the rules are respected. And it works. For example, if the Arlanda Express train from the airport is one minute late, everyone gets their money back.

Eva Kalling-Hansson, director of sales at the Radisson SAS Royal Viking Hotel, says that this cleanliness and organisation is one of the reasons Stockholm is such an attractive destination for major international businesses. "In terms of business tourism we are competing against Vienna,

HOTEL CHECK

Grand Hotel Intercontinental



WHAT'S IT LIKE? A member of Leading Hotels of the World, the Grand Hotel became part of the Intercontinental portfolio in January, making it the only IHG property in Scandinavia. The original building opened in 1874 but the hotel has had a couple of extensions since, most recently in 2006, adding an extra 76 rooms including the 330-sqm Princess Lilian Suite, the Flag Suite and the Nobel Suite.

WHERE IS IT? On the waterfront next to the Swedish National Museum and opposite Gamla Stan and the Royal Palace.

HOW MANY ROOMS? 376 rooms, including 42 suites.

ROOM FACILITIES All rooms are individually decorated to reflect different time periods and range in size from 20 sqm for a

Small Double room to 50 sqm for a Deluxe Double, and 65 sqm for an Executive suite. All rooms have 35 free television channels, free wifi and a minibar. My room was an Executive Suite with a balcony and a harbour view. It had wooden floors, chandeliers, a large bathroom with a spa bath and separate rain shower, L'Occitane toiletries (which are being trialled for six months), robes and slippers. The Executive suites also have a dining room (pictured) and a sitting room with a sofa, coffee table and television.

RESTAURANTS AND BARS The Cadier bar has recently been extended to offer more seating. It's popular for its à la carte breakfast, as well as business lunches and afternoon tea, but

it really comes to life in the evening. The Veranda restaurant overlooks the harbour and serves a comprehensive buffet breakfast with everything from reindeer, pickled herring and fried potatoes, to fruit, cold meats, and the usual cooked options. Veranda also serves a traditional Swedish smorgasbord (a four to six-course meal with a variety of dishes). The hotel's fine-dining restaurant is the Michelin-starred Mathias Dahlgren (see page 65).

BUSINESS AND MEETING FACILITIES Wifi is free throughout the hotel and there is also a business centre. The facilities are extensive and lavish

– the Grand used to host the Nobel Prize banquet in the Hall of Mirrors (this has now moved to the City Hall). There are 24 conference premises including the SeaLounge, a 61-foot yacht, and four new rooms including “New York” and “Berlin”.

LEISURE FACILITIES The compact gym is free for guests and has features including a sauna and a couple of treatment



Executive Suite

rooms. (In spring 2009, the hotel will open a spa and swimming pool in the basement.)

PRICE Internet rates for a midweek stay in June started at SEK4,790 (£409) for Small Double room.

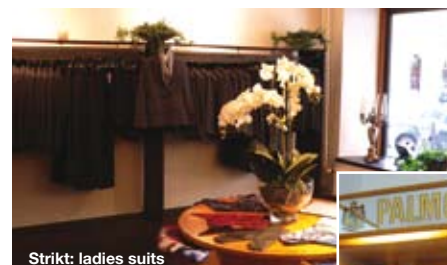
CONTACT S Blasieholmshmnern 8, Stockholm; tel +46 8679 3500; grandhotel.se.

Barcelona and Amsterdam, but we are in a different league,” she says. “We have a very high quality of life here. I take my bike to work and there is a very good transport system.”

Stockholm hosts around 100 international congresses a year: Stockholm International Fairs is northern Europe's largest congress facility, while Stockholm City Conference Centre is also a huge draw. Between them they attracted 290,000 visitors last year, and in 2005, the World Congress of Cardiology saw 24,000 people descend on the capital's hotels. So it is perhaps not surprising that the city was recently named one of the ten most popular congress destinations in the world by the International Congress and Convention Association.

Peter Andersson, director of sales and marketing for the Sheraton Stockholm, says the city is a popular destination for the pharmaceutical industry (it is home to the renowned Karolinska Institute, the medical university): from the UK, GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca International are regular visitors. Apart from Western Europe, Stockholm attracts travellers from the US, the Baltic region (Moscow is an hour and a half by air) and China.

