A person is silhouetted against a vibrant green aurora borealis (Northern Lights) over a lake at night. The person is standing on a rocky shore, looking out over the water. The aurora is a bright green, flowing across the sky and reflecting on the water. The sky is dark with some stars visible. The overall scene is serene and majestic.

UMEÅ AURORA GUIDE

2024-09-12

01

THE AURORA GUIDE

The ultimate guide to maximize your chances to experience the Northern Lights in and around the Umeå region.

Table of contents

Welcome to the Aurora Guide. In this guide, you'll find everything from practical gear to locations and ways to experience it. Whether you're a curious learner or a dedicated traveler chasing the aurora, this guide will help you.

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02

SAFETY

Watching the Aurora Borealis is a magical experience but it's important to be prepared and stay safe. Here are some guidelines to ensure a safe and enjoyable viewing.

SAFETY

TRAVEL SAFETY AND INFORM

Inform someone of your plans and expected return time. If you are with others, stay together. It's easy to get disoriented in the dark. Ensure your vehicle is in good condition if driving to a remote location. Carry a spare tire, jumper cables, and a full tank of gas/charge.

DRESS WARM AND HAVE LIGHT

Wear layers of warm clothing, including thermal undergarments, insulated jackets, hats, gloves, scarves, and warm waterproof boots. Especially during winter. Bring a flashlight or headlamp with extra batteries to navigate in the dark. Avoid using too much light as it can affect your night vision.

BE CAUTIOUS OF WILDLIFE

Be aware of the presence of wildlife, especially in remote areas. Make noise to avoid surprising animals like brown bears if you're out in a remote location. Don't venture out on the ice of the river or lakes unless you are very familiar with the situation and know the location. Especially in spring where the ice quickly can lose strength. If you find local people living where you want to hunt for the Aurora, ask them for guidelines as they might know of any hazards.

CHARGED PHONE AND FIRST AID

Bring a fully charged mobile phone and, if possible, a portable charger. In very remote areas, consider having a satellite phone or a personal locator beacon. Bring a first aid kit if you're not close to settlements and want to venture further from civilization.

RESPECT LOCAL GUIDELINES

Follow any local rules and guidelines, especially in national parks or protected areas.

03

WHEN TO SEE AURORA BOREALIS

If you want to come to northern Sweden to watch the Aurora, when is the best chance for you?

WHEN TO SEE AURORA

SEASONAL TIMING

Often people think the optimal will be the winter, but we can often see Aurora from mid august until may. Equinox Periods: The weeks around the spring (March) and autumn (September) equinoxes are extra favorable.

DAILY TIMING

Aurora is visible after dark. In August its mostly seen during midnight, but in mid winter in december and january it can be seen before dinner though it usually peaks around midnight. The more darkness the month have, the more chance to time it. Overcast skies are really bad for viewing the aurora. Check local weather forecasts for clear nights. Best months are august, september and then februari to april. During october and november/december we have lots of clouds in the region. The Aurora is not a constant phenomenon as it comes and goes in waves. The solar wind charges up and releases the energy into Substorms that form stronger Aurora.

AWAY FROM LIGHT POLLUTION

To see the aurora clearly, it's better to be away from city lights and other sources of light pollution. Rural and remote areas are also ideal if the Aurora is weak. When the Aurora is strong it can be seen in the middle of the city.

SOLAR ACTIVITY

Aurora activity often increases during the solar maximum, a period of high solar activity that occurs approximately every 11 years. The next solar maximum is expected around 2025. The activity on the sun is not always equal to more Aurora as its only the potential for more chances.

KP Index: If you want the easy way, the KP index shows a very rough idea of the forecast and what the Aurora might be, but very often the reality differs. The best forecast comes from FB-groups and social media with forecasters. You can also use webcams to know where and how strong the Aurora is where you are.

04

WHERE TO SEE AURORA BOREALIS

If you want to come to northern Sweden to watch the Aurora, when is the best chance for you?

