

Post



Scott Farnsworth

Aug 20, 2023 · 6 min read

# 800 year-old flush toilets - August 21, 2023

Updated: Aug 23, 2023

## ***SUMMARY***

Room service breakfast followed by a trip to the gym (Karen) and stair climbing (Scott). Huge buffet lunch on the pool deck served by the crew - burgers, hot dogs, bratwurst, ribs, a whole roast pig, fried chicken, tons of side dishes and desserts. Docked in Visby, Sweden and joined a shore excursion which took us out to see a former, underwhelming, fishing village, the ruins of a 13th century church before returning for a hike around town. Visby is a very charming, picturesque little village with narrow cobblestone street and well preserved buildings. Dinner was an all-you-can-eat Asian buffet with all the countries of Asia

represented. All-you-can-eat = eat too much! - Karen

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### ***DETAIL***

We awake right at 8:00 a.m. Well, Karen does anyway. She prods me to get up, reminding me we ordered room service breakfast to be delivered between 8:00 am and 8:30. I begrudgingly acknowledge this fact and throw on some clothes.

It's the first real day of our cruise so I guess we should seize the day, as they say. I throw open the curtains and just as quickly close them again. It's a crystal clear day and the sun is barely above the horizon. This means there are two of them: the real one and the one reflected off the still water. Way too much light and too much radiated heat for this time of the morning. Artificial LED light will have to do.

A moment later a knock at our cabin door announces our breakfast. To be good we didn't order anything unhealthy like eggs Benedict with crab, extra crispy bacon, or a well toasted bagel with cream cheese and smoked salmon. Just bran flakes, skim milk, a banana, and a small bowl of fresh berries, and black coffee. We both agree that eggs Benedict, waffles, or anything else would have been better. Tomorrow, we promise we going to the dining room.

Today we're switching from the Denmark of yesterday to the Sweden of today. Specifically Visby, somewhere about which we know almost nothing. We do know it's an island and it's likely pronounced Vizz-bee, like Frisbee. On our balcony the weather is delightfully cool (thank ya Jesus). The source of this cool, sadly, is the pea soup fog. From our ever marginal ship wifi a map shows we're motoring between the Swedish mainland and the island of Gotland, on which Visby is situated.

Karen goes to exercise in the gym and she invites me along. I invent some lame excuse for why I can't join her. Quickly feeling guilty I change into workout clothes and do the stairs from the fourth to the 10th deck and back, with laps on the "jogging track" in between.

We have lots of options for lunch but the barbecue by the pool, served by the crew, sounds the most fun. We try their roast pig, ribs, fried chicken, Caesar salad, potato salad, slaw, sauerkraut, etc. It's quite good. We didn't get any of the "Mexican food". Maybe another day. And we had some, OK, quite a few desserts. Quite good!

By 1pm we're docked and by 1:30 we are walking up the dock, through the pea soup fog, towards bus number seven. It's 65° and Scott's happy he has his US\$6 pullover purchased in Copenhagen. Our tour guide, Mary-Louise, reminds us that it's federal law here that we wear our seatbelts, even on a bus. And she lets us know that "Visby" is pronounced Vees-Boo. OK, so we were totally wrong, sue us.

The things she was going to point out, on the left and right, were made a pointless exercise due to the fog. One of those things was [didn't get the Swedish name] which translates roughly into "Steep Elderly". It's a sheer cliff and 800 or so years ago, when the annual harvest wasn't go good, those who were quite elderly (40s? 50s?) would either voluntarily, or with much help, climb to the top of the "Steep Elderly" and soon they'd no longer be a burden on the family. Yikes, hopefully that not on today's tour.

As promised, we're headed to a fishing village. It's no longer a fishing village, not enough fish. In the harbor, looking into the water we see three jelly fish. We agree, that's not enough fish. We also see the dozen or so small fishing huts still there, all closed. Each is about 12' by 12' with one door and a window or two. And that's it. Each is identical, in dimension, design, and material to the next. They're equidistant, one from the next, and all are the same (red and white) colors.

Someone asked if the owners rented the fishing huts to tourists. Answer: They're prohibited by law from doing so and, yes, of course they do". Apparently there are about 350 similar fishing villages in Sweden. They all look like this and there isn't any real fishing down from any of them.

Our next stop (27 meters down the road) is to see the 'sea stacks'. These are interesting rock formations that it seems shouldn't exist, but do. They're tall and ... well, they're tall.

A bit further down the same road we stop and get out, again, to see and enter the ruins of an old church from the 1500s. It doesn't have (any more) a roof, but it does have a door and some "windows" (openings). Apparently the Swedish weren't dummies. They knew that if the devil were to visit he'd come from the north. Thus no window on that side. I guess better safe than sorry. The Swedish are (traditionally) all Lutherans and they have beaucoup churches. Back in the day you didn't ask IF someone was religious or lutheran, rather you asked to which church they belonged. Times have changed.

