



#GOTHENBURG #SUSTAINABLE

# Sweden's smartest city

Sweden's second-largest city, Gothenburg's forward-thinking strategy toward design and lifestyle has seen it become one of the most sustainable cities in the world. *By Eugene Yiga*



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IN SWEDEN'S WEST COAST, Gothenburg is Sweden's second-largest city, yet it's just a few minutes from a wonderland of 20 car-free islands, its offshore archipelago a place where nature and history collide. People are encouraged to arrive here using public transport, and then explore either via hiking or cycling. And, needless to say, everything is hyper-local along your route – when you sit down to lunch, you know your food has travelled only as far as the surrounding fields.

It's an enviro-focused philosophy supported back in the heart of Gothenburg on the mainland, and one that prompted the Global Destination Sustainability Index to rank the city the world's most sustainable destination four years in a row, from 2016 to 2019. It was also selected as a co-winner (along with Malaga in Spain) of the 2020 European Capital of Smart Tourism competition, while Lonely Planet named

it the world's 'Best Sustainable City Stay' in its 2021 Best in Travel List.

That's a lot of accolades in a short period of time. But they shouldn't be unexpected – this has been a planned goal for years. "We've worked hard on sustainability issues for the last decade," says Katarina Thorstensson, Smart Tourism and Sustainability Strategist at Göteborg & Co. "We use benchmarks to develop our destination, to widen our network, and to learn and share all over the world. We see these awards as a catalyst on our long-term journey."

## GOING GREEN

"We want people to discover more of Gothenburg and, at the same time, prevent areas from becoming overcrowded and distribute the tourism economy so that more people benefit from our industry," Thorstensson says. "Fortunately, our city is green in many senses, with parks and gardens and nature reserves around every corner." So much so that the overall green space per person in Gothenburg is 314 square metres – in Sydney, it's around 80.

Protecting the environment is a grassroots affair in Gothenburg, with the local community encouraged to collaborate through projects like Rain Gothenburg. The initiative brings together artists who use rain and storm water as a resource for cultural expression, to change our perception of rain, its connection to our climate and how it can be used to our advantage. Past activities have included the creation of a rain playground, rain artwork (where art pieces are only visible when the heavens open), as well as creative storm water solutions and an open-air public swimming area in a location that once housed heavy industries.

The results have led to more robust and attractive water drainage and rainfall solutions for the city, which was nominated for the European Centre for Creative Economy NICE Awards in 2019 due to its innovation.

Another award came in 2018 when the Gothenburg Culture Festival – one of the largest gatherings in the Nordic region – was named Sustainable Event of the Year. The festival now has the goal of eliminating all disposable packaging. So far, it has tested different systems, such as drinks being served in reusable



OPENING SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Beautiful Gothenburg © Per Pixel Petersson; park life © Peter Kvarnström; dining out © Studiograppen. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Sustainable transport © Peter Kvarnström; cruising the archipelago © Happy Visuals; Wine Mechanics © Kalle Sanner; sustainable seafood © Tina Stafrén. All images © Göteborg & Co

glassware and encouraging visitors to bring their own lunch boxes in exchange for discounted food. On top of this, all energy used to power stages and theatres comes from renewable sources, and every single attraction is free – economic sustainability is also a major focus.

To calculate the economic, social and environmental impact of events like the Cultural Festival, Gothenburg often uses the Event Impact Calculator, a locally developed forecasting tool designed to give organisers a broad feel for the scale of impact an event might have. The city even has its own accessibility app called Got Event, which won the Global Destination Sustainability Index Innovation Award in 2017. The app provides flexible seating for people with vision or hearing disabilities, live visual interpretation, hearing loops for sound amplification, and much more.

Accessibility is also at the fore at major attractions like Liseberg Amusement



Park, which receives more than three million visitors a year to experience its 42 rides and attractions, music stages, restaurants, games and dance floor. The park is known to host the Special School Day, where all rides are reserved for students and teachers from special needs schools in Gothenburg, so they can experience this wonderland with fewer visitors and in calmer surroundings.

In addition to being run by wind power, Liseberg has been working to make the park as accessible as possible by redesigning concert stages, adding ramps for people with wheelchairs, and even having performances with narration and signing for guests with visual and hearing impairments – it also donates 13,000 visits per year to socially disadvantaged children in Gothenburg.

**STYLE AND SUSTAINABILITY**  
Sleep soundly when you check in to your hotel knowing that a staggering 95 per cent of Gothenburg's rooms are

environmentally certified. To receive this tick of approval, the hotels are required to meet strict environmental sustainability criteria: think highly regulated use of fossil energy sources; the amount of waste is measured and checked against specific parameters; the use of chemical products is limited; and staff receive regular training in key environmental areas.

The Scandic Hotel chain is a good example of a company committed to sustainability – as early as 1996 it began to report its energy, water and chemical use, as well as its unsorted waste – and is thought to be the first in the world to ask guests to re-use their towels, which has now become an accepted practice worldwide.

Given the city's coastal position, many Gothenburg restaurants have a focus on sustainably caught wild seafood, complemented by seasonal produce from surrounding fields. A case in point is Natur, where you can savour whitefish roe on new potatoes, or pickled smoked scallops paired



with a natural wine. And Vrå, which unites Japanese and Nordic flavours – try the chef's four-course tasting menu. Kafé Magasinet, meanwhile, has a 200-square-metre rooftop garden and organic bakery, housed in a 19th-century warehouse, and Wine Mechanics is the first urban winery in Scandinavia, transforming grapes from around Europe into flavourful drops, including a funky pet nat. Head 25 kilometres out of the city to dine at Garveriet in Floda, a beautiful space where you can sit down to meals cooked in a wood-fired oven or take a class learning how to prepare dishes using scraps you would normally throw away. 🍷

**TRAVEL FACTS**

**GETTING THERE**  
There are flights to Gothenburg via one of the larger European hubs, with airlines like Qatar Airways, Singapore Airlines and Emirates.

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