

Post



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# Stockholm, more than just a syndrome - August 22, 2023

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## ***SUMMARY***

Sightseeing tour of Stockholm including time at the amazing Vasa Museum, the Old City, and the Royal Palace. Drinks at the very cool, very cold (18-degree Fahrenheit) IceBar wearing a fur-lined cape and heavy gloves. Took a 3 mile hike back the ship for Mexican buffet night. - Karen

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### ***DETAIL***

No time for messing around this morning. We're in Stockholm today. The nation's capital is at the heart/end of a huge archipelago. We're docking at 8 a.m. but have been sailing through the archipelago starting at 4:30 a.m. We were invited to get up early to watch, but we declined. We did get up at about 6 a.m. and looking out from our balcony we could see the amazing beauty that this route offers. There's plenty of light and we see island after island and lots of summer houses with lawns and docks. Tons of trees.

At 8:30 we're dressed and fed and are boarding our tour bus with our guide Cecilia. Legal once again with the seatbelts we head towards town with our guide pointing things out and relating facts and history of Sweden and its people. The country is the size of California or Spain, and 80% of the 10.5 million person population live in the south of the country for the better climate.

The city has been around a while, it was founded in 1,252 and in the mid-1600s it became the country's capitol. Children learn Swedish from when they're very young, but they start learning English at the age of six. Between nine and 12 they add either German or French. Helping them learn these other languages better is that there is no dubbed TV or movies. Subtitles, yes, but the language you hear for an American TV show or movie will be English. And it shows.

Eighty percent of the population is blonde and at least that percentage has blue eyes. She rattles off a long list of Swedish headquartered company we likely know, such as Electrolux, Erickson, AstraZeneca, and Spotify. Saab, she says, no longer makes cars but now just focuses on military jets. We try to help out by asking about the Swedish Fish candy. Apparently that doesn't add a lot to the country's GDP. (Is it even Swedish?) They do love Licorice. We learn that H&M is another popular Swedish company around the world, but we never hear her talk about Ikea.

We go into (?) city hall which is also where the national government is housed. We spend quite a while dazzled by the beauty of the Blue Hall, which (of course) is not blue. It is all red brick and was to have been painted blue (like the color of the sea surrounding so much of Sweden, but after the brickwork was done, it was so pretty, they just left it like that.

Next to the Blue Hall is the Golden Hall which, just to jack us around, IS gold. It's mosaic. It's made with gold leaf then mosaic glass, then more gold. It's very impressive. Gold was cheap when they started and they were afraid it might not stay that way, so they finished the room in just two years. The building was done in 1923 (?) and was to have cost three million Swedish Crowns (Kroner) but ended up costing 18 SKr. Quel surprise.

We drive around and see the amazing buildings in Stockholm. It's very impressive. We learn that they have a graduated income tax but on average people pay about 30% of their income in tax. They also pay a VAT, Value Added Tax, of 25%. It's built in to the prices, so you don't notice it, and (if you're a visiting foreigner) you can get it back.

We hear about the Stockholm syndrome, which was invented here during a 1973 bank hostage situation.

Next stop is to visit an old ship, yawn. Actually it is mind blowing. The king (in the 1600s) commissioned the ship, paid for it, signed off on the design, and then pushed to have it completed and rolled out very quickly. Alas, back there, there was no Computer Aided Design to say if the volume of the ship below the water level was sufficient to support the weight of the ship above the water line. Spoiler alert, it wasn't.

On it's maiden voyage the ship sailed for all of fifteen minutes. After that, after a light breeze tilted the ship slightly, it started to take on water and it began to sink. That act took all of thirty minutes. 2/3rds of the crew aboard got off with their lives, but that doesn't speak well for what happened to the other 1/3.

The amazeballs part is that in the past couple of decades they found the boat, brought it up, preserved it, repaired it, and now we have it, 98% original, to look at. It is enormous. It's all above water and indoors. You can see it from four or five different floors of the museum, so you can see it from any different angles. And it is so decorated, d so 'tricked out', and so well preserved.

Normally when something is in seawater for a long time it disintegrates. This was in brackish water, so that helped to preserve it. Once they got it out of the water they could tell it was disintegrating, due to the air. So what to do? For 17 years they were constantly spraying it with polyethylene glycol. So now it's (fairly) preserved and we can admire it. And it's a sight to behold. It's called the Vasa and you should look up some YouTube videos to see what it looks like. Well worth a long visit.