We learn there are no significant mammals on the island. There are Foxes and also rabbits (much to the delight of the foxes). Their official bird on the island is the King's Eagle, which had been on their "red" list (i.e. endangered species list). No longer though. When covid hit the pesky humans just stayed indoors and the eagles could partake of whatever animals they could find, unmolested. As a result there was an explosion in the King's Eagle population and bingo, they're no longer endangered. Some well-meaning local brought deer to the island at one point. The explosion of that population, and the innumerable car/deer collisions each year, show in hindsight what a bad idea it is to mess with Mother Nature.

A big part of the tour is to see the walls around the city of Visby. They're 3.4 kilometers long and circle the city. Forty of their original towers remain. UNESCO deemed this a heritage site back in 1995, much to the delight of the locals. They did a lot of work to fix them up, using cement (not the original technique) to shore up some of the crumbling walls. In the harsh winters that followed, the cement absorbed water, froze, and eventually exploded, much to the locals' chagrin. Now any additional repairs are being done the old fashioned way, with locally available ground up limestone. They're also holding their breaths hoping that not too many more earlier 'fixes' explode.

We walked through one of the towers of the wall. Very impressive. Where we entered was simultaneously where the "ladies of the evening" used to live and where a good portion of the Pippi Longstocking movie was filmed. We also heard about how, back in the 1200s, they figured how to route some of the water from the top of the hill, down through small purpose-built rooms of the houses. This resulted in (essentially) "flush" toilets, 800+ years ago!

Back on the ship we have dinner at the Asian Buffet in the serve-yourself dining room. Pad Thai, lots of Sushi, and crispy Peking duck. We did have desserts though none were anything to write home about (though it seems we are...)

We considered going to the 9pm show... the Assistant Cruise Director, a very tall and accomplished tenor is performing a series of much beloved opera pieces. We've heard him once and he's good, but we don't go tonight. Just off to bed.

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## Photos



Heading off the ship, for our excursions, we weren't sure we were going to be seeing much of anything.



The fog soon lifted and we got to see what life was like on the island, including the (one time?) use of windmills.



The fishing village was a tad underwhelming, but it was green!



The buildings in the fishing village were very economical on space.



It seems that someone was catching fish somewhere



We did see the seasick rocks. Just some natural phenomenon, we're told.



A church from the 1500s. Upkeep came to be too costly so they asked their neighbor church if they could join them and abandoned this one.



The city walls were, indeed, impressive



The city itself was quite quaint

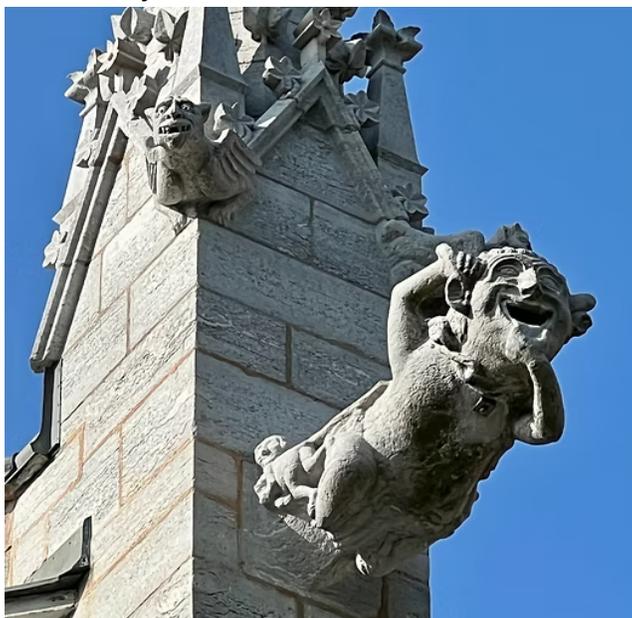


With impressive churches. Lots of churches.



## FARNSNIENTE

historians. They know their new windows are 'simplistic' but feel that in 800 years these may be revered.



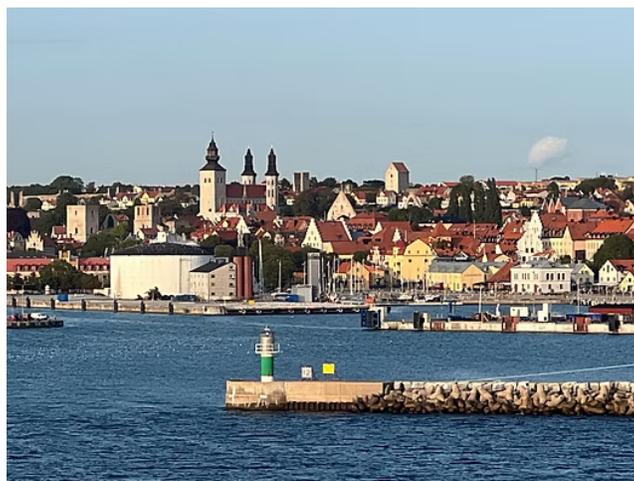
Their gargoyles were whimsical



And there were some more traditional figures, too.



On the walk back to the church the weather had redeemed itself.



And so we got a nice view of Visby in the ship's rear-view mirror.

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