WHERE TO SEE AURORA

FINDING A GOOD SPOT

Usually the further north, the closer you get to the Aurora.

In Umeå region we will get everything from small Aurora to really strong Aurora. If we have a clear sky, there is chance for Aurora almost every other night even though it might be very faint and very low to horizon.

As the Aurora is very low light phenomenon, the less disturbing light you have, the better chances to see the Aurora as light pollution interferes with your night vision.

Example of general good locations

A lake. The lake offers both a dark location and during autumn it also works as a reflective area that doubles the Aurora in the sky as it reflects the light.

Big fields. No lights and trees in the way makes a field optimal for observing the Aurora. Make sure it's not a planted field you step on.

High hills and ski slopes. Getting higher up makes it easier to find a location without lights and trees in the way.

LOW ACTIVITY NIGHTS

During very low activity nights we need a location with a dark clear view towards the horizon towards the north. Optimal is a lake or a field where you face north and there is no light pollution.

HIGH ACTIVITY NIGHTS

When we have a night with higher activity the Aurora might be visible during substorms even in the centre of Umeå in all directions. This is not very usual and happens only a few times every season.

When we have a medium to strong night with Aurora activity it means that we usually can see Aurora towards east and west. Very strong Aurora nights it will be visible above you and to the south as well. Check the forecast and webcams to know if the Aurora will be strong or weak.

04

WHERE TO SEE AURORA BOREALIS

Umeå have lots of different great spots to spot the Aurora Borealis.

BEST UMEÅ LOCATIONS

- 📍 **NYDALASJÖN**
The most popular place in Umeå. Easy to reach.
- 📍 **BÄCKSJÖN**
Popular dark place outside of Umeå reachable by car.
- 📍 **TAVELSJÖ**
Large lake just outside of Umeå
- 📍 **YTTERSJÖ**
Lake outside of Umeå
- 📍 **HOLMEN**
Lookout between Obbola and Holmsund
- 📍 **I20**
Dark forest next to the city
- 📍 **CITY**
Umeå city
- 📍 **HÅGRING**
Large swamp with a glass church outside of Vännäs.



UMEÅ



Nydalasjön

A popular lake to observe Aurora and is close to Umeå and the University region. Easy access through buss, bicycle or just walk from University

From Umeå city

🚗 25 MIN 🚲 30 MIN 🚌 35 MIN

■ HC / FAMILY - ADAPTION

HC: Both locations are easy access for HC. In Hällan there is a closer parking but sometimes there is a boom restricting it. Kärleksviken have a HC-parking next to the lake.

Kids/Family: Kärleksviken as it have an adventure path and more things to enjoy while waiting

■ HÄLLAN

Perfect view towards the north with grill rings to setup a fire and enjoy.

Public transport:

Take bus no:2 to "Rullstengatan". From here you take a right and walk up "Istidsgatan". Where it ends, take the tunnel underneath E12, then make a left along the cycle path for 100m until you see the sign "Kinabron". From here you walk 300m and take a left.

Car:

Drive east from the city towards "Tomtebo" along "Tomtebovägen". Then take the road "Älvans väg" up towards "Olle Fiskares väg" which you will follow 1.6km north. Here you can park the car and walk the 350m left to Hällan.