The hotel scene is well-equipped to deal with large events – there are 5,000 rooms within ten minutes' walk of Central station and double that if you go by public transport. There is a range of accommodation options, from the boutique-style Berns Hotel (see box on page 71 for more properties) to the



Strikt: ladies suits

big names like Intercontinental, Hilton, Sheraton, Radisson SAS, First Hotels and Scandic. The newest and largest hotel to arrive, the Clarion Hotel Sign, adds a further 558 rooms to the mix, with different designers displaying their talents on each



Handsticked leather gifts at Palmgrens

HOTEL CHECK

Clarion Sign



WHAT'S IT LIKE? The Clarion opened its doors in February this year, making it Stockholm's newest hotel. Designed by Swedish architect Gert Wingardh, the granite and glass façade is certainly eye-catching among the more traditional buildings in the area, and from above, the hotel resembles the numeral four, with a triangular inner-courtyard from the third floor.

WHERE IS IT? From Central station the hotel is a three-minute walk. It is close to the main shopping and business centre and you can easily stroll to the Old Town as well.

HOW MANY ROOMS? 558 – room categories range from Moderate and Standard to Deluxe and Superior. There are also eight Triangle Suites.

ROOM FACILITIES My room was a Standard room on the third floor facing the inner courtyard, and on the opposite side of the hotel from the lifts.

Inside it was stylish and clean with a desk and flatscreen TV, while the bathroom had a power shower.

I stayed for two nights and on the first evening the hotel was quiet, but at 10.30pm the following evening I could hear music from an event which was taking place. I called reception to find out how long this was likely to be going on and they apologised and said around 45 minutes. At 11.45pm I called again as the music was so

loud I couldn't sleep. The staff offered to find me an alternative room but unfortunately the hotel was fully booked.

Having spoken to the general manager I understand that they are aware of the issue so will hopefully manage to sort it out soon. (I would advise guests to phone ahead to see if there is a big event on during their stay.)

RESTAURANTS AND BARS Aquavit Grill and Raw Bar is a sister restaurant to the New York restaurant of the same name, and serves a fusion of Manhattan and Swedish fare. This is also where breakfast is served, with a full buffet offering everything from traditional local options to the usual hot breakfast.

LEISURE FACILITIES

Selma City Spa on the eighth floor has an outdoor pool, treatment rooms, and a small – if a little crowded – gym area. There is also a relaxation spot on the roof with bubble-like chairs which swing gently from the ceiling.

BUSINESS AND MEETING FACILITIES

There is free wifi throughout the hotel – just call reception for a username and password, which give you access for eight hours. Conference facilities range in capacity from 20 to 240 people.

VERDICT A stunning building with well thought-out room facilities in a good central location. The heated outdoor pool and relaxation area are a bonus too.

PRICE Internet rates for a midweek stay in June started at SEK2,121 (£181) for a Standard room.

CONTACT Ostra Jarnvagsgatan 35; tel +46 8676 9800; clarionsign.com.



Standard room

STOCKHOLM HOTELS: OTHER OPTIONS

First Hotel Reisen: Private sauna and spa bath



SHERATON STOCKHOLM HOTEL

This well-established Seventies five-star waterfront hotel underwent a major refurbishment last year. All of its 465 rooms have been updated from traditional décor to cutting-edge design with a 1940s twist. There is also a new Club floor and guests staying in the 61 Club rooms have access to private check-in and a lounge.

Wifi is available throughout the hotel at a charge (SEK119/£10 for 1 hour, SEK199/£17 for 24 hours) and there is also broadband in the rooms (SEK99/£8.50 for one hour and SEK179/£15 for 24 hours).

Other additions include a 24-hour business centre with four computers and free broadband, 15 conference rooms with capacity for up to 600 people, a restaurant called Threesixty Degrees featuring renowned chef Joakim Brostrom, and a 120-sqm fitness suite.

PRICE Internet rates for a midweek stay in early June started from SEK2,395 (£204) for a Superior Lake View room.

CONTACT Tegelbacken 6; tel +46 8412 3400; or visit sheratonstockholm.com.

Gamla Stan



BERNS HOTEL

The hotel is part of Berns Salonger, a Stockholm landmark since 1863, which holds concerts and events in its breath-takingly original rooms. The boutique hotel, which shares the building, has 65 rooms (with possible plans to expand to 80) ranging from Extra Small (10-13 sqm) to X-Large (25-57 sqm) and the Clock House suite (pictured bottom right), located inside the clock tower on the front of the hotel overlooking Berzelli Park.

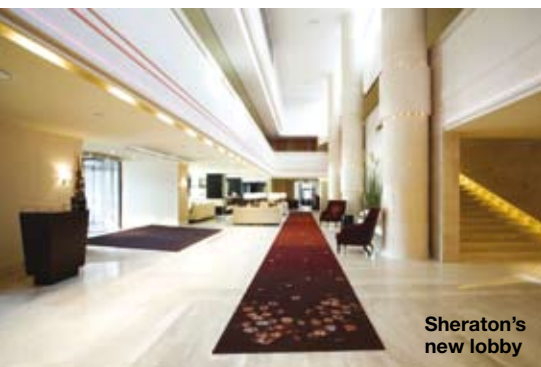
The property also features conference and banqueting facilities, an Asian restaurant and summer terrace, and the popular Club 2.35:1, which holds fashion shows and concerts. Guests have free access to the Sturebadet Grand Fitness centre and free wifi.

