



THE SOUND OF GOTHENBURG

MUSIC FANS SHOULD HAVE THE VIBRANT SWEDISH CITY FIRMLY ON THEIR RADAR, SAYS **JACK CARTER**

BY THE TIME NEW ORDER AND THE SMITHS broke onto the scene in the early 1980s, the city of Manchester was a hotbed of new bands – on show for those in-the-know at the famous Hacienda. Now, as Sweden's second city lingers on the brink of its own cultural movement, it's a great time to pay it a visit.

The best starting point for anyone embarking on their first foray into a city's musical scene is the record store, and it just so happens that a 20-minute walk from the city centre, is Bengans Skivbutik, housing one of the region's largest record collections.

Spanning a whopping 700 sqm, Bengans (bengans.se) has been an icon in the city since it first opened in 1974, selling everything from old, new and reissued vinyl records, to band merchandise, books and Blu-ray. A morning lost trawling through its sweeping archives is a great way to rub shoulders with the locals, and you never



Opposite page:
Bengans record store;
Port of Gothenburg

know what interesting characters you might find loitering around a 20th-anniversary reissue of Nirvana's *Nevermind*.

Gothenburg's character is strongly influenced by the Gota river that cuts through the west of Sweden between the vast Vanern lake and the Kattegat Strait at Gothenburg, feeding the city's canals. For those who prefer to explore on foot, the city is an easy one to navigate, although its tram system provides a handy

alternative during the colder months, with a network that stretches from Central Station all the way out to the coast. The vibrant city centre is dominated by large market halls connected by broad shopping streets and charming courtyards filled with fragrant food trucks and snug coffee shops.



Beyond the city's compact centre is a congregation of small neighbourhoods where Gothenburg's quirky character shines brightest. Well worth a visit is the leafy district of Majorna. Over the years, the area has evolved from a typically working-class neighbourhood housing the city's dock workers, to a part of town where museums, art exhibits and independent shops have proliferated, providing a bountiful choice of Scandi souvenirs to spruce up your home décor.

The area is the prime hangout of culture vultures, and the well-loved music venue Musikens Hus (musikenshus.se) is where you'll find them. More than a venue for visiting acts, its eclectic concert and theatre programme provides a platform for local artists to cut their teeth. Be sure to check out the venue's event calendar to see what's on during your visit. Time it right and you could be in town for one of Musikens Hus's famous all-day jubilee parties.

After a stint of exploring, it's time for *fika*, the traditional Swedish coffee break enjoyed with a snack. Head for the organic Cum Pane bakery (cumpane.coop) and choose from an array of skilfully crafted pastries. Next, head to nearby Slotsskogen park to say hello to native Gotland ponies, seals and penguins at the park's zoo.

Summer temperatures top out at around 20°C, which is enough to coax the locals out to play, often until sunset, which in early July, is after 10pm. Roda Sten (rodasten.com), a former boiler house now graffiti-festooned art centre, is a colourful harbourside spot for al

fresco dining and socialising. The venue has become an influential instrument in the city's cultural arsenal, housing work by both Swedish and international painters, photographers and video artists. Recently, its adjoining restaurant has become an even bigger draw, particularly on Sundays for its sumptuous meat-free brunch buffet.

At night, there's a multitude of excellent music bars and clubs to sample. Nefertiti (nefertiti.se) stands out as one of the best. For almost four decades, this legendary spot has been Gothenburg's iconic jazz venue, but these days its wild repertoire swings from house and techno, to hip hop and R&B. By the weekend, the club is bouncing, which can mean a queue to get in, so be sure to book in advance.



The city's most prominent club is arguably Pustervik (pustervik.nu), particularly for those of the indie rock persuasion. As well as welcoming international acts, club nights and open mic evenings prove to be very popular in the week.

WHERE TO LAY YOUR HEAD

A hotel behemoth on the city centre's fringes, Gothia Towers (gothiatowers.com) offers a first-class stay with an inspiring view. Bag a room here (from £120 in June) and watch your Instagram follower count skyrocket thanks to your envy-inducing snaps from the tower's summit.