■ KÄRLEKSVIKEN

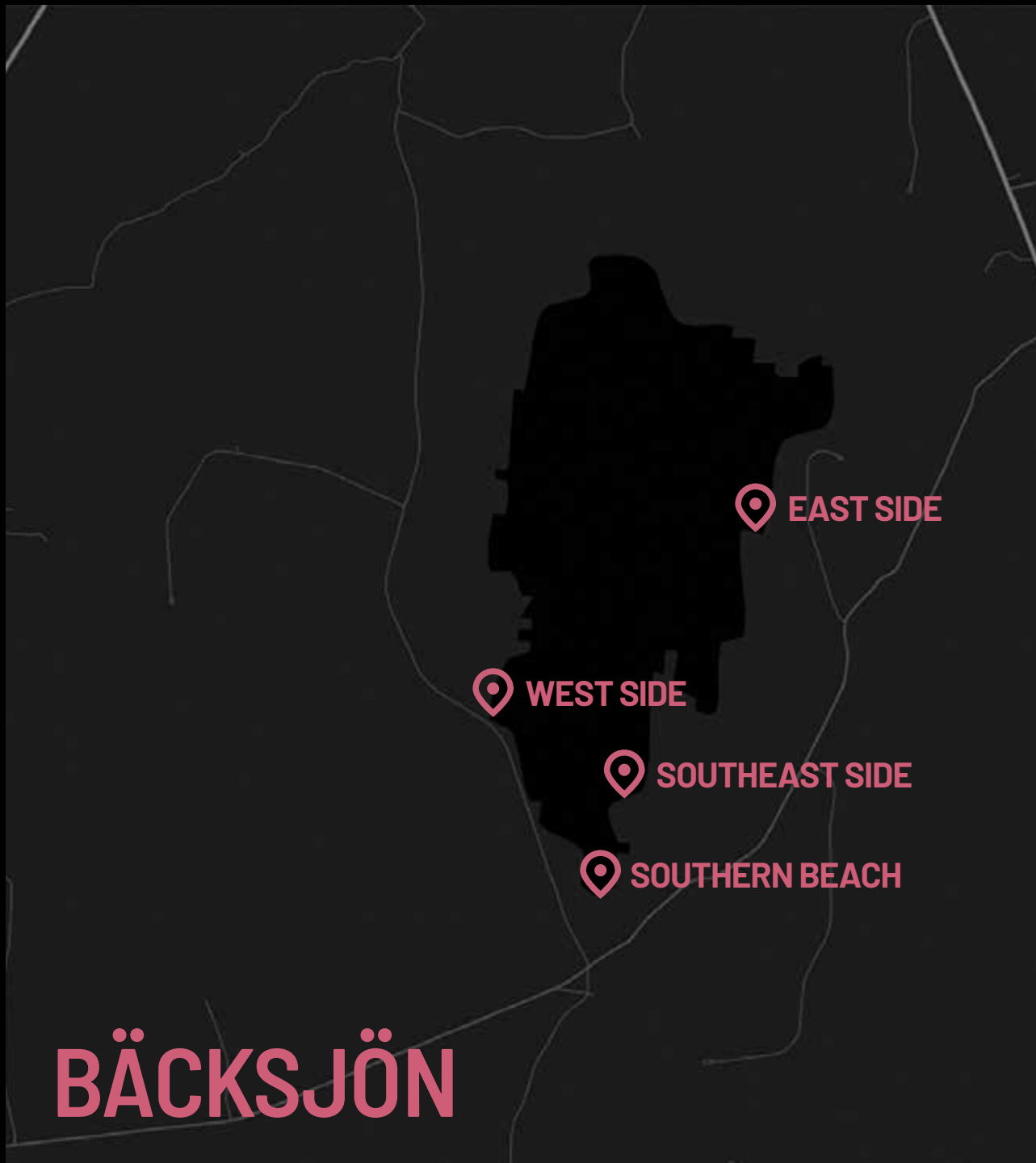
Here you find a nice beach and places to make a fire to keep warm.

Public transport:

Take bus no:8 to "Källplatsen". From here you walk north towards the lake. When you come to the lake, just follow the walkpath and then gravel road 1.100m until you reach "Kärleksviken".

Car:

Drive east from the city towards "Tomtebo" along "Tomtebovägen". Then take the road "Kålhagsvägen" on your left and follow it up towards the lake. When you come at the end of the parkinglot where the lake is, take a right and drive along the gravel road for 700m. When you pass "KFUM" you will have a parking lot on the right where you can park. Then there is 400m walk towards Kärleksviken.



