

Djurgarden: Choose Your Own Adventure

There's this amazing island in Stockholm called Djurgarden, and I went the wrong way on a bus for about an hour before I realized I was heading out of town in the opposite direction very quickly. A bus stop in the middle of the road led me astray, and cursing myself, I exited the bus, stomped across the street, and awaited the bus going in the correct direction. My confidence navigating a foreign city was demolished, so I really had nothing to lose. Time to see a million museums!

There's no way around it: Djurgarden can be overwhelming, but it is in the best way possible. There is an amusement park, large amounts of green space for biking and walking, a variety of cafes and food carts, and most notably, museums covering a vast variety of topics along the waterfront. I decided it would be best to just choose my own adventure based on my interests instead of stressing about seeing everything.

The first task is to get there: and this is a win-win as the two ways to reach the island, by ferry and over the bridge from Ostermalm, are both dramatically beautiful. The ferry comes from Gamla Stan, so if you have started the day in the old town, it is easy to make it to Djurgarden for more sightseeing. This is particularly wonderful at sunset, as the water and islands are unreal in the evening glow, but any time of day will provide you with a wonderful perspective of the various islands.

The second option, the bridge from Ostermalm, was the way I arrived my first day in Djurgarden, and it felt so quintessentially Swedish crossing the water there. People were boating with Swedish flags flapping in their wake below the bridge, and others were sitting at the cafe having fika (an afternoon coffee and a sweet treat) with bright lovely flowers blooming in the surrounding gardens, all while the breathtaking spires of the Nordic museum loomed above.

It is important to note that the Stockholm card gives visitors to Djurgarden access to almost every attraction on the island, so time can be spent as long or as short in each place as you desire. The bridge entrance from Ostermalm is particularly helpful because of the visitors center with information on each museum and helpful maps of the various attraction locations.



Stopping in the Nordic Museum gives insight into the Swedish history and customs while seeing a beautifully designed building from the early 1900s, but my preferred stop was Skansen, the world's oldest open air museum. I learn upon arrival that Djurgården (literally used in earlier centuries to keep deer, reindeer, and elk for the king, thus giving it the name) became a popular attraction after the additions of the Rosendal Palace, Skansen, and Gröna Lund (an amusement park) were built in the late 1800s for the citizens of Stockholm.

Of these three, visiting Skansen first is my recommendation because the open air museum has a wonderful variety of Nordic people, animals, and treats. I chose to huff it up the steep entrance hill, but there is a tram available for a price for anyone who doesn't want to make the trek. I come upon a traditional village with shops and houses that have been literally moved to the site for visitors to explore and learn from. Friendly citizens dressed in traditional garb greet me and explain Swedish life in olden days. I watch a pottery making demonstration in a quaint cottage and feel transformed back in time; until the shutters of digital cameras and dings of smartphones go off of course. It is still a wonderful experience, just funny to see time periods clash.

After being alone and lost for a few hours, I am famished and step into a traditional baker's hut to buy a delicious classic cinnamon pastry. Then I run into two human friends who had successfully made the trek earlier and another new friend, a begging goose that harasses me outside for a piece of my pastry. Luckily they are the cute kind, not the hissing kind.



I bid my animal friend farewell in search of a more fulfilling lunch, and success is right around the corner - there are food stalls in the center of Skansen with a variety of traditional meals and drinks. After selecting and devouring a wrap with elk meat and potatoes (definitely eat this with the lingonberry drink, trust me) I meandered through the animal area towards the back of the park.

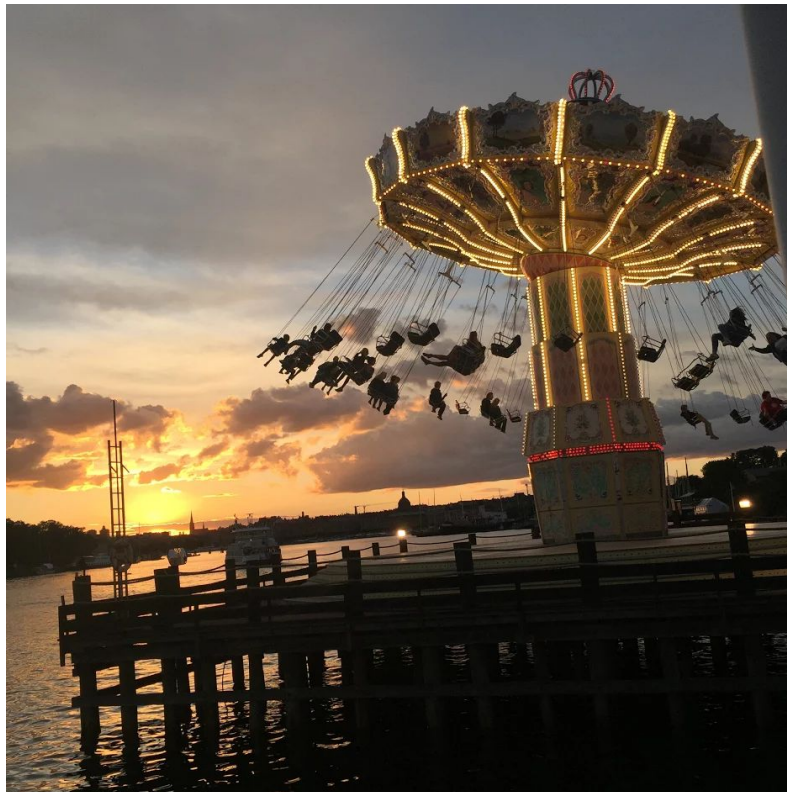


There are brown bears, elk, otters, and wild boar that I happened to catch during their feeding, so they were particularly content and playful, which was nice, but it's kind of your run of the mill zoo. I was starting to feel a little exhausted from the sun, so we took a quick goofy but necessary picture with the dala horse, a common symbol of Sweden, and headed to an indoor museum, the famous Vasa.



This old shipwreck is essentially their version of the Titanic, and it has been excavated from the bay where it sank and has been turned into a massive museum. I appreciated Swedes taking a huge failboat and turning it into an educational experience. There were even archaeologists working on the ship pieces that visitors could talk to through a cage as they sat at their workstations. It was a little weird at first, especially after coming from Skansen where animals were in cages, but we had a cool conversation about the pieces of the ship he was working on.

I ended my time in Djurgarden with the old amusement park Grona Lund because the childlike fun and thrilling rides were not to be missed at sunset. I would recommend going on a weeknight and getting the discounted pass after 7PM for all the rides because it offers an amazing view of the city and the lines are super short.



Oh and last but not least, don't forget to have at least one hot dog from the food carts on the waterfront. I think your American citizenship might be revoked if you don't. Go for the crunchy onions on top too! Skal!



Also, there are many other options that I just couldn't get to but highly recommend:

- The Abba Museum - if you are a superfan, check it out. If not, don't worry because it isn't included on the Stockholm pass and you have to pay about \$30.
- The Spirit Museum - If you like stiff drinks and friendly bartenders check out this exhibit and bar. It is a nice way to cap off the day if you don't like the screaming youths of Grona Lund.
- The Aquarium - Located near the Spirit Museum, animal lovers will enjoy this stop - there is even an area visitors can climb down into to view to fish that live in the water and sewers of Stockholm!
- Rosendal Palace and the surrounding park - This massive green space stretches out behind Skansen and can be an alternative for those who don't want to be around a bunch of people. You can rent a bike, explore the gardens, and sit in a quiet cafe in the woods!