The hotel's modern décor, complemented by a few simple Scandi touches like exposed timber and pastel grey shades, creates a comfortable and luxurious ambience for travellers on a mid-range budget, with a host of restaurants under its roof, too. Tack on a nightcap at Heaven 23 to mingle with Gothenburg's elite.

Meanwhile, occupying the 18th-25th floors of the central tower is the hotel's five-star bolthole the Upper House, which is filled with multi-level suites

and an intimate fine-dining lounge. The piece de resistance is its deluxe spa, capped off by its glass-bottomed outdoor pool, which hangs from the 19th floor (exhilarating, but also slightly terrifying).

For a city-centre stay, check out Clarion Hotel Post (nordicchoicehotels.com), located inside Gothenburg's old post house and walking distance from the best shopping areas and nightlife. Rooms (from £175) are moderately sized but perfect for those who prefer chic boutiques with touches of luxury like a rooftop pool and a private wine cellar, not to mention the city's biggest brunch.

For a room with a river view, head to Comfort Hotel Goteborg (nordicchoicehotels.com). Newly renovated and with moderate prices (from £120), it's a great option for a cosy night's sleep.

A SMORGASBORD OF FLAVOURS

Cuisine in Gothenburg is defined by three 'Fs': fine dining, food trucks, and *fika*, and there is oh-so-much to choose from.

The Michelin-starred Thornstroms Kok (thornstromskok.com) on Teknologgatan is

Swedish gourmet dining at its best and, rather than picking from the menu, diners are encouraged to choose from the wine list and to leave the pairings up to the kitchen.

Feskekorka (feskekorka.se) – or "fish church" – is where locals come to buy their fish. After taking a stroll through the market, reach Restaurant Gabriel (restauranggabriel.com) and feast on an array of top fish dishes, or fill your boots at the Bohus Buffet for as much lobster, crab, shrimp, salmon and oysters as you can eat.

One thing Gothenburg doesn't lack is excellent coffee shops, and Magasinsgatan is where to find them. Ask a local for their favourite spot for *fika* and chances are they'll point you in the direction of da Matteo (damatteo.se), voted best café in Sweden in 2015. It has its own roastery and serves up some of the best freshly made pizzas in the city. The queue is often out the door, but worth the wait.

This lively neighbourhood is also where you'll find food trucks galore, such as Jinx (jinxfoodtruck.com) which serves up Asian street food; Korv United (korvunited.se) which cooks a mean hot dog and Strommingsluckan – meaning "herring hatch" offering a traditional dish of fried herring, mashed potatoes and lingonberries. Follow the smells and see where your nose leads you.

BEYOND THE MUSIC

Directly opposite Gothia Towers is Liseberg Amusement Park (liseberg.com). A must-see between April and October, the park attracts three million visitors, making it one of Sweden's top sites. This year, the park will premiere its 42-metre-high spinning gondola, reaching a gut-wrenching top speed of 100 km/ph.

Don't leave Gothenburg without taking a day-trip to its archipelago. The number 11 tram line from the city centre will take you swiftly to the Saltholmen ferry port where a collection of charming islands with pebble beaches, scenic trails and quaint cafés awaits. The smaller archipelagos are situated to the south, most of which are car-free and populated by a just a few hundred people – ideal for getting away from it all. The northernmost islands are a little more set up for adventure, offering seal safaris, sea-fishing and scuba-diving.

An hour's drive north is Marstrand Island (marstrand.se), a popular holiday spot for Swedes, and an ideal escape from the city. In the summer, the historic Carlsten Fort provides a stunning viewpoint for the annual Marstrand Regatta and other major sailing events hosted by the island. Fill a day here with fishing trips, golf and country hikes – and stay a night if only to witness the crazy nightlife. ■

Clockwise from top left: Clarion Hotel Post; Gothia Towers; Live lobster at Feskekorka; Gothenburg Archipelago; Fika; Saluhallen market hall