Bäcksjön

Bäcksjön is a popular lake to observe Aurora next to Umeå. A lot of darkness in combination with the many great locations and easy access beaches

From Umeå city

🚗 25 MIN 🚶 60 MIN 🚗 N/A

Drive along road 364 towards Botsmark. In Fäbordåkern, take a right. After 4km you come to the junction.

■ HC / FAMILY - ADAPTION

HC: Some of the spots along the west side as they are of more easy access.

Kids/Family: West side or southern beach

■ SOUTHERN BEACH

A perfect view of even the weakest Aurora. Easy access and good place to start a fire. 300m after the junction, you park at the parking lot and walk 150m towards the lake

■ WEST SIDE

On the west side the road runs pretty close to the lake with several easy stops like Svartviken up until Dalesanden. You can choose any location along the 2km stretch.

■ SOUTHEAST SIDE

Here the road runs further from the lake and you have to travel along the path close to the lake instead. Harder to reach during wintertime.

■ EAST SIDE

The road on the eastside continues for 2km from the junction where you have another junction. Take a left here and continue 200m to 63.947142, 20.406642 where you can park. From here its a walk 400m down towards the lake. Harder to reach during wintertime as this road is not plowed during winter.

05

GEAR AND EQUIPMENT

Viewing and photographing the Northern Lights is a breathtaking experience, but it requires some preparation. Here's a detailed guide on the gear you'll need

CLOTHING AND PRACTICAL GEAR

- WARM CLOTHING**
Layered clothing with thermal underwear, a warm hat, gloves, scarf, and insulated boots are essential to endure cold climate with long time of waiting.
- HANDWARMERS / FEETWARMERS**
To keep your hands and feet warm during long periods outside these can be the difference between enjoying the Aurora and enduring the Aurora.
- HEADLAMP**
Even if the phone can work as lightsource, a good head light is recommended. Lamps with red light preserves night vision better than white light. If not available with red light I prefer a head lamp with a very low setting of white light.
- PORTABLE CHAIR**
To sit or lie down comfortably while watching the sky or to get warm by the fire. If you have to wait for a long time it feels good to be able to sit down on something for a while.
- FOOD / FIRE**
You get hungry waiting a long time chasing the Aurora. If its cold it hugely befits if you can make a fire and heat some food or bring something warm to drink. To make a fire you need a lighter/matches, some burnable paper and wood. A knife and axe is also very handy when making a fire.

CYBERPHOTO - TIPS AND PRACTICAL GEAR

Tips and gear that will help you outdoor
In addition to the obvious camera equipment, it is mainly heat and food that you need to make your Northern Lights photography a success. We will help you with some concrete tips in this regard



05

THE AURORA GUIDE

GEAR AND EQUIPMENT

Photographing the Aurora is on a lot of peoples bucket list. Here's a detailed guide on the gear that can help you take better pictures.

PHOTOGRAPHY GEAR

SMART PHONE

Ensure your smartphone has a high-quality camera capable of manual settings adjustments, such as recent iPhone models, Google Pixel, or Samsung Galaxy.

A sturdy tripod is beneficial to keep your phone stable during long exposure shots. A flexible or mini tripod specifically designed for smartphones can be very useful.

Powerbank. As cold weather drains batteries fast it can be wise to bring a powerbank to charge your phone if you are out for a long time.

CAMERA / ADVANCED

A camera with manual/semi manual settings is beneficial.

Wide-Angle Lens: Preferably with a focal length between 14mm and 24mm and a fast aperture (f/2.8 or wider).

Tripod: A sturdy tripod is crucial for long-exposure shots to avoid camera shake.

Remote Shutter Release: To take photos without touching the camera, reducing vibration.

Extra Batteries: Cold weather drains batteries quickly, so bring spare batteries and keep them warm.

Extra memory cards: In case you run out of memory on your camera, always bring a spare.

