

The Swedish Prescription

Welcome to the first country in the world prescribed by doctors.

Across the world, doctors are increasingly prescribing time in nature or cultural activities to support both mental and physical health. Now, Sweden is taking it one step further – becoming the first country to be offered on prescription.

Ranked as a global leader in quality of life* and consistently named one of the happiest countries in the world**, Sweden offers more than just a scenic escape. It has been shown to support measurable health outcomes and a lifestyle centred on balance and belonging.

This document brings together research, inspiration, and practical tools to support those who want to prescribe – or be prescribed – Sweden.

For patients:	For doctors:
<p>Bring this document to your doctor and ask to have a visit to Sweden prescribed. Use it to start a conversation about how Sweden – and the way of life it represents – could support your wellbeing.</p>	<p>Use this document to prescribe a visit to Sweden. Explore the list of health benefits and suggest personalised experiences based on your patient’s needs.</p>

The Swedish Prescription is a marketing campaign initiated by Visit Sweden, Sweden’s official marketing company for the destination Sweden. The initiative is intended as a supportive tool to promote physical and mental wellbeing, particularly in cases of stress, fatigue, mild anxiety, or other low- to moderate-level symptoms. It is not a substitute for clinical treatment. Healthcare professionals should use their clinical judgement to determine suitability, and patients with acute or severe health conditions should receive appropriate medical care through standard channels.

*Based on Global Citizen Solution’s passport index.

**Based on World Population Review’s ranking of the happiest countries in the world.

Prescribe activities in Sweden

The activities on this page are intended for healthcare professionals looking to prescribe a visit to Sweden or individuals planning a wellbeing-focused stay. Each activity reflects everyday Swedish habits with proven mental and physical health benefits. The list provides a foundation for creating a personalised programme as part of a Swedish prescription and can be followed in full or adapted to suit individual goals, needs, and length of stay.

Boost your energy – see the country by bike		Recharge in the Swedish forest	
<p>Swedish cities are made for walking and cycling, and with an ever-growing number of quality-assured national cycling trails and signature hiking trails across the country, Sweden is the ideal place for an active recovery. As a visitor, it's an ideal way to explore more of what's around you – at your own pace. Regular exercise like cycling and walking has been shown to support cardiovascular health and reduce feelings of stress.</p>	<p>Doctor's note:</p>	<p>With nearly 70 per cent of the country covered in forests, nature is never far away in Sweden. Spending time in the forest helps ease stress, lower blood pressure and boost focus. Thanks to the Right of Public Access, anyone can enjoy Swedish nature. Join a guided forest bathing tour, try wild swimming or forage for berries and mushrooms. It's a mindful tradition that supports wellbeing, and the berries are deliciously healthy.</p>	<p>Doctor's note:</p>
Get your daily dose of 'fika'		Get a good night's sleep under the stars	
<p>'Fika' is a cherished Swedish habit. It's a moment to enjoy something small to eat and drink. It's a chance to slow down and enjoy your company – without fuss or expectation. It's about taking a real break, even from your phone. Linked to lower stress and better focus, a fika can be enjoyed anywhere. Try a cosy café during your stay or enjoy your fika in nature, as Swedes often do.</p>	<p>Doctor's note:</p>	<p>Sweden serves up all the conditions necessary for restorative sleep: Cool temperatures, clean air and many areas with no light or sound pollution. Add a plethora of unique accommodations in nature, ranging from luxury escapes to off-grid cabins. A few nights in the Swedish outdoors can help reset the body's circadian rhythm and increase your overall wellbeing.</p>	<p>Doctor's note:</p>
Feel uplifted by Swedish culture		Raise your spirits with Swedish music	
<p>Culture on prescription has been a thing in Sweden for over twenty years. It can be consumed everywhere: at one of the many renowned museums, through public outdoor art in both rural and urban settings, or simply by taking the Stockholm subway, which is said to be the world's longest art exhibition. These small encounters can reduce stress and lift your mood.</p>	<p>Doctor's note:</p>	<p>For being a sparsely populated country, Sweden plays a significant role in shaping the global music scene. From inventions like Spotify to super producers like Max Martin and Billboard No. 1 bands like Ghost, music runs deep in Swedish everyday life. Sweden ranks among the world's top metal nations, and studies show that even extreme genres like death metal can reduce anger. Catch a show and feel it for yourself.</p>	<p>Doctor's note:</p>

While these activities are designed to be experienced in Sweden, the habits and mindset behind them can also be brought home. Lasting health benefits are most likely to emerge when these practices become part of everyday life.

