Think Smaller: Why ‘Townsizing’ Is Sweden’s Latest Travel Trend

As travelers look beyond crowded capitals for places with more character and less friction, “townsizing” is gaining ground. From medieval university hubs to Arctic art scenes, Sweden’s smaller cities offer a compelling case for thinking beyond the big-city break — and fresh data suggests travelers are increasingly looking in that direction.



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The term “townsizing” — a blend of “town” and “downsizing” — describes a shift toward smaller urban destinations that offer more breathing room, local character and a closer connection to everyday life. Recently highlighted by Condé Nast Traveller in Germany, the trend reflects a broader move away from crowded hotspots and toward places that feel more manageable and distinctly local.

For Sweden, the trend feels particularly timely. Compact cities, extensive rail connections and easy access to nature make it possible to combine an urban break with the kind of local experiences travelers increasingly say they are looking for.

The Numbers Point Beyond the Big Cities

Fresh U.S. data from Airbnb adds weight to the broader shift. Ninety percent of Gen Z respondents say small towns and under-the-radar destinations appeal to them for fall 2026, with authentic local culture and offbeat, “only-here” attractions among the biggest draws. Nearly half of Gen Z’s trending fall destinations booked on Airbnb are small towns.

Sweden, meanwhile, is seeing strong tourism demand overall. June 2026 recorded more than 7.5 million overnight stays, making it the strongest June on record.

More telling for the townsizing trend is where interest is growing. Airbnb data reported by Swedish news outlet Nyheter24 shows that searches for Swedish destinations from leading international markets increased 19% during summer 2026 compared with the previous year. Stockholm and Gothenburg remain the most popular destinations, but some of the fastest growth is happening beyond the big cities: searches for smaller destinations including Trollhättan in West Sweden and Strömsund in northern Sweden jumped more than 40% in the second quarter.

Together, the data points to growing interest in Sweden at the same time as smaller destinations are gaining ground — a combination that gives the townsizing trend particular relevance here.

Why Sweden Fits the Shift

Sweden’s smaller cities combine compact scale with distinctly local experiences and, in many cases, easy rail connections. Here, thinking smaller does not necessarily mean doing less. A city break can take in everything from 13th-century fortresses and Viking history to contemporary art, cold-water bathing and a serious debate over where to find the best cinnamon bun.

And because nature is rarely far away, an urban stay can easily extend beyond the city itself — whether to the coast, a lake, a

forest trail or the surrounding countryside.

Five Swedish City Escapes Made for Townsizing:

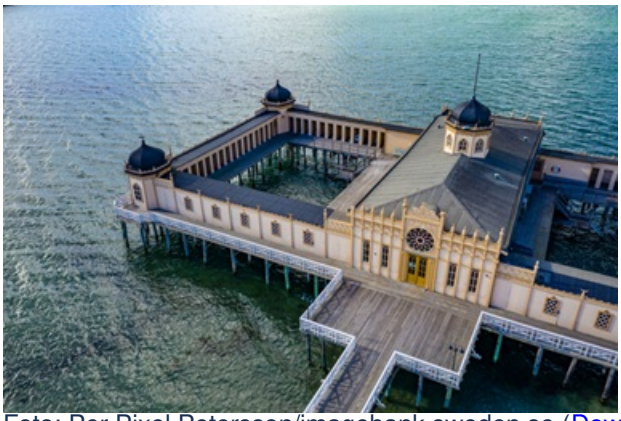
- **Lund: For the Hearth and the Mind**

One of Sweden's oldest cities, Lund manages to feel remarkably young thanks to its world-renowned university and 50,000 students. Life here revolves around the medieval cathedral and the cafés of the Lundagård district. It is a city where quality of life — and the quality of the cinnamon buns at local favorites such as *Broder Jakobs and Mannz Bageri* — is taken seriously. https://visitsweden.com/where-to-go/southern-sweden/skane/lund/


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- **Varberg: The Home of 'Kallbad' Culture Lund: For the Hearth and the Mind**

In Varberg, a city break can begin with a plunge into the Kattegat. The city's iconic*Kallbadhus*, or cold bath house, has stood on wooden stilts for more than a century, offering the sauna-and-sea ritual that is firmly embedded in local life. Beyond the water, a 13th-century fortress dominates the skyline and overlooks a lively surf scene. https://visitvarberg.se/


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- **Linköping: Where History Still Lives**

Gamla Linköping is more than a museum district. Its preserved wooden houses, shops and craft workshops form one of Sweden's largest historic wooden urban environments. Nearby, travelers can watch boats navigate the Berg Locks on the Göta Canal or stay overnight among the cobblestone streets at Hilma Winblads B&B. https://visitlinkoping.se/en/


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- **Uppsala: From Viking Kings to Botanical Wonders**

Just north of Stockholm, Uppsala combines the energy of a university city with centuries of Swedish history. The Royal Mounds of *Gamla Uppsala* are among Scandinavia's most significant Viking sites, while the former home and gardens of botanist Carl Linnaeus offer a quieter counterpoint to the city's cathedral and student life. https://visitsweden.com/where-to-go/middle-sweden/uppland/uppsala/


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- **Umeå: High-Latitude Culture**

Located around 400 kilometers south of the Arctic Circle, Umeå has a cultural scene that belies its size. A former European Capital of Culture, the city is home to Bildmuseet, one of Sweden's leading contemporary art institutions, on the banks of the Ume River. It is a reminder that world-class art and an ambitious creative scene do not require a major metropolis. https://visitsweden.com/where-to-go/northern-sweden/vasterbotten/umea/


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Images for Media Use

A selection of high-resolution images for these destinations is available through theVisit Sweden Image Bank.

Sources and Further Reading

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https://press.visitsweden.com/townsizing