

Skara city

An urban savannah

A green zone with plenty of ancient trees and flowering herbs is found near the Cathedral in central Skara. It is a haven for bats, birds, butterflies and people. Enter it, and you will be surrounded by a green and peaceful bubble of calm.

A wildlife oasis

Starting at the old cemetery, the Botanical Gardens (Botan), the Victoria Lakes and the Fornbyn open-air museum are aligned along a verdant stretch of murmuring trees. Biologists refer to the area as an “urban savannah” as the old trees, flowering herbs, shrubbery, water features and sandy soils are the home of a diverse flora and fauna. More than seven different bat species forage among the treetops at dusk, which is as many as you will find in the surrounding agrarian landscape.

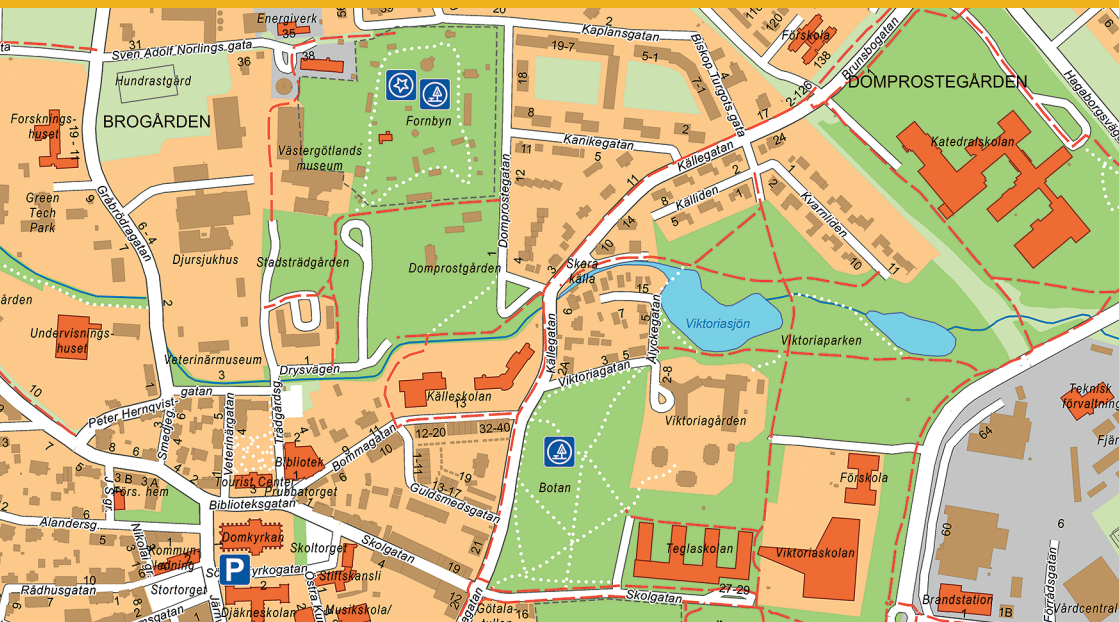
Botan


The green heart of Skara is Botan, a botanical garden that Peter Hernqvist, a disciple of Carl Linnaeus, began to work on in 1776. Many of the old ash-trees found here were planted in his lifetime. Other 17th century features include a beech grove, an oak grove and a pasture. There was a period of decline following Hernqvist's death in 1808, but the gardens were restored to their former glory a hundred years later. Today, at first glance, Botan may appear much like any other park, but rare trees, including ginkgo, katsura, Caucasian wingnut, Himalayan birch and Manchurian cherry, grow here. Many of the trees in the park have wide canopies that seem to be made solely for the purpose of embracing


stressed city dwellers and invite you to enjoy a picnic underneath them. They emit a soothing hush and birdsong despite the noise from the surrounding city. Along the western perimeter is a small herb garden with motherwort, valerian, Echinacea and other medicinal plants.





The weight of ancient trees reigns in Botan. Some have a circumference of up to four metres.



 **Don't miss:** Entering into the old cottages at Fornbyn. Get a feeling for how people huddled together in the tiny, dark rooms, sometimes with only a ten-centimetre-high window. If you like vintage objects, visit the coffee shop in the old store where you will find 1940s-style bottles and tins.

 **Wildlife:** Look for linnets, goldfinches, northern bats, pied flycatchers, yellow anemones, pearly heath and European peacock butterflies, and parrot toadstools.

 **Picnic spots:** Practically anywhere in the botanical gardens or Fornbyn.

 **Getting there:** Park at Skara Cathedral (a prime destination that goes back to the 11th century). To get to Fornbyn, walk down Skolsgatan to Botan or follow signs for the Västergötland Museum.



Fornbyn

The old buildings in Fornbyn have been moved there from various locations in Skaraborg County. There is a village shop, a forge, a chapel, an inn and many small cottages. Millennia and centuries come together – from Stone Age tombs to veteran motorcars. Old-fashioned fruit trees, vegetables and flowers are cultivated in between the houses.

This little shortcut to the county's historical past doubles as a city park and cultural hub. There is always something going on in the summer: fiddlers, singalongs, dog shows, midsummer celebrations ... and in the autumn the city's seven-year-olds get to spend a day living as people did in the 19th century.

Fornbyn was founded in 1921 and is now part of the Västergötland Museum. It is contemporary with the Stockholm open-air museum Skansen.

The leafy, murmuring trees continue inside the Fornbyn open-air museum with its historical stone cists, dry stone walls, wells, milestones, sawmill, belfry and lychgate.



The Victoria Lakes

You can glimpse the mirror surface of the Victoria Lakes from the northeast corner of Botan. They form the centre of a peaceful walk. These ponds were named for Gustaf Viktor Hofling and his wife Hilda Josefina Victoria. Hofling was an industrious man who not only had the Victoria Lakes dug out, he also established Skara's first factory (for making tiles) in 1894. From the "Victoria Falls" the water flows into one of the city's life-giving blue veins, the river Dofsan/Drysan.



Enjoy the rhododendrons in Botan, Skara's most diverse park. It also includes rare trees such as ginkgo, katsura, Caucasian wingnut, Himalaya birch and Manchurian cherry.