[Not so worth a visit... a museum we don't make it to... is the Abba museum.

Apparently this is a very big deal. To the Swedes this musical group hung the sun and the moon. I'm fairly sure that if the country was being destroyed, and the locals could only rescue one national treasure, first in line would be Abba.

Actually, people who went says they did a terrific job and there's lots of interactive exhibits where you can sing along with the band, being your own Dancing Queen.

Next to the Nobel Prize museum Karen and I have lunch: Pizza, beer and wine. Next we rejoin our tour, after 'free time' and head to the Royal Palace. It is where the king, and next in line to the throne, his daughter, have their offices. But there's a lot (a lot) of the palace that you can tour. As expected, it's opulent.

They let you see a lot of the palace. It's a replacement. The previous one was mostly wood, heated by burning wood. What could possibly go wrong? Yes, you guessed it. A guard charged with ensuring the palace doesn't catch fire, got hungry. Went to the kitchen. Palace burned down. Skip ahead. We're in a new palace.

Skip ahead. Russia steals Finland from Sweden. Sweden's pissed. Who to blame? King! You're exiled! You have no heirs so... hey you... other guy.. with a son... military guy from napoleons army with a good record... with no royal blood... do you want to be king of Sweden? (and Norway?) yes? Good! Done. You're hired. (And the rest is Swedish history.)

At this point, the tour will be headed back to the ship. Karen and I bid them 'adieu' and walk towards the Center a Stockholm. We go to the Ice Bar where it's 18° F. Our admission fee includes a drink and a loan of gloves and a fur-fringed poncho. How bad can it be?

Our admission includes two vodka drinks served in glasses made of ice. We drink our drinks and take pictures. To take pictures it requires taking off your gloves. Having your gloves off and holding a glass made of ice does not work well. Your warm fingers warms the ice, and soon it is slipping down away from you. Bad idea.

I thought it would be a gimmick and would not be that cold. I was wrong. It is cold as shit. After about 20 minutes, we were done with our drinks and we were cold to the bone. We were ready to go.

There are two doors to get out. An inner and an outer door. Both doors cannot be open at the same time. So if a group is coming in, the inner door cannot be opened, so you have to wait. Once you get into the entryway, do you have to wait for the first door to close before the second door can open. We were never so happy to get back to warm air.

After we give up our rental gloves and fur trimmed poncho, we start our walk back to the ship. How far can it be?? It's a long way (~3 miles) but there's lots of interesting stuff to see along the way.

Dinner theme was Mexican food. Most food on the ship is pretty good. We guess, though, the number of Mexican chefs aboard is less than one and the number rhymes with Hero!

Tonight's big 9:00 p.m. show is a local full orchestra called the Musikkår Tre Kronor. The conductor was a hoot. His English was a bit rusty but he's cute. What floored me (Scott, who attended the performance) was one of the bassoon players who spoke much better English and introduced about half of the musical pieces. It turns out he is the Captain of another ship in the Azamara fleet, the Onward. It turns out he had been the captain of the ship that carried us from Tokyo to Singapore earlier this year! I had attended an AMA (ask me anything) with him and the hotel manager (and of course I asked a question). Small world.

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## Photos



The hours gliding gently through the Stockholm archipelago were pretty, so many islands and summer homes



Stockholm at last



The Blue Room. OK, not as advertised, but pretty nonetheless



The gold colored Gold Room



Vasa, at least it sailed for 18 minutes successfully



Such a tremendous job of rehabilitation.  
Thanks to all who worked on it.



It's not the colors it was when it launched  
(briefly)



Beware, vicious attack police dog in training



## FARNSNIENTE



Palace guards are allowed to move around, yawn, talk to tourists. More lax.



The King's bedroom. You might be invited to talk to him, dress or eat. It's not optional.



The man invited to be King of Sweden and Norway. (Buy a lottery ticket, it's your lucky day)



The Ice Bar. Is it cold? Yes. Yes it is!



Ultimate recycling. You push your square, ice glass into one of the three holes. They slide down into a bucket. Later they melt it, and bingo, water for new glasses.



On the walk back to the ship we ended up walking through the bus terminal. About 20 slots for busses. So much public transportation!

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