PRICE Internet rates for early June started from SEK2,950 (£250) for a Small Standard room.

CONTACT Nackstromsgatan 8; tel +46 8566 32200; or visit berns.se.

FIRST HOTEL REISEN

The five-star Reisen in Gamla Stan is one of three First Hotels in Stockholm (along with the First Hotel Amaranthen and First Hotel Royal



Sheraton's new lobby



Star) and is close to the Royal Palace. Several of its 144 rooms and seven suites offer harbour views, while others feature private saunas, spa baths and balconies. There is a restaurant, spa and indoor swimming pool and meeting rooms for up to 20 people.

PRICE Internet rates for June started from SEK2,550 (£217) for a Standard Queen room.

CONTACT Skeppsbron 12; tel +46 822 3260; or visit firsthotels.com.

RADISSON SAS ROYAL VIKING HOTEL

There are several Radisson SAS properties in Stockholm, including The Strand and Royal Park hotel, but the Royal Viking is probably best suited to business travellers. The 459-room hotel is close to Central station and the main business and shopping areas, and five minutes from the water.

On the top floor is the Skybar and in the lobby area is Stockholm Fisk, a popular fish restaurant. The hotel also features 27 conference rooms with capacity for up to 150, a gym, indoor pool, spa bath, sauna and solarium. (Entrance to these areas is free for guests staying in Business Class rooms or any of the suites.) As with all Radisson SAS properties, there is free wifi internet access throughout.

PRICE Internet rates for early June started from SEK2,595 (£220) for a Superior room.

CONTACT Vasagatan 1; tel +46 850 654 000; or visit radissonsas.com.

HILTON STOCKHOLM SLUSSEN HOTEL

On Sodermalm Island, close to Slussen, the Hilton is a good option if you want to be in the south of the city: JP Morgan, Citigroup and Ernst and Young are all nearby. The property has 17 meeting rooms, an Executive lounge, business centre, gym, spa bath and sauna, as well as two restaurants and two bars.

PRICE Internet rates for June started from SEK1,990 (£169) for a Queen room.

CONTACT Guldgrand 8; tel +46 8517 35300; or visit hilton.co.uk/stockholm.



Clock Suite entrance

floor (see review on page 62).

But the city's hoteliers are not resting on their laurels. The Stockholm Sheraton was the first for the brand in Europe, built in 1971, and was completely renovated last year. Marriott arrives in 2010, as will a new offering from Rezidor, which is opening a conference hotel with 420 rooms on the waterfront. The building will be the largest



The Old Town

and the most central conference facility in the city, with an auditorium holding up to 3,000 people. From the Radisson SAS Viking hotel's Skybar, you can get an idea of the scale of the project, as well as good views across the city.

Stockholm itself is easy to navigate. Walking south down Drottninggatan, a popular shopping street in the city centre, passing numerous hotdog sellers, you soon reach the city's soul – the water – busy with boats as well as locals swimming and fishing. Here is the heart of the city. There's the Parliament buildings, the Royal Palace and the City Hall all within sight. Set back a little is the King's Garden (Kungsträdgården) with rows of apple trees wearing pink blossom, like balls of candyfloss against the sea-blue sky. Cruise boats bob outside the Grand Hotel and the Swedish National Museum, which face the Royal Palace in Gamla Stan.

Here in the Old Town, the cobbled streets

curve past the palace and up the hill towards the cathedral, and the original 17th-century houses lean against each other like lines of old women, their worn, cracked facades spilling their history onto the medieval alleyways where cosy tavern-like restaurants nestle among boutique shops and bars.

It's a good place to eat in the evening and on the corner of Storkyrkan Square, where the Nobel museum is located, I find Pastis, a small French bistro. Soft jazz music plays along with the happy chatter from busy tables set with Ricard water jugs. A generous starter of creamy *terrine de canard* sets me up for the main course of lamb with potato, sun-dried tomato and onion sauce. The food is excellent, unpretentious and reasonably priced (my main was SEK185/£16), while the service is relaxed and friendly.

