



## Stockholm

by Nadine M. Jernewall

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One of Europe's most progressive cities, Stockholm has recently become notably gay-friendly. The home of the largest glbtq Pride celebration in Scandinavia, the city has also been the center of a successful glbtq political movement.

The capital of Sweden, Stockholm has a population of 760,000, and Greater Stockholm has a population of 1.9 million. Since glbtq people live throughout the city and are thoroughly integrated into the city's cultural and civic life, Stockholm does not have a specifically "gay neighborhood." There are businesses and venues catering to glbtq people in many areas of Stockholm. However, the mid-1990s saw a boom in gay bars and nightclubs and gay-friendly business in the Södermalm neighborhood, which has also been the center of glbtq political activity.

### **Political Progress**

In 1944, homosexuality was decriminalized in Sweden. However, homosexuality was for many years afterward considered an illness and queer people could be--and frequently were--confined in hospitals for their sexual orientation and sometimes subjected to aversion therapy.

But in 1950, RSFL (The Swedish Federation for Lesbian and Gay Rights), Sweden's first organization for gay men and lesbians, was formed, and the political struggle for glbtq equality began. The initial approach of the RSFL was similar to that of American homophile organizations, with the emphasis on helping glbtq people adjust to society. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, benefiting from the (hetero)sexual revolution that transformed sexual attitudes in Scandinavia, gay activism became more aggressive and better organized. As a consequence, the Swedish glbtq movement, largely headquartered in Stockholm, has achieved great progress in the struggle for equality.

In 1978, the age of consent between same-sex sexual partners was made the same as the age of consent for opposite-sex sexual partners. In 1979, homosexuality was removed as a medical diagnosis after queer people began to demand medical leave based on their sexual orientation.

As a response to the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, harsh laws against spreading infectious diseases were adopted and gay bathhouses were closed, but at the same time the Swedish government acted to strengthen glbtq organizations such as RSFL and indicated its commitment to legal equality for glbtq citizens. In 2003, the ban against gay saunas was lifted.

In 1987, the Law of Cohabitation conferred legal recognition of gay and lesbian couples. The Law of Partnership of 1995 guaranteed same-sex couples rights equal to those of married heterosexual couples.

Sweden also recognizes same-sex couples for immigration purposes, allowing citizens and permanent residents to sponsor partners for immigration.

In 2002, Sweden became the fourth European nation to allow gay and lesbian couples to adopt children. Under the law, cohabiting gay and lesbian couples registered in a legal partnership can apply for the right to adopt children from within the country and abroad.

In 2005, lesbians were granted the right to insemination, which had previously only been available to women in heterosexual relationships.

Sweden's government is currently debating whether to extend marriage to same-sex couples. In a 2004 poll, six out of ten Swedes said that gay people should be allowed to marry in the state church. However, there is organized resistance to the move, particularly from members of the Christian Democrats party and from the hierarchy of the state church, and it is by no means certain that Sweden will extend marriage to same-sex couples in the near future.

In 1999, discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation became illegal and "the Office of the Ombudsman against Discrimination on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation" (HomO), was established. While the Swedish government appoints the Ombudsman for a six-year term, HomO is an independent, non-governmental office established by Parliament.

HomO is responsible for assuring that laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation are enforced. HomO addresses complaints of discrimination, and advocates--both in and out of court--on behalf of individuals who have suffered discrimination. HomO also conducts public relations campaigns to combat homophobia, and also acts as an independent advisor to the government regarding legislation on sexual orientation.

Between 2002 and 2003, hate crimes against glbtq people rose precipitously. In response, in 2003 a prohibition against persecution on the basis of sexual orientation was written into the Swedish constitution.

## **Pride**

Stockholm hosted its first Pride event in 1998 and is now home to the largest glbtq Pride celebration in Scandinavia. Stockholm Pride, now a weeklong event, has grown to become one of Stockholm's largest annual festivals. The pride parade itself usually has approximately 30,000 people in attendance.

Stockholm is built on 14 islands and Pride takes place in "Pride Park" on Södermalm, the largest of the islands. Other parts of the city also host a variety of Pride-related events, including movie screenings, art exhibits, political debates, meetings with politicians, and, of course, parties and dances. Since 2002, Stockholm Pride has featured "Pride House," a cultural center where open forums are held, along with other activities featuring various glbtq organizations, associations, and activists.

However, the Stockholm Pride celebrations have not been without controversy. In 2003, a group of 30 skinheads, claiming membership in a right-wing political party, attacked marchers in the Pride parade with bottles and stones. Two were arrested for the attacks and one person was hospitalized.

## **Support Services**

In 1971, RSFL expanded to include bisexuals; in 2001, it voted to include transgendered people as well. RFSL serves both as a social and political group. In 2003, they had approximately 6,700 members. RFSL has chapters throughout Sweden; its headquarters is in downtown Stockholm.

The Swedish Youth Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights (RFSL Ungdom) was originally the youth branch of RFSL. In 2003, RFSL Ungdom was established as an independent organization, run by young people, to focus on the rights and interests of young glbtq people in Sweden.

The Swedish Association for HIV-Positive People (Riksförbundet för hivpositiva) is a national organization headquartered in Stockholm that works to promote the interests of HIV-positive Swedes. It fights discrimination, advocates on behalf of HIV-positive individuals, educates the public about HIV-positive people, and helps HIV-positive individuals return to the workforce.

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