Appendix. Health benefits in Sweden

This section outlines the core health benefits associated with Sweden's natural environment and way of life. It's all supported by scientific research and developed in collaboration with Yvonne Forsell, Senior Professor at Karolinska Institutet. It provides context for why spending time in Sweden can have a measurable impact on mental and physical wellbeing. These insights form the foundation for the practical activities listed on the previous page, which are designed to help guide or personalise a Swedish health prescription.

Silence and tranquillity

In Sweden, silence is part of the landscape – found in forests, by lakes and even within city parks. Over 5,000 protected nature reserves across the country – even in cities – offer a natural counterbalance to the overstimulation of modern life. Sweden is also home to a growing number of silent retreats, where individuals can immerse themselves in stillness and nature. These environments promote relaxation and mental clarity, creating space for recovery and calm. **Listening to natural soundscapes enhances brain connectivity and reduces stress.** (Stobbe et al., *Environmental Research*, 2023)
Reduced exposure to environmental noise supports better sleep, cardiovascular health, and overall wellbeing. (European Environment Agency, 2020)

Swedish sauna culture

In Sweden, saunas are often found near nature, by lakes, or even floating on the water. You'll find them in summer houses, public bathhouses, and many places to stay, making the experience easy to access. Swedish sauna culture is relaxed and social. It's a way to slow down and reconnect, whether with family, friends or simply by yourself. In the north, it also carries deeper roots, used for cleansing and quiet reflection. Today, saunas are a growing part of wellness travel, often paired with dips in cold water. **Sauna use can help activate the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting deeper rest and better sleep quality.** (Hussain & Cohen, *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 2018)
Regular sauna bathing is associated with a 65 per cent lower risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia. (Laukkanen et al., *Age and Ageing*, 2017)

Slowing down with Swedish fika

'Fika', the daily pause for coffee and conversation, is deeply embedded in Swedish culture: at home, in cafés, and even at work. These quiet social moments create space to slow down, step away from screens, and be fully present with others. **Reducing smartphone use has been linked to improvements in mental health, focus and overall wellbeing.** (PNAS Nexus, 2025)
Regular participation in social rituals strengthens belonging and helps protect against emotional distress. (Haslam et al., *Social Science and Medicine*, 2018)

Forest bathing

Forest bathing is the practice of slow, mindful immersion in nature. In Sweden, this is more than a trend. It fits naturally into the landscape and the way people spend time outdoors. With nearly 70 per cent of the country covered in forest, you'll find space and stillness in every direction. From quiet trails just outside the cities to guided forest bathing experiences deep among the trees, it's easy to find a place where you can slow down, listen, and simply be. **Forest bathing significantly reduced cortisol concentrations, indicating a stress reduction.** (Antonelli et al., *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2020)
Nature contact appears to promote health through stress recovery and attention restoration. (Kuo, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2015)

Restorative sleep

Sweden's natural environment offers ideal conditions for restorative sleep. Even for infants, the tradition of outdoor sleeping reflects a cultural belief in nature as a foundation for rest. Visitors can experience this too. From remote cabins to quiet lakesides, Sweden makes it easy to sleep well and reset. With Sweden's clean air and cool night temperatures, there's no need for artificial cooling – just open a window before going to sleep. **The ideal room temperature for sleep is around 18 degrees Celsius, promoting deeper and more restorative rest.** (Sleep Foundation, 2023)
Spending time away from artificial light and aligning with natural light-dark cycles can help reset the body's circadian rhythm. (Wright et al., *Current Biology*, 2013)

Light and dark

In the far north of Sweden, daylight stretches through the night in summer, providing natural exposure to blue-enriched light that mirrors the spectrum used in therapeutic light treatments. This extended daylight can help reset the body's circadian rhythm, improving sleep patterns and supporting mood regulation. In winter, the darkness reveals something just as powerful: stargazing and the Northern Lights foster a sense of awe and emotional release. **Prolonged exposure to natural light helps regulate circadian rhythms and improve sleep quality.** (Wright et al., *Current Biology*, 2013)
Clear night skies are associated with increased feelings of wonder about the universe, which correlates with emotional wellbeing. (Barragán & Meltzoff, *Scientific Reports*, 2024)