CYBERPHOTO - PHOTOGRAPHY GEAR

Photogear that will help capture Aurora
Photographing the Northern Lights is a challenge. To have a camera with optics of a suitable model, and that everything is set correctly, including the sharpness. It is possible to photograph the northern lights with almost any camera or optics



05

APPS & INFORMATION

Apps can help you track and predict the Auroras by providing info on aurora visibility, solar activity, and weather conditions aswell as help you navigate to your viewing spot.

APPS & INFORMATION



SPACEWEATHERLIVE

Advanced and popular

One of the most used by professional Aurora hunters. The app can seem a little bit advanced for new users but it have lots of great resources.



MY AURORA FORECAST & ALERTS

Local food with Guided Aurora tour

Combine a hike up Hamptjärnsberget with an experienced Aurora guide. Enjoy a good dinner with local Västerbotten food (souvas) and keep warm by the fire while we wait for the magic Aurora to appear above us.



GOOGLE MAPS

Great navigation and scouting

When finding great spots and navigating its essential to have a good map that can help you. Google maps is a very good tool for this.



LIGHT POLLUTION MAP - DARK SKY

Finding the darker areas

If you want to venture to areas with less pollution its great to use an app/webpage that shows you where the city lights don't affect your night vision as much.



UMEÅ AURORA HUNTERS - FBGROUP

Local group for forecasts

In Umeå Aurora Hunters we publish regular forecasts and heads up when there is Aurora incoming for the region. Group is free for everyone to join, even if you're not close to Umeå.

06

SETTINGS AND TECHNIQUE

Viewing and photographing the Northern Lights is a breathtaking experience, but it requires some preparation. Here's a detailed guide on the gear you'll need

SETTINGS AND TECHNIQUE

SMART PHONE

Using your phone you can either use your phones standard photography mode or newer cameras "night mode"

Some phones have a build in app or setting that can have you set manual settings.

If your phone don't have a night mode or a manual mode you can try to download an app to be able to fine tune your settings.

Recommended settings depends on how long you can keep your phone steady. If you have it on your tripod, try a longer shutter speed. If not, you can try to manually stabilize your phone and try a shorter shutter speed to avoid shake and blurry images

DSLR / CAMERA

Manual Mode: Set your camera to either manual mode or aperture mode to help you control exposure settings. It can work in auto aswell if you're not comfortable with changing settings.

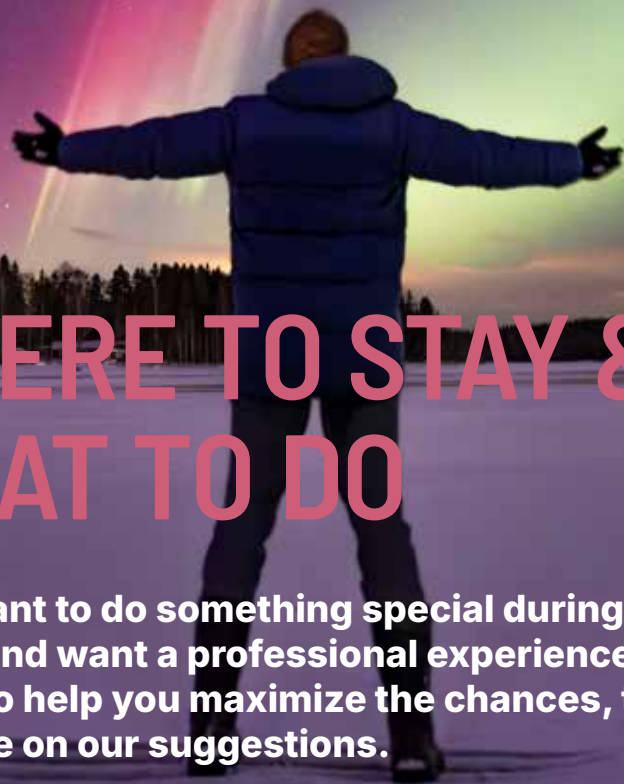
ISO: Start with an ISO between 800 and 3200, depending on your camera's noise performance.

Aperture: Use the widest aperture (smallest f-number) available on your lens.

