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Move over, Stockholm: Sweden has a new dining darling

Text **Terry Ward**

Malmö's SECRET

Malmö, Sweden's third largest city, located in the southernmost county of Skane, is coming into its own as one of the most inspiring cities in Scandinavia for rich eating options. The city's greatest food affair is the diversity of ethnic eats in its varied neighbourhoods. A third of the city's population has foreign origins, and it's no surprise that dishes from Thailand to Iran to Korea can be found along the city's tree-lined streets.

"Malmö is changing very quickly right now," says native son Marko Wramén, a writer and photographer who recently moved back to the once-gritty port city from Berlin. "New bars and restaurants are popping up like love affairs on spring break, and not even those of us who were born here can keep up."

Menu prices are far more affordable than in Stockholm – often two-thirds and sometimes even half the price. "Because it's so cheap, people really go out and eat here," says local food blogger Pernilla Weman. "Dinner is almost the same price as lunch, which is not the case in Stockholm."

1 Seasonal produce stars in fresh lunch dishes at SMAK

2 Delicious dumplings draw the crowds to Dubbel Dubbel

3 Cauliflower, leek and radish salad at Saltimporten, a lunch-only restaurant

4 Soaking up the sun at the waterfront promenade along the city's western harbour

5 Nina Christensson, chef and owner of SMAK

Pernilla recommends Chinese dim sum-style hotspot Dubbel Dubbel (dubbeldubbel.se), a bolthole of a restaurant not far from the Folkets Park. Popular year round, Dubbel Dubbel really buzzes during long summer days thanks to the inviting outdoor courtyard. Sharing small plates is the way to go, so come with a crowd to taste as much as possible.

"It's fun because you choose from menus and get four or so small dishes to taste and share, and the flavours are really interesting," says Pernilla. Order from the extensive selection of dumplings, and choose from other dishes like spicy Korean ribs, *tempeh* spiked with Sichuan peppers, and Chinese-style fish cooked with mounds of fresh ginger.

No exploration of Malmö is complete without trying *falafel*, the popular Middle Eastern snack. There are countless fast food-style restaurants where you can try it, particularly around the multi-ethnic Rosengård neighbourhood, just outside the city centre. But to make a real occasion out of a meal, head to Occo (occorestaurant.com) in Drottningtorget square, one of the town's central gathering spots, where the romantic lantern-lit atmosphere is a cosy backdrop for all manner of Mediterranean *meze* dishes. Order the *falafel* as well as classics such as *labneh* and *hummus* and more exotic offerings like *mhammara* (peppers and walnuts marinated in olive oil and oriental spices) and the delicious mix of artichoke, lemon and garlic called *ardishoki*.

For great people-watching at lunchtime, set your sights on SMAK (smak.info), a clean-lined, high-ceilinged space located in the same building as the Malmö Konsthall, the city's contemporary art museum. On warm days, snag a table in the leafy courtyard and order dishes that focus on seasonal produce with some great vegetarian and seafood selections; think lingonberry salad, fried chili polenta with fennel and dried olives, and cod with cumin, grapefruit and pea shoots. "We do our best to create and serve seasonal food from local farmers," says SMAK's chef and owner Nina Christensson, "In the past year, a lot has happened on the produce side of things locally; there is a greater demand for organic produce, for example, and that has helped the smaller farmers to expand and widen their variety."

Things are decidedly more meat-focussed at Bastard (bastardrestaurant.se), tucked down a quiet street off busy Lilla Torg Square, where the nose-to-tail rage isn't just a passing trend.

Christensson is also a partner at Bastard, whose bar opens at 5pm, perfect for sipping an aperitif while tucking into a meaty spread that includes house-made *pâté*, sausage and *rillette* as toppers for the crunchy-outside, soft-inside homemade sourdough bread. The scents wafting from the open kitchen will tempt you to stay for dinner. Try chef Andreas Dahlberg's comfort-style European dishes such as pork neck, blood pudding with Scotch egg and grilled mackerel. "You really have to book a table here," says Pernilla, "It's always full and the food is wonderful. It's not a cheap place, but when you pay you feel it's worth more."

And for New Nordic cuisine, cast an eye on the casual, warehouse-minimalist surrounds of Saltimporten Canteen (saltimporten.com) in the port area, where locals pedal their bikes for lunch (and sometimes hang them inside on the repurposed meat hooks) before snagging a seat at a communal wooden table.

"When you eat our food, we want you to feel the Scandinavian *terroir* through the products we use," says chef Ola Rudin, who opened the restaurant in 2013 with Sebastian Persson to serve their take on a traditional Swedish lunch.

"The fresh air and cool climates of the northern countries make the flavours develop at greater depths," says Rudin of Scandinavian ingredients,

1 Hooks once used for hanging meat are repurposed for hanging bicycles

2 The Øresund bridge connects southern Sweden and Malmö to Denmark and Copenhagen

3 Fresh produce for sale at the farmer's market

4 The local dining scene has seen a spike in demand for organic produce

5 Locals and tourists enjoying *fika* at the terrace of Konditori Hollandia

pointing to game, wild berries, foraged mushrooms and wild herbs as distinctly Nordic. Danish fans of the restaurant regularly cross the Øresund bridge from Copenhagen (just 35 minutes away) for hearty set menus of beef brisket with turnip and celery or pork shoulder with Jerusalem artichokes (there's a vegetarian option too) before turning right back around and heading back to Denmark for dinner.

And don't miss B.A.R Krog & Vin Bar (barmalmo.se), just south of the Kungsparken, for its convivial outdoor terrace, excellent tasting menu and natural wine selection (wines made with as little technical and mechanical intervention as possible).

And whether you're in Malmö or Stockholm – or anyplace in between – no culinary adventure in Sweden is complete without taking part in *fika*, the country's national (and virtually round-the-clock) coffee ritual. Spend any time with a Swede and you'll surely be asked, "*Ska vi fika*?" "Should we do coffee?" is the loose translation, but don't think for one second that it's a grab-an-espresso-and-go occasion.

"*Fika* isn't just a coffee break, it's an integral part of Swedish culture," explains Anna Brones, author of the new book Fika, which explores how near and dear the concept of the coffee break is to social Swedes. "No matter where you go in Sweden you're sure to find a cosy café that serves strong, dark coffee and a *kanelbulle* (cinnamon roll) on the side," says Brones.

For a classic *fika* option, head to Konditori Hollandia (hollandia.se), where "the chefs wear baking hats and ladies keep their hats on," according to Weman. It's an old-school place with wall-to-wall carpeting, big glass bakery cases full of treats, and always a line of people queuing to get inside. The strong filter coffee here goes best with a beautiful slice of cake made with real cream and butter and topped with bright Swedish berries.

For *fika* with a less polished but very neighbourly vibe, it's worth visiting Café Grannen (Östervärnsgatan 5) in the grittier neighbourhood of Värnhem, just east of the city centre. Here, mismatched furniture and slouchy couches pair with retro lamps, a book exchange and a stack of grab-and-play board games that beg you to settle in for a spell with strong coffee, a slice of rhubarb pie and conversation. Be sure to take your time sipping and chatting; it's the local way. ■

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