Accessible nature

In Sweden, nature isn't something you have to plan for – it's all around you. Forests, lakes, and parks are often within walking distance, even in major cities, making it easy to step outside and unwind. And thanks to Sweden's Right of Public Access ('Allemansrätten'), you're free to roam, swim, camp, and forage in most natural areas, provided you treat nature and wildlife with care. This closeness and openness to nature support both physical and mental wellbeing. **Urban green spaces are linked to relaxation, reduced stress and improved mental wellbeing.** (World Health Organization, 2021)
Spending 72 hours immersed in nature has been shown to significantly reduce stress levels and improve overall mood. (72 Hour Cabin study, Karolinska Institutet & Visit Sweden, 2017)

Culture without the crowds

Sweden's cultural institutions are easy to access, ranging from world-renowned modern museums to fairytale-like historic castles. Unlike many European destinations, they usually offer lots of space, allowing for a quieter, more personal experience. Engaging with art has been shown to support mental health. **Cultural engagement is linked to reduced depression, anxiety, and loneliness, as well as improved quality of life.** (Fancourt and Finn, *World Health Organization*, 2019)
Arts on prescription programmes have been shown to improve wellbeing, especially in people with low to moderate mental health needs. (Jensen et al., *Frontiers in Public Health*, 2024)

Clean air

In Sweden, people walk and cycle as part of daily life, not necessarily to exercise, but to get around. A well-connected network of walking trails and cycling routes makes active travel easy, whether in cities, towns, or the countryside. Sweden is also recognised as one of the most bicycle-friendly countries in the world, with the Göta Canal recently named the best cycling trail in Europe. **Physical activity during travel improves wellbeing and supports long-term health.** (Psychology & Health, 2012)
Regular walking and cycling are associated with reduced risks of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers, as well as improved mental health and overall wellbeing. (Public Health England, 2018)

Active travel made easy

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Sweden's foraging culture

In Sweden, foraging for wild berries and mushrooms is a national pastime. Every summer and autumn, people head into forests to find treasures like bilberries, lingonberries, and chanterelles – all naturally abundant thanks to the Right of Public Access ('Allemansrätten'), which allows anyone to roam and forage freely (yet with respect for nature and wildlife). These forest foods are rich in antioxidants and nutrients linked to heart health, immune function, and reduced inflammation. **Forest visits and foraging contribute to human wellbeing through stress reduction, connection to nature and mental restoration.** (Riedl et al., *Forests*, 2024)
Bilberries and lingonberries contain polyphenols with anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects that support heart health and immune function. (RISE Research Institutes of Sweden, 2024)

Life by water

Sweden is home to some 100,000 lakes, meaning water is never far away – whether you're in a city, forest, or archipelago. This closeness to nature's so-called 'blue spaces' offers more than scenic beauty. From lakeside walks and cold dips to kayaking and quiet reflection, water is a central part of many Swedes' daily life and contributes to a calmer, more balanced state of being. **Being near water is linked to lower levels of psychological distress and improved overall mental health.** (Wheeler et al., *Health & Place*, 2012)
Regular exposure to blue spaces promotes physical activity and reduces stress-related illness. (Gascon et al., *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health*, 2017)

Wellbeing through metal

Sweden has long punched above its weight in music. With globally influential producers and pop artists as well as a world-renowned metal scene, music is woven into the country's cultural fabric. There's a music event for every taste, from city festivals to countryside festivities dedicated to everything from rock to social dancing. With approximately 428 metal bands per million residents, Sweden ranks among the top countries globally for metal bands per capita. **Attending live music events has been associated with increased feelings of well-being and life satisfaction.** (Koeffler et al., *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2024)
Listening to extreme music genres such as metal can enhance positive emotions and regulate anger. (Sharman & Dingle, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 2015)

Lagom: The Swedish art of balance

'Lagom' – the idea of "not too much, not too little" – is central to how Swedes approach life. This concept of balance encourages moderation in consumption, relationships, and lifestyle. It's reflected in everything from interior design to daily routines. Studies show that cultures embracing balance and sustainable rhythms report lower stress levels and higher life satisfaction. **A lifestyle based on moderation and balance is associated with better emotional regulation and reduced risk of burnout.** (American Psychological Association, 2022)
Cultivating contentment involves shifting focus from external achievements to inward fulfillment, leading to a more sustainable sense of wellbeing. (Cordaro, D., *Journal of Happiness studies*, 2020)