Shutter Speed: Start with an exposure time between 5 and 30 seconds, depending on the aurora's activity. Stronger Aurora requires faster shutter speed as low as 1-2 seconds.

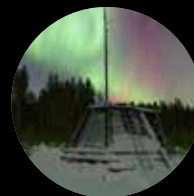
Focus: Manually focus to infinity. Using live view to focus on a distant light source or star can help.

07



WHERE TO STAY & WHAT TO DO

If you want to do something special during the Aurora and want a professional experienced guides to help you maximize the chances, take a look here on our suggestions.



AURORA BOREALIS ADVENTURES

Aurora Tepee!

A night in an Aurora tepee is a unique way to experience nature. The comfortable tepee is a perfect place to enjoy the magical scenery with northern lights. Both our tepees are 12 sqm and have comfortable beds for two



AURORA BOREALIS ADVENTURES

Aurora Tepee tour!

Book our package with a half-day tour with huskies including outdoor lunch, overnight stay in an Aurora tepee including snacks and non-alcoholic sparkling wine.



GRANÖ BECKASIN

Stay overnight with windows to the sky

By the Ume River and far from light pollution, Granö Beckasin is a great place to witness Aurora Borealis. Stay in a Bird's Nest in the trees and take a northern lights tour on foot, snow mobile or dog sled.



NORTHERN LIGHTS TOUR GRANÖ

Learn to photograph the Northern Lights

Take a Northern Lights tour, an hour from Umeå, and learn how to best capture the night sky with nature guide and professional photographer Petvin at Akvafjell Photography.



SPRUCE ISLAND HUSKY GRANÖ

Dog Sledding under the dancing light

Aurora Wilderness is a dog sledding tour at night, out of Spruce Island Husky in Granö. A truly magical nature experience and a fantastic chance to see the northern lights.



07

WHERE TO STAY & WHAT TO DO

If you want to do something special during the Aurora and want a professional experienced guides to help you maximize the chances, take a look here on our suggestions.



BACKFORS GÅRD

Horse sleigh ride

A winter adventure with northern Swedish working horses! You get to ride a horse and sleigh through the forests in the winter darkness with torches illuminating our way. Enjoy the northern lights and the starry sky



HAMPTJÄRNSSTUGAN

Local food with Guided Aurora tour

Combine a hike up Hamptjärnsberget with an experienced Aurora guide. Enjoy a good dinner with local Västerbotten food (souvas) and keep warm by the fire while we wait for the magic Aurora to appear above us.



FREDRIK LARSSON

Experienced Aurora Guide

Enjoy the comfort of having an experienced and dedicated guide to show you the best spots and when and where to go. Listen to amazing stories around the fire while we wait.



Do it yourself or have a guide

Experiencing the Aurora can be very easy as you can see it directly from your garden or hotel room. All data and forecasts are free for everyone to take a part of.

By having an Aurora guide it ensures that you make the most of your experience without the stress of planning. The guide's expertise in optimal locations, weather patterns, and safety precautions saves time and maximizes your chances of seeing the Northern Lights. You can focus on enjoying the breathtaking experience while the guide handles logistics, offering valuable insights and local knowledge

07

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Who is behind this Aurora guide? Learn more about who I am and where I come from.



Fredrik Larsson

My name is Fredrik Larsson and I am a freelance photographer, northern lights guide and creator based in Umeå who loves to be outdoor with my son and my dog.

I've photographed and experienced Aurora since 2015 and I'm running the FB-group Umeå Aurora Hunters.

I'm so happy that my dog and son also loves to experience the Aurora and we are a great team out there.



Book of Umeå - The four seasons

Fantastic picture book that captures the beauty of the city of Umeå in all its glory. Through magnificent photographs, you as a reader can follow Umeå's unique mix of magnificent nature, vibrant culture and historical landmarks.



Get it on umeaboken.se

The book depicts the city's change through the four seasons, from winter's snow-covered landscape with northern lights to the magical midnight sun of summer nights.

