Where history meets future: witnessing transformation in northern Sweden

Dioxin, quicksilver, arsenic – only some of the toxic substances that the timber industry left behind over some 100 years in the Scharins area of otherwise beautiful Ursviken, just outside the northern Swedish city of Skellefteå,

But May 2026 will see the unveiling of what decade-long efforts to decontaminate and revitalise the site by the Skellefte river have achieved.

Standing out is the Crystal Sauna – a fully functioning sauna, yes, but also a large-scale public artwork in screaming pink, created by famous Swedish artists Bigert & Bergström. Its prismatic form is inspired by lithium, a chemical key to battery-electric vehicles and the wider energy transition.

“By placing a sauna - a space for heat, conversation, and pause - on land that once represented ecological harm, we want to reflect both the scars of the past and the possibilities forward”, artist Mats Bigert said.

The Crystal Sauna is at the heart of what is called theSkellefteå Climate Action Park Wasteland. An art and urban development project that wants to inspire both the local and the global transition through presenting a bigger vision, that of a sustainable place for several generations: integrating climate-smart solutions, pedagogy and innovative technology in both design and operation.

The sauna will be unveiled during the Society Expo, taking place between May 27 and June 9, 2026. Climate scientist Johan Rockström, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany, is one of the world-renowned speakers at this two-week event that aims to discuss how innovation and collaboration are shaping tomorrow’s sustainable society.

Skellefteå (pronounced “Schelleft-e-oh”, more or less) is known for its investments in green technology and wood architecture. It is home to one of the world’s tallest wooden buildings, Sara kulturhus, a cultural flagship housing an art centre, a library, and several stages for performances, as well as the Wood Hotel.

Where to stay and what to do in Skellefteå, Society Expo aside:

- The iconic Wood Hotel is simply one of a kind. The 20-storey wooden building is constructed from locally sourced timber, powered by renewable energy, and offers panoramic views of the very forests that built it, including from a top-floor spa. Located above the cultural centre that gives the building its name, the Wood Hotel gives off a warm, woody atmosphere and has an incredible breakfast buffet with local foods.
- Snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing and ice skating are popular during the wintertime.
- Hiking, fishing and canoeing are some of the activities travellers can enjoy once the snow has melted away.

More info:

- Visit Skellefteå
- Discovering the region of Västerbotten (Visit Sweden)

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