Sheraton's Andersson says: "There are a lot of myths about Stockholm – people think it is really expensive but it is not as expensive

THREE STOCKHOLM MUSEUMS

VASAMUSEET

The Vasa



VASAMUSEET In 1628, the Vasa warship sank on its maiden voyage in Stockholm harbour. When you enter the museum, you immediately see why this is the most visited in the city (there were 1.2 million visitors last year). The original 17th-century ship fills the room, adorned with lions (the King, Gustav Adolf, was known as the “Lion of the North” for his success in battle) and hundreds of carved sculptures. The museum is on several levels and takes you close to different parts of the ship as you follow its story. The Vasa was raised in 1961 with well-preserved examples of life on board. Entry is SEK 95 (£8), open 8.30am-6pm in the summer. Visit vasamuseet.se.

MODERNA MUSEET Art lovers have been

visiting the Moderna Museet on Skeppsholmen island since 1958. Outside, colourful sculptures turn in the sun and inside is also a delight. There was an Andy Warhol exhibition when I visited, with a massive collection of films, interviews and screen tests from his life as an artist and filmmaker, as well as a good range of his other work. I found it hard to

tear myself away to look at the main exhibition rooms, which have excellent displays of 20th-century painting, sculpture and photography from all over the world. Entry is SEK 80 (£7), closed Monday. Visit modernamuseet.se.

ARKITEKTURMUSEET If design and architecture are your bag then head here, next door to the Moderna Museet. There are temporary exhibitions as well as the permanent collection – when I visited, there was a feature on super cities such as Beijing, showing how it could look in 2050 with futuristic models. The main room has hundreds of images and scale models of Swedish architecture and urban design. Entry is SEK50 (£4), free on Fridays 4-6pm, closed Mondays. Visit arkitekturmuseet.se.

ISTOCK

The archipelago



Stockholm harbour



as many other European countries.” Torbjornsson of the Visitor’s Board agrees: “Because Sweden is not part of the euro, it makes Stockholm more affordable as a destination, I think, especially compared with other Scandinavian cities like Oslo.”

Another image Stockholm is keen to dispel is that it is a bit too prim to be fun. Andersson says: “Sweden works so well and is so organised, and sometimes it can be boring when everything works so perfectly. But I think Stockholm has a little bit of a twist. It is still very cutting-edge when it comes to fashion and design.”

Kalling-Hansson agrees: “It’s a very trendy city. Stockholmers are very trend-sensitive. I wouldn’t call it a boring city at all – quite the opposite, there is always lots going on in both the summer and the winter.”

It’s true, the city centre is filled with high-end designer shops, exclusive night clubs, and restaurants like the Theatre Grill (Teatergrillen), packed with celebrities, royalty and the big cheeses of the Swedish business world. Around the corner from here, and opposite the old Royal Stables, I find the oldest shop in Stockholm – Palmgrens leather shop, and Strikt, an austere but extremely stylish shop for tailored women’s business suits.

For a more Bohemian take on fashion and design, Södermalm, once the working-class part of town, has been reinvented and is

MATHIAS DAHLGREN

From the traditional style of the Grand Hotel you are transported into another world when you descend the steps to Mathias Dahlgren’s restaurant. Inside, there are two dining options: the elegant Matsalen or the more informal Matbaren.

I was eating at Matbaren, which seats 50 people. The interior design is by Ilse Crawford: simple cast-iron tables with red hard-backed chairs and wooden detail fill the cosy room. (There is also a bar area with stools.) The open kitchen creates a happy atmosphere (there is no music) and when I was there every table was taken (it’s best to reserve ahead as it’s been fully booked since it opened last May, although some tables are always kept free for drop-by customers).

Since its launch, the restaurant has received a Michelin star and is tipped for a second. The menu has both local and global influences, and changes daily depending on what fresh produce the chefs can source.

There were also some lovely intimate touches, like the small brown paper packet on a wooden tray on the table, which contained bread. The sommelier chooses the wine each day depending on what is on the menu, and the service was excellent, from the waitress pouring

water into tiny shot glasses before taking the order, to topping up the wine (in whisky-style glasses). I thought the food was faultless.

CONTACT

Grand Hotel;
tel +46 8679
3584; or visit
mgdhs.com.



billed as the more edgy part of the city, with boutique designer shops, cool nightspots and a plethora of cafés and restaurants. The Hilton hotel resides here, as does another Scandic hotel, and it is here that, amid much anticipation, the ABBA Museum is due to open next year. Apart from celebrating one of Sweden’s most famous exports, it will no doubt be another popular venue for events, catering for about 350 people for dinner.

But even if Seventies pop doesn’t rock your boat, there is no doubt that, from the galleries and the nightlife to the waterways and the Old Town, Stockholm has plenty to offer both casual and business visitors. ■